• Notes •

Fan-driven Identity Narratives:
The Performative Culture of Star Wars Cosplayers

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While the early age of folkloristics drew significant attention to distinctions between elite, pop, and folk culture, lately folklorists have given more consideration to the ways in which folk and pop culture interact with each other and occupy some of the same spaces. A prime example of this occurs in the world of *Star Wars* fandom. It is evident that *Star Wars* is inspired by traditions, consciously or unconsciously, and arguably, like so much science fiction and fantasy, this is what gives it its ability to connect with people in significant ways outside of the product itself. One of the means in which this manifests itself is in the act of costuming, and here I examine the performative culture of *Star Wars* cosplayers across the United States. This project, still certainly in its initial stages, does not claim to be a comprehensive study of this folk group. However, I do aim to highlight how studying cosplayers through a folklore lens offers insight into the complex relationship between dress and identity.

To contextualize my article, I will first provide a literature review of relevant scholarship on folk costume. Building upon this framework, I will then reveal how the act of cosplaying can be studied in a similar manner. And, finally, my article will conclude with findings from interviews I completed with members from the three primary *Star Wars* costuming groups: the 501st Legion, the Rebel Legion, and the Mandalorian Mercs. The interview material considers how *Star Wars* cosplayers embody particular *Star Wars* narratives, both traditional and innovative, and how their ties to the franchise are tangibly enacted through dress. While folk costume is certainly a substantial area of folklore studies, there has been little attention

devoted to cosplay, and this article hopes to contribute to the need for more conversations about fandom and folkloristics—a promising direction, particularly in light of the recent *Star Wars* revival and its effect on the folk. Ultimately, I propose that scholars need to move beyond the trend of approaching cosplay as a superficial display of one's loyalty to a franchise, and, instead, consider, as I hope to show here, how cosplayers use costume to enact various identity narratives that intersect with their everyday lives—a significant, though largely unstudied, process.

The Relationship Between Identity and Dress

Researchers of folk costume typically studies how and why groups choose to dress in a particular way, what visual communication occurs through their choices, the context in which the dress is worn, the norms and deviations, the embodiment of narratives, and dress as a way to bridge the mind-body divide. Among all of these directions, it is clear that costume is full of signs and signifiers, emotional and even psychological ties. While some might diminish the import of a physical object, research on costume, and cross-dressing in particular, has explored the sensory responses and transformative power of something as seemingly simple as lipstick. Marilyn J. Horn, in her 1968 book *The Second Skin: An Interdisciplinary Study of Clothing*, an early groundbreaking look at the subject, discusses the "concept of clothing as an extension of the bodily self… [capable of] providing the individual with an increased sense of size, power, movement, rigidity—whatever the characteristic of the object" (11). onsequently, when an aspiring prom queen wears an elegant ball gown or the interviewee walks into an interview donning her expensive new suit, it is evident that dress does have an effect on one's emotional or psychological state. Although it might seem superficial to put such importance on one's outer appearance, studies from the mid-twentieth century to today regularly draw attention to the various functions of dress and how they affect the wearer.

While *clothing* is typically used to refer to everyday dress, the term *costume* is reserved for special occasions like holidays, festivals, and rituals. Pravina Shukla,

one of the key folklorists to draw attention to the relationship between identity and dress, states, "Dress grounds us in the daily social structure and in the essence of our personal identities. Costume, on the other hand, allows us to transcend the here and now, allowing for a deeper communication of meaning" (2015, 15). However, with certain costumes, like a child's sequin-lined tutu for a dance recital, or a Methodist acolyte wearing an alb to light the candles on the communion table, there is a specific role that the costume-wearer is being asked to perform. While these costumes might cause the wearer to become more confident, with the former, and perhaps more solemn, with the latter, there is not the same freedom that is permitted in other costuming contexts—like cosplaying events, as I am examining here.

Much of the recent research on folk dress and material culture continues to focus primarily on national identity. For example, Lizette Gradén's 2014 article "FashioNordic: Folk Costume as Performance of Genealogy and Place" examines how Nordic dress practices change depending on where they are produced and worn— all with political significance. In her introduction to the journal that features Gradén's article, Shukla asserts, "All bodies are in place, and place becomes the next theme that unites the papers in this volume, a gathering of articles that center on folklore of, in, and from the northern countries of Sweden, Finland, and Estonia" (2014, 250). While place is important to consider in terms of folk costume and identity, if we are to approach cosplay from a folklore perspective, we must be willing to broaden our notion of place—from virtual communities to imaginary worlds. As folklorist Lynne S. McNeill reminds us, "With regard to our identity in different locales, we have become *multilocalized*, embodying multiple localities" (2012, 93).

Our understanding of cosplay as folk costume might be better understood in relation to specific costuming holidays, like Halloween, that allow one more freedom in dress than one would be permitted as a traditional Spanish folk dancer, for example. Of Halloween, Shukla observes that, "perhaps for most, it is a chance for

psychological release, a way to bring personality to the fore in projections of identity beyond what is possible through daily dress…With a seemingly endless number of costumes to choose from, the one a person selects will inevitably reflect several aspects of his or her identity" (2015, 11). Relatedly, when individuals, such as cosplayers, are allowed to create and perform an identity through costume, they are given permission to explore or express other identities that they might be unable (either physically or due to societal norms) to enact in their everyday lives.

Consequently, due to this freedom allowed with performance and costume, it is worth considering how Mikhail Bakhtin's views of carnival—a theory that has been explored widely in folklore studies—can be applied. Bakhtin, in his theory of carnival, considers identity fluidity as he proposes that carnival allows for an inversion of ordinary life: a place to experiment with alternative forms of expression (1997, 250-259). This experimentation is allowed and even encouraged in costuming contexts, and Bakhtin's attention to the role of carnival in various cultures emphasizes the importance of the carnivalesque space in society—this allowance for identity play (1997, 256). Carnivalesque spaces disrupt the fictitious normativity and individuals are allowed more freely (both in terms of accessibility and acceptability) to test out or fully claim non-normative identities. In the context of my research, Bakhtin's theory of carnival encourages readers to observe how self-creation through costuming is an important act through which to consider the possibilities of identity.

Furthermore, in the situations in which costuming is encouraged, the role of the community in accepting one's identity-shift is an important aspect of the process. Gregory P. Stone contends:

> Playing the role of the other requires that the player dress out of the
> role of roles that are acknowledged to be his own. Costume, therefore,
> is a kind of magical instrument. It includes all apparent
> misrepresentations of the wearer. As such its significance or meaning

(the collective response that is mobilized—the coincidence of the wearer's program with the review of the other) is built upon the mutual trust of the one who appears and his audience. Collusion is required to carry of the misrepresentation" (1995, 31-32).

Although I certainly agree with the notion of communal collusion, I take issue with Stone's use of "misrepresentation" to describe the performance. I argue, and intend to demonstrate with support from the interview material included later in this article, that rather than a falsification of self, costume—particularly when it is self-created as in cosplay—is an extension of the self.

To reinforce my point, would it be fair to say that a drag queen in costume is "misrepresenting" themselves? In "Embodying the Feminine: Male-To-Female Cross-Dressing," Jane E. Hegland and Nancy Nelson Hodges examine the sensory effects of dress as described in online narratives by a group of male-to-female cross-dressers. Approaching cyberspace as a type of carnivalesque environment, Hegland and Hodges assert, "The internet also allows for a certain amount of anonymity, which is particularly important for those cross-dressers who have yet to make their identities public" (2007, 156). The cross-dressers do not view their costumed selves as false or imaginary; rather, "a particular body supplement will be described as the key piece that bridges the gap between the real and the ideal self" (Hegland and Hodges 2007, 160). As Hegland and Hodges affirm, the act of costuming becomes an essential component in the process of subverting, claiming, and developing one's individual identity (2007, 165-166). Similarly, as I am proposing here, the act of cosplaying can be approached as a significant catalyst for identity-formation processes in the "real" world.

So, as the editors of the collection *Dress and Identity* ask, "What is the relationship between identity, dress, and the body? Can we treat dress as independent from the body or is dress inextricably tied to the body?" (Mary Ellen Roach-Higgens et al 1995, 2-3). They confirm, "Because it is the biological self that is

subject to acts of dress, the body has a certain primacy in our consideration" (Mary Ellen Roach-Higgens et al 1995, 2-3). Perhaps this seems like an obvious point: the physical body wears the clothes so it should be considered in the effects of dress. However, one might be surprised to discover that research that moves beyond studying clothing, of the more everyday variety, to costume, the body, both physically and mentally, is often removed. This point will be discussed in detail in the subsequent section on cosplay, as previous scholarship that has examined individuals who are highly invested in the act of cosplay often argue that it is simply nostalgia, a tool of escape, or a means of revisiting and recapturing childhood—a performance that has no transferable value to their "real" life. Unfortunately, these conversations tend to be both limiting and demeaning. Therefore, by approaching cosplay from a folk costume perspective, I aspire to bring the whole body back into the conversation. Horn attests, "Clothing, as part of the body-image, acts as a 'second skin' in establishing the physical boundaries of the self" (1968, 90). However, although I am intrigued by the idea of a "second skin," I propose that rather than creating boundaries, costuming allows the wearers to transcend those boundaries— especially those that are dictated by physical restrictions or societal norms.

The Augmented Identity of Cosplayers

As has been hopefully established, scholarship on dress has examined the emotional and psychological effects of a piece of clothing; however, this leads one to wonder why these same inquiries have not been applied to cosplay. Regrettably, as mentioned above, scholarship on cosplay either, one, tends to cast the cosplayers in a negative and infantile light, or, two, focuses on expressions of fandom as superficial and separate from one's "real-world" identity. In a 2012 article titled "Cosplay: Imaginative Self and Performing Identity," the authors suggest, "It would be interesting to explore the relationship between reality and fantasy or the real/actual self and the imaginative/ideal self in the context of cosplay. In other words, how do cosplayers negotiate the boundaries between these binary

opposites?" (Osmud Rahman et al 2012, 322). While certainly an interesting direction (that they unfortunately do not pursue further), I argue that these are not binary opposites. Here, I want to suggest something different: that this process is much more akin to an augmented reality. The term "augmented reality" is typically attributed to technology that blends virtual and physical reality; it is an immersive act that provides a composite or fused experience. And here, I am proposing that both the "everyday" self and the cosplaying self merge together to form a hybridized identity.

To transition from a discussion of folk costume to cosplay specifically, it is worth briefly defining what cosplay is and how it began. There are two primary theories for cosplay's origins. Most scholars attribute the "founding" of cosplay to Myrtle Douglas, an active member of the sci-fi community. She attended the first-ever Worldcon wearing a self-made costume from the 1936 H.G. Wells film *Things to Come*. Others, however, locate the start of cosplay even earlier to a couple who designed costumes based on the work of cartoonist A.D. Condon, who created *Mr. Skygack, from Mars*—which is believed to be the world's first sci-fi comic. The cosplaying couple donned their costumes at a masked carnival in 1908, and, due to the context, some debate that this act of costuming does not count because it leans more toward masquerade. Regardless, all of this marks the early stages of fandom, and the bodily bringing of beloved fictional characters into the "real" physical world that we inhabit. The term cosplay itself, nevertheless, did not come into use until the 1980s when Japanese reporter Nobuyuki Takahashi attended Worldcon and created a term that combined the costume and play that he observed. This is an important point and one that I think serves to highlight for folklorists the value of studying cosplay. With the act of cosplaying, of creating and wearing a costume that represents not just a fandom but also themselves, the cosplayer engages in a unique act of self-expression and identity play.

Consequently, I believe that fandom functions as a productive space to consider the link between folk and pop culture. Cosplay comes from pop culture, as

the costume ideas are taken from mass-produced, widely transmitted forms of media. However, the act of cosplay itself is much more akin to folk culture: one of the most important "folk rules" is that the costumes should be self-made and as accurate as possible. Although costumes can be pre-bought, seasoned cosplayers disparage the retailers that sell mass-produced cosplay costumes, and the wearers of such are viewed as inferior and fake. As evidenced here, cosplayers exist within a folk community or group—one bound by its own rules, customs, traditions, knowledge, and even language. Therefore, the question remains, why has fandom as folklore continued to be a relatively unexplored area by folklorists? Matthew Hale, whose article "Cosplay: Intertextuality, Public Texts, and the Body Fantastic" was published in the Winter 2014 issue of *Western Folklore*, is one of the few folklorists to approach the subject. In Hale's ethnographic account of his experiences at Dragon Con—an annual multi-genre convention—he draws attention to the rich world of fandom and identity-studies that has been largely ignored by folklorists, despite its clear ties to performance theory and material culture. Hale argues, "We must develop a phenomenology of fandom and textuality and cultivate a greater interest in fans' material culture and their sensuous realities. The physical objects that fans produce must be taken seriously. The same is true of the fan's body" (2014, 28). As Hale contends, we must move beyond the tendency to approach fans as "disembodied" participants and instead attribute more value to the material culture of fandom (2014, 29).

If we are only looking at the text or the narrative, we fail to observe the import of cosplay to the cosplayer: the stories cosplayers have about their connections to the characters they cosplay and also the implications of their performances—especially as they affect their "living" realities. Scholarship continues to overlook the transference or interplay that I am arguing occurs for individuals who regularly cosplay. Cosplay is intended to be fully immersive: beyond the physical appearance of the character, the cosplayer takes on a character's personality, dialogue, and gestures. It is most often an act of self-

transformation, to be empowered in one way or another: perhaps to be bold, perverse, strong, hyper-feminine or queer—to name a few. Theresa Winge writes, "Cosplayers spend immeasurable monies and hours constructing or purchasing costumes, learning signature poses and dialogue, and performing at conventions and parties, as they transform themselves from 'real world' identities into chosen (fictional) characters" (2006, 65). Winge does not perceive that any part of the "real' self enters the cosplaying space and vice versa. Similarly, although Craig Norris and Jason Bainbridge attest that cosplay "has significant implications for gender play and gender disruption," they fail to observe how this play can be transferrable to the "real" world (2009). Furthermore, what these scholars overlook is the fans themselves: the bodies who are performing. After interviewing numerous cosplayers, Anne Peirson-Smith concluded:

> This response suggests that the boundaries of superficial identification with the character are often transgressed in the act of Cosplay from public through private to publicly exhibited secret self, and the players are not only visually transformed by the costume, but often become the imagined persona, both cognitively and affectively, carrying this into to their daily lives and other social worlds (2013).

In thinking back to "augmented reality," I want to reiterate that the term itself means supplemented or expanded, and, as Peirson-Smith observes, this is how people who do take part in these "alternative" states of being describe the process.

To support my claim that the act of cosplaying involves much more than a brief, unaffecting costume change, I maintain that when speaking of those who actively consume and take part in the *Star Wars* franchise—as the latter portion of my article will be concerned with—it seems dismissive to simply call them "fans." There is nothing short of religious devotion among this crowd—particularly in the ways in which *Star Wars* becomes a part of their everyday lives. Beyond the passive

consumption of films, novels, comic books, and video games, there are those who practice a daily, active involvement with *Star Wars* through the act of costuming.

The Rebel Legion, the 501st, and the Mandalorian Mercs are international *Star Wars* costuming organizations that have bases all over the world. Being a part of one of these groups encompasses more than simply dressing up for movie premieres. It involves the act of regularly meeting together in costume and often for the purpose of charity—not simple to attend conventions. Additionally, there are membership qualifications, costume standards, and expectations of serious involvement.

These groups have been given special attention in recent years as news, media sites, as well as academic publications, have been filled with *Star Wars* talk— primarily due to the December 2016 release of *Rogue One: A Star Wars Story*. David G. Allan, editorial director for *CNN's* Health and Wellness section, comments:

> When I hear of a choice to abstain from the biggest cultural event of my lifetime, and maybe yours, it's as puzzling as if you said "I don't read books," or "I was a feral child raised by woodland creatures…. I have difficulty fathoming what would satisfactorily fill the huge gap in my soul if someone had extracted "Star Wars" from it. Gambling? Hard core drugs? Shopping? Watching professional sports? Organized religion? . . . Perhaps religious fervor is the closest experience to how I feel about "Star Wars" (2015).

Allan is certainly not alone, as many express these strong emotional, reverent ties to the world of *Star Wars*. Jason T. Eberl and Kevin S. Decker, who edited a collection titled *Star Wars and Philosophy* in 2005, returned a decade later with a new collection titled *The Ultimate Star Wars and Philosophy: You Must Unlearn What You Have Learned.* One article featured in this collection, "*Star Wars*, Emotions, and the Paradox of Fiction" by Lance Belluomini, reads, "…our strong emotional

reactions…raise[s] intriguing philosophical questions: why should we care about what happens to Han, Leia, or anyone in the *Star Wars* universe when we know they don't exist? Isn't there something irrational about having an emotional response to fictional characters?" (2015, 273-274). Belluomini goes on to explain what philosophers have termed the "paradox of fiction" in relation to the *Star Wars* franchise, writing:

1. We have genuine and rational emotional responses to the fictional characters and events in *Star Wars*.
2. In order to have genuine and rational emotional responses, we must believe these characters and events really exist.
3. Nobody believes these fictional characters and events in *Star Wars* exist (2015, 275).

This paradox, while humorous, is what has continued to limit the ways we approach the material culture of fandom. The cosplayer, who spends an enormous amount of time and money on costuming, is often criticized by those outside of the community who believe that it [whatever the fandom] does not matter because it is not "real." This is a naïve and dangerously narrow position, and, as the paradox also reveals, it is clear that although we admit that these are human-created narratives about fictional universes, this does not in any way diminish the very real ways *Star Wars* influences our culture and ourselves.

The Parallel Universes of *Star Wars* Fans

There is a vast number of Star Wars costuming individuals and groups all over the world, but here I focused my research on the three main organizations: the 501st Legion, officially named in 1997, the Rebel Legion, formally established in 1999, and the more recent Mandalorian Mercs, which developed in 2004. Each of

these groups are international organizations that have thousands of members and bases all over the world, and, a visit to each of their websites reveals that they are all driven by similar objectives. The website for the 501st legion, or Vader's Fist, reads:

> The Legion is an all-volunteer organization formed for the express purpose of bringing together costume enthusiasts under a collective identity within which to operate. The Legion seeks to promote interest in Star Wars through the building and wearing of quality costumes, and to facilitate the use of these costumes for Star Wars-related events as well as contributions to the local community through costumed charity and volunteer work (2017).

Costume, community, and charity are also the core values of the Rebel Legion and the Mandalorian Mercs. Each of these groups has strict guidelines about meeting costume standards: those who apply for membership must self-create authentic, evidently research-informed costumes. Although customization is allowed to a degree, the costumes are generally required to be canon. According to the Rebel Legion, "costumes that have appeared in at least three (3) Lucasfilm licensed materials are accepted. Costumes with fewer than three licensed sources may be accepted as a secondary costume for an existing member (2017). The 501st Legion has an extensive costume reference library that lists all of the presently accepted costumes, and, it is important to note that with each of these organizations the guidelines are regularly revised. For example, the Mandalorian Mercs website— with their lengthy list of costume do's and don'ts—states, "'Naked' circuit boards glued on to items as greeblies are no longer acceptable. If circuit boards are used as greeblies, they must be modified so that they fit the 70s tech aesthetic of the films. Any use of exposed circuit boards as greeblies will be highly scrutinized" (2017). These guidelines—whether spoken or unspoken—are evident in general folk costume practices. As Shukla writes of Swedish folk costumes, "The instance of

inventing a costume that never existed before, like the national costume, is rare. A more common practice is to make slight alterations to existing pieces or to revive forgotten items…Innovation and change lie at the heart of the definition of folk costumes" (2015, 105). Adhering to the aesthetic of the films is important for all participants, no matter the organization, and, as the questionnaire results reveal, the process of creating the costumes is an investment—both financially and timewise.

In order to do my fieldwork for this subject, I created a questionnaire (appended to this article) that I first emailed to my friend Jake (the names of each of the interviewees have been changed to ensure their privacy), the person who initially drew my attention to the fascinating world of *Star Wars* costuming groups. After receiving Jake's answers, I contacted the organizations themselves as well as individual bases to ask if they would be willing to circulate the questionnaire among their members. It is worth mentioning that in the early stages of this research, I was only aware of the Rebel Legion and the 501st Legion, so those are the only two listed on the questionnaire. As the questionnaire began to circulate, I received answers from the third primary group, the Mandalorian Mercs, as well. Therefore, the absence of their name on the questionnaire is an oversight that will be corrected in revised versions of the questionnaire. Unfortunately, attempting to do research during the summer, especially with it being "con season" among cosplayers, I have not received as many questionnaires as I anticipated. Nevertheless, due to the valuable material I did receive, which will be reviewed below, I intend to continue accepting questionnaires as I further research the relationship between identity and cosplay.

An interesting aspect of the *Star Wars* costuming community is that there is no "one" type or typical cosplayer. The individuals who responded to my questionnaire varied in age from twenties to fifties, and there was a roughly even mix of genders. Responses to the first question in my survey revealed that although individuals ranged from *Star Wars* devotees since birth to late-blooming fans of the franchise, *Star Wars* has significantly shaped their everyday lives. Jake commented,

"The Jedi code sort of impacted the way I made decisions even (to a reasonable degree). As I grew older I respected Qui-Gon's way of thinking more, the grey Jedi was the path for me" (2016). Many of the interviewees belong to more than one of the primary costuming groups, and, even those that are proud members of the 501st Legion (the "bad" guys) are committed to giving back to their community. Brent responded, "Having the ability to brighten someone's day no matter their age, health, or background is why I stay involved. Having fun and helping people is what makes all the time and money worthwhile" (2017). Similarly, Kelsey reflected on how her involvement with *Star Wars* cosplay has developed her creativity and compassion and provided her with friends from all over the world" (2017).

The majority of the respondents have leadership roles in their groups—ranging from membership liaisons to public relations specialists to commanding officers. Brent, a membership liaison, said of his role, "In this job I am not only responsible for ensuring that only high quality screen. . .costumes are accepted into the legion, but also to help those whose costumes fall short, and get their costumes to that higher caliber 501st level costume" (2017). Speaking of his present costume, Grand Admiral Thrawn, Brent explained how his real-life experience translates into cosplay: "Being in the military myself it comes naturally to wear a dress uniform and carry the posture and poise of an Imperial Grand Admiral" (2017). Similarly, Kelsey said that she chose a Jawa costume because she is short, and Jake selected the "dirty" version of the Stormtrooper "because," as he says, "it's Alabama and you'd expect an AL trooper to be in the 'shit' right?" (2017, 2016). Krista's desire to be a Jedi was fueled by the freedom she is permitted: "I really loved the Jedis on screen and thought it would be wonderful to be a Jedi…I also liked the fact that I could be my own person—not a specific screen Jedi. I am not emulating anyone on screen. I have my own profile and identity in the Jedi community. I like the uniqueness of that" (2017). With each of these responses, it is evident that the costume choice is shaped to some extent by their everyday reality or personality.

The question then arises as to whether the experiences in costume translate or affect their lives outside of costume. Jake confided that being a Jedi has caused him to feel both more "strong and confident" in and out of costume (2016). Similarly, Benjamin stated that he used to feel that only in his Stormtrooper costume he was more bold in public, but now he is much more willing to talk to strangers when he is out of costume as well (2017). Krista finds that the Jedi-lifestyle is directly applicable to her everyday life:

> I like to think that much of the time I can conduct myself in a way that Jedi are portrayed in the movies. I am a Human Resources Manager professionally and although I do not wield a lightsaber at work (it is tempting) I am juggling many different sides in situations and handling delicate negotiations and situations between employees and managers. I am a peacekeeper and so I think my position is inherently Jedi even though it is not in my job description (2017).

Even for those who find that their role in the costuming group and their every-day job are vastly different from each other, most view their involvement in the group as an every-day commitment. Carl commented, "The Legion and Star Wars in general are a big part of my life and everyday reality. Being CO [commanding officer] is like having a second full time job" (2017). Furthermore, all of the respondents stated that they are fully open with family and friends about their involvement in the costuming organizations.

Although, as mentioned previously, this research is only in the initial stages, what I have aimed to show here is that the world of cosplay provides a rich—largely untouched—field for folklorists to consider dress and communal identity. To return to the question of whether we can look at dress as distinct from the body, I would venture that we cannot—especially when it comes to cosplay. With cosplay the individuals invest greatly in the process of creating a costume and performing a

different—though, as I have hoped to show here, not separate—identity. Although progress has been made to move us beyond the traditional humanist valuing of mind over body and human over animal—to name a few—we as a society have had a harder time learning to value imagined, fictional, or virtual worlds over what we continue to identify as "real." Bill Ellis wisely reminds us, "as anthropologist John L. Caughey (1984) observes, imaginary experiences are a normal part of most people's everyday lives, and they have immediate impacts on their real world conduct and social relations. To assume that fantasy is intrinsically trivial, 'is in itself a cultural myth' (29)" (2012, 184).

The equation of *imagined* with *inauthentic* creates significant problems when one speaks of popular culture in a folklore context. The desire for authenticity has long been a component of folkloristics. In her discussion of Richard Dorson's and Benjamin Botkin's highly different views on what folklore is and can be, Regina Bendix concludes, "Absolute standards of authenticity could not withstand the scrutiny that eventually led to an appreciation for the created and invented as well as the conscious and strategic deployment of expressive culture" (1997, 194). Despite this development, however, folklorists have remained hesitant about engaging with popular culture. A welcome conversation began with Michael Dylan Foster and Jeffrey A. Tolbert's 2015 work: *The Folkloresque: Reframing Folklore in a Popular Culture World*. As Foster and Tolbert claim, the connections between folklore and popular culture have long been present—yet there has been uncertainty about how to speak of material that is not folklore per se but still exudes a folkloric feel. While texts like *Star Wars* do draw on traditional material, it might be more appropriate to identify them as communicating a particular feeling—a quality that Foster terms *folkloresque* (2015, 4). Foster and Tolbert wisely avoid getting tangled up in defining folklore or locating authenticity in the folklore products themselves—which has too often been the focus of folklore studies. Instead, they seek to identify authenticity as audience-based—that is, the folkloresque returns the attention to the folk experience, how people respond to this

material and why that matters. Similarly, in approaching cosplay, I propose that we focus our attention on the bodies inhabiting the costumes: the folk and their authentic experiences.

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Questionnaire

Interviewee Information

Name*: _____   Date: _____

Gender: _____

Age: _____   City: _____ State: _____

*Optional if you wish to remain anonymous

Please take time to answer each question as thoughtfully as you can. If you have any questions or additional comments, feel free to contact me directly at anelise.farris@gmail.com.

1.   How has Star Wars influenced your life? This is a really broad question, and feel free to go in any direction: how you discovered it, when you became actively interested in it, various ways you've participated in/consumed Star Wars, etc.

2.   Are you a member of the 501st or Rebel Legion? Please briefly explain at what age, how, and why you chose to get involved with 501 or RL.

3.   Describe your involvement with your particular legion (including both the legion as a whole, as well as your particular base/outpost).

4.   What is your costume? After describing your costume, please explain why you chose it.

5.   How important is it for the costume to be canon?

6.   For you, is costuming about identification? Representation? Community? Something else?

7.   Do you identify with the character you are dressing up as is? Or is it someone you believe is very different from yourself?

8.   Do you feel emotionally or psychologically different when in costume? That is, do you take on a different personality?

9.   How much does your work with the legion invade your everyday life? Is it a regular part of your everyday "reality," or would you say it is a different "reality"?

10.   Are you open with family and friends about what you do, or is it a private part of your life?

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