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Stormtroopers Among Us: Star Wars Costuming, Connection, and Civic Engagement

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Stormtroopers Among Us: *Star Wars* Costuming, Connection,

and Civic Engagement

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts
Department of Communication
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University of South Florida

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Dedication

This is for my children, Danielle and Scott.

Thank you for enduring 20 years of *Star Wars* and 13 years of higher education.

I love you both.

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my thanks to my major professor, Dr. Janna Jones. Even though she is not a *Star Wars* fan, she embraced my topic and shared my enthusiasm. Beyond supporting the contents of this thesis, she nurtured my writing and research process. Janna's dedicated assistance comprises an invaluable contribution to this work and my future as a scholar.

I would like to thank my thesis committee members, Dr. Elizabeth Bell and Dr. Marcy Chvasta for agreeing to participate in my thesis. They gave me the support and the freedom to effectively explore this community. I would like to thank the entire committee for recognizing the value of my intentions and conclusions.

I would like to thank all the members of the *Star Wars* Costuming Legions, especially the Florida 501st Garrison, who allowed me to pry into their hobby, asking questions and participating in events even before I became an official member. They were always welcoming, honest, and interested in what I was trying to accomplish.

Finally, I would like to thank all *Star Wars* costumers for acting upon their interests and keeping *Star Wars* alive.

Table of Contents

List of Figures

Stormtroopers Among Us: *Star Wars* Costuming, Connection,
and Civic Engagement

Dava L. Simpson

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to examine the bonds that form between people as consumers of popular visual media and to discuss the relationship and impact of the resulting subcultures on the larger culture. *Star Wars* costumers offer a magnified glance at some of the ways in which people engage with images. As reflections of popular culture, costumers display their textual devotions and opinions; they embody spectatorship by reincarnating their favorite characters and contexts from text-bound sources. Moreover, they embrace modes of visual representation by performing the roles of both image consumer and image producer. I strive to understand the activities shared by audiences after the viewing experience is over; they are highly articulate interpreting media texts in a variety of interesting and unexpected ways. Whether they impart opinions or pursue alternative relationships with some aspect of the text, people do form communities and celebrate their connections to visual texts. As fans, individuals appropriate movie materials to fulfill personal goals and build social connections. While not all-encompassing, these smaller communities say a lot about the social impact of movies—the impact of images on individuals. This thesis combines an ethnographic study of *Star Wars* costumers within a theoretical framework of cultural studies and performance to investigate the ways

in which media images impact individuals. In documenting events from the

perspective of the costumer, I seek to understand the costumer as a member of

a visual audience, a reflection of popular culture, and a participant in the

dominant culture.

Chapter One

Introduction

Based on box office revenues alone, more people around the world have seen some portion of the *Star Wars* Saga than almost any other movie in history; yet, even with these statistics, there is no way to gauge these films' audiences as compared to those of any other top-grossing film or any low-grossing film for that matter. Capitalistic representations have permeated our cultural understanding of movies as they are often recognized in terms of gross ticket sales and merchandizing campaigns. Although figures indicate the commercial value of films, the audiences remain shapeless and anonymous. While we can map the financial connections between movies and their audiences, it is not always easy to characterize audience perceptions and their connections to moving images.

I turn to fans for my research as they are a definable group of human beings paying homage to particular texts and images. Fan groups participate in a variety of activities inspired by popular culture. Many participate in creative endeavors, generating artistic and interpretive products as a response to visual cultures. Whether they produce a painting, a novel, interpretive remarks, or an appreciative letter, fans' activities generally center upon individualized forms of personal expression. As my literature review affirms, a great deal of research has been geared toward television audiences investigating the viewing responses of those who habitually watch specific shows. With articles ranging from

investigations of fan-written letters and person-to-person interviews to the writing of fan fiction and slash fiction, fans are lauded for actively engaging with media texts, but they are isolated within their own subculture. People struggle each day to find ways to connect to one another, and for nearly a century movies have provided moments of commonality among diverse groups of individuals. While fan activities emphasize the connections between human beings and texts, they also link individuals to one another.

My project focuses on the costume-wearing fans of *Star Wars* Saga. They construct and wear movie-quality costumes fashioned after the galaxy of characters created by George Lucas. *Star Wars* costumers work primarily within two collaborating collectives based upon costume design as well as the narrative concerns of the Saga with one Legion devoted to the fictional antagonists (Stormtroopers, Darth Vader, Boba Fett) and one devoted to the protagonists (Luke Skywalker, Han Solo, Obi-wan Kenobi). The activities of *Star Wars* costuming clubs differ from those of other fan groups because they include a strictly social aspect where they perform in public spaces. They share their pleasurable viewing experiences and resulting admiration for the text not only with other members in the fan group but with the larger public. It does not really matter what aspects of these particular films inspire members, but rather that these people choose to form collectivities that serve their interests, as well as their communities. Costumes provide a cohesive element to form bonds around individual performances and interaction. Costumes, along with other methods of fan appropriation, represent the sense of fulfillment that individuals take away

from movie watching. In this context, fandom is a mode of production that is fueled by the appropriation of cultural texts and steered by active audience members seeking ways to share or re-create pleasurable viewing experiences.

As a tangible bridge between a fleeting personal viewing experience and the sharing of that text through a performative experience with others, costumes become cultural commodities that dictate preference. For de Certeau and Jenkins (et. al.), appropriation is a springboard for re-imaging popular texts of the cultural industry as fans seek to fulfill voids left by unclear or questionable narrative choices. Costumers are not generally concerned with the production of material that deconstructs the source material in search of new meaning to unsatisfying resolutions. For the costumer, the source material stays intact and the appropriation is solely associated with how the text is "used" by the fan: as a display of devotion, a creative outlet, or even a tool of interpretation. While costumes imply fictional realities, they also indicate intentionality. The costumer negotiates cultural spaces where their activities are allowed and appreciated: parades, fund-raisers, openings, and festivals. Costumers want to mingle—they want to share their product and be seen. Instead of wearing a familiar label or style, the costumer replicates the appearance of a recognizable character/thing/text purposely representing something that is important to the costumer. To fully understand the costumer, we must look at the appropriation, the construction and exchange of materials and ideas, and, perhaps most important, the ways in which costuming enables individuals to connect with other costumers and the communities in which they live.

Literature Review

      The study of fans includes the work of researchers seeking to uncover the mysteries and motivations behind group behaviors and organizations. Most of the research examines subcultures or fans marked by their devotion to television shows, movies, music groups, romance novels, celebrities, and sports teams. Work in this field finds its focus within fan groupings because they comprise a cohesive entity that can be adequately measured and identified. Within these subcultures, writers endeavor to identify the dynamics and boundaries of the group, the source of their collective devotion, and the activities that the members of the group share. Many fan groups are distinguishable by familiar cultural studies categories of race, class, and gender. There is a general consensus among researchers that fan cultures are composed of active, participatory audience members but the conclusions are unclear as to whether the activities of these smaller groups implies a general atmosphere of participation among audiences that do not classify themselves as fans. Because fans are primarily defined by their social activities, however, researchers continue to draw correlations with larger social structures.

      Dick Hebdige delivers additional insights into the construction of subcultures with his examination of Britain's youth. He reveals a youth-based subculture that he believes comprises an indelible piece of the larger culture. Hebdige contends that by definition subcultures form as a reflection or a reaction to the larger culture. Dependent upon "communal and symbolic engagements"

with a dominant grouping, subcultures appropriate and incorporate chosen "styles" in order to survive (17-8). These styles encompass practices and beliefs that are inherently connected to the culture that fosters them. Because of this intrinsic connection, styles represent significant commonalities within the subculture that are also recognizable to the larger culture. According to Hebdige, these groupings are almost always bound by a commercial imperative, yet they do not represent drones or mindless patrons. They are active consumers forging new paths of expression within rigid guidelines. Hebdige theorizes that subcultures "cobble together (or hybridize) styles out of the images and material culture available to them in the effort to construct identities which will confer on them relative autonomy within a social order fractured by class, generational differences, work" (441). Hebdige explores the creation of youth subcultures as a direct response to a dominant cultural matrix that did not allow for youth expression. Ultimately, he is trying to identify the line between active and passive consumer, between subcultures of resistance and compliance. As individuals consume images with greater frequency and interconnectivity, new identities are formed. These new identities are still forged from the same cultural soup and still carry the same level of cultural engagement.

Similarly, John Fiske's work on popular culture seeks to understand the bonds between active subcultures and the dominant social structures that often overshadow them. The notion that a subculture cannot disentangle itself from the larger culture directly reflects de Certeau's suppositions and is central to any discussion of Hebdige and Fiske. Fiske talks about ripping jeans as an act of

resistance and appropriation as the consumer makes the clothing his/her own. Even when the industry started mass producing ripped jeans, consumers found new ways of constructing their own look. Like Hebdige, he designates the subculture as a subordinated faction of a highly organized, industrial culture. According to Fiske, "popular culture is a site of struggle" (14). Although individuals are continually subjected to dominant cultural forces, fan groups cultivate many activities meant as ways to cope with said forces. As a result, oppressive forces are "dealt with, evaded, and sometimes resisted" (14). He labels the subordinates' choices for resistance "excorporation" (15). According to Fiske, excorporation is the process by which the subculture makes their own meaning out of the resources and commodities available. Fiske is quick to point out that the only resources are those established and made available by the entity that subordinates them in the first place. Because industrial culture does not purposely foster resistance, popular culture serves as the platform for individual expressions that do not always conform to the norm. He claims that any examination of popular culture "requires the study not only of the cultural commodities out of which it is made, but also of the ways that people use them" (114). Fiske's subordinated subcultures continue to thrive amidst oppressive capitalist ideologies altering their choices with each new wave of enforcement. Fan groups are ideal proponents of excorporation as they continually express their textual devotions with or without the endorsement of the dominant culture.

Through participation and observation, Camille Bacon-Smith reveals the depths and idiosyncrasies of science fiction fandom as a writer of both science

fiction and fan ethnography. Like those before her, she understands that subcultures are interconnected with the dominant society. The subjects of her analysis are not passive viewers but active audience members utilizing commodities to construct personal identities. Familiar commercial symbols are recycled to relay new meanings. Her books discuss the ways in which fans adopt texts, form communities, and, most interestingly, how they incorporate these commercialized identities into their daily lives. Although she acknowledges the growth of costuming among science fiction fans, she does not dwell on their activities beyond a couple of paragraphs. Bacon-Smith does commend the costumer for breaking outside of commercial boundaries by constructing their own product contending that most science fiction fans are dependent on merchandise produced and distributed by commercial entities. Bacon-Smith categorizes specialized dress and costumes as "ritual garb" or decorations that do more to transform gathering space into science fiction space than produce reflective or interpretive meanings. She also distinguishes between science fiction themed fashion and costumes stating that the fashion is the more denotative, rather than representative, practice.

Henry Jenkins is well noted for his work analyzing fans of visual media particularly television audiences. First and foremost, like those before him, Jenkins defines these fan cultures by their social nature. He dissects the relationship between consumer and text identifying certain imperatives for understanding these subcultures. Subcultures develop a relationship with texts through specific modes of production that are supplied by the dominant culture.

Visual texts deliver image laden narratives through television sets and movies screens and Jenkins investigates the viewing practices of fans considering issues like proximity and frequency. Fans become intimately involved with interpreting the text often carrying their interpretations beyond the original narrative through persistent scrutiny and speculation. These acts of interpretation spark activism in that the spectators respond to the text. Jenkins states, "Fandom originates, at least in part, as a response to the relative powerlessness of the consumer in relation to powerful institutions of cultural production and circulation" (278). Fan groups covet parts of a chosen text and re-circulate those pieces as new interpretive media. They create new, often artistic, forms in direct response to commercial cultures that, in many cases, alter, augment, and/or criticize the original text. Because of these activities, fan groups comprise alternative social communities or subcultures distinguishable yet inextricable from the dominant culture. Recognizing that the initial viewing of a text is just the beginning, Jenkins complements my work by revealing cultures and subcultures struggling to construct their own communities.

Lawrence Grossberg is concerned with critical dependency on generalized notions of active audiences or easily identifiable contexts. Believing that context is a slippery category reliant on too many interdependent variables, Grossberg thinks that we need to ground theoretical considerations around cultural structures of authority. In seeking new ways of uncovering the relationships that connect audiences and cultural forms, Grossberg labels each possibility inherent in this relationship a "sensibility" (54). A sensibility identifies forms of engagement

or activity that result from textual connections. Sensibilities can entail the "possible" relationships between texts and audiences and presuppose how specific texts and practices will be experienced. Fans' embody sensibilities through their connections and investments in certain texts. The sensibilities merge together to form an individualized "matter map" based on their personal preferences and pleasures. Fans gain authority by choosing their texts; "they gain control over their affective lives." For Grossberg, the cultural critic seeks the unifying sensibilities of groups and subcultures in an effort to recognize the possible matter maps of the larger culture. His sensibilities are inherent to both the text and the individual because of paradigms enforced by dominant ideologies, and they provide an umbrella explanation for the infinite numbers of possible connections between texts and individuals but they do not address fans' activities. While Grossberg calls for caution when identifying audience members as active, it is clear from much of the research on fans that their activities emanate from and also define their textual devotions. Without the understanding that subcultures and fan groups are composed of active and participatory members of a larger group, we cannot outline or validate the sensibilities as they would be virtually undetectable.

Several additional authors including Roger C. Aden, Matt Hills, Kurt Lancaster, Tom Mikotowicz, and Cheryl Harris and Alison Alexander concentrate on fan groupings considering the ways in which subcultures incorporate the stories that come from television, film, fiction, comics, and magazines into their everyday lives. From this body of work, it is clear that scholars understand the

9

fan dynamic as inseparable and dependent on the dominant culture. There is no isolation tank for brewing subcultures, fan groupings, or virtually any other socialized collective. Global cultures are labeled and packaged according to categories that serve to represent their "place" within particular groupings: we are democrats and republicans; men and women; and workers and managers. Even with the understanding that fan groups are an inextricable part of the larger culture, these collectives are frequently categorized by negative connotations with fans standing in resistance to forces of power and conformity. Fans produce their own representative culture on the basis of what others have characterized as inconsequential and meaningless and this difference of opinion segregates fans from the dominant culture. My work outlines a relationship within a subculture of *Star Wars* fans, and also between the subculture and the larger culture of non *Star Wars* fans in an effort to reveal the cultural connections rather than documenting points of cultural separation.

Method

My primary method for analyzing fan communities is based upon face-to-face interaction, participation, and observation all synthesized into a written account. Ethnography keeps me grounded in the human elements of the research as I strive to understand the people not the text. While often supported by statistics, images, first-hand accounts, or other writers, James Clifford and George E. Marcus note that "ethnography is inherently partial" (7). Thus, my participation in this project has numerous implications towards the bias of my

10

product: I am a cultural critic but I am also a fan and *Star Wars* costumer. Thus, this project is as much a self-reflexive endeavor as it is observational. I cannot remove myself from the research because I am an integral part of my subject and my motivations and connections to the texts as well as to other fans and costumers are inseparable from my critique. The best way to determine reactions to a specific texts or image is to ask the people who consume them. I have been affiliated with two major *Star Wars* costuming groups for the past 18 months: the 501st Legion of Stormtroopers and the Rebel Legion. I have personally attended 20 events as a member of these groups. From science fiction conventions to Walt Disney World parades featured "*Star Wars* Weekends" to community parades and hospital visits, costumers are active audience members reflecting popular culture images. Through costuming, characters are animated for interaction and re-enculturation. For the *Star Wars* fan, costuming is a physical expression of choice, devotion, and community.

Costuming is performative. As a participant, I am a costumer and I am performing texts. My performances are participatory and observational in that I am recognizing the various performances that denote textual and human connections while I learn to perform them. According to Norman K. Denzin, "We inhabit a performance-based, dramaturgical culture where the dividing line between performer and audience is blurred and culture itself has become a dramatic performance" (81). In fact, Denzin questions whether or not a true self exists without performance, believing that individual identities rely on performances or roles. Like costuming or fashion concerns that change with

mood and purpose, people transform not because they are composed of different selves but because of the different performances that they are required to carry out each day. Like Denzin, I believe that every day performances are interpretational and even representational. Costuming is all about performance because costumes are worn for public display and social interaction. According to Dwight Conquergood, performance is most affective because of face-to-face encounters which enhance ethnographic inquiry. Instead of making people use language to describe their perspective, performance can be analyzed as a purposeful, reflective practice.

In choosing different costumes for different situations, we enter into an unspoken social contract to perform a certain way. The costumer emulates fictional, and sometimes biographical, characterization through performance combined with clothing, make-up, and even prosthetic enhancement. The people who wear *Star Wars* costumes comprise an audience but only represent a tiny fraction of the massive box office sales generated by the films. While their specific actions are not necessarily representative of the larger audience, they do represent one of the ways in which individuals engage with a text. Their public display of affection is inseparable from the fact that they "watched" one or more of the *Star Wars* films. Instead of internalizing their mutual admirations by solely participating within a subculture of like-minded individuals, the *Star Wars* costumer finds ways to participate with the surrounding community of non-watchers and non-fans. While building and perfecting a costume tends to be an independent, sometimes intensely personal, undertaking, wearing a costume is a

social activity that requires an appropriation of a character or image, display and/or performance of that character in a public arena, and interaction with others. Henry Jenkins identifies fans as "textual consumers" by "the social nature of their interpretive and cultural activity" (72). Costumers appropriate fictional identities for social interaction. This social nature promotes a complex interplay within the group, as well as between the group and the public sphere.

Thesis Overview

The *Star Wars* Saga is a cultural phenomena consisting of six films released in two trilogies over the course of thirty years. Permanently fixed in motion picture history in terms of technological achievement and box office revenues, these films spawned a multi-billion dollar media market while capturing an equally impressive, ever-increasing global audience of loyal consumers and fans. My personal interests and enthusiasm towards *Star Wars* have thrived from childhood and I know that everyone I have ever known thinks of me when *Star Wars* enters their lives. I have always enjoyed watching the movies, but everything changed when I saw a real live Stormtrooper at a small science fiction and gaming convention in Tampa, Florida. Outside of the movies, there is no such thing as a "real" Stormtrooper. What I saw was in fact a *Star Wars* fan dressed in specially crafted white armor. I had never seen anything quite like this Stormtrooper costume in a lifetime of Halloweens. His was more movie-accurate than any other costumed individual in my history. For all intents and purposes, this person was a Stormtrooper and ceased being a person identifiable by

gender or physical characteristic. The more *Star Wars* costumes that I saw, the more intrigued I became by costuming as a purposeful activity; through the appropriation of certain materials and the enculturation of the texts from which the material is appropriated, a performance is developed for personal satisfaction, public display, and communal understanding. For me, costuming demonstrates that the American movie audience is composed of innumerable smaller groups of active individuals who keep movies alive long after the viewing is over. Audiences do form communities and celebrate their connections to visual texts. As fans, individuals appropriate movie materials to fulfill personal goals and build social connections. While not all-encompassing, these smaller communities say a lot about the social impact of movies—the impact of images on individuals and communities.

The second chapter of my thesis focuses on costume choices. While there are multiple volumes devoted to the study of fan communities, I have found no critical works that examine people who wear costumes. The costuming shelves of libraries and bookstores are lined with guides to assist people in making clothing and accessories but little to no consideration of the time and skills involved with constructing costumes and no real consideration of people who wear costumes. With an annual holiday devoted to the practice of wearing costumes, the rising popularity and attendance at science fiction and fantasy conventions and renaissance fairs, along with community theaters or Elvis impersonators and other celebrity look-alikes, there is ample room for the analysis of costuming. Individuals participating in these activities are members of

a visual audience employing images to fulfill some sort of personal satisfaction. Costuming groups offer a unique collectivity that relies on the physical appearance of the body along with the ability to re-align symbols and characterizations for public display. This is not to say that one must necessarily look a certain way or follow some pre-conceived notion of beauty but that wearing costumes transforms one's physical appearance into something purposeful and reflective. Costumer's bodies are visual expressions of their loyalty to books, movies, games, and television shows but they also show a great deal of forethought and consideration to the persona and/or physical needs of the costumer's body. For fans, costuming is an activity that externalizes textual connections. Active audience members re-create images by taking fictional characters off the screen and the page—literally breathing life into familiar forms.

The third chapter considers modes of production and exchange within the fan group, as well as the transformation of the individual who constructs a costume. *Star Wars* costumers rely on human communication and Internet connections for the production and exchange of ideas, information, support, and materials. Cyberspace offers community in a malleable space, allowing costumers access to important tools: forums for the exchange of information, communication tools to personalize these exchanges, personal design space to share their processes and results, and advertisement of events and organizations that welcome costumers to participate. The source material is important to the costumer as an object of devotion and a model for design as individuals study movie stills and narrative subtleties in order to capture all of the

nuanced details for their physical re-characterizations. Like a fashion fad where people adopt a certain style because they see it in a magazine or on another person, *Star Wars* costumers are inspired by images, as well as other costumers. *Star Wars* costuming comes with an instant collectivity of like-minded individuals that belong to the same movie audience. *Star Wars* costumers gather online and in person to discuss the construction and display of their costumes. Through these activities, individuals pay homage to texts but also take ownership of the product. While George Lucas holds the copyright for the character designs, individual costumers are lauded for the quality of their work in replicating that design. The trials and successes of building a costume combined with wearing the costume constitute important rites of passage from consumer to producer and owner.

The fourth section of my thesis focuses on interaction and participation. Through community, display, and performance, costumers gather for interaction and enculturation. Whether as part of science fiction themed event, a parade, or a movie opening, a performance is initiated once the individual dons a costume. A great deal of the satisfaction achieved in building a costume comes from wearing the costume in a public sphere. It is the recognition among fans and non-fans that really inspires the costumer. Sometimes asked to "play" *Star Wars* for an event or photo opportunity, *Star Wars* costumers participate in a number of performances as a result of wearing their costumes in public. There are events that are designed specifically for science fiction and fantasy audiences like conventions and comic book fairs but there also events that have no relation to

16

the text or have constructed a relationship with the text based on the Legions'

participation. By interacting with others in costume, these individuals share their

favorite movies. In posing for pictures and participating in fan-generated projects,

they become part of their favorite movie scenes. In personifying *Star Wars*,

costumers transform spectatorship into a shared social experience that extends

beyond other fans and toward a kind of civic engagement which may be

characteristic of a new type of civic participation.

Chapter Two

Costuming and Personal Choices

As a child, I had numerous opportunities to dress in costumes, but I have

not worn one in many years until I was re-introduced to the activity when I

attended a fan convention in Tampa, Florida. In October 2003, I attended the

22nd meeting of Necronomicon, a hotel-based convention for fans of science

fiction, fantasy, and gaming. I have attended many organized gatherings

including academic conferences and Shriner's conventions, and I was used to a

uniform appearance among attendees. It did not occur to me that this

environment would be any different. I knew from past experience that shared

interest was the fuel behind such gatherings. I like movies and games and

thought this event might feed those interests—which it did. I found a living,

breathing, microcosm of trade, ritual, and celebration that resounded in the

hallways and continued day and night for three days. People gathered in this

space to learn, buy, sell, share, play, and perform. When I arrived at the hotel,

there were quite a few cars unloading their packed cars of supplies. It looked as

if they were moving in for a month. Standing outside the entrance were three Star

Trek fans clad in Starfleet Officer uniforms; off to the side was another unfamiliar,

darker character in a cape; and on the other side of the door were five or six

people dressed in various black cloaks, boots, and gothic-inspired garb. The

people decorated the entrance not because they were hired to draw attention to the event, but because they were attendees.

At Necronomicon, the audience defines its reality, marking a space and time in terms of fictional imagery. Stepping inside the hotel, I was confronted with noise, color, and excitement. A large number of guests were checking in, toting carts loaded with costumes, odd packages, coolers, groceries, as well as the expected suitcases and traveling bags. The two lobby restaurants supported full tables of excited chatter. Nearly everyone wore some sort of clothing appropriate to the event; if they were not already sporting costumes (and many were), then they were dressed in themed t-shirts, prosthetic elf ears, or brightly colored hair. The people at this hotel were distinguishable from usual hotel guests. They entirely dominated the building and the costumers stood out amongst the rest. The most interesting aspect of the costumers at fan conventions is that, aside from masquerade entrants, they are attendees just like everybody else. In this respect, costumes are not identity changing personas but rather textual uniforms representing preference and perspective.

I saw my first Stormtrooper—a *Star Wars* fan dressed in specially crafted white armor—at this convention. He was perfect. It was as if he had walked off the movie screen and into this hotel. His suit was not made out of cloth or cardboard but several pieces of hard white plastic, creating the same effect as the cinematic armor. The armor exuded a crisp, white appearance and made a good bit of sound when he moved. In the *Star Wars* movies, the Stormtroopers make a distinctive sound, and I suspect that this was born in relation to the actual

noise made by human beings moving in plastic armor plating. In the films and in person, they make a clickety clack sound as the individual armored pieces rub

Figure 1: Stormtrooper (with R2D2) at Necronomicon, October, 2004

against each other or come into contact with hard surfaces. Even standing in place, I could hear the creaking of this man's armor as he walked or shifted from side to side. I was reminded of the sounds of troops marching through the metal halls of the Death Star chasing Han Solo and Luke Skywalker. The helmeted costume was so convincing, and I could not resist interacting with him and touching his armor. He was a real *Star Wars* Stormtrooper, and I thanked him for being in the same room with me. Movie characters are images projected on a screen. Even *Star Wars* celebrities do not wear their fictional personas when they appear in public. Costumers, however, construct and maintain fictional personas in the most unlikely surroundings and situations. The Stormtrooper that I saw at Necronomicon was the closest I had been to the movies in my entire life.

Drawn to the idea of emulating my favorite movies through costuming, I decided to construct one of my own when I attended a second event in Jacksonville, Florida the following summer. There was little doubt in my mind that I would choose to create a costume from *Star Wars*. It has always been my favorite movie. I knew nothing of the *Star Wars* Costuming Legions. My desire for a costume was primarily motivated by my personal appreciation of the films along

with the availability of a venue to wear it. This convention arena was the ideal space to break away from conventional clothing choices in favor of those worn by characters in my favorite movies. Unlike many costumers, I was unsure which character to re-create. Not only was I concerned that I may not have the skills necessary to construct a recognizable costume, but I wanted something fairly easy to make and comfortable to wear. Most importantly, I wanted a costume that fit my preferences, perspectives, and personality. My first impulse was to make the costume of my favorite character in the *Star Wars* films, Han Solo. Of course, this choice raised a number of immediate concerns. First and foremost, I am a blond woman with no inclination, at this time, towards changing my gender to accommodate the costume. After briefly considering alternative costumes from a number of my favorite films, I decided to go with my first choice and create my own appearance in Han Solo's garb, and let onlookers decipher my choice of characterization. Although still concerned about the discontinuity in my presentation, I was hopeful that my twist on the theme would be accepted in this venue. As long as I achieved accuracy with the various components of the outfit, then I would be me in a *Star Wars* context because everyone would recognize the Han Solo gear. In this way, I not only emulated aspects of my favorite films but I established a new, original identity built upon my personal relationship with *Star Wars*—I chose to wear my favorite character from my favorite text.

Making the costume was an involved process that took several weeks of concentrated effort but the result was a complete success. My design was close enough to the original that people recognized the outfit instantly, taking my

picture and commending me on my efforts. The attention and compliments made

me feel welcomed and accepted. Because of the gender change that I imposed

upon the character, I also received some interesting responses. One person re-

named me Han-na Solo, and I have since adopted that title when describing the

experience to others. Another asked me, "Is it true what I hear about Corellian

chicks?" playfully attributing Han Solo's fictional home planet to my attire. When I

attended a panel of female celebrities focusing on the representation of women

in science fiction, another woman and I were pointed out as females adopting the

garb of masculine characters—interestingly, the other

woman was also dressed in a *Star Wars* costume. We were

part of a discussion about the over sexualized images of

women in science fiction. While the other woman's gender

was usurped by her masculine guise, I was clearly a female

counterpart to the original character. This led into a

discussion of unnecessary cleavage and skimpy outfits. I

Figure 2: My Han Solo costume at Dreamcon, June 2004

was pleased to offer a positive image to the discussion

because I did not force a masculine persona by choosing a masculine costume

nor did I feminize the costume with a plunging neckline; in costume, I was female

and I was *Star Wars*. The experience of wearing a costume was satisfying; I was

proud of the work I did in constructing the costume, the enthusiastic responses

from other attendees, but most of all I was proud to wear *Star Wars*.

22

From Clothing to Costumes

      Personal histories are marked by special attire representing achievements and memorable moments. Throughout my life, I wore special holiday dresses, a Girl Scout uniform, a cheerleading outfit, softball and field hockey uniforms, a bridesmaid's dress from my cousin's wedding, a bridal gown for my own wedding, gymnastics leotards, a karate gi, specific clothes for school and the different seasons of the year, a gypsy and a fairy costume for Halloween, a clown costume for a High School circus, costumes for two school plays, and the cap and gown for my college graduation. All of these outfits were intended, designed, or chosen to represent a specific activity, membership to a particular community, or special abilities: children wear Halloween costumes to participate in a ritual of candy gathering each October; a girl scout uniform binds each scout to a collective while each girl wears a sash of patches denoting individual achievements; a softball uniform binds the individuals of a team together and indicates that members have the necessary skills to play. Not only do we wear the clothing that represents pieces of our identities, but we depend on people who wear specific clothing; police, fire fighters, and other civic employees have clothing designed to relay communal understanding, and we trust these individuals, sometimes entirely based on their uniforms, to provide certain services. Clothing is utilized to intentionally project information to other people. The outfits that mark many of the circumstances of our lives represent purpose, belonging, and occasion.

23

Humans take control over their own form. In some cases, physical features introduce and define individuals as height, weight, gender, skin color, and clothing provide information to others. While many of these attributes are unchangeable matters of fact, clothing can be altered to accommodate the needs and desires of the individual. As Patrizia Calefato notes, "Dressing is a non-verbal language, a form of projection and simulation, valid for both the individual and society" (96). Humans continually make intentional clothing choices about style, behavior, and representation according to the influence, the moment, and the occasion. Because the intentional and representational aspects of specialized outfitting are similar to those of costumes, it is easy to consider them interchangeable terms. However, there is something about costumes that goes beyond daily configurations of clothing. Costumes are less about functionality than they are about generating meaning—representation. For example, many costume accessories are meant to represent specific purposes yet they are built without the actual capabilities: a *Star Wars* Jedi Light Saber is a weapon that was created solely for the movies and only exists as a toy of light-up replica in the real world. In costuming, even common weapons like guns and knives are constructed out of harmless materials. They are only part of the costume to validate the character represented. Clothing becomes a costume once a fictional, or purely representation context is established. Looking back over the list of outfits that have passed through my life, I see outfits equipped or designed to serve specific purposes and others that had no other purpose but to represent the moment: while winter clothes protected me from the elements, my frilly

24

Easter dresses did little more than designate the day. Some outfits have practical applications assisting the wearer in achieving specific goals: gymnastics leotards are form fitting allowing for additional flexibility and ease of movement and fire fighters wear heavy protective clothing to combat fires. Other outfits are primarily representative: traditional brides wear white gowns and graduates don a cap and gown in ritualistic ceremonies of union and achievement. The clothing that fits the latter category is the most costume-like. A costume's sole purpose is representation. Costumes constitute the physical presence of something that is meaningful or something solely created and connected to fictional texts. Ultimately, humans wear different outfits to fulfill cultural expectations but they wear costumes to stimulate specific reactions and represent cultural recollections.

Fan groups, and costumers in particular, replicate imagery and fabricate experience in order to express their textual devotions. The first action of any potential fan simply involves watching visual texts. Karen Ross and Virginia Nightingale understand the consumption of media as an educational practice where fans acquire knowledge and those "who want to do more than 'consume' the text will often turn to producing a fan artifact" (137). Because costumes provide a great deal of explication to visual narratives, they are an intrinsic part of the media-generated images that engulf and engage individuals. Costuming is a persuasive dramaturgical tool enhancing many visual displays. Movie, television, and theater artists design and wear costumes to secure illusion and provide entertainment. While professional costumers create visual ensembles to enhance

the text, amateur costumers are composed primarily of spectators reflecting texts and images. Thus, costuming is form of exchange and participation that is largely controlled by the spectator. According to Camille Bacon-Smith, "Costume, which includes the fan as actor and as audience, spans the breech between the written and the visual modalities of the genre in a display that appeals to the aesthetic and emotional commonalities among community members" ("Science Fiction" 60). This activity melds the activities of spectatorship and participation. Costumers construct popular cultural images transforming their selves into a fictional context by reincarnating fictional characters into physical, three-dimensional forms. They are textual fans communicating viewing perspectives and choices with their bodies. Only a minute percentage of visual audience members are costumers, but the activity represents an intelligible and negotiable interchange between spectator and text. Costuming is a form of popular cultural production that is fueled by the viewing choices of spectators.

Cultural imagery has a strong presence in our daily lives as corporate logos, movies, and television shows stream in and out of our vision. According to Stuart Hall, social groups live "increasingly fragmented and sectionally differentiated" lives depending on the media to provide the "images, representations and ideas around which the social totality composed of all these separate and fragmented pieces can be coherently grasped" (85). Media generated products become a common frame of reference people use to connect to each another. It is common to share viewing choices and reactions with others and there are some images that have captured the attention of millions and

millions of spectators: traumatic events like 9/11 are displayed on screens and in print; reality television shows like *Survivor* and *American Idol* draw huge audiences; and films like *Star Wars* that have permeated the cultural imagination through viewing popularity and pervasive merchandising campaigns. We consume images, recollect what we see, and talk about our opinions and reactions with others; but how do we participate in what we see? Some people choose to seek out the images that impact them the most by physically visiting landmarks and image laden locations: people attend sporting events to see the athletes play in person; people visit the space where the World Trade Center towers stood; billions enter amusement parks every year to "ride" the movies; and others visit movie studios and set locations, write to their favorite celebrities and visit their homes and public appearances, and even participate in making movies. These image pilgrimages grant individuals opportunities to physically interact with images: they ride, touch, scrutinize, and validate their image-based recollections. Although a commitment to watching texts is the single most vital action of the spectator, it is also the most tenuous. Watching films and television shows is not a guarantee of anything—those that watch are not necessarily fans of the material nor are they bonded to other spectators. Pleasurable and sometimes negative, disturbing or surprising viewing experiences produce reactions that provoke people to exchange perspectives with one another. The mode of exchange comes in many forms including costuming.

Choosing a particular costume

People are in part defined by the choices they make. Costumers seek to combat the ephemerality of the viewing experience by continuing a connection to the text and building connections with others. Personal perspectives dictate many costume choices: they relate to individual characters, appreciate particular fictional behaviors and abilities, and most importantly they enjoy their viewing experiences. Costume choices revolve around viewing popular media with fans embracing different aspects of representation. For Jenkins, choices "hold special potential as vehicles for expressing the fans' pre-existing social commitments and cultural incidents" (34). In costuming, this "potential" rests on constructing recognizable images. Costumers are, fundamentally, consumers of popular culture and as such costume enthusiasts choose from the images put before them. As "subcultures are, at least in part, representations of representations," Hebdige asserts they employ elements of the dominant culture as "signifying practices" to make meaning in their own lives (86). Costumers choose which texts to consume and then take an additional step by choosing to represent, or become part of, the images that inspire them. Each tier of decision making draws the source material and the costumer together. Costumes are commonly generated from commercially driven products like television shows and films, but the choice of re-characterization belongs to the costumer.

From viewing choices to costume choices, people actively engage with visual texts and their common recollections and reactions connect them to other spectators. Costumers love to talk about their personal connections with

particular films, comic books, or television shows recounting when or how they encountered the original images. The costumer does not generally have to answer these questions, however, because they wear the answers. For every spectator that asks a costumer about the origins of their designs, there are ten others that show approval for the costumer's choices by sharing their own fascinations with the text. When I saw my first Stormtrooper, I did not ask him why he chose his costume. Instead, I declared my appreciation for his Stormtrooper armor because I love *Star Wars*. He did not have to prove his devotion to *Star Wars* because he was wearing it. But I was not wearing a costume. It was up to me to let him know that I share his enthusiasm. Fan communities develop from shared connections to the source material. It is rare, for example, for new recruits of the *Star Wars* Costuming Legions to be drawn to the costumes before they encounter and become fans of the *Star Wars* movies. This is not to say that the high quality and realistic appearance of these costumes do not inspire others to enter into costuming, but most costumes are inspired by the love of the films. Before his official acceptance into the 501st Legion, TD-3150 (his Legion designation) introduced himself by posting, "I've been obsessed with *Star Wars* since I was a kid." New people posting on *Star Wars* Legions' Internet message boards often introduce themselves as die-hard *Star Wars* fans proclaiming a lifetime spent watching the films. At this point, they are still pre-costume spectators sharing their enthusiasm with a group of people that, in their minds, have already proven their allegiance by physically reincarnating *Star Wars*.

The overwhelming majority of costumers discover the activity long after they have cemented their relationship with the text; before one chooses the particular adornments to change the body, they choose to wear the text. Their choices are not controlled by commercial imperatives, but rather personal prerogatives within a commercial and mediated world. Fans' activities take place after they have viewed the material. There is no way of knowing which images will resonate with fans. We can gauge the strength of particular images as chosen by costumers: *Star Wars* always has a commanding presence at different events while *Star Trek* characters have all but disappeared from the scene; Superheroes are extremely popular and there are usually multiple versions of Batman and Superman present; and Indiana Jones is another popular and consistent participant. While some movies and television shows are driven by singular characters like *Superman*, others like *Star Wars* or the *Lord of the Rings* offer a large range of distinctive characters. Costumers are drawn to images with distinctive appearances. Costume choices are personal, yet costumers share the same reasons for choosing particular characterizations. A representative sampling of individual costuming choices within the *Star Wars* Costuming Legions is adequately showcased in a message thread on the *Florida 501st Garrison Website* titled, "Why/How do you choose your character?"[1] Here is a representative answer posted to the thread:

I wanted Stormtrooper armor ever since I first saw SW way back in '77. I even tried to make my own out of white poster board. You can imagine

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[1] The *Florida Garrison Website* archive was corrupted on 2/6/06. It is no longer available. Last access to strand "Why/How do you choose your character?" was on 2/4/06

what that looked like. After hearing about the 501st, I was going to acquire

another one of my favorite costumes, Jango or Boba Fett, but the finances

didn't allow it, so here I am a TK (the Legion designation for accepted

Stormtrooper costumes). I'm very happy with it, since besides Darth

Vader, it's one of the most recognizable costumes in SW. I'm sure

eventually I'll get a second costume, like Biker Scout (something a little

more comfortable - it'd be nice to sit down!!) or maybe go dirty. Whatever

I'm wearing, I'll be having fun! (TK-9482 6/23/05)

Throughout this message thread, there are significant references that help

elucidate their individual costume choices. Each person has a relationship with

these movies. Their entries are dense with connections to *Star Wars* and their

favorite characters but they also recognize specific viewing experiences and

other costumers. Ultimately, their choices are built upon overlaying influences

with the *Star Wars* films as the common denominator.

For the *Star Wars* fan, watching *Star Wars* for the first time was an event

to be remembered and cherished—and now reincarnated. The people

responding to the question as to why they choose their character usually refer to

the original trilogy of films. They frequently make reference to the first film they

saw, specifically noting their age and the year it was released, suggesting that it

was a turning point in their lives. Inaugural viewings are the foundation for

costumers' adoration of the *Star Wars* Universe. I chose my first and second

costumes from *Star Wars* because I enjoy the films, but most of all I remember

seeing the first movie. I distinctly remember seeing *Star Wars* in 1977. Before it

was released, there was very little information available about the movie; the only thing we knew that it was a fantasy set in outer space. It was not shown in our immediate area, but my parents, who were film enthusiasts, found a theater some 50 miles away. It was a small two screen theater in a free-standing building of a shopping mall. The ticket line stretched around the side of the building, and this was the first time that I remember standing in line for a movie. We entered just as the lights were going down, and the only seats available were in the very front row of the auditorium, another first time experience for me. The movie began as soon as we sat down and for the next two hours there was nothing in my reality but *Star Wars*. There were no opening credits only the words "A Long time ago in a galaxy far, far away" followed by a brief prelude to the story that sets the tone and captures the imagination. The words speak of rebel bases, an "evil Galactic Empire," a princess, and stolen plans for a secret super weapon. As we watch the film and make sense of the situation posited, we are introduced to characters, spaceships, and locations unlike anything seen on film. Until 1977, space dramas were limited by money, special effects capabilities, and the vision to create an unseen world. By perfecting the processes involved, George Lucas delivered new, powerful images connected with a fundamental tale of good versus evil. *Star Wars* was one of the primary topics of conversation in 1977 as nearly everyone (that I knew at least) shared their opinions of it. By the time the merchandise filled the stores *Star Wars* was well on its way to becoming a cultural phenomenon. In talking with other *Star Wars* fans, I realize that we were all children watching something that fascinated us, and we continue to share that

32

fascination with others. It is my favorite film because it is my favorite movie experience. All of my recollections of *Star Wars* are laced with these initial feelings of wonder, escape, and satisfaction. Most costumers are generally nostalgic. They want to reconnect with pleasurable viewing experiences and childhood fantasies.

Although fans give the texts credit for their initial reactions, they prove fandom through their activities. In searching for the moment of "emergence" for individual fandom, Matt Hills indicates that "fans do not claim agency in their 'becoming-a-fan' stories, but they do claim agency through their later performances of fan identity" (160). Watching a movie does not make someone a fan. The initial viewing of the movie was a significant point in their development as fans but it was their choice to continually re-watch the movies and to make and wear a particular costume that secured their status as fans.

For a large number of *Star Wars* costumers, the choice of costume fulfills a personal fantasy. They know exactly which costume they want to wear because they have always admired or wanted "to be" a specific character since first watching the movie. Stephen Hinerman employs the theories of Sigmund Freud and Jaques Lacan to discuss the role of fantasy in fandom. For Hinerman, fantasy assures personal "satisfaction and total meaning in a world marked by separation, absence, and traumatic disruption" (114). In fandom, the separation and absence emanates from the limitations of media delivery and the limited accessibility of media icons. Thus, fans "disguise" their losses by creating fantasies (115). While Hinerman describes an internal negotiation between

33

consumer and image through the personal written fantasies of female Elvis fans, costumers fall into a similar rubric. Instead of internalizing their devotions, however, costumers externalize and personify their fantasies in public displays of attachment and performance. Referring to the anticipated delivery of his new armor on the *Florida Garrison Website* message boards, TK-5735 wrote, "I grew up dreaming of this didn't think it would ever happen." Of the 3731 active members' costumes[2] registered in the entire 501st Legion, 1695 are Stormtroopers modeled from the Original Trilogy of films; this represents 46% of the registered costumes. I have met dozens of people who dress in Stormtrooper armor and most of them have wanted to be a Stormtrooper from the first moment they saw them projected on a screen. "All it took was the door to be blown open and these really cool guys wearing white armor shooting for me to be hooked," wrote TK-9292 describing the opening moments and debut of the Stormtrooper character in the first *Star Wars* film released. After TK-7100 first saw *Star Wars*, he "couldn't stop talking about the troopers" and "wanted to be a trooper ever since." For them, costuming is an outlet to revisit childhood fantasies. Because of their appreciation and admiration for the Stormtrooper character, these individuals were compelled to seek out a way to capture and personify an image.[3]

A number of the people responding also recognize the influence of other costumers on their choices. They are thankful to the *Star Wars* Costuming

[2] *501st Legion Website* <www.501st.com> on February 12, 2006. They are based on total number of costumes in each category. Because several members have more than one costume registered, these numbers do not accurately reflect the total number of active members.
[3] All quotes obtained from message strand, "Why/How do you choose your character?" on the *Florida Garrison Website* last accessed on 2/4/06.

Legions for giving them an outlet to share their enthusiasm and providing a group identity beyond that of simply 'Star Wars Fan.' TK-688 has always loved Star Wars and admired the "commanding appearance" of Stormtrooper armor, but it was his experience with other fans in costume that helped cement his choice: "I wasn't entirely sure on my decision on TK until I attended my first event and got to see everyone and the suits in person. My decision was final, TK or bust! Been happy ever since." Filmed images of Stormtroopers are limited by the confines of the text and the screen. The physical presence of people wearing movie quality costumes opens those images to physical interaction with spectators and real world environments. An admitted Rebel, TK-9799 began her Star Wars costuming as a Jedi. After she "saw all the fun the TKs were having and how much people loved them," she obtained a set of armor. Stormtroopers, or TKs as she refers to them, garner a lot of attention in crowds. While Jedi enjoy the attentions of onlookers, I have yet to enter an event with a Stormtrooper that is not stopped for pictures within seconds of walking in the door. For costumers, fun is characterized by the recognition and appreciation of observers—fun equals attention. The influence of the Star Wars Costuming Legions goes deeper than having fun and even accurate representation. The Legions give interested individuals permission to display their enjoyment of Star Wars in public. The existence of an organized and codified group that has gained acceptance by fans, producers, and outside entities validates each individual's devotion. As TK-9015 posts, "I am glad I found the 501. I never thought it existed that there are so many cool people wanting to become a part of the greatest saga ever told. I love

35

it." All of these costumers want to become "part" of *Star Wars*. The cohesive

identity of the Costuming Legions gives individual enthusiasts a public persona

and it gives them a group of like-minded individuals that share their enthusiasm.[4]

Choosing which costume to make and wear also depends on a willingness

of the spectator to both develop and externalize personal relationships with visual

texts. Although the initial possibilities of the relationship are inspired, even

prompted, by the text, the boundaries of this relationship are primarily determined

by the costumer. The costumer does not necessarily make choices to fit in with a

particular crowd but to make personal statements about pleasure, desire, and

identity. They use, according to Hebdige's description of youth subcultures that

adopt distinctive fashion styles, "intentional communication" to display personal

opinions. Hebdige classifies "intentional communication" as "a visible

construction" or "loaded choice" which "directs attention to itself" and "gives itself

to be read" (101). The fact that their choices align them with other fans and

consumers illustrates the pervasive nature of images in our culture. For *Star

Wars* costumers, these initial choices oscillate between inaugural viewing

experiences, a desire to fulfill personal fantasies, and, as I will address in the

next two chapters, the need to connect with other individuals.

Dressing the Costumer's Body

Choosing a particular costume begins with the text or a specific character

and ends with the body. The costumer's body is an inseparable part of the final

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[4] All quotes obtained from message strand, "Why/How do you choose your character?" on the *Florida Garrison Website* last accessed on 2/4/06.

product. Most of the characters that costumers emulate are inseparable from their wardrobe and makeup—as visualized entities, their appearance defines them encompassing physical, textual, and cultural components. Speaking primarily of fashion models, Calefato describes the carefully chosen or designed garment as a "vessel of otherness" where the "identity of one's body is confused" (60). Clothing the body creates "an indistinct zone between covering and image" (60). Calefato recognizes that people make intentional choices about clothing and presentation that is partly based on a desire to embrace "otherness" (60). Costuming promotes an interactive illusion that requires recognition and acceptance of multiple sources. Human bodies are facilitators of the costume and its representation. Whether they choose to show their faces and expose their bodies as feature characters like Princess Leia and Anakin Skywalker or they choose helmeted characters that hide their real identity and physical appearance, the costumer, like Calefato's model, displays the body as a symbolic representation that encompasses both the real and the unreal. In a sometimes challenging effort to accurately personify images, costumers either match their physical traits to complementary characters or they force their given body type into a new physical display. From the most basic costumes that simply require particular articles of clothing to elaborate manifestations requiring mechanics or prosthetics, the body must either fit the final image or be hidden to preserve a commitment to the source material.

Many popular costumes like Superman, Luke Skywalker of *Star Wars*, or Lara Croft of *Tomb Raider* are not only recognizable because of the clothing that

they wear but because of the physical appearance of their fictional bodies: Superman is tall and lean with dark brown hair; Luke Skywalker is recognized by his blonde hair and boyish looks; and Lara Croft is known for her brown, braided hair and double-D bust size. Some are not daunted by these requirements donning wigs and other accessories that assist them in achieving certain looks. There are a number of people who choose costumes because they look like certain characters, or even because they look like the actors that portray them. While attending the last two annual meetings of Dragoncon in Atlanta, I met a man who has a passing resemblance to Harrison Ford. He has several costumes all dedicated to variations of the characters that Ford has immortalized on film: I have seen him wear two Han Solo costumes fashioned after the character's appearance in two different *Star Wars* films and I have seen him wear two Indiana Jones costumes also taken from two different films featuring the character. This intertextual web of representation adds complexity to the identity he projects while in costume. Unlike fictional source texts, representation through costuming is not limited by the confines of narrative reality. In conversations, people recognize this costumer as "the guy that dresses in Ford characters:" thus, he is manifesting Ford as much as he personifies the characters portrayed by Ford. The actor is an icon of popular culture with the distinction of having starred in a number of popular films making him a highly recognizable character on and off the screen. The costumer looks more like Ford in costume because spectators frequently associate these characters with the actor and vice versa.

The popular cultural interplay is based upon the body's ability to wear the representation.

Costuming is one of the few activities where sex is weighed equally. Costume contests do not separate entrants into gendered categories. Men and women both design and construct their own costumes with equal skill, and both men and women wear the garb of the other. Bacon-Smith states that costuming has always "broken stereotypes both outside and inside fan culture. In costuming, men sew sequins along with the women, and both men and women number among the costumers considered master class" ("Enterprising Women" 18). The *Star Wars* Costuming Legions do not discriminate on the basis of class, race, or gender except when it comes to the accuracy of the costume. Thus, I could not submit my Han Solo costume for membership because it is not an accurate representation of the textual canon. There are, however, a number of events where my feminine depiction of the cinematic smuggler is a welcomed perspective. A majority of Imperial, or antagonistic, characters in the *Star Wars* Universe are gendered masculine with outfits that replace or eliminate emotional characteristics. Most are unmistakably humanoid, but they have helmets and special body attachments to suit their fictional personas. Because these costumes quash personal identities, it is nearly impossible to tell who is underneath. Several female *Star Wars* costumers wear the garb of masculine characters; their bodies and their genders give way to the costume and the fiction. I have spoken to and observed numerous female Stormtroopers and many of them enjoy the anonymity in a forum that is sometimes full of highly

sexualized images of women. They revel in the reactions of fans who presume they are male, based on the costume, and they especially appreciate the surprised reactions when they remove their helmets and reveal their identity/gender. I have recently completed work on a helmeted character and the costuming experience is completely altered by the anonymity afforded by wearing this type of costume. When dressed as Han Solo or a Jedi, I am still me: a blonde, thirty-something woman wearing a costume. Unlike "the guy that dresses in Ford characters," my presentation is not interchangeable with the character or the actor that portrays him. Wearing a helmet, on the other hand, trumps physical appearance with anonymity. Regardless of whether the costumer is male or female, the helmeted persona receives its gender assignment from a fictional source.

Many costumes were not really designed to conform to the human body but rather to stretch the limits of the human imagination. Because not all

Figure 3: General Grievous

characters are humanoid or even proportionate to the human form, creativity, planning, and research of both subject and possible building materials are sometimes necessary to eliminate or downplay the human body from the final look. For these characterizations, the costumer's body is part of the guise. At the *Star Wars* Celebration III, there was a man who designed a costume as General Grievous, a digitally generated and cartoon rendered character that is basically an eight-foot metal skeleton with a battered Jedi cloak,

40

successfully disguising his body to accommodate the representation. As you can see from Figure 3, the physical dimensions of this never before constructed character are not exactly proportionate to the average human body. The man pictured in Figure 4 cleverly built the metal-like skeleton to accommodate his body wearing a black body suit and a black lined cloak to mask his self in order to make the costume more meaningful—more real. The costumer's head is actually just above the chest plate. Metal skeletons, like many of the characters in the *Star Wars* universe, are costumes that are not easy to wear. In effect, the costumer sometimes relinquishes his/her body, and physical identity, for an accurate or meaningful representation.

Figure 4: *Star Wars* fan in General Grievous costume at Celebration III, May 2005

In order to re-create a seemingly impossible image, costumers also sacrifice comfort for representation. In *Dressing the Galaxy*, Hayden Christensen, the actor that portrayed Anakin Skywalker in the prequel trilogy of *Star Wars* films, talks about the inevitability of becoming Darth Vader and wearing his distinctive garb but did not anticipate how difficult it would be to wear: "Since I first got the role, I'd been looking forward to the moment I'd get to don the dark helmet of Darth Vader. Unfortunately, it is not the most comfortable thing to have to spend more than 10 minutes in. It's really hot, and feels like hydrogen peroxide on a cut. Even so, it was truly thrilling" (28). The actor notes his discomfort and

then trumps that feeling with the "thrill" of becoming this iconic character. Costumes can be extremely cumbersome limiting motion and maneuverability. Physical discomfort is a given with Stormtrooper costumes in particular: armor and accessories pinch and scrape the body, hinder the ability to easily use the bathroom, sit or bend down, negotiate stairs, corners and crowds; and complicated headgear and helmets obstruct sight and hearing. Even relatively plastic-free costumes are heavy and hot and otherwise difficult to tolerate. Like Christensen, costumers negate discomfort in favor of the "thrill" of embodying their favorite characters.

Costumes function like a fictional skin. They are extremely varied by text, context, and form. Some costumes require a specific physical appearance or complement the human body while others can be adapted and some seem impossible to recreate. Many *Star Wars* costumes completely usurp the wearer; individualized characteristics like facial expression, body language, and gender all but disappear or change in favor of the costume and the characterization. The costumer's body takes on the primary responsibility of representation. For Calefato, cinematic dress deals with "widespread intersemiotic practices" that serve as "the basis of which an image is directly measured against corporeality" (104). In costuming, the human form plays a communicative role providing a skeleton, both symbolic and structural, that animates a fictional character or context. A commitment to costuming requires a commitment to the image and this commitment is exhibited and endured by dressing the costumer's body. In fact, the body represents the costumer's initial, and arguably most important,

42

contribution to the final product. As they struggle to achieve accuracy often foregoing pain and discomfort, costumers maintain the integrity of the source material in order to project recognizable images. Wearing a costume transforms the body from human to character—from spectator to participant.

Striving for Originality

Even though costumes derive from recognizable sources and the very idea of costuming revolves around replicating images, there is, ironically, a strong desire to achieve originality in some costume choices. What is original? Even the most liberal definition of the word signifies something that is fresh and new and without parallel. In one respect, there is no way that fan costumes can be considered original. Costumers imitate popular forms by re-presenting recognizable images. As Hebdige summarizes, "subcultures do not stand outside the reflexive circuitry of production and reproduction which links together, at least on a symbolic level, the separate and fragmented pieces of the social totality" (86). Costumers realign the "fragmented pieces" in relation to their own experience producing new incarnations of familiar images. Some individuals develop original characterizations from generic components. While they may be considered one of a kind, all costumes are irrevocably linked to the cultural forms that foster them. A seemingly new manifestation of an alien or a robot has its roots within the science fiction genre just as the various incarnations of elf and renaissance maiden have their roots in literature and film. Similarly, Gothic costumes are not founded on any one particular image but instead from the color

43

black and its relationship with the macabre in the visual media. Yet all of these various incarnations are considered original creations of the costumer. Calefato calls the social emergence of the clothed body a "hyper-semiotic connotation" which provides "a narrative, communicative space" where the body is perceived as "unique, even though it is a reproduced image" (60). In most cases, creativity trumps conformity and costumers are distinguished by their costuming choices, a liberally constructed costume persona, and their ability to invoke a cultural critique through representation.

In search of original incarnations, costumers frequently comb their favorite texts or search genres for obscure characters that have not been previously personified. Jack Sparrow of 2002's *Pirates of the Caribbean* movie is a popular costume for convention attendees, and I am used to seeing three or four identical renderings at the larger gatherings. At the 2005 Dragoncon, a clever costumer created the makeup for Jack Sparrow reproducing his skeleton form in the same film, reproducing an original characterization and drawing a lot of attention. The *Star Wars* Costuming Legions are organized around a relatively strict code of costuming standards (see Appendix) that is based on the visual canon of the films. In order to be inducted into either Legion, one must submit a picture that conforms to the costuming requirements outlined in the Legion Charter. The submitted image is carefully scrutinized for accuracy before acceptance is rendered. Because the *Star Wars* universe encompasses dozens of characters types some with multiple incarnations, some Legion members obtain originality by choosing costumes that no one else is wearing like the aforementioned

44

General Grievous. While still imitating certain aspects of the films, costumers

also achieve originality through obscure references and images, specialized

accessories, intertextuality, and even interdisciplinary approaches to popular

characterizations.

Costumes fashioned after recognizable characters can carry pieces of

originality. There are a lot of people who dress as pirates, Klingons from the *Star*

Trek stories, Stormtroopers and others that build Jedi costumes based upon

protagonistic characters in the *Star Wars* universe. These characterizations offer

a wide array of images and accessories to embellish the final product. While

these costumes have some uniform pieces that designate them as

representatives of specific characters, they are also representative of a larger

group of fictional individuals with their own distinctions and idiosyncratic traits.

Star Wars Jedi generally wear a long brown cloak over layered tunics; they have

a utility belt, knee high boots, and most carry a lightsaber weapon. These

elements aside, the Jedi is open to vast range of interpretation. In the *Star Wars*

texts, Jedi come from all corners of a fictional galaxy with many species

represented opening the doors for the diversity of human costumers here on

earth. In a very real way, race, class and gender are eliminated as the cloak, belt,

and lightsaber equalize these individuals into Jedi no longer separated by their

physical characteristics but instead bound together by fictional context. Similarly,

Stormtroopers have different accessories and cinematic incarnations that serve

to hone individual preferences into individualized costumes. After participating in

several events, I began to distinguish between the different Florida

Stormtroopers. In reality, no two are exactly the same: they have different body types; they have different appearances in the films according to duty assignment and fictional terrains, they carry different weapons, some have specialized accessories like belt packs and backpacks, some have colored shoulder harnesses representing different ranks, and others have decals and identification plates. While Jedi and Stormtrooper costumes remain canon-specific and worthy for Legion consideration, they also support a range of difference that allows costumers latitude in personal expression. Costuming offers the opportunity to be somewhat original, and yet also exist as part of a textual group or celebration.

Some individuals mix texts and genres to develop original characterizations. Costumers are not always bound by textual elements, and many choose to express their originality by altering a text-based costume to include other popular cultural sources. The Stormtrooper, in particular, has undergone a number of transformations that indicate the representational range of *Star Wars*: I have seen an Elvis Trooper complete with the trademark hair, glasses, and rhinestone-studded cape; a Japanese Trooper with rice hat and obi; a Jack Sparrow Trooper with the beard and hair of the pirate and the body armor of a Stormtrooper; a Key West Trooper with straw hat and Panama Jack shirt; a

Figure 5: Elvis Trooper at Dragoncon, September 2005

Peace Trooper with a rainbow and peace sign paint job; Troopers with black, red, and chrome armor; along with others that cleverly mix their Stormtrooper

costumes with other popular cultural forms to display more individualistic

creations. These hybrids represent beings that do not

exist fictionally or in the real world. Instead, they are

amalgams unique to costuming. This is a form of

appropriation with fans assigning new meanings and

contexts to established forms. Jenkins examines "textual

poaching" among fans as a "struggle" where individuals

continually "confront media representations on an unequal

terrain" (33). He exposes fan communities that rework

Figure 6: Peace Trooper at Celebration III, May 2005

and redeliver the source texts in order to produce new meanings and resolve

unsatisfying or unexplored plot issues. Costumers participate in individual acts of

resistance by defying textual convention. Instead of generating complicated

scenarios to existing narratives, costumers merge images into new displays

critiquing both the text and culture that fosters it. A professional costumer must

follow all specifications to create a scripted illusion while amateur costumers

stretch convention by freeing characters from the confines of scripts and screens;

in doing so, they also create new popular cultural forms.

Some costumers take a more unconventional approach in choosing or

designing their costumes; these costumers create original appearances weaving

contexts from unlikely sources. There are several Stormtroopers, predominantly

women, who have obtained specially molded chest plates accentuating a

feminine form perhaps commenting on the masculine-dominated text. Recently, a

group of Legion women designed and purchased cheerleader outfits with the

word "Sith" sewn into them designating that they are cheering for the antagonists of the Saga. The Sith are powerful ex-Jedi knights connected with the dark side of the movies. There are only two in power at one time and they are the most dark, powerful, and dangerous characters in the story. *Star Wars* merchandizing garners its own mimics as costumers animate images that solely pertain to commercial representations of *Star Wars.* A pair of individuals at Dragoncon 2005 constructed *Star Wars* Pez dispenser costumes out of cardboard. Another

fan who attended the *Star Wars* Celebration fashioned a costume he called "Luke, mint in the box." Remarking and reacting to the collecting aspects of *Star Wars*, this costumer dressed as a full sized action figure constructing and incorporating the packaging into his costume so he looked like a store-bought action figure. The packaging portion of his costume recognized the collectors' practices of preserving *Star Wars* materials for their value, but it

Figure 7: Fem-Trooper at Dragoncon, September 2005

also distinguishes his Luke costume as not being from the movie directly but rather from the toy. When I decided to attend the *Star Wars* Celebration III, I was determined to find a way to achieve originality among thousands of other *Star Wars* fans and costumers. I made 'fan outfit' with a skirt composed entirely of different *Star Wars* themed neckties and a jacket covered with distinctive *Star Wars* images, pins, and memorabilia. While wearing this outfit, I was stopped numerous times by people commending the results and acknowledging the originality of my idea. It was not that I wanted *more* attention than others, but I

did want my own attention—I wanted to be original. Because my work has nested in the area of fans and subcultures, and because I was at an event solely attended by fans, I wanted to represent fandom. When my daughter mentioned the idea sewing of necktie skirt, I instantly thought about *Star Wars* and asked to borrow her idea. There are hundreds of neckties with *Star Wars* designs. For me the necktie skirt represents an original piece of clothing constructed from articles that decorate a man's ordinary business suit into an expression of fandom. I also thought it would look "cool." These costumes do not come from any source within the *Star Wars* canon. These costumes are amalgamations from different aspects of consumer culture designed and executed by fans.

Costumers embody their textual connections. They are active participants of a media audience. Costumers take the role of image producers delivering physical incarnations based on their own experience which is interlaced with multiple images from multiple sources. Ross and Nightingale indicate that progressive technologies and increased media production are managed by audience members who "actively add complexity to the range of information to which they are exposed by mixing media, media sources, and media activities" (2). For the costumer, constructing obscure characters and popular culture hybrids manifests some of the ways in which images impact individuals. Beyond the accurate representation of a firmly established character, these costumes provide a stronger depiction of the fluidity of spectatorship as consumers merge multiple images into a crossbred representation of popular culture. For Hebdige, experience is "encoded" into the subcultures through different locales; home

experiences differ from work experiences because each locale has its own

"unique structure, its own rules and meanings, and its own hierarchy of values."

These experiences intermingle becoming "the 'raw material' which finds

expressive form in culture and subculture" (84). The complex interchange

between consumer and text is not solely conditioned by the images presented

but by everything that stands in opposition or relation to those images as well as

the person viewing them. In effect, the costumer is Hebdige's subcultural "stylist"

(17-8), stretching the confines of the text by recognizing characterization as an

opportunity for reflection and criticism.

Conclusion

For fans and costumers alike, popular cultural production is fueled by

choice. These choices are predominantly based on coveted viewing experiences.

Audiences have very little control over these inaugural viewing moments; not

only do they lack the ability to control the content, duration, and sometimes

location, of this experience, but they generally have no idea whether or not they

will like anything before they see it. The consumption of visual media is a fleeting

emotional experience that can only be shared through future recollections. Thus,

fan cultures seek ways to prolong and manipulate certain texts for continued

enjoyment. "Fans' investment in certain practices and texts provides them with

strategies which enable them to gain a certain amount of control over their

affective life," writes Grossberg, "which further enables them to invest in new

forms of meaning, pleasure and identity" (65). Fans gain control by appropriating

media generated materials for their own use. In choosing to personify images, costumers take ownership of certain images often providing their own context. Thus, as Grossberg suggests, "fandom is, at least potentially, the site of optimism, invigoration and passion which are necessary conditions for any struggle to change the conditions of one's life" (65). Although the initial bonds between consumer and image are prompted by the text, they are strengthened through the activities of the consumer. Costumers both solidify connections with source images and step beyond the limitations of those texts to reincarnate its characters. They pay homage to texts but also take "affective control" by physically expressing their devotion.

Costumers celebrate memorable viewing experiences through physical displays; they use their bodies as a communicative response to popular culture. In examining the motivations behind the distinctive fashion choices of British youth subcultures, Hebdige comments on the intentionality of physical expression: subculture fashion is "*obviously* fabricated" to reflect preference, difference, and communal belonging (emphasis in original 101). The same can be said of costumers because they purposely transform their bodies into fictional guises indicating their viewing preferences, their ability to transcend conventional notions of appearance; and their communal belonging among media consumers. Their physical appearance is purposely adorned to project meaning. Consequently, "they *display* their own codes or at least demonstrate that codes are there to be used and abused" (emphasis in original Hebdige 101). As a connotative act, costumes transform the body into a communicative form that

codifies spectatorship through different configurations of popular cultural images. In her discussion of fashion and cinema, Calefato states, different manners of dress, including costume, deal with "intersemiotic practices that allow the mixing and remixing of styles and tastes, a sort of navigating between signs where one can choose either affiliation or travesty and disguise" (105). Instead of relinquishing their physical identity to a movie accurate reflection, costumers infuse their own meanings and criticism into their physical displays. Wearing a costume is a physical display of spectatorship; the body is the canvas that signifies a commitment to, and sometimes a critique of, the source material.

Costumers gain credibility through accuracy but also take liberty with interpretation. While they maintain a relationship with the source material, they are not bound by narrative constraints or fictional landscapes. As Grossberg indicates, "fans' investment of energy into certain practices always returns some interest on the investment through a variety of empowering relations" (64). Hybrid costumes grant the costumers control over the final product. As spectators consuming media and producers reconstituting the images for other viewers, costumers exist in an interpretational sphere of their own design. As Hebdige contends, a subculture distinguishes itself from the industries that purport to exploit it "by repositioning and recontextualizing commodities" and also "by subverting their conventional uses and inventing new ones" (102). In this respect, the subculture "opens up the world of objects to new and covertly oppositional readings" (102). While individual pieces of visual media are contained and even constrained by narrative and commercial imperatives, the spectator is not.

Costuming is about the reincarnation of familiar images, but it is predominantly about visualizing spectatorship.

Chapter Three

Construction and Transformation

I met Rob at the first convention that I attended in the Han Solo costume.

A member of the *Star Wars* 501st Legion, he was dressed as a German

Stormtrooper Soldier from World War I, and I wore my Han Solo garb. He was

accompanied by a man dressed as Knight, who was completely covered in

shining armor. No matter how difficult *Star Wars* Stormtrooper armor is to wear, it

cannot compare to this man's plight. While visually stunning, he could barely

move. Rob designed and built the armor and was there to help him on and off the

stage. A self-proclaimed master craftsman with a great deal of experience with

many forms of armor including Stormtrooper, medieval, military, and other movie-

inspired forms, Rob has made weapon replicas for nearly every war in the history

of our planet, and has expanded his production to include fictional weaponry from

other planets. He constructed his own *Star Wars* armor and weapon, and has

helped others get the materials they need to make theirs. We connected because

I was the only entrant dressed in *Star Wars* gear. While we were talking, he told

me about his workshop and invited me for a visit. Located in a small industrial

strip, it was a relatively compact space, the size of a self-storage facility. The

space was packed floor to ceiling with tools, equipment (both large and small),

plaster molds, models, props, and projects in various degrees of completion. I

saw several familiar pieces, and I noted the full suit of metal armor, now devoid

of its human compliment. I also noticed several plastic pieces leaning against the entry; these were copies of the armor pieces fashioned after the colonial marines in the 1986 film *Aliens*. Rob's workshop was like a cinematic back lot. With over 2000 plastic laden costumes officially registered with the *Star Wars* Costuming Legions, there are many fans out around the world melting plastic to make their own costumes.

Rob's workshop was a mess, but it was the good kind of mess that meant things were getting done. Six of us concentrated on different tasks. Two people were outside spreading plaster over a *Star Wars* helmet in order to make a mold for plastic replication. The rest of us were inside. Rob cut and finished off pieces for his wife's Biker Scout armor. There was a faint smell of something cooking. Dave was standing in front of an oven. He attached a heavy wooden frame to a large sheet of thick, black plastic. The sheet was probably 48 inches square. Behind him was an oven mounted from the ceiling. The heating space had been modified to hold the wooden frame allowing for clearance all around the item inside, but the heating element and knobs were from a regular kitchen oven. There was an extra light mounted on the inside of the oven for monitoring the cooking plastic. The contraption looked a little flimsy and unreliable, but I watched it complete its task time and time again. It takes 10 or 12 minutes for the plastic sheet to be ready, but it is necessary to supervise the amount of droop— as the plastic heats, the center begins to droop. Dave waited until the current piece had just enough of a droop and switched the plugs behind the stove to power the compressor. Dave removed the frame with the drooping plastic that

looked solid. He deftly and quickly moved the frame from oven to a high work table with two molds propped on small wooden blocks. The table had been covered with a thick layer of tough foam that had a little spongy give when pressed upon. In the middle of the table was a hole. Lisa braced the frame while Dave switched on the compressor. With a short, but eventful, *whoosh*, the warm malleable plastic hugged the plaster molds beneath it. Dave's hands now covered with thick welding gloves pushed down along the edges of the molds forcing any remaining air bubbles to escape and insuring that the impression held. After a very long 60 seconds, Dave shut down the compressor and lifted the frame. One plaster mold popped obediently from place, while the second required a little coaxing with a rubber mallet. He removed the frame setting the still-warm plastic aside to finish cooling. I was still reeling from the process when Dave picked up another piece of plastic and switched the electrical plugs to re-heat the oven. In the time I spent at Rob's workshop, I saw people working with plaster, molding melted plastic, and cutting, sanding and refining the pieces. Each process took time and patience and represented a fraction of the work required to produce a completed costume. The more I learned about their construction techniques, the more I admired the dedication and adaptability of *Star Wars* costumers.

I wanted to become part of the *Star Wars* Costuming Legions. I was already equipped with a love for the movies, but I did not have a movie accurate costume. Aside from Han Solo, I felt the strongest attachment to the Jedi as the mystical underdogs devout in their beliefs and dedicated to good. The first trilogy

of films documents Luke Skywalker's journey from novice to Jedi master; his transformation is a vital element of the narrative. I liked the idea that I could still be me while in a Jedi costume. Although I did not have to cook any plastic, this costume required me to learn and apply new, or barely used, skills. It took weeks of concentrated effort and a moderate amount of money to complete. I purchased the pants and the boots, but I made everything else. I sewed the Jedi cloak and tunics myself carefully choosing cloth that not only matched the movie images and chose several inexpensive alternatives to save money. The twill fabrics generally used can cost upwards of ten dollars per yard but I found complimentary cotton blends on clearance shelves for less than two dollars per yard. As a consequence, I dyed the cloak material the requisite dark brown in a large plastic vat in my bathtub and

Figure 8: My Jedi Costume at Walt Disney World, June 2005

following sewing patterns that I found on the fan-generated websites. Beyond a few curtain panels, I do not have many occasions to sew but I spent a several hours bent over the machine working on this project. I learned about leather and the hardware to produce my own Jedi Belt, perhaps the most distinctive piece of the costume. I dyed and buffed the leather and connected the pieces with metal studs according to images from the films and information from other costumers that I found on the Internet. The final piece to add was the buckle. The majority of Jedi costumes use similar buckles, but I fashioned my own out of two silver,

57

other-worldly looking beads and some rawhide lacing adding a personal touch. I am very proud of the belt because I never worked with any of these materials before. The building materials cost about fifty dollars and the construction took all my concentration and the better part of a Sunday. Along with the belt, I constructed my own lightsaber hilt. While I have also purchased a mass produced lightsaber replica complete with green glowing blade, I felt it important to construct a unique hilt to wear on my belt when in costume. Using the Internet, I found tutorials about making hilts. I looked at dozens of images and read about the interesting supplies that people used to construct their own. The most common pieces used by costumers are pipes and rubber rings from hardware stores. I had been to the fabric store, a leather outlet, and Payless Shoes and now I needed the offerings at Home Depot. Grabbing a basket and wandering the massive aisles, I found a hodgepodge of items that I could use to replicate this fictional weapon. I bought a bathroom sink drain, a faucet knob, a connector pipe that was about ten inches long, and varying sizes of rubber o-rings, a cell phone charger, a strong adhesive, and a couple of clamps. I spent about twenty dollars. The finished hilt took less than ten minutes to put together; all these mismatched pieces were made for one another. After an additional ten minutes for gluing and about four hours for drying, I had my original hilt completing my costume. With just over one hundred dollars, over two hundred if you include the official lightsaber replica, and over forty hours of research and production time invested in the project, I knew that had earned the right to join the group.

This was an intensely creative and transformative endeavor for me. I made creative decisions and acquired new skills turning raw materials into an accurate *Star Wars* costume. For me constructing the lightsaber hilt was similar to the progression of the fictional Jedi whose last steps of training, which includes the construction of their weapon. Making my own hilt was significant to my fictional transformation. Although I followed the general parameters for Jedi costumes, I felt free to incorporate my own perspectives. I am proud of my Jedi costume for a number of reasons: I have always been drawn to the protagonists of the films, this was terrific way for me to embody my cinematic viewing experiences, it was the first costume that I submitted to the *Star Wars* Costuming Legion for acceptance, and most important of all I made it myself. I am indebted to the Internet for allowing me unbridled access to a variety of information and materials along with connecting me with other costumers: I got the pattern for my Jedi cloak from *The Padawan's Guide*; received ideas and methods for building a lightsaber hilt from *The Big Yellow Box*; and I joined *Star Wars* message boards on the *Florida Garrison Website* and *The Rebel Legion Website* to find and interact with costumers in Florida. While I frequently visit boards for both, I am more involved with the Florida Garrison. The Communications Officer, an appointed and voluntary position, maintains a stand-alone website boasting a large number of active members that is organized and moderated with pages that load smoothly and a constant infusion of new discussion topics. The *Rebel Legion Website*, on the other hand, is cumbersome, serving the entire Legion with very little variety among local posters. 501st Members from all over Florida

are active on the boards and their enthusiasm and expertise drew me into their online discussions. I am particularly impressed by the strands dedicated to "newbies" and costume construction: members are welcoming, they offer valuable support and advice, and they seem willing to go out of their way to help. Even though I only had a Jedi costume at the time and was not technically a member of the Florida Garrison, they welcomed me into their discussions and a number of events that were not strictly limited to 501st participation. The Internet both took me away from *Star Wars* and brought me closer to it. I do not watch the movies on the Internet. In perusing movie stills, reading rumors and news, learning skills to create costume parts, and sharing perspectives on message boards, I have become more involved with *Star Wars* than ever before. I am no longer confined to watching the movies; I am actively engaged with the movies.

Finding *Star Wars*

The Internet is integral to costuming construction. Internet ventures often begin with a particular interest or goal; whether checking or sending email, playing online games, shopping, or seeking information, people surf with a purpose. Accuracy is a primary consideration as costumers attempt to personify the movies. Choosing a costume is a personal decision, but costume construction requires a focused commitment to obtain the information and materials necessary for accurate representation. Obtaining a costume is an involved process based on textual devotion and motivated by the desire to accurately represent that text to others. Even costumers that mock or criticize the

60

text rely on visual accuracy to make their point. As I will discuss in chapter three, costuming is a fruitless endeavor without the recognition and interaction of future spectators. All costumers conduct some sort of research, some more intensive than others, to understand the different facets of characters and their appearances. Costumers are detail-oriented. They probe images, carefully examining clothing, accessories, and the physical characteristics that define characters. In order to create accurate representations, a future Darth Vader may seek the dimensions and button configuration of his chest box or a future Queen Amidala may examine the exotic beading on the Coruscant Kimono. Costuming research can be as simple as re-watching the original movie or as complicated as studying the history and process of production designs. Re-watching movies and television shows is often limited by the clarity and size of television screens, blurred images produced when DVDs and videotapes are paused, the amount of time that a character occupies the screen, and the visibility of the costume. One *Star Wars* costumer created a Dengar costume; this character is only on the screen for a few minutes in the film. Queen Amidala wears many outfits throughout the prequel films with some receiving more screen time than others. Her costumes are elaborate ensembles designed to visually express her elevated status as Queen. Even costumes that are clearly visible on the screen may only be shown from one side. Because of these limitations, costumers seek out alternative outlets for information.

The most accessible and copious source of information for special interest research is the Internet. Although there are film and television images available

in magazines, posters, and art, access to these items is often limited to physical trips to specialized stores and events. The Internet, on the other hand, streams directly into billions of homes every second of the day. The Internet provides costumers a place to discover and display their research through images and content-based websites, and most of these are produced and maintained by other fans and spectators. It is not surprising that costumers would find their niche in cyberspace as it is a venue motivated, controlled, and utilized by the user—the spectator. Individuals carve their own space designing, viewing, or linking to pages that interest them. For the burgeoning costumer, there are images galore: all the major search engines like Google and Yahoo! have image based searches that will pull pictures from pages dedicated to everything from movies to family vacations; movies, television shows, and magazines have their own "official" websites, and many of these have image galleries; fans create "unofficial" websites, also equipped with galleries, devoted to all manner of subject and text; other commercial and retail entities use familiar images to tout their products; and there are thousands of websites dedicated to the research and craft of costuming. All of these sources supply images that are connected to the original in the form of production stills and drawings, commercial renderings, or fan-generated art and memorabilia. On the Internet, different texts and styles intermingle, waiting for the spectator to link together the connections; with a sea of images at their fingertips, costumers study the object of their desire.

In a general search for "*Star Wars* Costuming," one will receive hundreds of thousands of hits for sites that sell costumes as well as links to fan-generated

sites dedicated to the research and craft of building them. Most of these fan-generated sites break down individual costumes displaying hard-to-find images and guides for finding the proper materials and putting everything together. One of the most developed and recognized web pages for costume research is called *The Padawan's Guide to Star Wars Prequel Costumes*. The author's intention for the site is to be both a fan tribute and an information resource with a mission statement acknowledging *Star Wars*, the films' costume designers, as well as present and future costumers. Additionally, the author encourages contributions from other costumers and fans. This plea was posted on the home page on 1/31/06:

> This is a costume research site—and some sections of the site are better developed than others. This is partly because some costumes are more popular than others. Padme and Jedi costumes are very popular—but there are a ton of other *Star Wars* costumes that need writeups! This is far too daunting a task for one person. If you would like to help out and research a particular costume, please do so. I'd be happy to post the information. Thanks to all of you who have contributed to the site so far!
> <www.padawansguide.com>

The site has a purpose and extends an invitation for inclusion and interaction. Numerous Rebel costumers have either contributed to the site or recommended it to others. *The Padawan's Guide* has grown into one of the most comprehensive sources of materials for *Star Wars* Rebel Costumes on the web. Paul Hodkinson asserts that participant websites "gave individual participants the

potential to involve themselves in the construction of their subculture" (178). Not only do fans produce their own subcultural products: they produce web content that highlights dedication, process, and activity in relation to popular culture. They contribute to the growth of costuming by assisting others in achieving similar results. Hills indicated that online fan activities should not be confused with the offline fan; the online community "perform(s) its fan audiencehood, knowing that other fans will act as a readership for speculations, observations, and commentaries" (177). With the Internet as a catalyst, costuming transforms ideas into realities and individuals into communities.

The *Star Wars* Costuming Legions emerged in the late 1990s. There is no way to adequately discern why an activity continually credited to three films released between 1977 and 1983, took over a decade to find its footing. While numerous costumers state that they have always wanted to be Stormtroopers, they were unable to realize their dream until nearly fifteen years after their initial impulse. It is likely they found a way to fulfill their dream through Internet connectivity. The beginning of *Star Wars* costuming coincides with the emergence and widespread use of the World Wide Web. Today's costumers depend on the Internet to assist them in nearly every aspect of researching costume designs, constructing costume parts, and participating in costuming events. Virtual space is permanently intertwined with costuming, and computer participation among members cannot be ignored. Hodkinson's analysis of Goth culture correlates with the costuming experience in that both groups adopt distinctive garb and perform their connections with popular culture in public

gatherings. Both costumers and Goth groups engage in online communities dedicated to their interests. Hodkinson states that "resources and forums on the Internet functioned to facilitate the subculture as a whole through providing specialist knowledge, constructing values, offering practical information and generating friendships" (182). Like the Goth culture, the first tool of costume research and construction is a computer with an Internet connection. Whether perusing for movie stills, researching minute details, purchasing and trading materials from vendors both public and private, or communicating with other fans and costumers, the Internet provides a versatile and critical platform for costumers. As individuals hone in on minute details of representation, they develop closer bonds with the movies.

Constructing Costumes

Constructing the costume is a personal journey of discovery, creativity, and accomplishment. Costumers are producers manufacturing costumes for display. They obtain the skills and materials necessary to make their costumes and pride themselves on the quality of their product: they learn to sew; paint; work with leather, plastics, and metals; and a myriad of other tasks. "This is a very 'do it yourself' oriented club," TK-408 informs a newbie asking about finding ready-made costumes; "You wouldn't be able to just buy a ready to go officer uniform very easily. I learned to sew when I got into this hobby." (*Florida Garrison Website* 2/1/06) Because of the variety of skills and purchased items involved, there is a higher level of personal investment in the final product, in terms of both

physical labor and expense. This liminal phase of the costuming process

represents the commitment to producing a product as well as the investment of

time and money. The most significant limitation for the costumer is the cost of

acquiring materials—this is an expensive hobby. The acquisition of materials can

be a costly venture. Many spare no expense to achieve their goals, while others

alter their costume choices based on the cost of the final product. Costume

quality is both a product of ability and cost. With a little ingenuity, cost does not

necessarily need to be a deterrent to costumers. Thus, the majority of costumers

learn to sew and vacuum-form instead of buying quality costume replicas, some

shop for bargains on the Internet, and others incorporate inexpensive items like

pipes for lightsabers and dye cloth to achieve their goals. Whether they can

afford to pay for costly materials or include clever alternatives, constructing

costumes is an initiatory process. It is a transitory phase, best described as a

place somewhere between watching movies and wearing them.

There is no doubt that the costumer identifies with commercialized

entities, but the costumer also takes control of the image and ownership over the

representation. Most costumers, including myself, tackle projects without direct

assistance from others. Some like to keep their creations a surprise, carefully

guarding their projects and techniques until the final product is displayed. Others

simply want to prove that they can do it themselves. I fall into the latter category.

I found a great deal of information and instruction through Internet sources, but I

feel a sense of accomplishment by making my own costumes. Reading about

how others construct the different pieces of their costumes cannot compare to

actually doing the work. This hobby is not about constructing a model from a kit. It is about making the kit and the model. I composed and designed my lightsaber as I picked over different parts in Home Depot. Although I looked at many websites and I could have printed a detailed list of items used by other fans to replicate their lightsabers, I chose to create my own interpretation of the weapon. For Hodkinson's Goth culture, the "selection of the desirable items certainly involved skill and knowledge, alongside elements of greater innovation and individuality" (135). Likewise, finding the right items to build a costume is a creative exploration of trial and error, and *Star Wars* costumers incorporate a myriad of unexpected or difficult-to-find materials into their final products.

Costumes are modeled after images, but the costumer is in control of the replication. They focus on the goal adopting almost any means necessary to achieve those goals. They do purchase ready-made materials, but even these generally undergo some sort of overhaul to better fit the costume. *Star Wars* Stormtroopers carry a specific kind of gun that is difficult to construct from raw materials. Although I have seen guns designed and built by individual costumers, most purchase toys produced by the *Star Wars* merchandising department. Even replicas designed by *Star Wars* experts do not accurately complement *Star Wars* costumes without modification; at the very least, store bought guns are stripped of labels and logos and painted solid black. The process of adapting available objects into costume parts and accessories accentuates the costumer's role as producer. Whether they diligently recreate detailed facsimiles or infuse their own perspectives into the design, costumers gain control over representation. The

process personalizes the costume because it represents a particular characterization and the choices, techniques, ingenuity of the costumer.

Some of costumes are more complex than others: sewing the long, straight hems of a Jedi Cloak may seem easy compared to the vacuum-forming, cutting, sanding, and riveting required when constructing Stormtrooper armor. Costume construction can be a daunting task. The Legion message boards serve as a communication portal where people can ask questions and express their concerns. "Well I did it. I ordered my armor today," a future Stormtrooper writes to the *Florida Garrison Website*, "was expensive but it's something I've wanted for a long time. I have to keep reminding my self of that and not think of the money I spent. I am looking forward to joining the 501st as soon as my armor is finished."[5] Posters responded by sharing his excitement, commiserating over the cost, voicing enthusiasm for the task, and offering help and advice. Additionally, 501st Legionnaires frequently hold armor parties where individuals can share their products and gain the insights and hands on assistance of others. When his armor arrived, the "newbie" received several cheers, two notices to throw away the instructions that come with the armor pieces, and one reference to someone nearby that could assist. "I'm slowly gaining confidence and think this will be a lot of fun when all is said and done," he responded. Perhaps sensing his uncertainty, several members arranged a meeting to work on his armor and get acquainted. After the meeting, the newbie posted a thank you message to the troopers who met with him. Whether you need the dimensions of the chest-plate

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[5] *Florida Garrison Website* <www.fl501st.com> - Message Board called "Ordered my Armor today" Last accessed on 12/14/05.

for a Tie-fighter pilot, the correct materials to make an authentic looking insignia

for the Imperial Officer's costume, or the hands on assistance of another, there is

plenty of expertise available to help costumers achieve their goals. Help always

seems to be readily available. Enlisting the help of others represents a

commitment to completing the costume, and it also fosters the potential of lasting

bonds between costumers. They share their abilities and work together on

common goals of representation.

Having perfected certain construction techniques, some costumers

become producers manufacturing costume components for others. Many

costumers choose characters that are solely designed, constructed and

visualized for movies and television shows. These costumes often require

specialized materials some of which are not easy to find or recreate. Previously

mentioned tutorials offered by *The Padawan's Guide* deliver construction and

research techniques from people that have successfully completed their

costumes; many of these sites also reference sources for purchasing certain

costume parts produced by other costumers. Some connoisseurs sell pieces

expertly molded, crafted, and designed to textual specifications: their

construction successes becoming a physical exchange of materials and services.

With the exception of some helmets, the plastic armor pieces of various *Star*

Wars costumes are not mass produced. Instead, they are vacuum-formed by

costumers. The exchange of these materials is carefully guarded because it is

unlawful to sell *Star Wars* items without permission. George Lucas and his

corporations own the copyright on all incarnations of *Star Wars*. It is rumored that

George Lucas initially stopped the fan production and exchange of Stormtrooper armor because it was openly advertised on websites. Now, all websites connected to the *Star Wars* Costuming Legions carry a disclaimer stating that they are in no way affiliated to George Lucas and forbid open discussions of armor sources. When people make inquiries on message boards, they are immediately informed that armor production is not to be discussed. This proviso is generally accompanied by a private message (pm) containing relevant contacts and information that is hidden from public view. Even though they walk a thin line between unlawful and accurate representations, armor production continues because of the demand among interested newcomers and the desire among existing members to share their hobby. The Internet supplies the demand by linking individuals to materials that are not easily obtained and many costumers take control by manufacturing and distributing components of representation.

Building a costume represents an individual's maturation from spectator to participant. As TC-1775 writes, "Putting it together is your Right of passage" (*Florida Garrison Website* 2/1/06). The process challenges costumers to reincarnate images, introduces them to other costumers, and represents a transitional phase in the development of the costumer into a producer. As they build costumes, the characters are taken from the screen and the costumer becomes the new screen on which it is displayed. They make decisions about representation. Putting together a costume is a 'rite of passage' turning spectatorship into participation. As Hodkinson points out, "active appropriation,

independent creativity and occasional transgressions in this assemblage of

[Goth] style emphasizes the important role for participants themselves in the

ongoing development of their shared style" (137). Creating intertextual costumes,

imposing personal design choices, or sticking to each known detail enables

costumers to leave behind the role of spectatorship and move to the role of a

producer. There are many members in the *Star Wars* Costuming Legions,

including myself, who have constructed multiple costumes: some individuals are

focused on representing different characters while others challenge themselves

with different projects. A creative outlet for ability and perspective, costume

construction is a thrilling and transformative process.

Constructing Connections

Cyberspace offers the opportunity to explore interests, to conduct

business, and to collect and exchange information. It allows us to ask questions,

share failures and successes, to display processes and results, and advertise

events and organizations that welcome participation. While the medium is often

criticized for fragmenting culture and isolating individuals, Elizabeth Bird

contends that such criticism is only "half the picture" (56). An interesting aspect of

the Internet is that a large percentage of its content is generated by everyday

people rather than commercial entities and experts. Websites are opening new

avenues for increased levels of communication with personal reviews and notes

laced throughout both commercial and public websites. Internet spaces

frequently invite user participation; from commercial sites like amazon.com to

costuming sites built upon the input of many individuals, there are ample

opportunities to read or provide personal perspectives. Internet interaction "does

not simply mirror the experience of being an 'offline' fan," and according to Bird,

"the medium allows for a level of self-reflection that makes the community itself a

focus of its members' analysis, and creates an additional body of text that takes

on a life of its own" (57-8). Websites, message boards, blogs, chatrooms, EBAY

auctions, stores, image galleries, are used by various entities to establish

communicative spaces on the Internet devoted to the sharing and exchange of

information. These communications cannot replace the physical and mental

spontaneity of face-to-face interaction, but they do provide new opportunities for

finding and establishing social connections.

Within virtual environments, costumers gain access to a wide array of

information, but they also connect with other costumers. *Star Wars* costumers

have created a virtual hub fostering new membership and sustaining continued

communication and participation. Even in face-to-face encounters, interested

participants are referred to Legion websites with many garrisons preparing

pamphlets and memorabilia pointing people to website addresses. All pertinent

information related to costuming, different events and the organization are posted

on websites and discussion boards; national elections for Legion officials are

conducted through online polls, group emails are sent relaying pertinent

occurrences, and event schedules and information are posted through message

boards. Although a large portion of the information is directed at current

members, interested onlookers and lurkers, people who peruse online interactive

sites without introducing themselves or posting any messages, also have access to this information. For the interested costumer, the details about costume construction are helpful, but reading about the different types of events and the personal responses of those who attended provides additional motivation to complete their own costumes and a purpose for their efforts. For the vast majority of *Star Wars* costumers, the Internet is an invaluable and indispensable resource of information, assistance, and community. *Star Wars* costumers utilize virtual space to organize community involvement, participation, and interaction. While one may buy a number of items from EBAY vendors, they will most likely never meet anyone in person. Not only do costumers find information and supplies through online vendors, they also have access to community message boards dedicated to welcoming new members, maintaining contact among members, and exchanging information about costuming. Internet message boards are the key to the collectivity among members of the *Star Wars* Costuming Legions. Hodkinson calls Goth message boards "subcultural media" because they are spaces devoted to mutual exchange among those with similar interests. On a global scale, Internet venues help people with similar interests find each other and share their experiences.

Numerous sites outline specific details in costume research and construction, but others provide forums that support personalized interaction between fans. The *Star Wars* Costuming Legions have web sites, for the groups as a whole and for regional garrisons and posts, each outlining the group's mission, charter, and membership details. These sites are not necessarily

designed to offer step-by-step instructions for building costumes. Instead, they provide message boards or listservs for direct interaction with other costumers. The tutorials offered by *The Padawan's Guide* are somewhat fixed and procedural because they only offer step-by-step instructions and pictures; although they may include information about the difficulties of working with some materials, common mistakes that should be avoided, or even contact information for the author, they do not always address individual concerns nor are the authors readily available for feedback. Costuming message boards, on the other hand, allow people to ask specific questions and receive feedback from a variety of contributors. Existing members of the *Star Wars* Legions actively help "newbie" posters on the message boards commenting, as Bird describes, "reflexively about the community" (58). In a recent discussion string on the Florida 501st Website, veteran Stormtroopers respond to questions about getting started and the costs of their armor.[6]

> I live in St Augustine and just found the 501st on the web. I want to do things right, and need information. Are there FAQs on getting together your first costume and armor and weapons? Is a Stormtrooper too ambitious for a first project? What would I be looking at in cost? Are there members in my area I could talk to? My thanks in advance.

Responses to this post are encouraging and honest about the realities of Stormtrooper armor. Members note the popularity of the costume and support this newcomer's interest; "it is a major commitment," TK-899 replies, "but you will

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[6] *Florida Garrison Website* <www.fl501st.com> **-** Message Board called "First Coast Newbie needs basic info" Last accessed on 11/12/04.

be so happy you did it." The *Star Wars* costuming community supports new

members, helping many to make initial costume decisions and find solutions to

problems. As a result such exchanges, costuming processes and concerns are

documented in relation to specific, practical issues, as all message strands are

archived and remain available for perusal. In seeking information about *Star*

Wars costuming, a person identifying himself as "WannaBe" posts, "Been looking

at every site I can find that has building tips and trying to examine every little

detail. The more I look the more questions I have."[7] Because of the complexities

of costume construction, people often need encouragement to follow through

with their goals. According to Aden, electronic communication "allows fans to

mark themselves as unique individuals expressing their individuality yet as

participants in an inclusive community where individualistic expression is

appreciated and understood by other members of the community." (95). In the

process of obtaining information, costumers find community support through

personalized exchanges of information.

Regional garrisons and squadrons within the *Star Wars* Costuming

Legions support message boards that comprise the backbone of the

communication keeping members focused on shared concerns and costuming

events. Aside from posting costuming-related information, many share

happenings in their personal lives as well as interests in *Star Wars* and other

films or visual media. Registration on most Legion message boards is open to

everyone. While there may be member-restricted threads within any given

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[7] *Florida Garrison Website* <www.fl501st.com> **-** Message Board called "Ordered my Armor today" Last accessed on 12/14/05.

message board, they remain open for many others including people interested in constructing costumes and event organizers who wish to have the Legions' participation. The identity of *Star Wars* costumers on the Internet is a multi-layered and complex combination of personal names, character choices, Legion identifiers, computer user names, and other computer add-ons like avatars and signature graphics. Unlike the perpetual anonymity afforded most Internet exchanges, participants in *Star Wars* message boards gain multiple opportunities to interact in person. Regional discussion groups share an initial anonymity that morphs into comfortable recognition once participants begin attending events and learn to identify people by their costumes and online identities. Members have coined the term "trooping" for all public appearances. When new people join the online community, a number of members often respond saying "hope to troop with you soon." With the ultimate goal of trooping in public, many people nurture their *Star Wars* costuming interests on the Internet.

Through their electronic exploration of the text, they consume, they learn, and they have the opportunity to interact with others. Internet-based "fan activities," according to Hodkinson, "have added a rich and rewarding dimension to their lives" (81). Communicating with other fans or costumers validates individual devotions as we realize that we are not alone. Bird argues that "electronic communities are not identical or interchangeable with more traditionally-understood, place-based communities, but they may indeed provide a 'sense of place' to their members, and fulfill some of the functions of other types of communities" (57-8). In virtual space, people communicate ideas and

perspectives that may never be communicated elsewhere. Without Internet

connectivity, *Star Wars* costumers would be limited to face-to-face meeting at

events that are sometimes few and far between and those conversations would

be limited by the number of participants and the activities connected with events:

it is difficult to have a conversation when you are constantly asked to pose for

photographs or wearing a helmet that muffles your voice. Internet message

boards cultivate conversations that are open to everyone. Online communities

thrive off of fan-generated message boards where interest is encouraged and

perpetuated by existing participants.

Conclusion

Costume research and construction are acts of preparation and

indoctrination; they are ritualistic processes that change and enhance an

individual's relationship with movies and television shows. This liminal portion of

the costuming process exists in a middle ground between the solitary viewing

experiences and wearing the costume in public. Once the decision to make a

costume enters into the construction phase, intentions and goals are constantly

tested by the depth of research, the availability of supplies, and the cost. The

amount and breadth of research depends on the individual costumer's goals;

many seek enough information to produce a recognizable replica while others

delve deeper to produce highly accurate and detailed imitations. The Internet has

proven instrumental to the costuming process providing people with access to

vast stores of information and materials. Ironically, it is also a point of separation

as much of this information is found outside of the original text. Hills asserts that initial media viewings are "simply one moment within cult fan's repertoire of practices," and implies that fans create new "practices" with each "type relating in specific ways to the originating affective relationship" (145). All costumers watch, and perhaps re-watch shows featuring the images they wish to capture, but many also seek information on the Internet. They can never recreate the inaugural viewing experience that sparked their interest, but they can explore and create new ones. Costumers learn history, process, and the reasons inspiring different designs and different accessories by consuming all possible images related to the source and those that created it including studying costume origins, production designs and notes, fan art, publicity campaigns, and other costumes. They embark on an educational journey that provides them with the knowledge necessary to recreate detailed replications.

After researching costume choices, costumers gather the materials necessary to achieve their goals. This specialized consumption does not necessarily conform to or oppose Hebdige's "hegemonic capitalism," which positions the subcultural consumer as conducting "semiotic guerilla warfare" against commercial products by subverting their meanings in favor of new subcultural contexts (105). The costumer appropriates commercial items as means to specific ends; when chalk holders and flight suits substitute for communication sticks and *Star Wars* coveralls, costumers are commended for the ingenuity not for their smite against chalk holder makers. Costumers are thankful for the availability of comparable items and purchase these products to

improve their representations. Hodkinson claims that "such selection and use of goods from external retailers often involved considerable discernment and innovation on the part of the subcultural consumers" (133). Consumers do not necessarily stand in defiance of "hegemonic capitalism," they are just not confined to its boundaries. While a small percentage of *Star Wars* costumers seek out commercially produced costumes, the majority construct their own. It is part of the costuming process.

Whether they tackle the project themselves or enlist the help of others, costumers rely on the Internet for information and guidance. It provides interactive spaces for costumers to gain advice and support from other costumers. These exchanges begin at the moment that an anonymous spectator steps into a public sphere. For Hodkinson, the increased concentration of "leisure-time Internet use on specialist subcultural material" illustrates "their practical commitment and their strength of identity" (193-4). While there are those who post to *Star Wars* message boards that do not follow through with joining the Legions, there are many more that do complete the process. One can decide to wear a particular costume and even construct that costume in private, but posting on discussion boards is an active step toward making private decisions public. For many, registration and participation in online forums constitutes an initiation into both the subject-matter and activity. Ultimately, Internet websites are powerful communicative tools designed and utilized throughout the processes of costume construction: websites provide information and resources while interactive message boards provide space for encouragement, comradeship, and

inspiration. Through the enthusiasm among potential and existing members and the interconnectivity of the Internet, *Star Wars* costumers have made costume construction a social, interactive process of creativity and transformation.

Chapter Four

Performance and Interaction

Dragoncon is one of the most established conventions in the United States growing from approximately 1400 to 30,000 attendees in its 29-year history. My daughter and I attended the event together, flying into Atlanta late on a Friday night. By the time we navigated the city's public transportation and arrived at the hotel, it was nearly 11 at night. As we entered the lobby in search of the check-in counter, we were confronted by a mass of people congregating in the lobby. Unlike most hotel guests, they were dressed in all manner of clothing and costume, packing every available niche of the large space. I loved the costumes, and recognized several of my favorite movies along with a number of fascinating ensembles that I could not place; everybody appeared happy, many were drinking and all were engaged in various conversations or photo opportunities. Entering the mob, I felt the energy of excitement. Several spaces opened as the crowd ebbed aside around various costumed characters, while cameras flashed all around the perimeter; these configurations held for several minutes as different spectators entered and exited picture frames. Making my way through the crowd, I fell into a stream of people moving from one end of the room to the other. The force of movement was strong, and before I really knew what was happening, I was on an escalator going down to a second floor where another equally large group awaited me. Thousands of people invade this city each year to celebrate their devotion to films and other forms of visual entertainment. While they may partake in dozens of activities, most of the

celebrating occurs in these large communal spaces where most of the people wear costumes, spend time recognizing other people's costumes, taking photographs and being photographed, and acknowledging each other.

Celebration III was the third official convention solely dedicated to *Star Wars*. Each Celebration coincided with the release of a film in the new trilogy of prequels in 1999, 2002, and 2005. The 2005 event that I attended was held in a large convention center in Indianapolis and attracted *Star Wars* fans from around the globe. Equal in size to Dragoncon yet concentrated on one text, it was quite a sight to behold as convention-familiar rooms including the art gallery, the vendor room, and the special events were all focused on *Star Wars*. When I saw the first *Star Wars* in 1977, the movie engulfed my senses for the two hours that it occupied the screen in front of me. In Indianapolis some twenty-seven years later, I was engulfed in a *Star Wars* interactive experience that lasted four days. Each day was packed with innovative representations of *Star Wars*. One of the most thrilling moments was when the members of the 501st Legion gathered for a group photo. They met in the lobby of my hotel during the last day of the festivities. As I looked over the balcony to the lobby below, I saw dozens of Stormtroopers. It was by far the largest number that I had ever seen in one place. I went down to walk among them with my video camera. They were lining up by costume type, preparing to march to the site of the actual photo. I saw several Darth Vaders, Biker Scouts, a few Royal guards, tie fighters, and even an Emperor but the Stormtroopers dominated the crowd. In their ranks, I was surrounded by white plastic armor and all manner of weapons. I wandered down

the line recognizing some of my friends and new acquaintances, and I was dizzy

from the site of them gathering together in this relatively confined space. At

Dragoncon, the costumes vary greatly from person to person; while small groups

from the same text may stand out in the crowd, they are still part of the crowd.

Here, Imperial *Star Wars* costumers were the entire crowd. I was the outsider in

my jeans and t-shirt. Throughout the Celebration, I found myself amongst giant

Figure 9: Official 501st photo at Celebration III, May 2005

hordes of people wearing *Star Wars* costumes, but the cohesive and organized

presence of the 501st Legion was a cinematic revelation.

When the last *Star Wars* film was released in May of 2005, *Star Wars*

costuming groups coordinated with movie theaters all over the country to attend

the midnight premiere. Our costumes earned free admission to the film and free

reign to wander the lobby and auditoriums. But, first and foremost, costumers are

members of the audience—we were there to see the movie. The last three *Star*

Wars films are listed in the top ten of all time top grossing films, and *Revenge of*

the Sith holds the all time record for opening day attendance.[8] As a member of

this opening day audience, it is hard to imagine that any film will match the

nation-wide simultaneous viewing of the last *Star Wars* film. In Tampa, Florida, I

went to the premiere of *Star Wars: Revenge of the Sith* at a large 24-theater

Cineplex. For the midnight showing, most of the 24 screens were sold out for

simultaneous showings. In unprecedented preparation for the anticipated crowds,

the Tampa Cineplex stopped showing their regular films by ten o'clock, and

proceeded to fill theaters with the early arrivals. With nearly two hours to wait, the

only entertainment available to these anxious audiences was buttered popcorn,

piped in music, and *Star Wars* costumers. We were not given instructions, nor

did we have to ask permission to play with audiences. We told the theater

managers that we wanted to be there,
and they accepted our presence and
our performances of interaction. A
group of us stayed outside to welcome
the arriving crowds, entertain the lines

**Figure 10: *Star Wars* Costumers at Revenge
of the Sith Premiere, May 2005**

that were forming, talk to the news crews that were documenting the evening,

and take pictures with movie fans. Another group traveled from theater to theater

entertaining those already seated with anecdotes and small trivia contests that

included prizes we donated to enhance the audience's experience. We were

celebrating *Star Wars*. I have vivid memories of seeing the first *Star Wars* film

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[8] *Box Office Mojo* <http://www.boxofficemojo.com/alltime/days/?page=open&p=.htm>. *Revenge of the Sith* earned more than $50,000,000 on opening day May 19, 2005, earning more than $10,000,000 more than its closest competitor.

because of the visual innovations on the screen. However, this recent viewing experience was memorable because I was acutely aware that everyone in this theater, and others around the nation, were watching this new, and last, *Star Wars* film at the same time. I did not feel as if I was seeing something new in *Revenge of the Sith*. As a devoted *Star Wars* fan, I already knew the narrative scheme of the film, and I was now familiar with George Lucas' innovative techniques. This viewing experience was unique because I was seeing something that I was now strangely a part of—I held a more interactive role.

Performing *Star Wars*

While costume choice and construction are rituals of preparation, wearing costumes are continuous acts that reincarnate and regenerate text bound characters. Wearing a costume is a malleable performance, varying greatly from person to person and situation to situation. Professional costuming is often constrained by context, space, and time. People dress for theatrical performances to project specific characterizations as dictated by scripts, and they are often bound to performance spaces. Walt Disney World employs an army of costumers for scheduled appearances, autograph signings, and photo opportunities; these characters are positioned throughout the amusement parks to enhance the Disney fantasy. In Tampa, Liberty Tax Service positions individuals dressed as the Statue of Liberty in front of their offices during tax season to draw in business. These people produce different levels of interactive performances and embody vivid, recognizable characterizations, but they are

ultimately connected to and driven by commercial imperatives: they are routinely paid to perform specific roles, and audiences frequently pay for the opportunity to see them. Moreover, they are part of carefully orchestrated performances that presuppose audience reactions and desires. In contrast, *Star Wars* costumers harness a particular appearance for personal performances of fandom and interactive performances with observers. According to Richard Schechner's description of audience participation, "The performance rises out of the audience, develops through both open and closed audience permission, and ultimately subsides back into the audience" ("Audience" 74). Costuming performances are comprised of unscripted encounters with costumers and non-costumers alike. The degree to which costumers are "in" character varies according the motivations of the individual as well as the level of audience participation.

Costuming transforms fictional characters from flat images projected on a screen into the realm of everyday where they are so familiar, yet also alien. As the physical personification of a fictional being, the costumer frequently becomes more real that the individual emulated. In person, Stormtroopers embody living, breathing fictions. Seeing my first Stormtrooper brought my favorite films to life, expanding my previously cinema-bound memories. Wearing a costume constitutes a purposeful performance of representation that sparks a performance of recognition as costumer and spectator meet on common ground. I have seen and worn costumes. As a spectator and photographer, I appreciate strange incarnations from unfamiliar texts; but, I am drawn to the costumes I recognize. As a costumer, people are drawn to me because they recognize me.

This is a key element to the relationship between costumer and spectator. Regardless of their source, characters reproduced by costuming enthusiasts are, at the very least, recognizable. The dynamic interplay of representation and recognition between costumer and spectator involves common recollections of popular cultural forms. This naturally sparks a relationship between the costumer and non-costumer. Recreating source material from history, folklore, and popular culture, the costumer generates pleasant and exciting memories for those who approach them and want to interact with them.

Costumers play out cinematic fantasies. When I gained entrance into the 501st Legion with my Gunner costume, one of the members presented me with the action figure equivalent to my costumed persona—a practice that constitutes his own little initiation into the club. Actors are frequently chided about commercial likenesses, but this toy is a reminder to me that I represent the aspects of movie audiences that want to play out movie fantasies. Play is generally associated with the imaginary antics of children or organized sports and games, but it also touches upon the fantastical and performative nature of costuming. Addressing the significance of costumed individuals in tribal ritual, J. Huizinga indicates that "dressing up" illustrates the "extra-ordinary" nature in play that "reaches perfection" as transformed individuals are accepted in their new guises and roles (13). Whether following the rules of the game or imitating popular forms, play is categorized by the involvement and commitment among those playing. Huizinga indicates that play includes secret rules that bind the players together and often exclude non-players. For costumers, however, non-

costumers are vital participants in the game of representation: chess cannot be played without bishops and pawns and costumers cannot play without audiences. While *Star Wars* costumers are often fans that know a great deal more about the text than most casual audience members, they display their craft as a means of enticing others to play. Costumers are not obliged to maintain a characterization; some oscillate between their true and fictional selves. Stormtroopers take their helmets off for frightened children and inquisitive onlookers. They even share their guises, allowing others to don their helmets and hold their weapons. Costumers and their audiences play *Star Wars* together.

Costumers interact directly with other people and the new unions often produce new pictures—new images. The most frequent and significant interaction between costumers and other people involves photography. Just as the subculture of *Star Wars* fans is inherently connected to the larger culture of non-fans, costumes and images are inextricable from one another. Costumes come from images or written imagery, but they also produce images of their own. In movies and television, the director is in charge of positioning the subjects within the camera frame. In this digital age of personal computers and camera equipment, costuming provides opportunities to recreate, or reexamine, source images with new audiences capturing these self-directed moments on film. The most common request of Stormtroopers involves pictures with the requestor on their knees, hands clasped behind their head, and the Stormtrooper pointing their weapon at them. This pose occurs in the films and positions the observer, audience member, as part of the scene. An unspoken duty of the *Star Wars*

Costuming Legions, picture-taking is an integral part of the performance. Photographers recreate familiar poses from familiar texts, mix texts and genres, and blur the lines between fantasy and reality with non-costumers frequently entering the performance frame. As live representations of fictional beings, costumers become image producers, playing different roles for different situations. As Huizinga indicates, "all play moves and has its being within a playground marked off beforehand either materially or ideally, deliberately or as a matter of course" (10). Hotel hallways and lobbies, exhibition halls, convention centers, and city streets serve as costuming playgrounds. Costumers dwell in these areas displaying their product while all manner of people, fellow costumers, fans and non-fans alike, take the initiative to compose images, play out their favorite scenes and circumstances, resulting in millions of pictures taken of costumed individuals each year. Cameras are tools of the onlooker. Unlike watching films in darkened movie theaters, audiences of costuming events come armed with a camera to take some control over the images they consume.

The costumer's performance is both denotative and dialogic, representing popular imagery and prompting social interaction and participation. According to Schechner, "Performances mark identities, bend time, reshape and adorn the body, and tell stories" ("Performance" 22). The costumer literally embodies a performative act, demarcates space and time, and transports observers into fictional realms through recollection and amusement. *Star Wars* costumers dictate the conditions of play and their presence transforms conventional locations into cinematic playgrounds. Outlining the relevance and persistence of

89

play in human behavior, Huizinga proclaims it as a marked distinction from "ordinary life" interjecting its own "locality and duration" and containing its own "course and meaning." (9) While costumers participate in organized activities, they are not contained to pre-determined schedules and locations. As long as they are in costume, they are, at least partially, playing a game of representation. Their play offers what Huizinga would term as "a limited perfection" in "an imperfect world" isolated from unwanted influence and only confined by a willingness to play (10). Costumes usurp ordinary identities in favor of fictional personas, but onlookers know that they are not seeing "real" Stormtroopers or Jedi recognizing that ordinary people like themselves are underneath the costumes. They share a "consciousness of only pretending" that propagates play. (Huizinga 23) The costumer's physical appearance transcends cultural and textual constraints: they are accepted in their fictional guises, and they are not confined by scripts and screens. Costuming initiates playful and performative interludes between individuals.

Performing Fandom

        Fans express their preferences through personal creativity and social interaction. Science fiction/fantasy themed conventions and vendor fairs are among the most popular places to wear costumes as people attending gather to celebrate their connections. Conventions and conferences bring people with similar interests and objectives together; whether they showcase new technologies or attract academics in a particular field, conventions provide a

neutral ground for sharing and exchanging information. Popular culture

conventions focusing on movies, television shows, comic books, and novels have

been around for many decades slowly and steadily growing in popularity and

frequency. These gatherings come in many shapes and sizes from large multi-

day festivals bustling with trade, presentations, and entertainment to small comic

book or toy fairs primarily focused on sales. Conventions are pre-planned into

specific blocks of activities in different venues including hotels, convention

centers, and fair grounds. Common understanding and appreciation of similar

texts and images among attendees promotes a ready-made sense of community.

Conventions or "institutions," as Jenkins refers to them, "are the infrastructure[s]

for a self-sufficient fan culture" (47). They support a realm of subcultural

exchange; vendor rooms filled with material appropriate to the theme along with

celebrity appearances and autograph signings, musical performances, and

media screenings transform individual interests into group interests. They provide

forums for face-to-face interaction with other fans, attracting attendees that might

not normally find each other. Many popular culture gatherings are annual rituals

of interaction and fandom with some people planning for their attendance and

participation throughout the year. The level of individual engagement varies from

casual observers to convention coordinators. People are lauded for continued

commitment to attending events, and many establish long lasting relationships

that are only realized in the conference space. Most important, conventions

provide spaces for fans to perform their fandom: they display art in the gallery;

sell or purchase wares in the vendor room; interact with their favorite celebrities; volunteer their services; and among other activities, they wear costumes.

Costuming thrives in a multi-textual convention environment. The costume contest serves as a central, or feature, event celebrating and illustrating the texts of popular culture. A staple of conventions, the contest is populated entirely by fans, and winning entries are generally decided by a panel of celebrities and media experts. Turning professionals into spectators and amateurs into producers, this role reversal grants the costumer the power of representation. While the costume contest generally occupies two to three hours of any given event, it sports a small number of entrants relative to the number of conference attendees. Because of this somewhat limited exposure and the amount of work involved with constructing a costume, people choose to wear their costumes beyond the confines of the contest. Of all the coordinated activities at fan gatherings, costuming has expanded to occupy part of every minute and every event as fans don their costumes, and sometimes multiple costumes, as their wardrobe for the entire duration of the event. Free from a scheduled block of time, the confinement of a stage, and the pressure of organized competition, costuming has grown in exposure and participants. Featured bands and panelists rarely give impromptu performances and celebrities often dwell in private spaces away from the crowds; costumers, on the other hand, are attendees and participants mingling in open spaces. Numerous textual sources and media are represented. While wearing a costume constitutes an act of textual devotion for the individual, interaction with others both in and out of costume comprise

interactive performances of fandom as people share their favorite viewing experiences through physical characterizations. Most costumes are inspired by fictional or historical characters. When designs involve living, contemporary beings, the source is generally an iconic symbol of the culture. In most cases, the original beings are not easily accessible: celebrities guard their privacy, historical icons are no longer with us, and others only exist on the screen. But costumers are accessible. Non-costume wearing fans enjoy their favorite characters by tapping into their recollections and creating new images with personal cameras. Such interactions are potent illustrations of popular culture, showing connections between audiences and images. The physicality of costuming allows individuals to share their previously ephemeral experiences and expand on their meanings through performance and interaction.

People wearing similar costumes or costumes from the same texts frequently gravitate towards one another for picture-taking opportunities, to discuss their costuming techniques, and to share their allegiance. In a sense, group devotion to single text could be considered a subculture of a subculture. While attending Dreamcon in Jacksonville, Florida, I met three costumers wearing outfits fashioned

Figure 11: Lord of the Rings Costumers attending Dreamcon, June 2004

after characters from the *Lord of the Rings*. I continually saw the three of them together and they entered the costume contest as a trio. They wore accurate

costumes and were popular at the event. After three days of festivities, I learned

that one of the three had never met the other two before. Solely because their

costumes complemented one another, they bonded, enjoying the weekend event

together. This was precisely the situation that inspired the creation of the first

Legion of *Star Wars* costumers. Two men dressed as Stormtroopers in self-made

white plastic body armor met at a science fiction convention in 1997. After

admiring the work of the other and sharing stories about how they always wanted

to be a Stormtrooper, along with stories about the construction of their suits, they

decided to start a club. Now, the *Star Wars* Costuming Legions are the most

organized costuming presence at a majority of these events. They often have

their own dedicated area to display information about their distinctive group,

while the members roam the venue in costume. Their "cohesive identity" draws in

new members and thrills audiences.[9]

For *Star Wars* costumers, the impact of their performance grows as higher

numbers of people don costumes. Although there are costumers who strive for

completely original designs or singular representations, *Star Wars* costumers

enjoy sharing the spotlight with others in similar costumes. Legionnaires actively

recruit new members and revel in multiple copies of the same character. Much

like my experience with the Stormtroopers at Celebration III, the presence of

more characters can bring the fiction to life. Because Stormtroopers are

understood textually as an army of identical soldiers clad in white plastic body

armor, Stormtrooper costumers gain cultural credence by appearing in large

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[9] The "cohesive identity" is best represented in the 501st Legion Mission Statement on *The 501st Website* <www.501st.com>. See Appendix

groups; costumers choosing this characterization maintain the integrity of the fictional army represented in the films. Fan performances are unscripted but they are still connected to their narrative sources. *Star Wars* costumers also gain

Figure12: Costumers dressed as Han Solo, Chewbacca, Princess Leia, and Stormtrooper play a scene against Celebration III backdrop, May 2005

credibility when multiple characters are seen together: while Han Solo or Chewbacca costumes may each garner attention, they are more powerful together, projecting the buddy connection between them in the narrative. Instead of placing the costumer in a real world environment, these costumers transport the observer into fictional spaces where Han Solo and Chewbacca are engaged in conversation and Stormtroopers march in long processions. Costumers force the illusion of *Star Wars*. Whether they appear as an army of Stormtroopers or groupings of cast members, they support stronger visual connections to the source, and since the text is the first commitment of the costumer, it is self-promoting and satisfying to see others from the same text. This is not to say that there is not some degree of competition between renditions, but rather that costumers do enjoy sharing their textual devotions.

There are always a number of intertextual moments occurring during a convention. Part of the performance of representation for costumers is to meet the quality of the text but also expand the possibilities. This microcosm externalizes the cultural interactions of a media driven society. We are an intertextual culture absorbing images from multiple sources and carving our own

understanding from the combinations. This interplay is externalized in a costuming environment where people dressed as Han Solo and Indiana Jones are available to pose in the same pictures. The performance of representation bends itself to the moment as the duo represents a fictional conundrum of two characters that could and would never occupy the same space, yet they share many relationships recognizable to spectators: they are both adventurer, fantasy-based characters, they both represent extremely popular films made by George Lucas, and both were portrayed by Harrison Ford. I have seen fans compose battle pictures between Stormtroopers and Aliens and I have seen Darth Vader pose with Batman. Along the same lines, there are opportunities for capturing multiple versions of the same character. Characters like Darth Vader or Princess Leia are individual characters, so when there is more than one, they defy the movies as well as the audiences' experiences with them. A professional display of *Star Wars* characters would never schedule more than one Princess Leia at a time—that would be stretching the text and weakening the representation. At Celebration III, however, a group of approximately 16 girls dressed in a "Slave Leia" costume were held for an hour while people took dozens and dozens of pictures. Such images and intertextual moments are orchestrated by the fans who help to produce new subcultural reincarnations and re-interpretations.

Because non-costumers understand that costuming is a performance of representation that denotes textual interest, they feel free to express their shared enjoyment, and sometimes dislike of or disappointments with the material. The communal recognition of a particular costume prompts interaction and

96

discussion. Costumers open doors of communication among audience members by externalizing viewing choices and preferences. For one day of Dragoncon 2005, I wore a costume fashioned after Glinda the Good Witch of the North of *Wizard of Oz* fame. A young girl approached me to admire my costume telling me how much she loved the movie and the new Broadway musical *Wicked* based on the same characters. She was so happy to see my costume that she proceeded to sing one of the musical numbers. As she serenaded me, I thought about my own experiences seeing the movie, the musical, and choosing my costume. I was thoroughly satisfied by her appreciation. I have seen little kids run to their favorite characters to shake their hands, and I have seen nervous adults stumble over their words while approaching different costume-clad individuals. Costumes allow the wearer and the observer to become closer to the source material through representation and recognition. Providing forums for reunions among geographically divided friends as well as an equal playing ground to establish new connections, conventions and other fan gatherings have grown accustomed to costuming as a means of performing fandom.

Performing Community

For *Star Wars* costumers, participation comprises performances of fandom and community. There are three significant requirements for maintaining active membership in the *Star Wars* Costuming Legions: one must be 18 years old, have a movie-quality costume based on a character in the *Star Wars* universe, and everyone must participate by wearing their costume to at least one

organized event each year. Active participation is the binding element for these clubs, and members are purged after an extended period of inactivity. Costumers must actively reinforce their commitment to *Star Wars* and the Legions, but they also establish commitments to the communities in which they live. With garrisons and outposts all over the world, members of the *Star Wars* Legions participate in hundreds of community-based events each year. Many occasions welcome *Star Wars* costumers with some specifically connected to the hobby and others incorporating or accommodating the practice. In 2005, members of the Florida Garrison volunteered for over 150 events. Although Florida is one of the more active states, this is just one regional segment of the 501st Legion. Each garrison comes up with their own events and there a few annual gatherings that are attended by members world-wide. Costumers initiate Legion participation at most of the events they attend, judging for themselves the different activities that seem appropriate and contacting organizers for details as well as other *Star Wars* costumers for interest. Individuals reach out to sponsors and organizers to find new activities for wearing costumes. Speaking with non-*Star Wars* entities requires the ability to effectively explain *Star Wars* costuming and the Legions' desire to participate. Because of their diligent efforts to integrate *Star Wars* into their communities, costumers participate in a large range of activities that do not necessarily cater specifically to fans. As costumers, they represent a global community of *Star Wars* fans, but they also cultivate connections with their local communities.

Almost everything that I have discussed thus far centers upon building relationships with visual texts as well as other people who understand that text. Whether seeking costuming advice or sharing physical characterizations with people who readily recognize the results, most amateur costumers stick to events primarily attended by other fans, where they know they will be well-received. The motivations of fans are often misunderstood by people outside of the subculture. They are frequently derided, and even feared, because their "interests are fundamentally alien to the realm of 'normal' cultural experience;" and, as Jenkins further indicates, "the fan still constitutes a scandalous category in contemporary culture, one alternately the target of ridicule and anxiety, of dread and desire, […] whose mentality is dangerously out of touch with reality" (15). Unlike the majority of costumers, *Star Wars* fans delve into their communities for opportunities to interact, participate, and display their costumes. They occupy an interesting position on the continuum between "normal" and "fan" activities frequently succeeding in merging the two into community displays of interaction. Even in the most mundane activity, wearing a *Star Wars* costume is not a "normal" behavior; but, coupled with the context of community involvement, they have established themselves as valued participants.

Community-based events often lack the concentrated knowledge base or theme supported by conventions and other fan gatherings. They garner involvement from a variety of individuals and generally involve a random mass of attendees. While I have seen other costumed individuals at community events, *Star Wars* characters and Superheroes are the only ones that I see wearing texts

without an overriding context: people wear green of St. Patrick's Day and red, white, and blue for the 4th of July; Santa Claus generally appears in a Christmas parade; Ronald MacDonald appears at restaurant openings; and, in Tampa, Florida, pirates descend upon the town for the annual Gasparilla events; but *Star Wars* costuming represents *Star Wars*. Thus, people dressed in colored or themed clothing or Santa Claus costumes are limited to specific contexts while *Star Wars* costumers participate in anything where they can represent their commitments to the text, their craft, or their own communities. *Star Wars* costumers represent participation no matter where they appear: they are attendees at conventions rather than presenters or paid performers; they attend movie premieres to see the movies as part of the audience; and they are active members and participants in their communities. They do not need to be directly connected to a particular event to represent the community.

Star Wars costuming has infiltrated a number of community events that have no obvious connections to *Star Wars* including school fairs, parades, and festivals. Parades, school carnivals, and festivals showcase different aspects of the community, and the attendees at these events support and celebrate their communities. Like conventions, they often support a theme and gather individuals for trade, exchange, and entertainment. Unlike convention themes which tend to be textually specific, these events center upon national and international holidays and community-specific history and needs, attracting a wide range of participants with different connections and motivations. A parade is a cultural event illustrating the community; various groups armed with costumes

and performances march down the street with the rest of the community serving as a constantly changing audience lined along the route. Parade entries include floats sponsored by local business, the mayor and other officials in convertibles, fire trucks and police cars, high school marching bands, local celebrities, and *Star Wars* costumers. A parade is defined by the variety of participants and their connections to the community. A single group marching down the street has far less impact than seeing the better part of the community represented in a long procession of pride and celebration. Parade audiences are likewise composed of varied representatives of the region. They are active participants cheering, clapping, and taking pictures. Parade participants wave, throw beads and candy, and perform for the attention of onlookers. The amount of interaction at a parade is somewhat limited by distance and the constant movement forward, but there are dozens of one-on-one acknowledgements along the route.

A lot of these events involve mingling with individuals who have never watched *Star Wars*. "There are so many people with so many different values and beliefs in our culturally fractured, postmodern society," asserts Kurt Lancaster in his discussion of interactive "performance entertainments," that "some are unable to relate to mainstream performances" (88). Thus, the level of recognition for the specific *Star Wars* characters, and even the films themselves, diminishes in these public, non-fan oriented displays, but *Star Wars* still retains some degree of familiarity. Because the films are so ingrained in our visual history through thirty years of films and merchandizing, some of the main characters like Darth Vader, who was recently voted the third greatest movie

villain of all time[10], are implanted in the cultural psyche. As Lancaster continues, "By providing arenas for people to socially express their own beliefs, values, and behaviors in our postmodern world, performance entertainments tend to bring conflicting voices together" (88). The presence and acceptance of *Star Wars* in the community illustrates the general acceptance and acknowledgement of visual media in our culture as we embrace establish communal bonds through newly realized performances of media representation.

There are a number of special gatherings that design their celebrations based on the participation of the *Star Wars* Costuming Legions including hospital visits, charity events, and weddings. These smaller events have no apparent, or initial, relation to *Star Wars*; yet they both invite and welcome Legion participation, and, most of the time, they are the only costumed characters present. The novelty and availability of movie-quality *Star Wars* characters prompts some creative and thoughtful celebrations designed specifically for the Legions' involvement. Costumers visit hospital wards cheering many with their guises. Charity events publicize the involvement of *Star Wars* costumers and often take Polaroid pictures to raise funds. Members have been active collaborators with the Make a Wish Foundation and other organizations geared toward children's needs. When the daughter of a founding member of the 501st was diagnosed with cancer, the Troopers sprung to action dedicating events and proceeds to Katie's recovery quickly nicknaming her "the heart of the Empire."

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[10] American Film Institute, *100 years, 100 Heroes and Villains.* Darth Vader follows Norman Bates of *Psycho* chosen as number two and Dr. Hannibal Lector of *Silence of the Lambs* listed as number one. http://www.afi.com/tvevents/100years/handv.aspx

The Legion's continued involvement with children's charities and hospitals was personalized by Katie's plight. These events remind costumers that they make a difference in the lives of children much like *Star Wars* made a difference in their lives as children. In Florida, a young fan passed away, and at the behest of his father, the Stormtroopers appeared as pallbearers for the boy's funeral. *Star Wars* costuming is built upon the compassion and commitment of its members. Community service and sacrifice are a part of the *Star Wars* Costuming charter. Their participation legitimates their hobby and solidifies their connections to the community.

  Star Wars costumers take pride in their volunteer efforts. They consider charity work as a driving force behind their purpose as a cohesive organization. According to Robert D. Putnam's analysis of the rise and decline in American community involvement throughout the 20th Century, there is an increase in the number of voluntary associations but a decrease in the actual participation among members (49). Putnam indicates that people have continued to join voluntary groups, but they have stopped attending meetings and engaging in civic events. Their involvement is often limited to writing checks and receiving mail; and, as he states, "their ties are to common symbols, common leaders, and perhaps common ideals, but not to each other" (52). Civically minded organizations offer individuals fewer and fewer opportunities to participate within the organizational community never mind within their geographic communities. As a result, "Americans have been dropping out in droves, not merely from political life, but from organized community life" (Putnam 64). *Star Wars*

costumers are both textually centered and civically minded. There are no dues associated with Legion membership; the requirements of membership rely on physical participation. Because they seek opportunities to improve community life; whether they visit hospital wards or collect funds for hurricane victims, costumers have proven themselves community assets.

Commercial entities invite costumers to participate in movie openings, game releases, celebrity appearances, and other *Star Wars* themed events. These gatherings generally have the most rules and restrictions expecting specific performances and outcomes. Commercial entities and *Star Wars* costumers have a mutual appreciation for each other. One supplies the stage for a performance and the other promotes their goods. With billions of dollars in merchandise and ticket sales, there are a number of outlets that distribute *Star Wars* materials. With the new trilogy of films to revitalize the Saga, there have been plenty of opportunities to celebrate *Star Wars* and costumers are on hand to add atmosphere and authenticity to each occasion. In Florida, stores like Toys

Figure 13: *Star Wars* **Costumers at Toys R Us in Brandon Florida, October 2004**

R Us, Electronics Boutique, Target, and Best Buy have developed relationships with costumers alerting them to new release dates to scheduling appearances. Although these events are geared towards *Star Wars* materials, a large portion of the people the costumers encounter are casual shoppers who are surprised by their presence. Commercial entities utilize costuming enthusiasts to draw in crowds

but costumers are there for exposure and the opportunity to wear their costumes—they are there for *Star Wars.* The release of a new movie, toy, or game promotes *Star Wars* continually renewing interest and keeping the imagery fresh in the public imagination. It does not matter whether or not the people that approach costumers are thoroughly familiar with the movies or the memorabilia. Whether or not they partake in the movies, the presence of *Star Wars* costumers invokes a cinematic response often similar to the public appearances of celebrities with the one exception that they are more accessible. Onlookers are drawn by the spectacle of seeing Stormtroopers in the mall. These public displays offer spontaneous interaction, prompting unsuspecting individuals to make cinematic connections and partake in cinematic interaction.

Because of their growing exposure and reputation, *Star Wars* costumers have ascended into a different realm of representation where they are included in some higher profile events. The American Film Institute honored George Lucas

Figure 14: Stormtrooper accompany William Shatner in a musical number during the American Film Institute's tribute to George Lucas

in 2005 with a nationally broadcast, celebrity-filled evening of devotion and entertainment. No tribute to Lucas would be complete without acknowledging *Star Wars* and the film was referenced and represented throughout the night. The producers enlisted Stormtroopers from a local branch of the 501st Legion to participate in the festivities. The Stormtroopers did a little dance on the stage and physically carried William Shatner of *Star Trek* fame from

the stage, playing on the continual and sometimes frustrating confusion between the two science fiction classics. Additionally, the Lucas organization invited costumed fans to participate in a couple of significant events in 2005: for the release of a new video game, *Battlefront*, the company paid for several Stormtroopers to go to New York City for a number of scheduled appearances; and the company invited people in a variety of costumes to open a new *Star Wars* themed exhibit at the Boston Museum of Science and Industry. Several people from Florida attended these events taking great pride in their participation. On a tour through Florida devoted to orchestral movie themes, the London Symphony Orchestra called upon the 501st Legion to walk among the formally dressed audience as they played the music from *Star Wars*. These events have more rules usually based on maintaining characterization and bound to specific performance spaces, but they also link fans to the source of their fandom both in terms of ability and acceptance. As of 2005, the 501st Legion was officially recognized within the *Star Wars* canon with a mention in a novel of the expanded universe and the *Revenge of the Sith* film. *Star Wars* costumers have gained a strong reputation both nationally and in their communities for the quality of their costumes and the range of their activities.

    Star Wars costumers do not always need a specific event to interact in public spaces. As a matter of circumstance, costumers frequently find themselves putting gas in their cars, stopping to eat at local restaurants, and even shopping at stores for necessities. It is sometimes easier to be in costume than to find places to change and store materials when they arrive at their

106

destinations. I recently attended Megacon in Orlando, Florida. The weekend

event was held at a huge convention center and attracted members from all over

the state. Many of us shared hotel rooms in the area.

Because of limited parking and the convenience of

public transportation, we chose to take a trolley to and

from the convention center. *Star Wars* costumers

frequently obtain industrial sized storage bins for their

bulky costumes and given the choice of toting their bins

or dressing early, many will choose the latter. They are

Figure 15: Clone Troopers on their way to Celebration III, May 2005

careful with their weapons using large, soft-sided duffels

that can be easily stashed at the convention booth. On Saturday morning, eight

of us set off to Megacon: four were dressed in combat gear from Resident Evil, a

popular video game and movie; two were in Stormtrooper armor with one in the

Feminine version of the outfit; I was in my Gunner garb; and one was in civilian

clothes. Of the eight, seven had helmets and/or facial coverings. As soon as we

left the hotel, we knew we were being watched—enjoyed. We were staying on

International Drive in Orlando, a Mecca for tourism and amusement parks and

the streets were busy with pedestrians and street traffic. As we made our way to

the trolley stop, we heard several car horns and cheers from people passing.

When we got on the trolley, it was nearly full with people ranging from infant to

elderly. I chose a seat at the back of the trolley and my Stormtrooper friend

joined me in sitting there; most of the others were standing or sitting near the

front. By the time I got settled and looked back up, nearly every occupant of the

trolley was turned around looking at us and half of them brandished cameras to document the moment. After the pictures were taken, we took off our helmets and proceeded to chat with the other travelers about our costumes, our destination, and our hobby. A seemingly impersonal ride on a public bus quickly turned into an interactive experience for everyone; we were the binding element among people that may not have noticed each other before. I have yet to have a negative experience while in costume and these impromptu exchanges are valuable to costumers, representing not only the impact of their distinctive appearance choices on individuals but they also illustrate the acceptance and appreciation from various communities not inherently connected to their craft.

Costumers reach out to their communities seeking ways to participate. Beyond superficial notions of appearance and personal collections, Hodkinson notes that organized activities are a "key source of subcultural capital." As an event coordinator, in effect a coordinator between fans and the community, the responsibility for "subcultural organizational or productive activities constituted strong evidence of subcultural commitment and tended to raise the general profile of those involved" (124). Through community endeavors and charitable events, the *Star Wars* Costuming Legions have garnered a great deal of respect around the nation. Many of these events were not originally designed for costuming but they have grown to accommodate the practice as attendees have grown accustomed seeing *Star Wars* costumers. *Star Wars.com* posted a list of the *Star Wars* top ten for 2005 and the efforts of the 501st Legion are listed as number nine. In a year of premieres and finales and record breaking sales, the

performances and participation of this group of fans had enough impact to make

the top ten. "It's inspiring how the members of the 501st will step up when called

upon, no matter how grand or humble the need," says Mary Franklin, events

manager for Lucasfilm. "From huge events like Celebration III and the DVD

release to local visits at children's hospitals—this group can be counted upon to

do their best."[11] *Star Wars* costumers are representatives of a specific text but

they are also representatives of their communities.

Conclusion

Costuming endorses performances of participation and interaction. In

posing for pictures and participating in fan-generated video projects, costumers

and photographers become active participants in re-inventing their favorite movie

images. As directors and initiators, spectators compose new images. Picture-

taking can categorize the producer-consumer relationship as costumers produce

new images and the spectators consume and capture the images with their

cameras. By interacting with others while in costume and taking pictures,

costumers share, create, and re-create popular culture. Costumers are watched

and scrutinized, but they also have a physical relationship with the public

interacting on different levels: as other human beings, as representatives of the

text, as participants attending the same event, and as representatives of the

narrative concerns of the text. The nostalgic connection between costumers and

non-costumers does not require people to have the same level of engagement

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[11] *Star Wars.com* "Best of 2005." Last accessed on 4/10/06.
<http://www.starwars.com/welcome/about/news/f20051223/indexp11.html>

with the source material. People recognize costumed characters without seeing specific movies or televisions shows; cinematic images are frequently utilized for ad campaigns, newspaper and magazine articles, and merchandise. Others make extra-textual connections to costumed individuals; a spectator may recognize someone dressed like Lara Croft as a representation of the actress that portrayed her. Costuming is a process of textual enculturation with fans choosing the texts as well as the manner in which they are displayed, and spectators recognizing the product. People do not have to see a movie at the same time, at the same place, or even in the same way to be a part of same audience; the interaction between costumers and non-costumers creates new, shared experiences.

Costumers invite spectators to play out their reactions to the movies, and to play out their cinematic fantasies. Play promotes the dynamic interaction between costumer and observer. "Whether one is sorcerer or sorcerized one is always knower and dupe at once . . . one chooses to be the dupe." (Huizinga 23) A suspension of disbelief, an acknowledgement of the source material, and reflexive comments about spectatorship allow audiences to participate in spontaneous performances of representation. Lancaster indicates that "new forms of performances are giving spectators many alternatives to mainstream theater" (77). They are "liminal participatory events" transforming spectators into performers (77). Costuming performances are enhanced by the interaction with non-costuming crowds, where "participants have the opportunity to explore different aspects of themselves" (87). These "ritual entertainment events" serve

as "vehicles for social interaction, revealing an individual's personality and relationship to the community" (87). Costumers are happily manipulated by photographers and organizers to set a particular tone or reincarnate scenes and images: *Star Wars* costumers have served as the entourage for scheduled guests, marching them into place; many *Star Wars* characters are asked to wield their weapons for pictures; and Stormtroopers have been employed as centuries, marking the boundaries of a given event of performance space. They are invited to be present. As fans, *Star Wars* costumers are representatives of the text, but they are also part of unstructured, communal performances with non-costumers.

Costumers are *Star Wars*. While many people may not know the difference between Luke Skywalker and Darth Vader, most know that we represent *Star Wars*, or even science fiction. Costuming choices represent the expanse of popular culture delivering images to wider audiences and situations. It is a purposeful performance of representation. "While performance presupposes a willful and volitional subject," Hills remarks that "the performative is always a citation, always a reiteration" indicating some degree of subservience to the text or the culture that fosters it. *Star Wars* costumers play with notions of representation through intertextual display and unlikely appearances where the text becomes a "citation" to the performance. Of course, this can have a circular effect as costumers rely on previously conceived characterizations for design, and also for their ability to inform new meanings generated by wearing the costume. For Huizinga, play is "transmitted" assuming "fixed form as a cultural phenomenon. Once played, it endures as a new-found creation of the mind, a

111

treasure to be retained by the memory" (9-10). While wearing a costume serves

personal satisfactions, it is also an external display for others. In fact, the

costumer cannot get the full benefits of their own costumes without a method of

reflection like a mirror or a picture. Onlookers provide that reflection through their

reactions and appreciation. It is the recognition among fans and non-fans that

really inspires costuming. Through interaction and participation, the line between

culture and subculture dissipates as communal understanding builds.

Chapter Five

Conclusion

When I was a child in the 1970s, my father was a member of the Shriners.

The Shriners are an internationally recognized, non-profit organization of

professional men who head charitable campaigns and sponsor hospitals

dedicated to children with severe burns and handicaps. I am certain that my

father paid some sort of dues, and I know that he went to numerous meetings,

but there are many other aspects of my experience with the Shriners that remind

me of, and perhaps prepared me for, my experiences with the *Star Wars*

Costuming Legions. First and foremost, they are both social clubs that organize

members into service to the community. As Putnam indicates, "social networks

provide the channels through which we recruit one another for good deeds, and

social networks foster norms of reciprocity that encourage attention to others'

welfare" (117). Collective civic engagement among both groups strengthens their

connections to their communities and to each other. They also share similar

organizational structures. Similar to the way *Star Wars* Costuming Legions

categorize their members by costume-type, the Shriners divide their membership

according to their hobbies and talents that are showcased at charity and

community events. Shriners can participate in marching bands, horseback

troupes, or brigades that build, maintain, and drive miniature cars and

motorbikes. And some join the clown units.

By now, it is probably not a surprise that my father was a clown complete with red nose, elaborate face make-up, and baggy costume. His "Sourdough" clown persona was based on the cartoon character Yosemite Sam. He chose this image because of his childhood memories of the Bugs Bunny cartoons, the playful connotations of the character, and the fact that he was unwilling to part with his full red beard and mustache. Most of the clowns in the Shriners design their costumes from existing clown-types or popular culture images. Ultimately, all costumers infuse their personal choices, image preferences, and physical characteristics into their costumes. Clown Shriners, like *Star Wars* costumers, take considerable pride and invest a great deal of time in designing and making their own costumes. Moreover, they attend conventions to showcase their costumes. Along with larger all-inclusive gatherings, clown units in the Shriners gather for clown competitions, earning prizes for costumes, make-up, and clowning talents like making balloon animals, juggling balls, and unit-directed comedy skits. As a family, we attended three or four clown competitions, and my father won many awards for the originality, quality, and craftsmanship of his costume. They were festive events, and I have fond memories of mingling with clowns, watching them apply their make-up, making balloon animals, and celebrating my father's victories. Like popular culture conventions, these gatherings offer a space for like-minded individuals to share their hobbies and interests, reinforcing friendships and establishing new ones.

By building quality costumes and displaying those costumes in performances of participation and interaction, the clowns reinforce their

commitments to the Shriners, their costumes, and, most importantly, their communities. While clown competitions and conventions are focused on specific aspects of clowning and costuming, the Shriners are known for their community work on the behalf of children. The Shriners introduced me to community service: as a Girl Scout, I learned to respect adults and build campfires; as an athlete, I learned to be a part of the team and play by the rules; but as a Shriners' daughter, and now as a *Star Wars* costumer, I have learned to be a part of my community. Shriners volunteer for parades, the Special Olympics, hospital visits, festivals, and fund-raisers, all in the name of community and service. By the time I was twelve, my mother and I had clown costumes of our own, and we became a clown family at events that welcomed the participation of non-Shriners including the Special Olympics and community festivals. My mother and I were not allowed to join the Shriners, of course, but we were part of their clowning complement on multiple occasions. "Volunteering fosters more volunteering," Putnam writes, "in both formal and informal settings" (121). The activities I did with the Shriners inspired me to participate in my own community—middle school. When I was thirteen, I volunteered at a spring fund-raising fair at my middle school: there was a bake sale, carnival games, and me in my clown costume making balloon animals for school donations. By volunteering, I made my newly-found hobby an asset to my community.

It is unlikely that I need to spell out the strangeness of the connection between my Shriners past and my *Star Wars* present. But, it is worth noting that I did not consciously understand the similarities between these activities until I

wrote this thesis. The connection between popular culture, play, and community

service is so deeply ingrained within me that the trajectory between past

clowning and present costuming was not an obvious one. As much of my past

that I am happy to escape, this is one part of my life that I am happy to uncover.

As part of the Shriners, my parents and I found an instant group of friends. But,

we also joined our community by participating in events. I am nostalgic thinking

back on the time my family was involved with the Shriners because we did it

together. Ironically, the only other activity that I associate with both of my parents

is going to the movies, including the first time we saw *Star Wars* in 1977. We

were a clown family, but we were also avid movie-goers. As a member of the

Star Wars Costuming Legions, I have unconsciously reincarnated and merged

many of my fondest childhood experiences: I have joined a new family of movie

enthusiasts whose dedication and commitment to the community equals that of

the Shriners. I am happy, and, perhaps more important, I am *involved*.

Decline in Community Involvement

In American culture, people are consistently and persistently disconnected

from one another; from hectic personal lives to darkened movie theaters, we are

often isolated from those around us. Putnam's comprehensive study of the

American community investigates this decline. He contends that a "treacherous

rip current" is rippling through our communities; "without at first noticing, we have

been pulled from one another and from our communities over the last third of the

century" (27). Putnam traces the "collapse" and supposed "revival" of American

society by investigating trends in civic engagement throughout the twentieth century. Utilizing organizational records, survey reports, time diaries, and consumer expenditures, he analyses the involvement of individuals throughout the United States. He concludes that community involvement and participation within clubs and organizations has been on a steady decline in American culture for several decades. While membership has progressively deteriorated, "active involvement in face-to-face organizations has plummeted" (63). People are disengaged from the world around them. From voting in public elections to playing cards with friends, our daily interpersonal connections are fading. "The last several decades have witnessed a striking diminution of regular contacts with our friends and neighbors;" and, as Putnam continues, "we spend less time in conversation over meals, we exchange visits less often, we engage less often in leisure activities that encourage casual social interaction" (115). In short, we seem to be avoiding each other. Group membership is in decline because people have stopped relating to one another, and even more detrimental to our society is the possibility that we have stopped looking for ways to relate to other people.

Putnam measures social disconnection in terms of money, time, location, technology, and age. Contending that we spend less time doing everything social, the purpose of his study is not only to trace the decline but also to determine what has replaced civic activities in people's lives. The only significant growth he documents in his study is among "mailing list membership" and "the creation of an entirely new species of 'tertiary' association whose members never actually meet" (63). Clearly, this growth requires only a minimal commitment from

individuals, and does little to highlight or support communities. In addition, we are geographically separated from our neighbors and families by suburban sprawl, spending more and more time alone in our cars and our homes. Interestingly, one of the primary causes for social decline in American communities involves a rise in leisure activities, specifically, watching television. Putnam makes the following declaration:

> Considered in combination with a score of other factors that predict social participation (including education, generation, gender, region, size of hometown, work obligations, marriage, children, income, financial worries, religiosity, race, geographic mobility, commuting time, homeownership, and more), dependence on television for entertainment is not merely *a* significant predictor of civic engagement. It is *the single most consistent* predictor. (231)

From time diaries, he identifies a marked increase in television watching: Americans watch more and more frequently, watch different shows, schedule their lives to television programming, and often watch alone. Basically, "we spend more time watching and less time doing" (Putnam 115). Ultimately, the level of media saturation in American society has engulfed our communities: isolating individuals, eroding interpersonal exchange, and virtually annihilating our civic connections.

The American community is in decay, and people are turning to the media for solace and escape. My experience with *Star Wars* costumers, however, reveals a direct link rather than a separation between media spectatorship and

community enhancement. We have turned away from civic responsibility, but there is evidence that smaller groups of individuals are engaged in cohesive and highly productive activities. Putnam uses a study by Robert Wuthnow to point out small trends among vast areas of community decline. Wuthnow found that approximately forty percent of American society is engaged in some sort of focus group: most of these are involved with churches or hospitals, but about five percent are devoted to a particular interest or hobby. Quoting Wuthnow, Putnam recognizes "small-group movement as a 'quiet revolution' in American society, redefining community in a more fluid way" (149). Putnam's consideration of literary groups is comparable to *Star Wars* costuming where "intense personal, intellectual, and occasionally even political bonds are forged" (149). Additionally, active members frequently "become more involved in wider community affairs" (149). By tuning into subcultural connections and encouraging involvement, small group participation is "an antidote to social disconnectedness" (Putnam 149). An increase in leisure activities over the last century has caused a shift in how people allocated their time and resources, promoting a rise in more informal forms of communication between individuals. Fluidity may be the key to growth of these smaller groups in American society as they ebb and flow according to ever-changing cultural landscapes.

Groups like the Elks, Shriners, the Rotary Club, and the Masons are in steady decline. From their peak in 1960 through 1997, the Shriners experienced a 59% decline in membership (Putnam 439). Mapping the membership rates from thirty-two organization including the Shriners, Putnam calculates that 1997

membership totals rival those of during the Great Depression. While economic

crisis explains the latter, the former is harder to clarify. These "plunging

memberships" represent, as Putnam contends, "a significant piece in the mosaic

of evidence on changing civic involvement in American communities" (57). In

contrast, membership of *Star Wars* costumers is steadily increasing. Are

costumers the twenty first century version of the Shriners? Not exactly. However,

they do represent a small growing faction of civic participation within American

culture. The most significant difference between Shriners and *Star Wars*

costumers involves the ties that bind their members together: the Shriners recruit

professional men, while *Star Wars* costumers recruit fans of the movies. One is

forged by professionalism, by work. The other is forged by leisure. Within

Putnam's timeline of community decline, we see that work relationships and civic

involvement follow parallel paths of decay. As he suggests, "structural changes in

the workplace—shorter job tenure, more part-time and temporary jobs, and even

independent consultancy—inhibit workplace-based social ties" (90). With

weakening ties in the workplace and growing interest in leisure activities like

watching movies and television, people are slowly establishing new networks of

communication. Shriners are professional men without a pre-determined

connection to each other. On the other hand, *Star Wars* costuming, like Putnam's

literary groups, both widens and narrows the field: the membership includes both

men and women but their motivations, in one way or another, are all connected

to the *Star Wars* films. These movies comprise the glue that binds them together.

Star Wars costumers have outgrown the confinements of competition, the spaces

marked to contain them, and, perhaps the very idea of spectatorship without participation. They are, perhaps, a new trend in community revitalization.

Emerging from Spectatorship into Participation

If we are, as Putnam states, spending more time "watching" instead of "doing," then perhaps *Star Wars* costuming is a sign of an emergence from spectatorship into participation. With the introduction of movies, television, and, most recently, the Internet, we have been transformed into a media-based society ever more reliant on media outlets for information, entertainment, and company. Furthermore, we have embraced the technology that propagates media; the entertainment center is literally the central focal point in a majority of American homes. The daily lives and interactions of American citizens have been forever altered by the proliferation of media. According to Nicholas Abercrombie and Brian Longhurst, "the media and everyday life have become so closely interwoven that they are almost inseparable" (69). Their analysis of audiences settles upon a new kind of "diffused audience" as a product of our contemporary, media-infused social existence (69). For Abercrombie and Longhurst, "the essential feature of this [diffused] audience-experience is that, in contemporary society, everyone becomes an audience all the time" (68). We are inundated with images. With the increased dependency on television as noted by Putnam, it is easy to understand why Abercrombie and Longhurst indicate that being a member of an audience is no longer "an exceptional event, nor even an everyday event. Rather it is constitutive of everyday life" (69). Our media-soaked society is

more accustomed to images than ever before: we not only engage with images within certain narrative contexts, but images are also mixed and mingled with other contexts, both real and fictional. Ultimately, how we process media images alters our choices, our commitments, and even our perspectives.

There is abundant evidence to support Putnam's conclusions that people are tuning out of social experience and tuning into the media, but it is also relevant that people are relating to each other in terms of these new viewing experiences. We are bound by popular culture because it binds us together—two strangers suddenly have something in common once they know they have seen the same movie. Interaction thrives off of commonalities among individuals. Because media consumes a larger portion of people's time, then it is reasonable to assume that rising commonalities in viewing practices, experiences, and perspectives among individuals may be reshaping our culture. "The more the world becomes aestheticized," according to Abercrombie and Longhurst, "the more it becomes drenched in images, the more it becomes a cultural object, the more it will becomes something that invites being looked at" (88). As we spend more time watching, the more we look for things to watch. Media is completely integrated into our culture, and *Star Wars* is completely integrated into the media; thus, *Star Wars* is a part of our culture, delivering images common to large number of people. Encountering *Star Wars* costumers on public buses or in shopping malls effectively illustrates the integration of *Star Wars* into our cultural fabric. *Star Wars* costumers embody the metamorphosis of the American audience from isolated spectator to the physical manifestation of a media outlet;

their shared primary objective is to be seen by as wide a variety of people as possible.

My first official outing as a *Star Wars* costumer was a parade in St. Petersburg, Florida. Although I have watched a number of parades, this was my first time as a participant. The event was posted on the Legion message boards, and I signed up. I arrived early, parking my car in the midpoint of the parade route and walking the distance to the starting point. We were number 19 of approximately 150 participating groups, and I was curious to see who, and what, was represented. As I turned onto Main Street, I saw blocks of people attending to last minute details of preparation: there was a high school marching band with several of its members adjusting their instruments or their uniforms; there was float sponsored by a local radio station, and its occupants were sorting through beads and other trinkets that they intended to toss into the crowds; there were six horses comprising a patrol, and their riders were adjusting saddles and talking to each other; there was a group of young cheerleaders fixing each other's hair and practicing with their pom-poms; there was new convertible that would eventually carry the Mayor over the parade route; and there was a car hitched to make-shift Santa sleigh, while Santa and the driver talked. Among many, many others, I found the group of *Star Wars* costumers involved in similar acts of preparation. While *Star Wars* costumers are frequently perceived as oddballs or fanatics, we fit right into the parade lineup. As I looked from one group to another, it became abundantly clear to me that we were all the same. It did not matter if you were politician, a member of a high school marching band, or a *Star Wars* costumer,

we all represented the contours of our community. We then began to march,

tenuously bound to one another but united in celebration.

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Appendix

Appendix A

Star Wars 501st Mission Statement and Legion Charter

501st Legion of Imperial Stormtroopers *Star Wars* Costuming Fan Club

Table of Contents
Article I Club Mission
Article II Membership
Article III Organization
Article IV Offices
Article V Elections
Article VI Code of Conduct
Article VII Costuming Event Standards
Article VIII - Merchandising and Promotional Standards
Article IX - Disciplinary Action

Article I - Club Mission

The 501st Legion of Imperial Stormtroopers (aka the Legion aka 501st) is a *Star Wars* fan club celebrating the movies using costumes and props, in particular those of the stormtrooper characters and their various incarnations. The Legion is a not-for-profit club formed for the express purpose of bringing together costume enthusiasts and giving them a collective identity within which to operate. The Legion's aims are to celebrate the *Star Wars* movies through the wearing of costumes, to promote the quality and improvement of costumes and props, and most importantly to contribute to the local community through charity and volunteer work. We the members of the 501st hold no rights to these characters and recognize it is a privilege to wear these costumes. We also acknowledge that while in costume we represent these movies and as such accept the responsibility to behave professionally and civilly while in public.

Article II - Membership

The 501st Legion is an inclusive, equal-opportunity fan club and will not tolerate discrimination on the grounds of sex, race, or religion. The only requirement for membership is "ownership" of an accurate, complete and professional quality costume celebrating the Imperial (Dark Side) characters from the *Star Wars* films or its expanded universe sources.

Upon admission, members are assigned a unique four-digit identification number following in the tradition of the stormtrooper character, TK421, mentioned in A

New Hope. Preceding this number is a two-character prefix code denoting the costume of the member. The prefix codes and what costumes they identify are listed below. Members owning more than one costume still have only one identification number but are referred to using whatever prefix codes are applicable. Identification numbers will be maintained by the Legion Membership Officer and are permanently assigned. If members convert to inactive status, their numbers will be retired until such time as the member returns to active status.

Persons under the age of 18 are not allowed as listed members of the 501st Legion club. The 501st claims no responsibility for minors at events that are hosted or attended by its members.

Active vs. Inactive Membership Definitions:
An Active Member of the 501st Legion is defined as a person who meets the following requirements:

1. Meets all 501st Membership Requirements (i.e. has an approved costume, is over 18 years of age, etc).
2. Has an approved membership record in the 501st Legion Membership Database
3. Maintains their personal and contact information in the Membership Database (through either their local Garrison CO or other designated Garrison membership representative).
4. Meets or exceeds the minimum activity level requirements for an "Active Member"

An "Inactive Member" in the 501st Legion is defined as a person who either:

1. Does not meet or exceed the activity level for an "Active Member"
   Or
2. Does not have current contact information in the database
   Or
3. Is a person who has requested to be placed on "Inactive Status"
   Or
4. Is placed on "Inactive" status as the result of a disciplinary "judgment" of either their Garrison CO or the Legion Council. Please note that Garrison level "judgments" may be appealed to the 501st Council. See Article IX - Disciplinary Action

An Active member is eligible to:

1. Vote in all matters that come up for a vote/poll of the "Active Membership"
2. Vote in their local elections for Detachment Leaders, Squad Leaders, Garrison Commander and Legion CO.

3. Hold Elected or Appointed Offices in the 501st Legion (including Detachment Leadership)
4. Coordinate/Host "Official" 501st Activities
5. Purchase "Official 501st/Member Only" merchandise (i.e. T-shirts, cards, badges, etc) that are offered only to "501st Members"
6. Have their picture posted on 501st.com in the membership section.
7. Participate in "Official" 501st activities (i.e. Charity Benefits, Celebrity Appearances, Guest Escorts, etc).

An Inactive 501st member:

1. May NOT vote in any 501st election or poll
2. May NOT hold Elected or Appointed Office
3. May not coordinate "Official 501st Activities
4. May not purchase "Official/Member Only" merchandise
5. Will not have their picture posted in the 501st.com membership section.
6. WILL have their membership information and ID number "saved/maintained" in the 501st Legion database. Once you are a member, your 4 digit ID number follows you from "cradle to grave" it will not be reassigned except by a "Judgment" of the Legion Council. To repeat, your membership number is yours FOREVER unless you do something so terrible that you are "drummed out, stripped of rank, etc.". So don't worry about this too much, when you come back, your 4 digits will still be here waiting for you.

Minimum Activity Level Requirements

1. Maintain active contact with his/her Garrison CO or designated Representative (GML). Active contact will be confirmed during the annual "Legion Census" held each year during the month of October.
2. Maintain their contact information/membership record in the 501st Legion Database (either through their Garrison CO or their designated representative (Garrison Membership Liaison).
3. Participate in ONE (or more) Garrison or Legion "activity" per year. Examples of an "activity" are (but are not limited to) the following:
   a. Participation in a 501st activities at any convention
      Or
   b. Participation in any 501st charity event, either in person or through support such as donating toys, printing, time, sewing, publicity, transportation etc.
      Or
   c. Participation as either an elected or appointed Legion, Garrison, Squad, Outpost or Detachment Officer.
      Or
   d. Participation in any Legion or Garrison support activity, such as hosting an armor party, sewing party, prop building party,

hosting/Web mastering their Garrison site, actively participating as a member of the local or legion web team, etc.
Or

e. Hosting or participating in a 501st Social Activity such as a party, movie day, picnic, etc.
Or

f. Any other event/activity that is considered as an "activity" by their local administrative unit by Legion Charter, Garrison Vote or local custom.

These Minimum Activity Level Requirements should be administered as justly and with as much "common sense" as possible. If someone is "Inactive" their appearance at any of the before mentioned activities should instantly be considered as "Proof/Fulfillment" of the "Active Membership Requirement". They should be allowed to participate in/at the event immediately, in all "Official/Un-Official" activities unless their "Inactive" status is the result of a Garrison or Legion Council level "Judgment".

As a member, one of the most IMPORTANT things you need to do is to STAY IN CONTACT with your local Garrison. If your local Garrison doesn't really know WHO you are or WHERE you are or HOW to get in touch with you, it is hard to determine if you are actually taking part in any activities. You may attend a dozen events a year, but if you don't "Keep in touch" you may find yourself wondering why your picture just vanished off 501st.com. So please do yourself and us a favor, keep your e-mail and phone number up to date in the membership database. Your Garrison Membership Liaison can help you and their contact information can be found at www.501st.com under the "Garrison" section.

A Garrison CO may determine that a member is "Active" even if they DO NOT meet the normally established "Activity Level Requirements". However the reverse is not true, if an "Active" member meets all membership and activity level requirements" they MAY NOT be classified as "Inactive" except by a Garrison or Legion level "Judgment" or by their own request.

In the case of a disagreement over your activity status at the local level, you may appeal to the Legion Council after you have exhausted all local means of appeal (i.e. your Garrison). However the fact that you obviously cared enough about your status to:

1. Contact your local Garrison to object
And
2. That you cared enough to appeal to the Council should be fairly good evidence that you at least "want to be active" with the Legion.

The prefix codes for costumes are as follows:

- TA-Trooper, AT-AT
- TB- Trooper, Biker Scout
- TD- Trooper, Desert Trooper / Sand Trooper
  To be posted as a Desert Trooper/Sandtrooper on 501st.com, a member must have: A Pauldron, Field Pack, and 1 other item from the following list:

  1. dirty armor
  2. modified armor (modified knee plate, abdomen, flat lenses, etc.)
  3. dewback prod/MG34/MG15/lewis gun or other similarly styled BFG
  4. ammo pouches

- TI- Trooper, TIE Fighter Pilot
- TK- Trooper, Stormtrooper
- TR- Trooper, Royal Guard
- TS -Trooper, Snow
- TC- Trooper, Clone (as featured in Episode II)
- TX- Trooper Special Ops (troopers from the *Star Wars* expanded universe, including but not limited to:
  - Swamp Trooper: Jedi Knight II - Video Game (not yet released)
  - Imperial Commando (black biker scout): *Star Wars* Rebellion - Video Game
  - Red Troopers (aka Magma Troopers) are referenced but not shown in the Episode IV Visual Dictionary
  - Black Troopers (aka Stealth Troopers) are Carnor Jax's personal troopers in Crimson Empire
  - Black Hole Troopers (painted black and coated in a stygian-polymer substance, answering directly to the Imperial Intelligence agent Blackhole (source: *Star Wars* web site http://www.starwars.com/databank/organization/stormtroopers/eu.html)
  - Sea Troopers - Aquatic assault stormtroopers trained to operate in marine environments, featured modified scout armor, with breathing tanks, flippers, and a helmet-mounted spotlight. (source: *Star Wars* website)
  - Spacetroopers - Zero-G armored troopers, massive suits of armor, powered by servomotors. Each suit functioned as a miniature spacecraft, with propulsion systems, sensor systems, and weapons. In full gear, a spacetrooper stood over two meters tall and was twice as wide as an unarmored soldier. (source: *Star Wars* web site)
  - Radtroopers, - Radiation zone assault troops, were a little known division of elite stormtroopers trained to handle irradiated combat zones. Their armor featured a lead-polymer substrate and a silvery reflective finish. (source: *Star Wars* web site)
  - Flying airtroopers (source: *Star Wars* web site)

- Tunneling underminers (source: *Star Wars* web site)
- ID- Imperial Officer / NCOs / Warrant Officers / Pilots
- IG- Imperial Gunner - Death Star Gunner
- IN- Imperial Navy - Death Star Trooper (personnel in the black open-faced helmets)
- IC- Imperial Crew - any other tunic-wearing non-officer serving in the Empire, such as scanning Crew
- IS- Imperial ATST Driver
- BH- Bounty Hunter
- SL- Sith Lord
- DZ- Denizens of the Empire - alien scum & villainy and any other *Star Wars* costumes of characters who could conceivably ally themselves with the Empire.
- Note: "Expanded Universe" costumes may also be considered for membership. These may include (but are not limited to) Count Dooku, Mara Jade, Clone Emperor, Prince Xizor, Admiral Thrawn, Zam Wessel, Bossk, Greedo, Dengar, Boba Fett, Jango Fett, Aurra Sing, Zuckuss, 4-LOM, Boussh, IG-88, Klaatu, Weequay, Nickto, Gamorrean Guard, Bib Fortuna, Jawa, Tusken Raider / Sand Person, Garindan. Final determination of costume eligibility is determined by the Legion Membership Officer in conjunction with the Legion Council and Officers.

Article III - Organization

The 501st Legion is a worldwide club but it recognizes that most activities will be on the local level. For this reason, the Legion is divided into subdivisions to foster local identity and to encourage teamwork and fraternity. The current list of Garrisons, Squads, Outposts, and Detachments, as well as information on the boundaries between these units, is maintained by the Captain of the Guard.

Garrisons
The largest subdivisions of the Legion are the Garrisons, which ideally cover large distinctive regions that host unique geography, language, borders or other distinguishing characteristics. A Garrison requires at least twenty five (25) members and is headed by a Garrison Commander (CO), who is elected every February by the members of the Garrison. The formation of a new Garrison may take place when an Outpost reaches sufficient membership or when a region within an existing Garrison finds pressing needs to break off and form a new Garrison.

Applicants must complete a Garrison Application Form in which they list their new Garrison name, roster of members from the 501st main membership roster, territorial boundaries, Garrison logo, working website and email forum, and a brief statement of purpose outlining the reasons for their Garrison to be formed. The form will also list the administrative staff of the Garrison, including a CO, XO, PR Officer, Webmaster, and Membership Liaison who will work with the main

Legion Membership Officer in helping to make sure their Garrison members are properly listed and updated on the main 501st website.

The application form must be submitted to the Legion Commander and Captain of the Guard. Upon their approval, the form is then submitted to the Legion Council and voted on by the Legion Garrison Commanders in a majority vote. If approved by the Legion Council, the applicant group undergoes a one year trial period, during which it must demonstrate that it can operate as an independent body. After the one year period the Council will vote again to approve the Garrison officially. It is highly recommended when a new Garrison forms within an existing Garrison that approval first be sought from the existing Garrison Commander. Garrison Commanders are free to assemble whatever rules and administrative staff they need in their area.

A Garrison CO has the following responsibilities:

- Organize all 501st Legion events taking place within the geographical territory of his/her Garrison proper, or delegate garrison members to organize/coordinate specific events.
- Represent his/her Garrison members in the Legion Council where club policy is discussed and voted on
- Organize his/her Garrison by appointing an administrative staff to handle the Garrison website, logo creation, public relations, communication, and enforcement of club and Garrison rules
- Resolve disputes internal to the Garrison and make all potential problems known to Legion Command
- Keep in touch with all members of his/her Garrison, either personally or through an intermediary, and build good relations and good morale among the troops
- Help in deciding if new Squads or Garrisons should be allowed to form within his/her Garrison territory
- Perform his/her duties in a professional and level-headed manner befitting an officer

Squads
Garrisons can sub-divide into Squads for even smaller areas or areas where clusters of members tend to operate together regularly. A Squad requires at least ten (10) members and is headed by a Squad Leader (SLDR), who is elected every February by the members of the Squad. Applicants must complete a Squad Application Form in which they list their new Squad name, roster of members from their local Garrison membership roster, territorial boundaries, Squad logo, working website and email forum, and a brief statement of purpose outlining the reasons for their Squad to be formed. The formation of a Squad must first be approved by the Legion Commander, Captain of the Guard, and the Garrison Commander of the area in which it is formed. If approved, the applicant group undergoes a six month trial period, during which it must demonstrate that it

can operate as an independent body. After the trial period the Legion Commander, Captain of the Guard, and Garrison Commander vote again to approve the squad officially.

Outposts
For areas that lie outside 501st Legion control and do not have enough members to form a Garrison, an Outpost may be formed. An Outpost requires only one member and is headed by an Outpost Leader (OL), who is elected every February by the members of the Outpost. Applicants must complete an Outpost Application Form in which they list their new Outpost name, roster of members from the main 501st roster, territorial boundaries, Outpost logo, working website and email forum, and a brief statement of purpose outlining the reasons for their Outpost to be formed. Application for an Outpost must be approved by the Legion Commander and the Captain of the Guard, at which time the Outpost immediately becomes official. Once an Outpost contains twenty five members it may apply to be a recognized Garrison as outlined above and may waive the one-year trial period at the discretion of the Legion Council.

Detachments
Given the diversity of costumes in the club, special 'theme' units may be created expressly to celebrate a
specific aspect of the *Star Wars* universe. An example would be a squadron of TIE Fighter Pilots. These units are called Detachments and lie outside the organizational, rank, and voting hierarchy of the club. A Detachment requires five (5) members and is headed by a Detachment Leader (DL), who is elected by the members of the Detachment. Application for a Detachment must be approved by the Legion Commander and the Captain of the Guard. Members of Detachments still report to their respective Squads and Garrisons. 501st members may be members of multiple Detachments.

Article IV - Offices

Two forms of offices exist within the Legion: command and administrative. Command offices exist to oversee the organization and deployment of troops and include Garrison Commanders, Squad Leaders, Outpost Leaders, and Detachment Leaders. Administrative offices exist to perform the administrative duties required by the club and are appointed by the Legion Commander within an Administrative Staff. Administrative Officers also sit on the Legion Council and are allowed to vote. The administrative offices are listed below.

Administrative Staff

Captain of the Guard - The Captain of the Guard assists the Legion Commander by serving as arbiter in matters of contention within the club, policing the code of conduct, keeping track of the Garrison and Squad boundaries, and updating the

master garrison map. The Captain of the Guard is appointed by the Legion CO, however the appointment is subject to the approval of the Legion Council.

Membership Officer - The Membership Officer is responsible for receiving and processing applications for membership, tracking identification numbers of members to guarantee their uniqueness, and conducting a semi-annual census to assess the current number of active members.

Webmaster - The Webmaster will be in charge of the club's web site, maintaining its content and appearance and incorporating information from the other administrative officers.

Merchandise Accountant - The Merchandise Accountant will monitor all merchandising and fund-raising done for the 501st Legion for the sole purpose of record-keeping. The Merchandise Accountant will be responsible for making sure copyrights are not flagrantly violated or that funds are not misused. The Merchandise Accountant may be responsible for recording all transactions and making these records available to the public. While we are not an officially sanctioned extension of Lucas Film Limited, we strive to operate within tolerable limits of their control of copyright. For this reason it is the hope of this club to keep merchandise bearing the 501st name or emblems to a minimum that serves to identify the club and no more.

Public Relations Officer - This position will be responsible for accepting all news of events and activities from the club members and chronicling them. This will include field reports and pictures and will distilling this information into a form that the Webmaster can use to update a gallery on the 501st main web site. The PR Officer is also in charge of making contacts with *Star Wars* celebrities, convention organizers, web and print publications, and other fan clubs for the purpose of promoting the club and coordinating cooperative relationships.

Legion Talent Liaison (Coordinator) - This position will be in charge of maintaining contact with *Star Wars* personalities, celebrities, and other people instrumental in the *Star Wars* field who make regular appearances. This officer will communicate with said personalities for the express purpose of advertising the Legion's willingness to provide services during public appearances. This officer will also coordinate with regional Legion personnel to facilitate communications with personalities for local events.

Executive Council

Policy and administrative decisions for the 501st are handled by an Executive Council, made up of two representatives from each Garrison and the Legion's Administrative Staff. The Council is moderated by the club President, the Legion Commander.

Titles commonly used and recognized within the 501st Legion
LC Legion Commander
LX Legion Executive Officer
CO Garrison Commander
XO Garrison Executive Officer
SLDR Squad Leader
OL Outpost Leader
AO Administrative Officers - appointed by LC to service the administrative needs of the club.
AOs may also serve as unit leaders elsewhere in the Legion.
Enlisted - standard rank for all stormtroopers unless appointed otherwise as above

Article V - Elections

The Legion Commander, Garrison Commanders, and Squad Leaders must be voted into office. All other positions are appointed by their respective local Commander. Elections for these positions are held once a year. Nominations for command offices may be made by any member within that office's region during the month of January. If no nominations are made for a particular office by midnight January 31, the officers holding these positions will maintain their posts. Voting begins on February 1. Votes are cast via email or online poll or whatever mechanism the Captain of the Guard deems appropriate. The voting will be open for exactly two weeks (fourteen days) after which no more votes will be accepted. Every member in "active status" or in "good standing" of the 501st Legion may vote. Members that are placed on "inactive status" may not vote until their status has been changed back to "active" by their Garrison CO and the Legion Membership Officer. Notice of upcoming elections will be posted on the main mailing list one week prior to the election. Notification of any elections to individual members is ultimately the job of Garrison Commanders for members in their region.

The Legion Commander is elected by popular vote of the entire legion. The offices of Garrison Commander, Squad Leader, Outpost Leader, and Detachment Leader are all voted on by members of each respective unit according to rules that unit has adopted. Administrative Officers are appointed by the Legion Commander, with the exception of the Merchandise Accountant, who is also elected by popular vote of the Legion. This is to avoid any conflict-of-interest between a Legion Commander and his/her choice of appointments in this office.

Issues of contention concerning the club may be voted upon by the Executive Council. A call to vote will require any three Council officers to request the vote. Following this, the Council members will have one week to cast their votes via email to the club's central mailing list or to an online poll overseen by the club's Captain of the Guard. Each member of the Council holds one vote. Calls to vote

can be on any topic, including the topic of removing or replacing office-holders. In this instance, however, the cause must be great enough to call for a vote. Thus, a call to replace or remove any officer must be made by at least 33% of the current membership, rounded up. This Legion Charter may be amended at any time by a popular vote.

Article VI - Code of Conduct

The 501st Legion recognizes that its costumes represent characters from the *Star Wars* films and as such, costume-wearers carry the responsibility of portraying these characters professionally and tastefully while in public. For these reasons, all members are prohibited from using foul language or behaving lewdly or obscenely while in costume and in public.

The 501st Legion is dedicated to creating an environment of friendship and good will. To this end, the Legion will not tolerate the practice of sexual misconduct or sexual harassment by its members.

Members who engage in such conduct will be subject to disciplinary action, including termination from the 501st Legion. This policy applies to all 501st Legion members. It applies not only to unwelcome conduct that violates state and federal laws concerning sexual harassment but also to inappropriate conduct of a sexual nature.

Article VII - Costuming Event Standards

The 501st Legion celebrates creating, owning, and wearing the costumes of the Imperial Forces as featured in the *Star Wars* films. To capture the magic of these characters, our goal will always be the accurate presentation and portrayal of these costumes. However, we recognize that the purpose of this hobby is for fun and creativity. Therefore, the 501st makes allowances for the creative modification of these costumes within the confines of decency (defined as being without profane or vulgar features or statements and must be viewable by young children). By the same token, different events will call for different standards. For this reason, two categories are created to help 501st members communicate what standards will be in place depending on the event being hosted or attended by club members.

FORMAL/CANON - Costumes must be authentic, canon Imperial costumes from the movies or licensed media (games, books, etc.). Costumes must be devoid of stickers, ornamentation, or any other decoration not found on the original costumes. Costumes must be complete, containing all the parts in good working order and appearance. If a member has a question whether his or her costume meets the specifications of a formal costume, they may refer to information provided by the 501st Chief Armorer. Formal events include any event involving Lucasfilm and its affiliates or any other event where formal presentation is

expressly asked for or required. An example of this would be escorting celebrities associated with *Star Wars* - this is considered an official event and calls for the group to represent the club in formal dress, unless the event organizer has specified that non-formal costumes are acceptable.

INFORMAL/NON-CANON - Costumes may be authentic, canon costumes or non-authentic, non-canon costumes never seen in any *Star Wars* movie or book and may be decorated and ornamented as the owner desires, within the confines of decency. Decency here is defined as being without profane or vulgar features or statements and must be viewable by young children. Costumes can be painted alternate color schemes, adorned with stickers or cosmetic changes, or supplemented with articles not found in the movies. Informal events include public parties or conventions or wherever the 501st is not officially representing the club.
NOTE: The default for any public appearance of the 501st is INFORMAL, although the club's code of conduct still applies. Events must be designated FORMAL for the requirements to apply. The final decision is left to the Legion Commander, event organizer, or the senior officer present.

Article VIII - Merchandising and Promotional Standards

It is recognized that any organization requires promotion on some level to help it grow. It is also recognized that the 501st Legion is a club based on a copyrighted property and has no legal rights to profit from the sales of merchandise bearing images or ideas from the *Star Wars* property. Consequently, it is agreed that whatever merchandise or promotional materials are created to advertise the 501st Legion will be sold only to members within the Legion and at cost. No material will be sold to the general public for a profit. All promotional materials will meet the following guidelines before being approved by the club. All materials not abiding by these guidelines will be considered unauthorized and forbidden to all members of the 501st Legion. Any member producing and/or distributing unauthorized Legion material will be eligible for disciplinary action by the Legion CO and or XO and could face expulsion, as decided by the Legion Council. Members wearing unauthorized Legion materials at official events shall be directed to remove these items, and if members fail to comply, said members will be eligible for disciplinary action by the Legion CO and or XO and could face expulsion.

501st Promotional Items Set of Standards
This set of standards includes any item, print, or paraphernalia that bears the 501st Legion name or logo.

1. Any items bearing the words "501st Legion", "Fighting 501st", or "Vader's Fist" or the 501st Logo are considered representative of the 501st Legion club. Such proposed items are to be submitted to the Legion Commander

and administrative staff before being produced. The Legion CO, Legion XO, and administrative staff have final word on approval.

2. 501st items must be free of vulgarity
3. 501st items must be as free of copyrighted material as possible
4. 501st items must be sold only to club members and at cost
5. 501st items must not be advertised openly on ebay or other forums to the general public
6. 501st items must not be tied to any outside commercial entity or venture
7. 501st items must not misrepresent or misidentify its user/wearer in any role other than as a member or supporter of the 501st Legion fan club. No shirt will bear the label 'Security' or 'Staff' unless created with the full permission of an event organizer and labeled specifically for that event only.
8. 501st items specifying a sub-unit of the club are allowed and encouraged. Such examples would be items promoting 501st Garrisons, Squads, and Detachments.

Article IX - Disciplinary Action

A member breaking the Legion code of conduct or behaving in an unacceptable manner or violating the tenets of this charter may face disciplinary action. This begins at the Garrison level. Any member in good standing may bring a charge against another member from their Garrison. The charge is brought to the attention of their Garrison Commander, who must then call a hearing. During the hearing both sides of the conflict are related and witnesses and evidence submitted and recorded. This process must run for at least one week after the hearing is called, after which time the Garrison Commander has the right to close the proceedings at any time at his or her discretion. Once the hearing is closed the Garrison Commander renders judgement and outlines the requirements for both parties to follow. The Garrison Commander has the option to assemble a panel of Garrison personnel to vote on a course of action or to decide for him- or herself.

If the losing party feels wronged, he or she may then appeal to the Legion Council. A hearing is called and both parties invited to speak and submit evidence to the Council. This process must run for at least one week after the hearing is called, after which time the Legion Commander has the right to close the proceedings at any time at his or her discretion. The Legion Council then decides if the charge is a minor offense, a major offense, or one without resolution. A majority vote rules and a course of action is laid down. A minor offense brings formal censure, to which the charged member must respond with a public apology and restitution of goods or services if these are involved as well. Failing this, the member is placed on one-month probation, during which time he or she is not allowed to participate in club activities. If after probation the accused refuses to comply with the Council's directive then the Council votes on the expulsion of the member by majority vote. In cases of a major offense, the

Council may move directly to a vote for expulsion. An expelled member may have his or her ID number removed and released for use by another member.

Any unit of the Legion, from Outpost to the Legion itself, may redress problems in leadership by calling for a vote of no confidence. A call for no confidence requires only one person at the Outpost and Squad level to make it. It requires three people at the Garrison level. And it requires five people at the Legion level to make the call. If a call for vote is made, the Legion Captain of the Guard is called in to oversee the process. A poll is opened for one week and a vote taken of the members of that unit. If at least one-third of the unit membership votes in favor of removing the unit leader, then a one-week period begins where nominations are taken. At the end of the week, a poll is opened for one week to vote on the nominees to replace the leader. In the case of a tie, the vote opens for another week and is repeated. In the case of no nominees, Legion Command will appoint a new leader.