



Tales of Badges

Celebrating Cultural Identity Through Engaging and Learning About the Characters Around Us

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Dedication

"People cannot gain anything without sacrificing something. You must present something of equal value to gain something. This is the principle of equivalent trade in alchemy. We believed that was the truth of the world when we were young." – *Fullmetal Alchemist*

This is a quote from the anime *Fullmetal Alchemist*, referencing the belief in alchemy that in order to gain something, one must be able to offer something equal in return. This is what I believe about the Capstone process – in order to gain the most from the process, one must present a year of their time. The presenter should also have the humility that one needs to others to make the design the best it can be. This report is dedicated to that trade, and the people who have I met and relied upon during the whole process. I am grateful for their help and knowledge (pictures from Jennifer Ash and Casey Addy).



Abstract

Conventions (cons) for Japanese animation (anime), video games, books, movies, and television shows are yearly gatherings of fans who come together to show their love and immerse themselves in these cultural experiences. This love is a manifestation of their identity as a fan of these experiences. For one group of people this love turns into a physical manifestation – cosplayers. For this group, costumed roleplaying is a way to meet other people and show their love of these cultural experiences. This Capstone explores how these groups of people currently come together to express their cultural and collective identity at the con and helps to bring attendees and cosplayers together to celebrate their love by learning about the characters that are cosplayed at the con. In this Capstone, I designed a mobile application to foster this love and identity after travelling to a con and learning the art and craft of cosplay firsthand from experienced cosplayers.

1. Introduction (done – check – pics)

Japanese animation (anime) and video games are currently a very popular cultural phenomenon. One avenue for people who enjoy these media to come together is through the convention (con). In the US alone, there are 238 cons held around the year that bring enormous amounts of people together to show their love, passion, and appreciation for these cultural experiences [need citation – animecons.com]. Attendance at these cons range from 5000 to 44000 [Wikipedia, genericon's website].

One group of people who outwardly show their love of these cultural experiences and the con atmosphere are cosplayers (costume roleplayers). Cosplayers become the characters they love by crafting costumes and becoming the personalities of these characters. Cosplayers will spend many hours to craft the details of their costumes and refine

their language and posture to become characters they want to be in real life. Examples of this dedication are: becoming another gender, wearing makeup, learning how to use metal and thermoplastics (for armor), tweezing eyebrows, and changing one's behavior to become the character in the real world. For many who attend cons, cosplayers have become a visual staple of the con experience and embody the values of both this group and the attendees who attend the conference.

During the duration of the con, cosplayers engage in their love of these cultural experiences in the same way as attendees do. Attendees mostly maintain their distance from cosplayers; those who decide to talk to cosplayers will ask for a photo of the cosplay, and the cosplayer will pose and act as their character for the camera and photographer. After the picture is taken, usually both the cosplayer and photographer go their separate ways.

Cons are places where people come together to celebrate their love of these cultural experiences and to celebrate their identity as a fan. The situation at the con mentioned above is an opportunity for design to help create more opportunities for both attendees and cosplayers to celebrate their role as a fan at the con, and to also celebrate the time put into the creation of the cosplay (both costume and performance). In the context of HCI/d, this situation is a valid and appropriate topic, as design has been used as a means to bring large groups together and create meaningful communities out of its constituent parties. In addition, this situation is appropriate for HCI/d to intervene, as it can create a design to be used as a social catalyst to bring together cosplayers and attendees who don't know that each other are interesting and worthy people of friendship and information related to these cultural experiences.

With the fulfillment of this Capstone, I contribute a design that can be used at cons to bring together cosplayers and attendees through the use of the photo opportunity and other natural aspects of the con experience. Employed through my design, called Tales of Badges, con attendees can be able to learn about the characters being cosplayed around them, creating an opportunity for the attendee to engage in a conversation with the cosplayer and find another anime, game, etc. that he/she may like. This learning opportunity about the character being cosplayed is a

crucial insight discovered after many months of user research.

For this Capstone, I have designed, tested, and evaluated one aspect of the Tales of Badges system, the mobile interface. Designed for the Apple iPhone, this design utilizes and builds upon the camera integrated within the smartphone. When a photographer takes a picture of the cosplayer, the camera takes the picture of the cosplayer and reads from the RFID signal on the badge of the cosplayer. This RFID signal contains the data about the character the cosplayer wanted to share with other people at the con. The photographer can then leave a comment or reflection about the cosplayer, mark it as a favorite, and also see what other characters are attending the con from the same "universe" (e.g. video game, anime, movie, book, etc.).

2. Design Approach and Methodology (Done – check)

Interacting with new people is a problem for many people, regardless of what clothes they are wearing. The con presents an interesting take on this situation, as it is full of people who share a common identity: their love of anime, movies, books, video games, etc. Even though this common bond exists, there aren't many times where attendees and cosplayers interact. To help address this problem, a human-centered design approach must be implemented to strike at the heart of this problem. This will help to get at

some of the reasons why there are few interactions between these groups that share this common love and identity of being fans and create a genuine and natural opportunity for conversations and friendships to grow in a genuine manner.

Approaching this situation from a design perspective can also help to add onto a human-centered approach. Many of the people who attend cons go there to express their love for these cultural experiences, learn new things, and meet new people. They are also attending voluntarily and spending their money for their enjoyment and want to get something out of the experience they are paying for. With this in mind, the perspective of design can bring people together through the natural activities people want to do at the con. Ultimately, this design shouldn't detract from the overall con experience. In this situation, design can help to make the experience even more worthwhile in attending, as meeting cosplayers might not only allow the attendees to learn about new characters, but it may allow them to appreciate the love cosplayers put into their characters and their craft.

In order to approach such a "human" problem, I want to take a qualitative and phenomenological approach to this situation, as this situation deals with how people make sense of and feel about what they see. In order to start to learn about the "lifeworlds" of the people involved at cons, both cosplayers and attendees together, I will need to employ a qualitative approach that will allow to see directly

how people think and feel about cons and cosplay. This can directly lead to methods such as focus groups, interviews, and ethnographic observations of this situation, as I can start to get at the thoughts and attitudes of people in action at the con. Quantitative information can be used to help get a sense of the values of the attendees and cosplayers at a larger scale across the world. The exemplars that I would need to learn from, including both work done in academia and in the business world, should be compelling and creative examples of design that can bring people together to celebrate the natural performing abilities of the human condition; in addition, these exemplars should also showcase the results of what happens when communities are brought together through design.

While designing for this situation, I don't want to interfere with the con experience: I want people to still enjoy the con at their own pace and the way they want to experience it. I also don't want to simply force people to interact with cosplayers to just say they talked to someone at the con. It would be more of a disservice to the cosplayers and attendees if the design I created forced an unnatural conversation or interaction between them, or presented an opportunity to abuse the love everyone brings to the con. Above all, I want to help create an opportunity for natural conversations and interactions between cosplayers and attendees, while using the con experience to augment the type of natural interaction created by the experience of cosplay. I also would want to instill an appreciation and celebration of the anime, video games, movies, etc. that

people come to the con for through the use of cosplay, the embodiment of the love the con creates. Through this appreciation and celebration, I would want to foster an atmosphere that is much more conducive to the social nature of cons that will allow attendees and cosplayers to talk after photos are taken of cosplayers.

In the following sections, I outline the approach I have taken through the Spring semester of 2010. There is a literature review, a presentation of the lives of cosplayers and attendees, an exemplar review of designs in similar contexts similar to this situation, the design research and experiments conducted, a presentation of the design that can address the issues raised in this Capstone, a strategy on how to implement the design presented by this Capstone, and a reflection on the entire process.

3. Literature research and/or theory (done/check)

Since cosplay is a part of the identity of the people who attend the cons, I had to research and study how people build their own identity. I have done this through multiple perspectives: through performance, through identity building, through fashion, through play, and through communities.

Identity Formation Through Performance

Humans have a natural ability to perform, and these performances help shape the performer's identity. A performance can occur anywhere and everywhere; performances can be something as a simple gesture of the body, or a complicated and prepared production on stage in front of a large audience (Schechner, 2003). Other (public) examples of performance include: theatre, play, games, sports, dance, rituals, and music. Within this performance, a performer helps to create a reality for the performer, but also for the audience that is superimposed on the current reality, where time is suspended, and the performer can become anything. Typically these performances occur in separated areas that people will travel to collectively enter this new reality and enjoy the separation from the real world. (Schechner, 2003)

Identity Through Actualization

The actualization process transforms oneself into another being and becomes a living embodiment of what he/she has become. Tribes and other cultures have used this process for hundreds of years, and the feeling is similar to becoming one with nature (Schechner, 2003). Through this process, one becomes transformed into another being; when done well, the experience becomes pure ecstasy (the act of the soul forsaking the body). The actualization process can be enhanced by the costumes and props people use during the performance, allowing the performer to confront the entity he/she is trying to become and move

freely in between each entity (Schechner, 2003). This duality forever leaves the performer a changed self.

The Audience's Role in Identity

The audience of a performance can also help shape the identity of the performers. There are two different types of audiences – the accidental, and integral (Schechner, 2003). The accidental audience is a group of people who serendipitously attend a performance, whereas the integral audience is a critical part of the performance, helping to shape the life and power of the performance. Integral audiences are also necessary for rituals to have been stated that they have been completed. When a performer can read the audience, he/she can adapt to their desires, becoming more in tune with the identity he/she is playing out, or adapting one's character to suit the excellence that the audience is subjectively asking for at the moment. This connection to the audience strengthens the performance and builds a bond between the audience and the performer, elevating the performer's status inside and outside of the performance. The audience also has a role in transforming the fabric of the performance: for example, the death preparation of the Makehuku Mudmen has been changed from a dance of impending death to pure entertainment after tourists have desired to see the dance performed. [Schechner]

Rasa and Identity

Rasa is the co-created emotion and feelings that exist through performer and spectator. Rasa is the result of

being able to read the audience to create the proper “juices” of performance and the result of training one's body to give the nuanced movements and gestures to communicate the feelings of the identity one is performing on a very deep and spiritual level. To foster rasa, performers go through different types of training: some end up training for years (e.g. Kathakali performers in India) learning how to contort their bodies to inform the audience what is really going on with the character and the performer (Schechner, 2003), while others train through playful exercises developed in theatre to learn how and when it is acceptable to allow one's body and soul to enter into a state where it can create the energy needed to create rasa. Rasa is situated within the culture of the performance, and the more successful rasa performers are able to use this context to successfully bring the audience and themselves into a unity with the stories and the characters being performed.

Identity Formation from Social Theorists

While reading about performance, I have also read some literature on what social theorists have to say about how people create and craft their identities.

Symbolic Interactionism

This is a theory that discusses how language and artifacts can help creating the identity of the self. Mead explains the “social self” as a person who is created through engaging with other people. How we engage with other people is very important, as language gives the speaker a set of symbols he/she uses to identify him/herself to other

people. A self has agency through the social experiences he/she creates with other people, and we end up viewing ourselves how others view us (Elliott, 2007). While this theory is especially rational and takes into account the experiences we have with others, it doesn't take into account how people's passions and emotions can help to form their identity.

Presentation of Self

This theory has its roots in theatre and tries to explain the building of one's identity through "impression management" (Elliott, 2007). We have different "faces", or roles that we play based upon the different contexts we are in each day, and the self has the power to control which face others get to see. The self has the power to create these faces on whim, but also can bracket off what it considers important and not important, which helps to control and play with the faces that people see. While this theory helps to explain the power of the different roles people have in creating their own identities, it has been criticized that it only applies in contexts where there is an overarching entity trying to assert power over every aspect of people's lives.

Gender Performance

This body of theory tries to explain how people construct and perform the notions of gender. In this theory, Butler showcases how people are always performing a gender identity, but critiques that identity doesn't have to be within a "sexed" body. She explains that identity come

from a result of one's culture and use of language. (Elliott, 2007). One of her main focuses of this theory is within the world of drag and crossdressing. She explains that people don't decide what gender they want to be on the particular day, but rather use their performance and language to create a notion of identity that people interpret. These values can get attached to particular pieces of clothes: for example, the notion of a bride being attached to a woman wearing a wedding dress. This isn't as true today, because "brides" of homosexual couples have the power to choose what they would like to be and wear throughout their lives, especially on their wedding day. One of the critiques of this theory is that it relies upon the construction of performance, but utilizes the construction of performance through language instead of gestures or action.

Fashion and Identity Formation

Fashion is a very personal and manifest way of people showing their identity to the world around them. Groups around the world use fashion as a means to also showcase their values: for example, those who identified themselves as "punk" crafted their bodies and clothes in a manner that subverted the power of the 1970s ruling class in Britain (Hebdige, 1981). Fashion is also used as a means to embed and change the cultural values associated with them. For example, jeans used to be a sign of working on the railroads in the 1930s, but is now associated with someone who is laid-back, and not working (Crane, 2001). Those who wish to use clothes to express their own social nature and

comfort with their surroundings have now reappropriated jeans. Clothes also have their own identity and codes inherent to them, and if one knows how to read them, that person can begin to understand the wearer's identity on a more nuanced level (Davis, 1992). Fashion has also led people to help take charge of their own lives and change the status quo. In the 1980s, women changed their attire and started to power dress to reflect their more important status in the workplace and that they should be taken just as seriously as men (Entwistle, 2007).

Community Identity Formation

People have been able to form an identity based upon their interactions with other people and the groups they interact with every day. Design has been able to utilize this aspect of the social nature of humans to create powerful designs that can create communities and help people identify with the people around them.

Grimes et al (Grimes, 2008) created a system to help people manage their eating habits through community and self-reflection. They found that people were able to help each other through the tough times of finding something healthy to eat, and realizing that other people out there are just like them – encouraging when necessary, but also trying to lose weight. McCarthy et al (McCarthy, 2009) created a community collage of workers' photos from Flickr. They found that people came together to observe the different pictures, but also people were on an equal level while interacting with the collage (the bosses and the workers

felt they were equals). Media Spaces (Bly, 1993) have also been used as a means to bring people together for work and fun. While people were using the media spaces, workers felt much more closer to each other and were able to get work done because of the strengthened awareness and social nature the designs created. All of these designs capitalized on the social nature of humans and brought people together for a common purpose. Those involved appreciated the fact they were a part of a group, rather than an individual operating by themselves.

How These Concepts are Relevant to Cosplay

During the Spring semester, I have been able to accumulate a vast amount of research on identity building. All of this knowledge can be applicable to cosplay for many, many reasons. Cosplay is a very real and embodied type of performance, where the cosplayer will spend months, or even years to craft the perfect costume, their gestures, and their speech to match their favorite characters. This is very similar to the training the Khathakli. In addition, the cosplayer's identity and joy of performing are enhanced and co-created through an audience, as they can help give the energy needed to the cosplayer to help him/her perform as their character. Cosplayers can cosplay anything they want to – a robot, the opposite gender, the complete opposite of themselves – but still maintain their own face underneath when they talk to people at cons, and this face management is critical in having an appeal to the audience and other cosplayers. The character the cosplayer cosplays as also reveals something about the person

underneath – why they love that character, why they love the costume, the expertise in their craft, and the social nature of the person - an invitation for other fans to come and enjoy the living embodiment of the cultural experience (e.g. movie, book, anime, video game, etc.). Design can be used as a way to help foster this love and give it to attendees to help everyone start talking to people who all share this common identity of “fan”, whether or not he/she is in a costume.

4. Research (done – pics)

In addition to accumulating knowledge on how people create and foster their own identities, I wanted to make this knowledge manifest in the design that I created. This section showcases the exemplar research, user research, design research, and analysis that led to the creation of the Tales of Badges system.

4.1 Exemplar research

To help aid in the design process, I have found exemplars that can help people explore and engage in the love of one’s cultural identity, with a special focus on those that deal with gaming, anime, etc. These are grouped in the following categories: group experiences, emerging and current technology, electronic fashion, art and celebratory design, and from the realm of information visualization.

Group Experiences

Design has been used to draw people together for exciting and fun purposes, especially in the realms of gaming, anime, and fandom. One can see the real world through the eyes of *Mystery Science Theatre 3000* with a special pair of glasses that remediate the experience of watching the movies (Bricken, 2009). One can also experience the fun of the *Ghostbusters* when tesla coils play the theme song (Bricken, Who You Gonna Coil?, 2009). The tabletop is also one place people gather for gaming and to meet people, and the team at Microsoft Surface has created a Surface application for people to play *Dungeons and Dragons* (Plunkett, 2009). Museums have also created special exhibits for children and adults to explore and be curious about the content inside (e.g. large pink dinosaur footsteps (Katayama, 2009))

Technology has also made performing with a group much easier and fun as well. The music department at Virginia Tech has used Wii-motes to help people play music as an orchestra (DISIS Linux Laptop Orchestra, 2009). People have also used the latest technology to perform in front of stadiums to create a pleasurable experience for people (Jardin, 2009). People have also reappropriated technology to create new performances (e.g. a jeep (Smith, 2009)). There have also been experiences made as well to help people celebrate festive times of the year (Eisenberg, 2009) (Jardin, Times Square snowball fight: #snOMG 2009, 2009). Technology has also made it easier for people to talk to new, beautiful (Ashcraft, 2009), and interesting people, especially cosplayers (Pescovitz, 2010).

Interesting and novel group experiences also happen in special rooms and vehicles with themes. People have been able to come together to see the Final Fantasy XIII bus to play the game and meet new people (Martone, 2010). Airlines have also started to create themed planes for their clients to improve their experience on the flight and to bring more people to the friendly skies (Manry, 2010). Hotel rooms have also started to pick up on this love of themes and helped to place people in themed rooms (Ashcraft, The Sonic The Hedgehog Room, The Hotel Room, 2010). Arcades have also started to foster the love people have for gaming and the chance to meet people with same interests by creating themed arcades, with unique architectural styles (Ashcraft, Japanese Arcade Themed Like China's Back Streets, 2009). Bars have also started to appeal to clientele who love video games and the desire to want meet people: some new themed bars include the Mana Bar (DtoidAustralia, 2010), the Gundam-themed bar (Hanagumori.com, 2010), the Haruhi-themed bar (Carview.co.jp, 2010), and the Dragon Quest VI-themed bar (Good, 2010).

Emerging and Current Technology

There are many different technologies that can be able to be used to help support a mechanism that will help everyone at the con interact with each other and celebrate their cultural identity. For those who like to text and type, there's the Talk and Type app for the iPhone that allows people to see where they walk while they type (Pescovitz,

Type n Walk mobile app, 2009). The iPhone has capabilities to take pictures and then allow the photographer to add filters, share photos, or blog (e.g. Hipstamatic, TiltShift, FuzzyShot, Clixtr, Night Camera, Best Camera). Twitter has also created means to allow people to celebrate the holidays and any other occasion (e.g. Christmas (DangerousPrototypes.com, 2009)). The development of HUDs have been gaining attention to give people access to real-time information in their environment; cars are just one area where additional information about the world is being used to help people navigate unknown areas (Borroz, 2010). The gaming industry is also creating physical devices that bring the experience of gaming into the real world, allowing people to interact, while still "gaming" (e.g. the PokeWalker (Fletcher, 2010)).

The use of Augmented Reality (AR) is also an interesting direction to take, as the designs mentioned below have the power to superimpose digital content in the real world to create new interactions. AR has been used to bring characters out of anime and gaming into 3D (Artefact, 2010). AR has also been used for leisure activities (e.g. shooting people with lasers (Lozano, 2010), Twitter (Rice, 2010), looking at cake (Tolentino, 2009), exorcising ghosts (Kelly, 2010), web browsing (Layar BV, 2010)). AR has also been used to help drivers look around corners to see if there is oncoming traffic (Frauenfelder, 2010). AR is also starting to become popular enough that it is being incorporated onto phones (Oxford University, 2010)

Other technologies may be novel enough to be able to provide the power for a design to help people celebrate the identities of everyone at the con. The new Skinput system is starting to gain some popularity due to its way of registering input by touching one's skin (Carnegie Mellon University, 2010). Photography and image recognition technology is improving to the point that at one day, one can get their paycheck by just taking a picture of it (Citibank, 2010). Cameras are also changing their shapes as well to embed themselves in the environment, or to change the way we interpret the artifact (e.g. a gun that is really a camera (Frauenfelder, Concept design for gun-shaped camera, 2009). Magazines are also changing, too: the Mag+ is a new concept to change the way we read magazines, making the experience similar to an iPhone or interactive surface (London, 2009).

RFID is an interesting technology to be considered, as it employs the use of simple tags embedded on objects, allowing people to learn about their surroundings. Since this technology is employed in many major suppliers, the use of this technology has started to be developed for mobile devices. The Baggage Finder app allows one to find their luggage at the airport through the use of RFID (O'Connor, 2009). RFID readers are also being developed for the iPhone (e.g. the iCarte (GeekyGadgets.com, 2010), other prototypes ((Caolo, 2009), (Lim, 2010))). The possibilities are nearless endless for mobile technologies

that can help power a design to help celebrate the identities of everyone at the con.

Fashion and Electronic Fashion

One of the realms I looked into to help celebrate the identities of the consplayers and attendees of cons was through electronic fashion and textiles. This area was looked into due to the power to attract one's eye to the wearer and the garments can be a natural way to create conversation based upon how the garment is working in the current context.

Since fashion is a part of our identity, there are many ways people who go to cons have been able to use fashion as a means to start a conversation. Many companies sell traditional clothing or apparel modded with the identity of anime or video games (e.g. bike helmets (Alafista.com, 2009)). Companies will also sell clothes that will make one look like characters from anime or video games (e.g. (Sheehy, 2010)). People have also used tattoos as part of their identity, and there are tattoos of characters and experiences from this culture as well (GodLen, 2010). In addition to tattoos, people have also used their fingernails to reveal parts of their identity to others (Leslie, 2010).

Electronic fashion has also been started to see a rise in popularity, and is also used to reveal the values of the designer and wearer. Adidas is starting to make shoes that use AR technology to give you access to the virtual Adidas neighborhood and gaming (Crescente, 2010). Designers

have also created dresses that will allow you to bond and feel at one with one's surroundings (GadgetSavvy.com, 2008). Wearable designs have also utilized LEDs to draw attention to the wearer (Edwin, 2009). In addition to LEDs, people have used small video screens to roleplay as famous celebrities (e.g. Lady Gaga (the_geila, 2010)). Some of the most ambitious of fans have been able to craft special suits that let them play video games while walking around (Tolentino, This 'Extreme Gamer' games XTREEEME with a PS3 backpack, 2009).

Badges are a natural part of the con attire, as they identify people at the con, and are a symbol of having paid for admission and being a part of the people who can attend all of the events. Technology has started to help make these badges more interactive, and create new types of situations and interactions among people at cons. People have started to make video tags at the Consumer Electronics Show in 2009 (McWhertor, 2010). There are also many other interactive badges on the market – the nTAG (Hanlon, 2004) and the Badge2Match (Badge2Match, 2009) – which work off of radio frequency and attendees filling out a general form about what their interests are. From this data, these badges signal interesting people in the area. These didn't take off because they were either too bulky, created non-genuine interactions, or were too expensive for attendees to want to use (Converve, 2007) (Mount, 2005) (Piquepaille, 2004).

Art and Celebratory Designs

Food is one way people naturally come together, and food is also present at cons, and at the heart of many celebratory designs. With respect to the content at cons, there have been attempts to bring together using food (e.g. (Chester, 2009), (Good, Capcom Gives Out 200 E-Tanks to Thirsty VGA Goers, 2009)). The love of these cultural experiences can also be found at weddings. There are many examples of the bride and groom showcasing their love through the cake (e.g. *Super Mario Bros* (Fahey, 2009), *The Legend of Zelda* (McWhertor, It's The Little Touches That Make A Legend Of Zelda Themed Wedding This Great, 2009), (GreatWhiteSnark.com, 2010)).

Public art exhibitions are also a great way to bring people together and naturally start talking, especially about the art and the meaning of the installation. Fans of *Guitar Hero* have made a public showcase of their love by controlling their Christmas lights with the game (Good, Christmas Lights Hero 100 Percents the Holidays, 2009). Artists have also created means of leaving messages to have people reflect on their environment, via video (Jardin, Video is the Paint: a guest art-dispatch from Kristen Philipkoski, 2009), pushpins (Maven, 2009) (EpicWinFTW.com, 2010), media spaces (ECI), the artifacts of the video game industry (Regine, 2010), search engines (Rice, Bing goes moe, enlists voice actresses to search for you , 2009), and even Google StreetView (Regine, Community Performance in Google Street View , 2010).

Ceremonies and festive occasions also have artifacts which naturally draw people together to form a tighter bond, which also reveals their identity as a culture. During the holiday season, many make their own Christmas trees. The nature and composition of these trees can vary from a simple, real life tree, to those that are built out of Heineken beer bottles (Katayama, Christmas tree made out of Heineken bottles, 2009) to giant Gundam robots (Ashcraft, Gundam Christmas Tree — The Video!, 2009). Many of the cons offer unique artifacts to that particular con, which can be used to start a conversation among people. One of the more interesting artifacts from Comiket 77 are the shopping bags with different characters on them (Alafista.com, 2010). Costumes and ceremonies also go hand-in-hand, especially in Japan and at cons. One of the larger celebrations for the New Year featuring maids and celebrants celebrating in cafes (Alafista.com, 2010).

Information Visualization

Information visualization has the power to present massive amounts of data to people in an artistic and coherent manner to have people gather and learn from the data. I explored this realm to learn how presenting large amounts of data can be presented to people at the con as a means to help people celebrate their cultural identity at the con.

Tag clouds and text visualizations are interesting and well-known ways of navigating through large amounts of data. The site oursignal.com pulls data from news sites and shows them to the user by use of color and size of text.

Word clouds, a type of tag cloud, have been shown to see what people are thinking about when they are writing (e.g. (Jardin, Word cloud of underwear-bomber's posts at Islamic forum, 2009), how people respond to disasters (Jardin, Chile earthquake: First-hand notes from Camilo of Disorder Magazine, 2010), and what people are talking about at large events (Juul, 2010).

Infographics are beautiful and interesting representations of data that provide an easy way to absorb information in a graphical and intuitive way. These have been created to show where taxpayers' money is going (Doctorow, 2009), tell stories about events that quickly spread over large areas (Infosthetics, 2010), show the buzz at current cultural events (Infosthetics, 2010), the different faces of people behind the scenes (USID Foundation, 2010), how people consume music (Infosthetics, 2010), how large companies use and take data from the public eye (Infosthetics, 2010), and the unfamiliar artifacts of tourist-heavy cities (Experientia, 2010).

4.2 User research

A large portion of this semester was spent becoming a part of cosplay culture and participating within this welcoming and growing community. The activities I did to help me become a cosplayer are: secondary cosplay research, creating a costume and attending a con, conducting a focus group of con attendees, and conducting preliminary design research on design concepts for this situation.

Secondary Cosplay Research

To start learning what it means to be a cosplayer and to know the cosplay world, I started to search for examples of cosplay in the real world and what activities people do while cosplaying. This section explores the world of cosplay in the following sections: the different realities of cosplay, the types of performance cosplayers do, children's cosplay

The Different Realities of Cosplay

Cosplay is viewed differently among those who don't have any knowledge of cons, those who have been to cons before, and those who actually cosplay. For those outside of the cosplay community, it is an activity viewed as something that defies logic, is a source of much embarrassment, or an activity where one can ogle girls in revealing costumes (Cracked.com, 2010). In addition, many are skeptical about the photos of cosplayers released on the Internet, as many have been digitally altered and perfected through the use of Photoshop and other photo-editing tools (Artefact, Cosplay Ideal vs Actuality, 2009).

For those within the cosplay community, it is a long tradition and way of showing the love one has for anime, video games, movies, books, etc. Cosplay originally started during the late 1970s in the US, where fans of *Star Trek* loved the series so much they created their own cons and dressed up as the characters from the show (AnimeVice.com, 2010). In Japan and the US today, cosplay is a means to release oneself from the mundane and normal

world of work into the worlds and characters one enjoys to watch, read, or take part in (gordon, 2010). Cosplay is also a means of empowering the person to become a part of a community of friends who enjoy the same characters and experiences one is a part of, even if the costume is more adult in nature (gordon, 2010) (Lin, 2010). This love and passion is very similar in nature to "diehard" fans of sports, but is often misconstrued to being something "weird", or "nerdy" (Dietsch, 2010).

Types of Cosplayer Performance

One of the fundamental activities of cosplay is the ability to act or roleplay as one's character and perform that identity (it's up to the cosplayer for how long/how deep this performance goes). One type of performance is the skit, where groups of cosplayers will gather and act out parts of the universe they are from, dance, or something pre-arranged. This happens not only at cons (e.g. (Artefact, Sexy Kuroko Cosplayer vs Otaku, 2010) (Bricken, Dignity, I Choose You, 2010) , but sometimes at weddings (Bricken, General Zod Is Apparently Available for Weddings, 2009) or on normal city streets (Ashcraft, Cosplaying In The Streets of Osaka, 2010). Other times skits and performances are what make up the con and gathering events for cosplayers (e.g. (Doctorow, Video from Mad Max campout weekend, 2009), (Ashcraft, Snowboarding Over 9,000!, 2010), (McElroy, 2010), (Bricken, Cobra Commander Is Waiting to Talk to You, 2010)).

Cosplay is also used to help advertise or draw attention to topics or events that people should know about (e.g. (Alafista.com, 2009), (Sliwinski, 2009), (Sheehy, Cosplay diplomacy; Japan sends Hatsune Miku to Thailand , 2009), (McMillan, 2010)). Other times, the fun of being a character is reason enough to perform in public (e.g. (Bricken, Dance Dance Stormtrooper Revolution, 2010), (Aziz, 2010), (Ashcraft, Brazilian Kratos Has Magnificently Painted Man Boobs, 2010), (GodLen, Red Ranger Flash Mob, 2010), (Bricken, Boba Fett Has Fallen on Hard (But Awesome) Times, 2010) Creating one's own film is also a very good way to perform as one's character of choice (e.g. (Bricken, The Best Way to Order a Pizza Ever, 2010)). Even celebrities will cosplay as characters because of the fun of the performance (e.g. Kirsten Dunst (Manry, McG, Dunst, Murakami's Akihabara Majokko Princess, 2010), the "Cosplay Fighter" (Tolentino, Touhou represents at the K-1 fighting tournament , 2010)).

Children's Cosplay

Cosplay isn't just for adults – children enjoy cosplay as well (e.g. (Artefact, Loli Hakurei Reimu Cosplayer Dangerously Cute, 2010), (EpicWinFTW.com, 2010)). Companies also cater to children's sizes as well when they make costumes of famous characters. Parents who love anime, video games, etc. also enjoy dressing up their children in their favorite costumes and take pictures of them as well (e.g. (Good, Link Baby Costume, This Time with Baby, 2009), (Ashcraft, It's Never Too Early To Final Fantasy Cosplay, 2009), (Great White Snark, 2010)).

The Desire to Share

Cosplayers have started to share how to create some of the characters they become. For those who can find other tutorials online, one can learn how to pronounce the simple details of a character (e.g. (wolfybrie, 2010) (Artefact, Serah Farron's Wardrobe Uncovered, 2009)), or learn how to take the time to learn how to do something complex, from building a full body costume, to learning how to get makeup covered perfectly on one's face (e.g. (Plunkett, Ladies, Here's How To Look Like A Space Vixen, 2010), (pirategirl1, 2010), (streek, 2009)).

An Adult Release

As cosplay is a release from the everyday world, some also release their inhibitions through the use of cosplay. Some use this opportunity to stay in character, but showcase the sexier sides of their character (e.g. (linkinstreet, 2010), (Artefact, Sexy Non-Japanese Cosplay Gallery, 2010), (GodLen, How Can Cosplay be this Good? Bikinis Edition, 2010), (Artefact, Nude Hatsune Miku Cosplayer, 2010)). Other times, companies bring out the revealing sides of their characters at cons or publicity campaigns as a means to attract people to the products they are selling (e.g. (Plunkett, Mass Effect? More Like Ass Effect, 2010), (Ashcraft, Dengeki Office Hijinks Continue!, 2010)). Cosplay also is used in burlesque shows as well, to appeal to a different type of clientele (e.g. (Bricken, Star Wars Trifecta: Nudity, Deadpool, France, 2010), (Bricken, Nerd

Burlesque Is Getting Weird, 2010), (Bricken, Science Fiction Sexy Feature, 2010).

Cosplay and Accessories

Accessories are one area that cosplayers strive to attain correct details on, or use as a means to show their own take on a character. Swords and guns are the most common accessories many cosplayers hand-create, but sometimes companies release authentic swords to celebrate the content they are releasing (Sterling, 2010). The devotion to the accessories can attract attention to those who know where the accessory comes from, or it can be sold for a high price on eBay (Matos, 2009). Whether large or small (manry, 2010), a well-crafted accessory will definitely add to the charisma of the cosplayer, and can sometimes make or break the cosplay.

Cars are one type of “accessory” that has been shown the love of cosplay. For those who have the capability to be able to “mod” or “trick out” a car, cars have been fitted to match cars from video games (e.g. (North, 2010)), become imbued with skins from popular anime and video games (e.g. (Boddington, 2010) (Artefact, MoeHaku 2010 Itasha Spectacular, 2010)), and come loaded with all of the accessories and tools the original car had in its “universe” (e.g. (Oden, 2010)).

Cosplay and Cons

Cons are one of the main areas where cosplay occurs. These are the events to show off one’s ability to perform

and to be seen as a craftsman, and interact with others who have like interests. Some of the more famous cons where experts and casual cosplayers flock to are: Comiket in Japan, which showcases the latest in comics and manga; PAX East, which showcases the latest in gaming and web comics (Kelly, PAX (f)East your eyes on the PAX East gallery, 2010); the Winter and Summer Wonder Festivals in Japan (manry, WonFes Part 2: Cosplay Too!, 2010) (Ashcraft, Cosplay This Winter, So Amazing, So-So, And So Frightening, 2010); Momocon and Megacon, both known for their focus on gaming, anime, and cosplay (Fahey, MomoCon Cosplay Gallery: Atlanta Gets All Dressed Up, 2010) (Cerrato, 2010). Cons can get very hectic, both in the US and in Japan. Many people come just for the cosplay and sometimes overwhelm the cosplayers (Artefact, Otaku Feeding Frenzy, 2009). Other times, cons can spontaneously occur in parking lots or at peoples’ houses, giving cosplayers another reason to perform (Duarte, 2010).

The World of Sold Cosplay

A high source of contention in the cosplay world is to the degree of how much of the cosplay is handmade, and how much of the costume was bought. This section features the different routes companies are in the business of selling cosplay materials (or garments to make one look like a cosplayer) to patrons, or are using cosplay as a means of marketing something.

Cosplay can be quite expensive and time consuming, and many companies try to make products that will make it easier for one to cosplay as their favorite character (e.g. (Sterling, Devil May Cry 4's Red Queen sword is pretty badical, 2009), <http://www.hellocosplay.com/>). Other companies imbue the qualities of anime, video games, and books into the clothing they produce and try to pass it off as cosplay material or for everyday wear (e.g. (Pescovitz, Star Wars sneakers by Adidas, 2010), (Martone, Eva -01 Bike Shorts Aren't just for Biking, 2010), (Bricken, Geek Apparel of the Week: Shredder Hoodie, 2009)). Other times the garments that are sold are meant to be an intentional joke for the wearer based on the character and their original body proportions (e.g. (Lozano I. ', The Creepiness Of The Pedobear Hoodie, 2009), (Bricken, Sexy Costumes Most Nerd Girls Wouldn't Be Caught Dead In, 2010), (Bennett, 2010)).

Cosplay has been used as a means to market many different types of products. The type of cosplay ranges from professional models (e.g. (Ashcraft, Korean Booth Babes Booted For Being Too Revealing, 2009) to amateur actors being hired by companies to promote their products, whether it is food (Lozano I. ', 2010), video games (e.g. (Aziz, Playboy Playmates attempt to be Bayonetta, 2010), anime, toys (Ashcraft, This Is How You Promote Final Fantasy XIII Figures, 2010), or types of awareness (Quen, 2010). Typically, these are found in commercials, although hired cosplay models or "booth babes" can be found at cons in a range and assortment of costumes (e.g. (Aziz, Girl

cosplays as Juri, stands around mostly, 2009), (Ashcraft, This Lady Will Put Your Eye Out, 2009). Cosplay has also been a means to attract business to bars, car dealerships (Artefact, Tokyo Auto Salon 2010 Sexy Girls & Moe Itasha, 2010), trains (Alafista.com, 2010), or massage parlors in Japan as well (e.g. (North, Moesham, a maid hair salon that likes to rub your head, 2009), (Alafista.com, 2010)).

Expert and Professional Cosplay Spotlight

The expert and professional cosplayers are able to create the most beautiful and intricate costumes from a variety of materials. These craftsmen (and women) are able to utilize fabric, metal, armor, and pretty much any type of material to create the details needed to evoke the life of the character they are trying to portray. The best of the best are invited to attend the World Cosplay Championships, where they can show off their costume and roleplaying skills. This section features pictures from the best in the world of cosplay.

-<http://www.animevice.com/news/daily-cosplay-spotlight-lady-ava/4054/>
a spotlight of one of the cosplayers from the time article [Expert, Pics]

-<http://www.sankakucomplex.com/2010/03/23/final-fantasy-xiii-cosplay-vanille-hope-lightning/>
ff13 cosplay that is well done [Expert, Pic]
-<http://www.animevice.com/news/daily-cosplay-spotlight-vickybunnyangel/4034/>

one of the experts from canada [Expert, Pics]
-<http://www.animevice.com/news/how-can-cosplay-be-this-good-sexy-robots-edition/4024/>
some of the best mecha cosplay out there [Expert, Pics]
-<http://www.alafista.com/2009/12/05/kipi-cosplays-black-rock-shooter/>
here is kipi cosplaying the Black Rock Shooter [Pic, Expert]
-<http://www.animevice.com/news/how-can-cosplay-be-this-good-thursdays/3269/>
the best cosplay out in public and people just taking pictures of them, and that's it [Expert, Pic]
-http://kotaku.com/5436145/comikets-sexy-pikachu-girl-and-friends/gallery/?utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=Feed%3A+kotaku%2Ffull+%28Kotaku%29
here are cosplayers are the japanese comic market, from pikachu girls to everyone else [Con, Expert, Adult]
http://www.toplessrobot.com/2010/01/war_machine_is_a_love_machine.php
this is the war machine costume, which looks awesome [Pic, Expert]
-<http://www.animevice.com/news/daily-cosplay-spotlight-jzh/3978/>
excellent cosplay from russia [Expert, Pics]
***<http://www.dannychoo.com/post/en/25383/Otacool+Worldwide+Cosplayers.html>
these are the best of the best in cosplay and give their stats as well [Expert, Pics]

-<http://www.animevice.com/news/how-can-cosplay-be-this-good-men-edition/3792/>
some of the best male cosplayers [Expert, Pics]
-
<http://www.figure.fm/post/en/7989/Otacool2+Cosplay+Submission.html>
more cosplay from the absolute experts [Expert, Pics]

Autoethnography and Con Travel

In order to truly understand what it means to be a cosplayer and know how to design for a con, I built a costume with the help of my peers and travelled to Genericon 2010 in Troy NY to live the life of a cosplayer and to be able to effectively design for this context. I also went to this con as an invited speaker on how to describe the process of cosplay for someone who is new to the community. Described within this section are my reflections and insights from this experience and the internal changes that happened.

Building a Cosplay – Costume and Character

The fundamental activity of building a cosplay is to build a costume and to become the character one loves in real life. The character I selected to become is Father Abel Nightroad, from the anime *Trinity Blood*. Abel is a priest working for a special unit of the Vatican to stop a vampire uprising. He is serious when it comes to his work, but very comical and lighthearted when it comes to everything else. He is also a special type of vampire that feeds off of other

vampires, rather than humans, which was one of the reasons why he was selected to work for the Vatican. A comical aspect of Abel (used in the anime frequently) is that when he eats high amounts of sugar (e.g. cake), it throws him into a drunken stupor, causing him to act in a comical way for a short time, and then falling asleep. He also is charged with protecting the main female protagonist, Esther, and will utilize his “true vampire form” to protect her and stop vampires from killing people. I chose him because of his character traits and I also like vampires and the Catholic Church.

After selecting Abel as my character, I then needed to be able to build the costume. To do this, I asked for much help from my friends and colleagues who have had experience with sewing and costume making. From their instructions, I spent time collecting all of the proper fabrics, accessories, and tools to build a costume (e.g. sewing machine, hot glue gun, etc.). I also bought a sewing pattern to base much of his costume on, and to make it easier to construct his duster (the big coat). Then I spent over 50 hours cutting the fabric, applying the white trim, painting the gloves, and creating the accessories needed to make me become Abel. In addition, I also had a wig trimmed to match the haircut Abel has, and I also had my eyebrows waxed to match the same pattern of eyebrows Abel had. This whole process involved much pain, love, and excitement, and I would want to do this process all over again.

At Genericon 2010 – Observing as an Attendee

I spent 4 hours on the Friday of Genericon 2010 (when I wasn't helping to prepare for the panel I had to run on Saturday) was spent watching attendees and cosplayers in the natural environment of the con. I sat at a table that was near the registration area and just observed. Most of the time, I was looking at the cosplayers, trying to figure out which character they were roleplaying as, and then giving a quick comment if I knew the character, or asking Jenn (my cosplay expert) who I was looking at. I really felt that I still knew only a small portion of the anime and games presented by the cosplayers there, as I could only identify about half of them.

Being able to spontaneously pull people over

One of the things I did that helped me to feel the role of con attendee was to spontaneously and instantly pull over a cosplayer if I liked the costume or if I knew who the character was. This isn't something I usually do, as I would normally calmly ask for a picture. I had to get their attention by either addressing them as their character, or joining a group of people who were already taking pictures of cosplayers. I really felt that I was interrupting their own fun at the con, but they seemed more than happy to do it, except for one case, see below. I was also able to find someone from *Trinity Blood* who I could do a meetup with on Saturday, which I almost missed the opportunity – she walked by about 4 times before I just ran up to her and asked for her picture.

Not knowing about the characters and having to ask – the awkward and insecure moments

One of the most awkward and unpleasant experiences of being at the con was when I saw a group of cosplayers from *Left-for-Dead*, but I didn't know who there were supposed to be cosplaying. After watching them perform a skit for a bunch of photographers, I got my camera and joined late and asked for a photo shoot. They were reluctant to do so, but they eventually said yes and posed for me. After I thanked them for the picture, I then asked them about the origins of their characters. One girl from the group gave me a short retort of where they were from and then they promptly left, making me feel especially dumb for even asking in the first place, and possibly wanting to feign knowledge so I can get a better conversation out of them.

Just seeing so many different people

It was totally awesome to be able to see so many people who had a great passion for anime and video games. It was also great to see many different types of cosplayers (age, skill, and craftsmanship), whom were mostly accessible and quite ready to talk about their costume and their character with me, especially if I knew who I was looking at. It was a visual spectacle for my eyes, and I would want to go back to more cons to not only see more of these cosplayers, but to also take part in more events.

The feelings of just wanting to go play and not do anything else

There were many times during this observation period where I was either bored, or excited to go play video games with my friends. Since I didn't have a costume on, I just wanted to go and enjoy myself and do things only I wanted to do at the con. I also wanted to make sure the people who came with me also were going to have fun as well, and not be bored. Without a costume on, or being incredibly suspicious with my camera, I felt completely apart from the whole con, and didn't enjoy myself.

Seeing other people touch each other's clothes

One of the interesting things I saw cosplayers do, and rarely attendees, is that they would go up to the cosplayer after their picture was taken and actually touch the fabric and ask about how the garments were created. In the instances where it was a cosplayer/cosplayer interaction, the touching was readily welcomed and appreciated (there were many smiles and long conversations). In the instances where it was an attendee/cosplayer interaction, unless the two were friends in the real world, one had to ask about touching the clothes the cosplayer was wearing. I took notice when I met cosplayers, and if I wanted to touch or learn about the fabric, I had to ask for permission first (to avoid any undesirable feelings). I learned a lot about different types of fabric, but it was very quick, and in a "you-probably-won't-understand" kind of way, as their descriptions were short, and high level in terms of craftsmanship.

Seeing a meetup

I was super-fortunate to be able to witness a cosplay meetup. This is a rare opportunity for cosplayers and attendees to witness an encounter with many different characters from the same type of series/video games/genre. These are mostly ad hoc, but this one I was able to find out from the cosplay meetup forum (even though they didn't disclose the location). It only lasted for about 15 minutes, and cosplayers from survival horror games came together to not only get their pictures taken as a large group, but to also engage with each other in a skit. While the meetup was in the darkest possible place (which is in-character for all of the cosplayers), they were still able to roleplay successfully and engage with all of the attendees that walked by with a camera. It made me want to find people from the anime I was from, as I wanted to share in that joy and mystery of a happy encounter.

Feeling left out of the fun

While I was sitting and observing cosplayers and attendees, I knew I was missing out on a lot of the fun of the con. First, I knew I was missing events which I could have gone to and enjoyed myself (e.g. a panel on especially bad anime and video games). I also just felt like a lump sitting in the corner waiting for opportunities to come my way for me to learn and take advantage of. I also couldn't share in the fun of having my picture taken, or having other cosplayers and attendees drop what they were doing and interact with me. I had to set time to go play games with my friends in the games room, away from all the other cosplayers and attendees, to feel like I was having some fun at the con.

Songs I was humming

I really did feel like a convention attendee while being an observer, as I would be mostly humming the songs from *DDR* or *Rock Band* in my head, as I wanted to go play those games with my friends whom I haven't seen in years. When these songs were in my head, I had less attention focused on trying to be able to see the wonderful cosplayers around me.

At Genericon 2010 – Participant Observations

Prep time

Preparing for the con and for the panel on Saturday morning was brutal. I got up around 7:15, and then I had to make myself beautiful (as much as I could in a hotel room – brushing teeth, showing, shaving as much of my facial hair – because it was a windy day and I didn't want my costume to fly away). Then we got in the car and drove for 20 minutes to the con, where I proceeded to find a secluded bathroom where my sister and I can make me Abel. We were able to find a bathroom that had huge mirrors and only 1 person came in during the 75-minute preparation. I was able to successfully put on my costume, and have help putting my makeup on. With each piece that I put on myself, not only did I feel more beautiful, but I felt more at one with my character. It also helped that I kept hearing swooning sounds from my sister saying how beautiful I was looking. After being completely dressed up, we put all of our materials away, and headed towards the panel area

where I would have to present in-character, with all my stuff in-tow.

Getting ready for the panel

Getting ready was quite tough. I had about 15 minutes to prepare a full hour presentation with someone who I only collaborated with a couple times from halfway across the country. I arrived at the panel early, and to my surprise, there was already an experienced cosplayer there waiting for me. She readily started talking to me about the issues she was happening with her dice, and I came over to her and started talking to her as if she was just an ordinary person. I had seen this person before at the last Genericon I went to, so seeing that friendly face was comforting. Also, the room was ridiculously hot, and so I was sweating throughout the whole presentation. I was able to make it through the presentation quite well, as the experienced cosplayers knew the troubles I had gone through and helped me fill some time, and the new ones learned some things as well. I also provided some laughs for them, and when I get the video of the panel, I'll post it as well. During the panel, when I was talking about roleplaying my character, everyone in the audience was about to start chucking candy at me – I asked them to wait until after the panel, because we wanted to make sure we got through our material. They were respectful enough to do that.

Walking around, temperature, roleplay

As mentioned earlier, walking around the buildings was quite warm, even though I didn't even touch any of the

video rooms or the games rooms. I just walked around the buildings looking for cosplayers and vendors and art for me to buy and remember the experience. Walking around wasn't too terribly difficult, but I had to plan where I was walking because going up stairs sometimes I would step on my duster, by sister was starting to get tired, and I didn't want to walk out into the wind. At all times, I was walking around as a cheery self who would be ready to stop and pose for people. At the same time, I was also looking for others to take pictures of.

When I was buying stuff

It was very wonderful to be able to draw people's attention to my character, especially when I was buying stuff. I had people come up to me and ask for a picture in the middle of a business, but no one really cared, including me. Also, when I was buying stuff, I also went up to other people and complimented their costumes as well, and I got a ton of positive feedback about mine as well. It is very different to be treated while walking around in cosplay –it makes the world seem a little bit cheerier, except for when you go near the karaoke rooms and people ask you to do caramelldansen. That was the line I wouldn't cross, even if my character was hopped up on sugar and candy.

Finding others in costume

Finding other cosplayers while I was in costume wasn't actually too hard. Wherever I would walk around, whether it was the great hall, the artist's alley, or any of the vendor rooms, it would seem as if many cosplayers would appear

out of nowhere. It was great to be able to walk up to them and just start talking about their costumes, as it seemed to me a good point of conversation. They would reply back quite wholeheartedly, and even ask me about my costume and tell me about the good job I did. They were also willing to ask me for a picture, and I asked them for the same as well. It was much more rewarding to me to grab pictures from willing cosplayers in a costume while trying to pull people aside and ask them for a picture, as it didn't feel so weird grabbing their attention.

Getting asked by people to be in a picture

This was one of the most satisfying feelings to ever have – and it's just a simple picture. To me, it not only symbolizes the effort used to capture the awesomeness of the craft of your costume, but it's also the memory given to the attendee and also the joy of seeing their anime character in front of their eyes. Just seeing the joy of someone recognizing you and then shouting and wanting your picture not only makes you feel like a star, but also that your efforts were worthwhile. And no matter where I was, I would not refuse a picture from any attendee – it makes their day so much better. The smile was worth it.

Finding another person from my anime

This was also a powerful moment for me in costume, especially since the person I found was the main female lead. Not only did I over-rejoice in seeing her, but I took great steps that I wouldn't normally do in real life to get her attention (I basically found her during a comedy event, and

asked her when she was about to leave to do a group pose with me, and she was overjoyed to do it as well, even though she didn't know what type of pose to do with me, but I was ready and prepared with one, as I loved the series so much.) And when that photo was taken, it symbolized the culmination of all of my efforts to make a successful cosplay, as she didn't refuse me or say that I was sketchy in any way.

How I felt when I was treated by other people

At times, being pulled over was sometimes annoying, because I had a ton of stuff to put down, but I didn't grumble at all. I was overjoyed to be able to not only have some attention while in costume, but also to see someone's day be made that much better. There were times, though, that being my character made me a little annoyed – people wanted me to dance at the karaoke events, which I wouldn't do anyways, but I at least considered it when I was in costume (there were no cosplayers there I recognized at that event, and just a bunch of dudes peer pressuring me into something they would find funny, so I didn't bother). Overall, though, being a generally cheery and funny person towards other people allowed me to engage with other cosplayers and attendees in such an awesome way that it was nearly intoxicating. And also being able to see and experience fan-girls was also comforting, partially because I have never been swooned over before, but also because it helped to legitimize my presence being there at the con in my costume.

How I felt when I was treated by other people for costume and panel

Other cosplayers treated me like a respectable and admirable equal while I was in costume. They were able to see and appreciate what I was doing, and I could see their efforts as well. I could be able to ask them questions about their costume, and they would be more than happy to tell me at great length about their costume and construction of it, something which didn't happen when I wasn't in costume. While I was giving the panel, the expert and novice cosplayers were able to see I was earnest and I earned a good rapport with them, as I showed them my troubles and they were willing to help offer me solutions to common problems they had, or where to get fabric at a good price. These were some of the kindest people I had ever met, and would love to get to know them even further.

Feelings of actually being a part of a participatory culture

This experience was one of the first times that I ever felt like I was truly part of a group of people, and that they readily accepted me into their group. The effort of making a costume and a successful roleplay left me feeling euphoric and in awe of what I was able to complete with the time and the materials I had around me. It was such a good and awesome experience, to not only be loved, recognized, and desired, that I would want to participate many, many more times with this group of people, and is something that I plan on doing many more times in my life.

Being able to get a hug

This was the best takeaway from the whole con – a hug. This was the most friendly and personable gesture I could do for those who not only recognized me, but loved my costume. I was more than happy to do this, even though I was a little reluctant at first, but I did it for the fans and for the love of the anime – and Abel would do that as well, as he loves to be around and protect children. This is the area I want to focus on when doing my design, is to be able to give this warmth and appreciation and fandom to other cosplayers as well at the con, and to give this warmth as a memory, because even as I am writing this, I still remember and loved the feeling of giving hugs to those who recognized and loved my character.

Ability to switch at any time to character and back to person with costume

Much of the time while I was walking around in costume, I was walking around “semi in-character”. I was walking around being cheery and happy to meet people, but I didn't act “priestly” – more like just acting like myself and just walking around the conspace and just trying to enjoy myself. At any time, though, I would look around at people and see if I had to switch my role to Abel, and also if anyone swooned or shouted my character's name at me, I would totally switch for their enjoyment (plus mine as well, as one of the things I still have a connection to are the Catholic church and possibly wanting to be a priest). It took a conscious effort at first to know when to walk around as myself, or when as Abel, but as the day went on by, I was ready to switch selves at the drop of the hat.

Being accosted by people with free candy

People wanted to give me candy to see me go loopy. It's different getting candy from complete strangers at a con than it is at real life, because the persons offering it to you are actual cosplayers and they just want to get a kick out of your performance. I readily accepted their candy because I saw it was just straight sugar, even though in real life I don't think these people would give me candy.

Getting asked to do cosplay chess

I must have left a mark at the panel, because I was invited multiple times to partake in cosplay chess, which I have never seen before. Also, I had to book my flight home at the time when the event was happening, so I had to decline. But, she was persistent – she found me while eating lunch, give me a bunch of spree, and asked me again in a more insistent manner to do cosplay chess. This time, I said that if I had time after booking my flight I would, as I could tell she was being earnest and actually complimentary towards the craftsmanship I put into my costume. I feel kind of bad after the fact about not going, as it would have been a new experience for me.

Still in character even during lunch

Lunchtime was one of the few opportunities I had to walk away from the conspace and be able to eat and be myself. This was far from reality. When I was ordering food from the student union, the cooking staff appreciated my costume and talked to me the whole time while I was

waiting for my food. They loved my costume and weren't afraid to ask who I was, and I was more than happy to share my love to them. It was great. Also, when I sat back down to start eating, I only took off my gloves and continued to eat as I normally would. While eating, I noticed a couple people always looking at my direction and smiling towards me, which gave me the suspicion that they knew who I was, or that they wanted my picture. When they were done eating, they promptly came over to where I was eating and totally wanted my picture. I was quick to say yes, provided that I get time to put my gloves back on. They didn't mind, and after I posed for them with my gloves on, they snapped a couple of pictures on their cell phone, thanked me, and I said my thanks back to them, even with a bow. And then I finished my meal.

The ops and eds I was singing

Even to the point now as of this writing, I am still humming in my head the opening and ending themes (ops and eds) from *Trinity Blood*, as I still feel like I want to be Abel and want to continue walking around in my costume, as I loved the experience of cosplaying so much. It is still very hard for me to crossfade to another song in my head to pass the time, but even when I do, I keep getting pulled back to these two songs, and I don't really know why, other than I haven't really left Abel behind, as I wanted to go and talk with more people.

Feeling of being at the comedy event with Esther

Esther is the name of the main female lead from the anime I was cosplaying, and there was a funny opportunity where she was able to take down a ruffian blue power ranger, but I felt that I should have helped her do so. I felt that this was a completely missed opportunity for me to show to her my honest roleplaying skills and honesty in wanted to meet her, but to also the other people at the con as well, even though nobody asked or called me out on it. I am still feeling some regrets of this even as I am writing this.

Being complimented by Scott and Jenn, fellow cosplayers

Scott, a good friend of mine from my undergrad and Jenn, the cosplay expert I have been working with since September (also a good friend from my undergrad), both were happy with the cosplay experience I gave to them. This, besides the opportunities from fangirls to cosplay with them, was a legitimizing gesture on their behalf to show me that they thought what I was doing was awesome, but also that I used their time and resources wisely. They have been vital allies in my capstone, and they didn't let me down, and I didn't let them down. I was worried that they might not even like what I was wearing or the efforts of 50+ hours worth of work put into this cosplay endeavor.

Afterthoughts

There were many times where I thought I did a good job roleplaying as Abel. But, like at the comedy event and at the karaoke panel, I missed some opportunities to make even more people happier and recognize my efforts in cosplay. These opportunities are the only regrets I have

now about the trip to the con, but I also think they were caused at the tension between which self I should show, Abel or Casey. These times were when I decided to be Casey in a costume, rather than Abel, and I would appreciate the opportunity to try this again.

Cosplayer Interviews

In order to learn firsthand what cosplay means to cosplayers and to learn more about the personal side of cosplay, I interviewed 5 cosplayers. I conducted 1-hour phone interviews to learn about the personal side of cosplay for them, and to learn about their expertise. Through these interviews, I was able to learn much about the meaning of cosplay, how cosplaying changes the experience of attending a con, and the impact cosplay has had on them and their identity. The names presented are the names of their characters that they like to cosplay.

Cosplayer #1 - Alice

Alice has been cosplaying since June 2009 and has cosplayed 1 character. Alice enjoys cons when friends are around, and enjoys the accomplishment of making a costume and showing it off at the con; she also enjoys the experience of roleplaying another person. Alice treasures the experience when "new people will randomly come up and talk to me give me a hug – I enjoyed that a lot". Even if the hugs and appreciation Alice receives are from complete strangers, she enjoys it when people recognize her, and then show their affection. She tries to remain in-character during photo opportunities, but breaks character

sometimes because of the difficulty, but also because “if you don’t have any of you, then it is nothing but an empty shell – you have to be there to give it life”

When Alice needs help cosplaying, she turns to more advanced cosplayers for help. She isn’t afraid of doing this because “cosplayers are some of the nicest people ever...[they] never told me my costume was bad”. In selecting a character, she identifies most with intelligent women and tough dudes, but not attractive women. To get into the “cosplaying mode” she researches the characters she wants to become, as she wants to know the character and be taken seriously when fans of the character interact with her. She also spends time practicing being in-character from the time she spends on the roleplaying forums from the games she cosplays. She has high standards for the costumes she makes, as details are important in evoking the character to those who know the character she is cosplaying, and will want to reciprocate the love of those who recognize her at the con.

Cosplayer #2 - Naruto

Naruto has been cosplaying for 9 months and has cosplayed 1 character. He enjoys cosplay because of the crafting skills he can learn while creating costumes and apply that knowledge to other parts of his life. While he hasn’t cosplayed at a con, he is planning on going to meet the same characters from his universe, find new series, and to just have a good time. While cosplaying, he looks for other people to improvise his behaviors off of, and when there

isn’t anyone else around, it feels as the activity is pointless. He enjoys it when people break from what they are doing and shout his character’s name and interact with him as if he was the embodiment of the character.

Naruto spends his time preparing his cosplay by researching the games and anime extensively to learn every detail about the character. The subtlest of details are of prime importance to Naruto, as “I’m stubborn and dead-set on making the article as close as possible and putting every little piece on”. He doesn’t judge other cosplayers when he sees them, as people are doing this for the fun of the experience. For him, he also spends his time switching from one his character to the person underneath, as he isn’t a professional actor and realizes the skill it takes to be a professional actor. When he is in character, he is immersed to the point that he forgets about the costume and is puzzled why people may look at him strangely. Naruto likes to pick characters that have a complex set of emotions and drives, in addition to the appeal of creating a costume from hand and showing off his work to those who would enjoy it. For Naruto, the essence of cosplay is “to become closer to the characters you love, and enjoy what you are doing. There’s nothing else – it’s that simple.”

Cosplayer #3 - Wesker

Wesker has been cosplaying for 7 years and has cosplayed 21 different characters. He enjoys the fun, camaraderie among like-minded people, the creativity, the satisfaction of creation, the “healthy escapism of everyday life”, and the

life-giving powers of cosplay. He loves to “have created something that has only existed in fantasy”. Every character for Wesker is an opportunity to continue learning how to act and how to design more costumes. At cons, he looks for the circle of friends he has found by going to many cons over the years and always wants to incorporate new friends into his circle. He loves to cosplay as video game characters, as it gives him an opportunity to play the games and to train his eye to find the details of the fabric and the way the characters’ bodies move, which motivates him to find the exact same materials in the real world. Cosplay for him is a very rewarding experience, as he enjoys having people interact with him as the character Wesker, and from that experience has gotten many friends from their same interests and fun times they have had at cons. He also talks to everyone at the con, regardless of whether or not others are in costume, as “we’re all there for the same reasons”, and compliment those who are in costume, as the con is an incredible opportunity to meet people and share in “the sheer energy of being with people – you see 30000 people, and it’s just overwhelming, and are surrounded by people who will form good opinions of you”.

As a designer, Wesker is very methodical and pragmatic, planning every detail up to 6 months in advance to give him enough time to avoid panicking and work with friends who have tools to help him get the details of his costume perfect. In addition with knowing how to use a sewing machine and work with many different types of fabric, he knows how to work with metal, clays, thermoplastics, and capes. Being at

a con helps to give Wesker more creative energy and life to create more costumes and see other “incredibly talented people – and respect the craft”. He also sees this as an opportunity to see the person inside of the character and what is appealing about that character and that person, as “I find it is easier to learn about the person and learn the story about the costume.” Wesker will also put himself into his cosplay, as it is important to “not to be snooty – try not to be pompous towards people who like your work” or stay too much in character, as he can tell from others’ body language that it is a turnoff for many. Also, the personal touch put into cosplay is something he looks forward to when meeting people, as it shows even more detail has been put into their love of their character.

Cosplayer #4 - Rogue

Rogue has been cosplaying for 11 years and has cosplayed more than 10 characters. Rogue enjoys making costumes, fashion, photography (has over 100 albums on Facebook), and enjoys when “people recognize me and I recognize other people... seeing all kinds of costumes and seeing people” when she cosplays. There is also much pride in being able show off her creativity and craftsmanship to others for her as well. She especially enjoys cosplaying characters from the *X-Men* comics, as she enjoys the costumes, characters, and learning how to do the moves the characters perform in the comics. While in costume, she is always herself and will only become her character when there are cameras are around: she doesn’t want to get into her character to the points where she “runs around sad all

day". She invites those who cosplay to put themselves into the cosplay, or "whatever that helps you have a good time."

Rogue is a very pragmatic designer. She collects all the materials she needs to create the perfect costume, a piece at a time, throughout the whole year to have "an amazing costume for Halloween". She'll also research her costume and character ("I would feel guilty if I cosplayed someone I didn't know...[I] would feel weird about being the character and just having the outfit.") people should know about the character") heavily during the process of collection and figure out all of the tough aspects of creating the costume on her own. She also has an innate sense of craftsmanship, as she knows when her costume is worthy of being judged, and when other people win costume contests that shouldn't. Here's an example of her process on her Rogue costume:

"I bought two suits and sewed them together, spray-painted the boots, bought two different wigs and sewed them together. Then I had the jacket and I didn't want to cut it, and the gloves I found in the dollar store. I look at how others did [the costume], find the mistakes, and try to improve – look it up, and say what you don't like, not just yellow gloves – cuffed gloves and bangles and sewed the glove to them..."

Cosplayer #5 – Prof. McGonnigal

McGonnigal has spent 11 years cosplaying and has extensively travelled around the world as a renowned

author, musician, star, and costume artist. She has spent her time learning how to create costumes from just looking at clothes, as she has learned from her eye what makes for an appealing costume. She loves it when people compliment her costume and the interactions she gets to have with the fans of her music. She also enjoys it when people end up cosplaying as her. She is also respected for her work in creating costumes for other people as well.

McGonnigal respects and enjoys any effort people take to cosplay, and welcomes everyone into her community when they earnestly try. In her reflection about cosplay, she attributes the activity to a fundamental social activity – the sense of belonging to a community and the love other people give to you from sharing in the love of books, games, music, etc.:

"Everyone has different reasons: some people are introverted and the costume is the way to break out; others it's a way to fit in – more time to hang out with my friends; some people are real artists and they want to showcase their artwork; some people like attention; when I wear a costume, I am much more social and people just come to me – that's a confidence booster – and that makes me stay physically fit for 10 years"

"People need to express themselves and I find that I need to express myself through music, books, cosplay, music, fan films, directed, costumes, I like doing a lot of things with my

energy – I wouldn't know where I would be without these books"

Con Attendee Focus Group

While learning about the personal side of cosplay from actual cosplayers, I also wanted to learn how attendees of conventions feel about the experience of cosplay, cons, and how they interpret the people underneath the costumes. To learn these pieces of information, I conducted a focus group of individuals who know the con experience especially well and have experienced cosplay in the "real world". Cosplayer pictures were also provided to help stimulate the conversation and have something to refer to when the individuals wanted to talk about an example cosplay.

The individuals go to cons a couple times per year for business and personal reasons. They mostly go because it "is fun to do, see new things, go for networking, meet new people" and also because "we're bonding" at the con. They also enjoy the concert-like fun and party-like mentality of the con where they can enjoy other people around them and impulsively buy items they can't find anywhere else.

When they see cosplayers, the initial reaction to the costume is important in their decision to approach. Even though they may be turned off by the costume, they recognize that the person underneath "probably has a really good personality", but because of the fact they stand out, and many cosplayers they have seen roleplay very

seriously, it is hard to approach and have a conversation with them. They also recognize that cosplay for the cosplayer is a fun activity, and "it's just normal people dressed up – not any different". When these attendees go to the con, they also know the video games, anime, etc. very well and can be able to distinguish subtle aspects of the characters that make them recognizable (one person was very quick to point out that the color of one of the costumes was slightly off and ranted about it for minutes on end). Ultimately, these attendees informed that if they didn't the character, they wouldn't approach (but would possibly think about it if the costume "was crazy enough"), but they enjoy taking pictures of cosplayers as the pictures are a token of the journey and the experience of going to the con and talking to people.

4.3 Design Research

Before I went to Genericon 2010, interviewed any cosplayers, and talked to attendees, I engaged in some preliminary sketching of possible concepts to address some of the issues in this problem space. These concepts were critiqued in small groups, which helped to inform me that the idea of recognizing new characters and wanting to find new ones at the con would be a great way to be able to start celebrating the cultural identities of those who go to cons, but the concepts lacked the substance of the true con atmosphere. This was one of the most informative design research activities, as it helped me confirm that I needed to travel to a real con to learn firsthand what it feels like to be

both a cosplayer and an attendee at a con. I have also conducted other group critique sessions of my final concept – those are described within the “evaluation and testing” section of the design process. All of these activities were jointly run while researching for this Capstone.

4.4 Analysis, Insights, Discussion, and Contribution

From all of this research, I learned an enormous amount about the human condition, cosplay, and the con lifestyle. All of this research has enabled me to see the following things are most important in helping to create a design that addresses the issues raised in this Capstone:

Humans Shaping and Expressing Identity

Humans have an innate need to shape, fashion, and build their own identity. Whether it is through performance, fashion, gestures, language, or the people one interacts with, humans want to build a sense of themselves that they can own and show off to other people. Sociologists and psychologists have studied this phenomenon extensively by looking at how the performer can change and adapt his/her identity during the performance, how the audience can influence how the performer behaves, how fashion and how one identifies with other people are all crucial in how people are able to build their own identity and display it in front of others. These are all crucial aspects of cosplay (the way the cosplayer moves, behaves, and creates the costume all reveal parts of the cosplayer’s identity), and for those who can identify with or know the performance, fashion, or gestures, the attendee can be able to interact with the

cosplayer in a very genuine and nuanced manner than just looking at a person in a costume.

The Con for Attendees

The con is a very social gathering place for all who attend. It is a means to find new anime, games, books, and other cultural experiences the con has to offer. The con also has many opportunities to buy memorabilia and other artifacts that are representative of the identity of the community who attends the con. The con is also a means to find more people and bond with them who enjoy the same types of experiences one is familiar with and enjoys. Attendees also see cosplayers around and enjoy unique, crazy, or familiar costumes, but don’t approach those who are in costumes they aren’t familiar with. Attendees enjoy taking photos and retelling the stories of meeting many cosplayers with those who haven’t attended the con.

The Con for Cosplayers

Very similar to attendees, cosplayers love to go to cons for the social opportunities to meet others who love anime, video games, books, and other cultural experiences that are displayed at the con. Cosplayers use their creativity, design skills, and passion to become the living embodiment of their favorite and personally identifiable characters at the cons. Cosplayers will also go to the con to get their pictures taken in their costumes as a way to celebrate their achievements and to fully actualize their transformation into their character, and will interact with people (in varying degrees) as the creator of a costume and as their

character. Being able to meet people and find others who love the same types of things are just as valuable at a con as being able to become their character.

Character Knowledge and Interactions

At the con, there are a multitude of characters that abound. For the attendee, being able to recognize a familiar character from an experience one has a personal and intimate relationship is an opportunity to meet a new person and place this love and relationship upon. Having personally experienced this for myself, this is one of the many rewards of the cosplay experience – having groups of people stop whatever they are currently doing and pass their love onto the cosplayer is a personal sign of connecting to a stranger and starting a conversation. Attendees will also interact with cosplayers if the costume piques their interest (whether it is “crazy” or exquisite), but will mostly comment on the costume. After talking to attendees, they realize that cosplayers are interesting people with great personalities and tomes of knowledge, but these opportunities are lost by not knowing about the character’s and costume’s origin.

Current Focus of Designs and Cons

After taking a look at a wide variety of designs that foster interactions among people at cons, strangers, and among fans, the current focus of designs situated at cons are either deeply situated in a forced connection of strangers or for the fun appeal of artifacts that only those “in the know” would know about. Designs such as the nTAG or the

Badge2Match system are very good at pairing people up after they have answered general questions about their interests, but these don’t strike at the nuances of what people enjoy about what they are answering. In addition, the technology is utilized to “icebreak” the two strangers together, which may not be the best approach in the context of a con, with thousands of people and distractions abounding. Other mobile applications just focus on the creation and manipulation of photos one takes, but don’t give the photographer any information that would be able to create a meaningful conversation or interaction after the photo is taken.

The Opportunity for Design

The con is a hotbed of cultural identity and passion. Thousands of people flock to these areas that allow all invited to step in a complete world full of fun, entertainment, and people who all enjoy the same types of experiences they do, and they won’t be judged as being weird or stupid (as a common stereotype about these people abound outside of this community). Design can be used as a means to help start connecting everyone at the con with these common interests through recognizing the living characters that are at the con. By giving attendees an opportunity to learn about the characters being cosplayed at the con, this information can be used to guide a thoughtful and meaningful discussion about the interests of both parties, creating friendships and the desire to learn more about what others like at the con (which is one activity already supported by the con). One activity that

brings both attendees and cosplayers together is through the photo opportunity. By taking advantage of the photo opportunity, design can present the photographer with information about the character in front of them, allowing all involved to celebrate the achievements of the cosplayer and the mutual love and identity fostered by attending the con itself.

5. Design Process (done – pics)

This chapter is where you present and discuss your design activities. Depending on the project and its character, the sub-headings might look a bit different, but the most common ones are: conceptual development, prototyping, evaluation and testing.

Since design is in many cases iterative, this section has to be written so it shows the iterations and the developments and improvements that are accomplished through the iterations.

If you are doing more of a research thesis, this is where you present your major research design, research activities, and research results.

5.1 Conceptual Development

Before heading to the con, I spent time creating possible concepts that potentially would have helped to address the issues raised in this Capstone. Many of these concepts revolved around creating a group experience that would bring cosplayers and attendees together, and the form of the experience would change. Whether it was a wearable microphone that would whistle the identity of the character

into your ear so you could start a conversation, special glasses that would create “just in time” character information, or tips in how to create a conversation, these concepts focused strongly on how artifacts can mediate a conversation between strangers. These were all communicated through storyboard sketches and presented in front of groups and critiqued from multiple perspectives. It soon became apparent that there were aspects of the con experience that would help to create a means for celebration and learning (e.g. helping to start a conversation and learning about the characters at the con), but all of the concepts lacked the richness and uniqueness of the con mentality and atmosphere. From this point, our group decided that I had to travel to create a meaningful and celebratory experience for all involved at the con.

After attending Genericon 2010, I gained the firsthand knowledge necessary to help create a celebratory experience that would foster attendees and cosplayers to come together, as the con is a unifying aspect of their identity. The one opportunity I was a part of and that I continually saw bringing people together and celebrating throughout the con experience was the photo opportunity for the attendee and the cosplayer. Whether it was an interesting costume, or a character that attendees recognized, the photo opportunity brought would-be strangers together into an intimate and welcoming experience. This love was the push that I needed to help put the power of celebration into both parties’ hands through the photo opportunity, which led to the creation of

the Tales of Badges system. It was first sketched out from the perspective of a single attendee with a smartphone, and then gradually iterated upon to create a quick means to learn about the characters one is taking a photo of. This would help to facilitate and foster conversations, hugs, shouts of joy, and other welcomed gestures and interactions at cons.

5.2 Prototyping

Once the concept of the Tales of Badges system was created, I went to paper prototyping the experience. I started with the smartphone piece of the system first, as this is what attendees and cosplayers will be interacting with and utilizing the most throughout the con experience.

The first iterations of the paper prototype involved a phone that could take pictures, and when the pictures were taken, it would just show the character information and keep the information always around. In addition, in order to do anything with the phone, one had to navigate through many different pop-ups throughout the interface. This was partially because I hadn't fully investigated the standards of interacting with a smartphone, and that I wanted to learn immediately what was important to people when using the design. After testing multiple iterations of the paper phone, it became apparent that the most intuitive, appealing, and efficient way to navigate through photos and information about characters is very similar to how the iPhone's native camera already works, as people who utilize the camera know how easy it is to take pictures, look through one's

pictures, and be able to bring up pictures to share with people, as one can hand the phone off to others to look at the photos one is proud to have taken.

After taking the paper versions of the prototype through multiple rounds of testing, I then created a medium-fidelity mockup of the phone application in Fireworks. I was able to prototype the screens for interacting with 3 different individual characters, 1 group photo, the cosplayer reel, and finding other characters at the con from the same universe (i.e. video game, anime, book, movie, etc.). These were then placed on the web for people to click through where they would naturally touch on the iPhone. These screens were also mocked up to broadcast onto an iPhone so attendees can be able to hold a real iPhone and interact with the design in a very natural and realistic manner.

5.3 Evaluation and Testing

Evaluation of this prototype occurred in multiple ways. The first way was for the usability of the design. This was conducted through the paper prototype and the interactive prototype. When working with the paper prototype, I found 10 individuals who have either had experience with cons or had a love or photography. During the evaluation of the paper prototype, I had each participant try to use the device to take photos of 2 different individual cosplayers, and 1 group. Participants were also asked to leave a message for the cosplayer when they wanted to. I used a Wizard of Oz approach, as I was the "computer" that would update the screen the participant saw after touching each

part of the interface. Participants were also asked to utilize the think-aloud protocol, which I could use to understand why and where participants were touching on the phone, and to also see how the experience of using the phone would augment the con experience. Participants were very fast to give their feedback quickly about how to use the phone as a means to discover more about the characters cosplayed at the con, and also other cosplayers who may be from the same universe. The experience for them was quite intriguing that they wanted to see everyone from the same universe. The participants' feedback about the design and the experience helped to me to know what to incorporate into the design, and what to improve, especially for the hectic atmosphere of the con.

In addition to testing the paper prototype of the phone aspect of the system, I also brought in 4 other individuals who have cosplayed or who have been to cons before and have seen cosplayers. Since they were located across the USA, I placed the medium-fidelity version of the prototype on the web and gave each participant the URL to start interacting with the mockups. In addition, I also called each individual and ran the evaluation session over the phone, while asking each person to say where they were clicking (so I could follow at a distance), and to also gain a perspective of how the experience of the phone would affect the experience of the con. Similar to the usage of the paper prototype, I asked each individual to use the design for 2 different individual cosplayers and 1 group of cosplayers. Participants were also asked to leave a

message for the cosplayer(s) they wanted to leave a message with and also star a cosplayer when appropriate. Once the evaluation session was concluded, I asked each participant about his/her thoughts about the design and how to improve the design. I received a great amount of feedback, especially from those who have cosplayed before and have had multiple characters over the duration of a con.

5.4 Findings and Results

I learned an enormous amount about my design and the con experience from the evaluation of this prototype. From an interface and *usable* standpoint, participants were able to quickly use the design to find out character information about the person posing for the camera. Participants were able to efficiently navigate through the menus in a matter of a few seconds to learn about the character, take many photos, and learn who else is attending the con. In addition, participants were able to use the cosplayer reel and photo sections to be able to view all of their photos easily and effortlessly.

Participants also commented on a number of improvements to the interface to make things easier and more usable for them. A number of interface elements (e.g. star, writing icon, and left and right arrows) didn't stand out from the background and weren't reflected in the cosplayer photo reel. In addition, participants were quick to note that the notification of a note left versus the act of writing a note should have two different icons, as the icon

itself led to some confusion after placement on the screen. Participants wanted to see at a glance which photos had a note attached to them or starred. Participants also wanted to have the “wonderful” text next to the star fade away, as the text covered part of the cosplayer’s image. In addition, the constant usage of the “Done” icon didn’t accurately reflect the context and desired action of the participants (e.g. done sometimes constituted the end of an action, or the end of looking at a character’s information). To improve this design, either “Done” should be used only when the participant is completed with inputting data into the device and use a different element to stop looking at character information, or “Done” should have the design end looking at character information and return the participant to the camera. Further testing and design will help to fix these issues. In addition, further design will be necessary to help the expert cosplayers be able to “switch characters” at the con, or be able to randomly switch to another costume they have carried to the con with them.

From a *useful* standpoint, participants were also very quick to point out that this would be an interesting addition to the convention, because it would not only give attendees a reason to look around for other cosplayers from the same universe, and be able to give compliments to cosplayers they wouldn’t normally have a chance to talk to. Participants were also happy for an additional need being addressed by the use of the design: a means to organize all of the cosplayer photos they have taken at the con. They also expressed a desire to see more functionality to the

design, such as an easy way to share all of the photos with other people or the websites they upload photos to, or finding a means to grab the cosplayer’s contact information to be able to talk to him/her after the con to learn about the process of making the costume or talking about the character in a much more personal manner. Participants also had mixed feelings about the use of sharing comments. They understood what the design was potentially asking of them, but half wanted to share their thoughts about the cosplayer, and half just wanted to make a note of where they saw the cosplayer or write down the contact information of the cosplayer. To help address this situation, a separation of public/private notes are needed, or a separate section of the design devoted to personal commentary and notes. One additional aspect of the phone that was desired by some of the participants was a link to information about the “universe” the character is from, as for some participants they wanted to know about the whole universe right away. An improvement to the phone in this manner will be also considered in the next iteration of the design.

Here are some quotes from the participants after having used the phone part of the Tales of Badges system:

“It’s helpful and has interesting info... [it’s] info on why they (the cosplayer) would want to pick that character – and see what it is in themselves – it’s a people tool...”

"I would definitely like to talk to them [the cosplayers] and be more interested – because I would have more to talk about and a way to see what they are trying to accomplish and a conversation starter"

"[the design] made me more confident and adds more emphasis and [it's] more exciting for the person who is cosplaying – that's the big thing"

"It would be handy to have at a con b/c I don't know them all... if you can use the iPhone, you can use this."

6. Final Design (done-pics)

The Tales of Badges system consists of multiple parts that encompass the life of the con. First, there is an addition to the con's web page that holds the place where cosplayers will place their information into the system that will be displayed when attendees and other cosplayers take pictures of them. This will be a natural extension to the forum or other area of the con's site where cosplayers leave information about the characters they will be cosplaying at the con. The next aspect of the system is the "electronic badge" cosplayers will be wearing. Normally, everyone has to wear a badge. The badges that the system will utilize will have an electronic signal on them (e.g. RFID, Bluetooth), which will be read and be used to display the information on the attendee's smartphone. The next aspect of the system is interface on the smartphone, which can take pictures and display information about each cosplayer,

and send comments about the cosplay back to the cosplayer. These can be found back on the con's website, and also on any "interactive" areas of the con (e.g. interactive surfaces, posters, TV screens, projectors, etc.). For the purposes of the Capstone, I have designed the smartphone interface and interactions for attendees. This part of the design will be the most used by everyone at the con, and is also the main element used in the celebratory process at the con between the cosplayer and the attendee.

6.1 The Smartphone Application

The smartphone application is capable of helping to celebrate the cultural identity of everyone at the con by bringing information about cosplayers into the hands of attendees, while also allowing attendees to be able to capture their experience of the con through taking photos. The following are aspects of the smartphone application: taking photos, learning about the cosplayer's character, cosplayer reel, leaving a message, starring, and finding more cosplayers at the con. Cosplayer groups are also given special consideration. The photographer can also delete photos he/she doesn't want to keep.

Taking a Photo

Taking a photo is very similar to taking a photo with the standard iPhone camera, and also fits well into the cosplay and con culture. After asking for a picture (which is standard etiquette at cons), the attendee can line up their shot, press the camera button, and then the shutter will

close, taking a picture of the cosplayer. At this point, the cosplayer's badge is read, and their name is shown after the picture is taken.

Learning About the Character

After taking a picture, the phone gives a way for the photographer to learn about the character. By tapping on the info button right away (or from tapping on the magnifying glass in the photo section), the character's information is displayed. This includes a photo of the original character, the cosplayer's photo (just taken), the origin of the character (e.g. the anime, game, etc. where the character is from), and also a brief description of the character. All of this data is left by the cosplayer on the con's website.

Cosplayer Reel

In a way similar to the iPhone's native camera application, the smartphone app also allows the photographer to see all of their photos, and to be able to see each one individually. In the reel, the photographer can still see the information about the cosplayer, star the cosplay, or delete the photo. The iPhone's ability to use the swiping gesture can also be a mechanism to toggle between which photo can be viewed at the current moment.

Leaving a Message

An important part of the celebration for the cosplayer and the attendee at the con is the reaction about the cosplay and the person underneath the costume. This app allows

the photographer to leave a comment about the cosplay, which is sent back to the cosplayer, and can also be seen on the con's website or other interactive avenues at the con at his/her own choosing (the latter hasn't been designed yet). Messages are left by typing them by using the native keyboard on the smartphone. An icon is left on the photo (but not saved onto the photo) to mark that a message has been sent to the cosplayer.

Starring a Cosplay

Another dimension in the celebratory process of this app is the ability to star a particular cosplay, identifying it as special or a favorite. A simple tap on the star icon will mark the cosplay as "wonderful", indicating that the compliment of the photographer. In addition, the star will also represent the prominence of that particular cosplay on the con's website and throughout the con (this will be designed in further iterations of the system).

Finding More Cosplayers

To continue the celebration at the con, an important facet of the smartphone application is to find more cosplayers from the same video game, anim, book, etc. This can be found by tapping on the name of the "universe" the character is from the cosplayer's information screen. This will show the photographer other cosplayers who are at the same con from the same universe. By tapping on one of the characters, it shows a small snippet of the information, and a picture of the character to give the photographer an idea

as what to look for at the con to start a conversation with and continue the celebration.

Cosplayer Group Considerations

As mentioned in the user research section, an important aspect of the con experience is groups of cosplayers coming together from the same universe (or from different universes) and interacting with each other as their characters, and as fans. During the process of taking a photo, the characters' photo is still taken in the same manner, but their names are displayed in the left-to-right ordering of the cosplayers in the picture. The information the photographer can learn from the cosplayers is about the group, and about the individuals as well. In the cosplayer reel section, white boxes surround each cosplayer to allow the photographer to focus on each cosplayer one-at-a-time in the same manner as mentioned previously. Stars and messages can be sent to the group or individuals. Cosplay meetups will also be displayed to the photographer in the same way groups are shown.

7. Strategy (Doen – check – pics)

In order to start helping cosplayers and con attendees at cons, I would want to get this design out into the real world for everyone to enjoy. In order to pitch this design to those who are in charge of cons, I will have to employ the following considerations to make an argument that this design is feasible from a business perspective.

To implement the Tales of Badges system as a part of the con, the design can reach cosplayers and attendees at the very beginning of the con. Those who would like to take part in this system can be able to pay a small fee on top of their registration to be able to get the app on their smartphone and the RFID on their badge. This fee can be very small (e.g. 5 cents USD), depending on the type and quantity of badges created for the con [need citation – RFID]. This allows the con to be able to cover the cost of the badges and the app, without driving the cost of registration too high that many would be driven away from attending the con to begin with. When a cosplayer receives their new badge with the RFID tag on it, the experience of going to a con doesn't change that much for the cosplayer, as he/she can place the badge on their body in such a way that doesn't affect their costume, and isn't too heavy that it pulls the cosplayer out of becoming their character at the con.

An important part of making the Tales of Badges system a part of the con experience is to implement the system. From the smartphone perspective, this system is possible because there are RFID reader apps being created right now, and is rumored to become a natural part of the next iPhone generation [need citation and pic – rfid app]. When a person takes a picture, the phone reads the frequency of the badge and can then present the character to the holder of the phone. In cases where there are multiple people in the image (not a cosplay group), the cosplayer's uploaded picture of their character can be used to help the software

recognize that person as the “subject” of the photo. This can help improve the results of reading the RFID badge, as multiple RFID signals might have been read at the time the picture is taken. In cases where a cosplay group or meetup are taken, the app recognizes this situation when it reads the badges of all the characters that are from a specific “universe” (e.g. anime, video game, etc.) The image processing can be done on a server at the con, because current smartphones don’t have the power to perform image processing in seconds after the picture is taken. By offloading the computationally intensive work of image recognition, the photographer can be able to receive results in seconds after the picture is taken, and use that information to become informed and enhance the interaction that is currently taking place. This comes with a reliance on cosplayers to provide “good” pictures of their characters when they sign up for the con, which isn’t too much of a burden – cosplayers already spend time researching their characters that they have access to numerous photos of their character to provide to the system. The iPhone was selected in this design because many of the people who attend cons use a smartphone to take pictures of, and many of the attendees who go to cons utilize Apple’s App Store for apps and games.

There is tremendous value in the creation of such a system. By having access to character information about the cosplayers who are performing around the con, the friendly and social atmosphere of the con is enhanced. As reported in the results of the focus group, con attendees go to be

social and bond with other people. By learning about the characters around them, cosplayers become “normal” people who are expressing their love and knowledge about video games, anime, etc. in a physical and outward form, rather than keeping it inside one’s head. This will allow for the growth of natural conversations and friendships at the con, and people to look forward to when returning to the same con year after year (or even when one travels to different cons around the country, or even the world).

An additional value of using the Tales of Badges system would also open up the photographer to other content the photographer didn’t realize existed. For example, if a photographer takes a picture of an interesting costume of someone from *Final Fantasy*, the photographer would not only have a new game to research and try when he/she leaves the con, but also something to talk about with the cosplayer. At this point, the cosplayer’s love for what they are wearing becomes transformed into a friendly suggestion to see why he/she loved this character to the point that it became part of the real world. This can feed back into the business plan of cons, where the system can be used to promote new content at the con. In addition, by embedding the use of the system in interactive surfaces and the con’s website as well, there are multiple opportunities to naturally interact and come together through the love of cosplay and fandom in general. These aspects of the system can further enhance the experience of the con to help become a larger celebration of the identity of everyone attending the con, whether the person is a technology

enthusiast, a cosplayer, a general attendee, an avid video game player, etc.

With all of these benefits, some steps will have to be placed into the system to help address some of the ethical and privacy problems possibly generated by the introduction of this system. A part of the etiquette of taking a cosplayer's picture is that one asks before taking a picture. With the smartphone and RFID reading capabilities, a photographer can take a picture of someone possibly who doesn't want to have their picture taken. While this can't be avoided completely, the usage of short-range (typically 5 feet [need citation – RFID]), passive RFID tags can help to promote the etiquette of asking for a picture and reinforce the intimate moment of a cosplayer becoming in character for the picture. In addition, with the usage of character art for image recognition, the system will only focus on the cosplayer recognized by the photo taken and the art, excluding many of the other people in the background from being "read" before being engaged in the real world.

Another situation that may occur is that a cosplayer may be "overwhelmed" by the number of people who try to take his/her picture, which happens frequently in Japan [need citation – pic from last 5 min]. This situation can be created from the aspect of the design that shows what other cosplayers from the same "universe" are at the con. While this cannot be prevented completely, the system will allow for a more orderly and respectful type of photo shoot due to the introduction of the range of the RFID. In addition,

photographers will only know that a certain character is at the con (and not the exact location of the cosplayer). This will give the photographer something to look forward to while at the con, but not the opportunity to "hunt down" certain characters to take their picture. Another situation that may occur is that photographers may want to take inappropriate pictures of the cosplayer. The system can help to discourage this type of behavior because the cosplayer's identity won't be revealed in this type of situation – the photo taken by the photographer, when compared against the fan art, should be close to what the cosplayer wants to be recognized as. Thus, the photo the cosplayer gives to the system will help to have a say in how he/she should be treated as a subject being photographed.

8. Conclusions

This is also where you can end with some ideas or speculations of future work.

The research presented within this Capstone is directly related to and helps to bolster the results from the evaluation of the prototype. The smartphone aspect of the Tales of Badges system directly helped the photographer see the elements of identity and the love of cosplayer come forth. The photographer is given the ability to see who the cosplayer is emulating, the love and connection the cosplayer has for their character, and the reasons for why the person is acting in a particular manner at the con. This relates directly to the research presented on performance,

presentation of self, fashion, play, and identity, as all of these elements are all harnessed within the realm of cosplay. This identity becomes transformed within the cosplayer through the process of building the costume, learning the identity of their character, performing their character for themselves and for other people at the con, and also finding other people at the con who have the same interests. The Tales of Badges smartphone app also has qualities of the exemplars presented, as it has a way of bringing people together to celebrate the efforts of the cosplayer, while also celebrating the opportunity for learning about new universes and creating a new friendship. The results from the Tales of Badges smartphone are also greatly enhanced by the user research I have conducted, as this design is a convenient channel to opening a conversation people who have like-minded interests, which is one of the main reasons why people go to cons (whether or not they cosplay): to meet other people who have the same amount of passion and love for games, anime, books, movies, etc. and to share that love with others. This smartphone app is just another way to share that love and give it back to the cosplayers who dedicate their time to become their character, and for those who take the time to celebrate their achievements as a photographer.

As a designer, to look back on this work is something of great value to the growth that I have had during my master's career here at Indiana University. This project employed almost the full gambit of what I have learned

from every professor here and the skills they have taught us. Whether it was to have a clever eye while looking for secondary research, staying committed to helping the people who I wanted to design for, seeking help when I needed it, being able to strongly critique the current situation and reflect upon what I can be able to do as a designer especially helped me to target this rich design space and create something people can actually use and want to use at future cons. I also appreciated the support of my choices as a designer to just do the work of experiencing a con firsthand and also having the pushback from the professors and my peers. Forcing myself to articulate the reasons for my actions is very important as a designer, and I would not have learned that as well by doing many smaller projects instead of a Capstone.

With this great devotion to rigor, though, even this project has had some shortcomings. For example, many of the design activities could have been improved. I could have been in costume and cosplayed around people during design sessions to get even more critical feedback about how to interact and experience cosplay. In addition, I could have had people utilize a real iPhone and the design to experience the tactile feedback and the experience of using the artifact to take pictures and learn about cosplay as one activity. In addition, I could have created my own con here at IU to be able to truly test the experience of using the design while having entertainment and distractions abounding around someone. One other step to improve this capstone would be to be able to test more participants

who have no idea about cosplay, or to be able to go to more cons and talk to cosplayers and attendees. Being able to have larger numbers to back up the findings of this Capstone would be able to improve the rationale for this design and the choices that I have made as a designer. A further critique of my project would be that as time went on during this project, I became more and more attached to and devoted to the people I am designing for in this Capstone. This possibly gave me different and more skewed results than if I was to remain distant from the design space and continue to design as an outside eye.

While the work represented within the Capstone experience has come to a close, the work is far from over. There will still need to have time dedicated to developing a working prototype of this system. This will include time to design how data gets entered into the system, and also time to create a working RFID badge with an iPhone to prove that the concept will work at a con. In addition, another aspect to improve upon the design will be to handle cosplay meetups (where cosplayers meet each other, interact as their characters, pose for photos, and perform skits for people). Since there are many cosplayers at these meetups, the current design (just placing white boxes around each character) may not be feasible for the photographer or other cosplayers, as the amount of white lines will end up taking away from the experience of viewing the meetup and trying to learn about the characters in the meetup. In addition, another aspect of this design is to have anyone who would like to share their photos at the con have a

means to do so at the con, and after the con is over. At the con, this design has given the start for integration with interactive surfaces or projectors that can showcase the efforts of photographers and cosplayers at the con. While this is another large and wicked problem, it is one I would be more than happy to take on, as it is another mechanism to further strengthen the bonds of friendship and identity among the people who go to the con. I would also want to take on the work of getting this system to a real con and see how people interact with the system and with cosplayers after the implementation of the system. I would love the opportunity to talk to attendees and cosplayers to showcase their love and to have more people celebrate their appreciation for anime, gaming, books, movies, etc.

9. Contribution to the field (Done – check)

From the work of this Capstone, the field of HCI can benefit in many ways. First, the field can see how the use of an empathetic and ethnomethodological approach can create nuanced and powerful insights for the design process. I would have never been able to learn what it truly means to design for a con for both cosplayers and attendees without having attended one and having made a costume and cosplay for myself. In addition, these steps allowed me to share in the lifeworlds of other cosplayers and see the fun they make out of cosplay, and their identity as triune: designer, performer, and fan. The approaches in the origins of HCI (e.g. cognitive modeling) would not have been applicable in such a project, as they would have missed out

on the formation of one's identity throughout the whole process of cosplay, which would have derived a set of insights that would have missed out on the human aspect of cosplay.

The field can also benefit from the work of this Capstone from the discussion and insights on identity and a new group of people design can reach and be able to help. There hasn't been much discussion in the field on how design can be used to harness the power of identity and what it means to people, along with how people celebrate their identity in the real world. This discussion on identity has not only left its mark on me, but also the field can begin to study identity issues with design to help people become more social and embrace the differences that make the world a diverse and wonderful place to live in. In addition, there hasn't been much research on the discussion of how design and human performance can be harnessed to allow all involved in the performance to grow and embrace each other. With this Capstone, I hope to try to get this work published so that a larger discussion on identity, performance, and cosplay can be brought to the community to discuss and research these overarching issues that can affect everything the field studies as a whole.

The HCI field can also benefit from the work of this Capstone by learning from a new population. The world of cosplay and fandom is so exciting, welcoming, and personal that it becomes an activity that is within every single person. Everyone has something they are especially

excited over (whether it is a TV show, a book, sports, anime, video games, etc.), and this passion brings out the most creative and interesting people in the world. This creates the opportunity for the HCI field to study overarching issues in the context of how fans and performers utilize what the field studies. This can lead to new insights about the human condition, which can help the community realize that an experiential approach to design can lead to the best and most impactful designs designers can create.

10. Reflections (Done - Put in Pics - check)

Throughout this spring semester of working on this Capstone, I have learned an enormous amount of information as a designer, and as a person. As a designer, I have learned that ultimately, the power of the design has to come from talking and engaging with the people one is designing for. I would have never been able to design something for con attendees and cosplayers without having attended a con myself. In addition, I would have never gained a nuanced understanding of why people would want to cosplay without having cosplayed myself. This type of experience I will never forget in my life, and it is much more than just the experience prototyping we have learned in the classroom. I have taken this to be a full and sincere empathetic approach to *lifestyle prototyping*, a means to not only learn the feelings and lifeworlds of the people one is trying to design for, but to also learn more about oneself and to add another dimension to one's life.

In addition, I have learned directly how it feels to have people comment and ignore one's character choice and costume. It is very frustrating and underwhelming when the work one has put into crafting their cosplay isn't recognized by others (very similar to the feeling when papers get rejected or when one doesn't win a contest). When I was at Genericon 2010, I really felt like a person walking around in a costume at the times when people weren't interacting with me, and I took it hard. But when I found people who recognized my work and my character, that was the point where it was worthwhile for me to continue on this project and to continue doing this as more than just a hobby for the rest of my life. These feelings kept me motivated throughout the design process and affected me on a personal level. From this experience, this project became a little more personal than just a simple design project – I was actually affecting the lives of people who aren't understood fully as to why they would dress and act as their favorite characters. It has allowed me to respect their work and what it truly means to be a fan of something.

In addition, this project has also left me seeing the world much differently than when I came into the HCI program. I am very grateful for the opportunity to be able to learn and design with cosplayers, as they taught me what it means to be comfortable in one's skin and what it also means to dress and act the way one wants to. From this, I have been able to advocate for cosplay as more than just "dressing up" – it is the embodiment of love. This embodiment has also left me seeing fashion as not only garments that one has put

on the body, but also as an outward sign of one's identity. I'll be much more secure in wearing the clothes that I wear and be equipped to use my identity to feel secure in the clothing that I wear, and the person (and designer) that I have become.

11. Acknowledgements (Done - check)

There have been many, many people whose support, mentoring, and suggestions have helped me to accomplish this Capstone project. I would like to first thank all of the professors (Jeff Bardzell, Shaowen Bardzell, Eli Blevins, Marty Siegel, and Erik Stolterman), of the HCI program who have helped me. I was very grateful for their support and suggestions for pushing me to take this project to the furthest level of my capabilities as a designer, and as a person.

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12. Biography (Done – need pic)

Casey M Addy is a May 2010 graduate of the Human-Computer Interaction Design program at Indiana University (School of Informatics and Computing). He enjoys designing to improve people's natural abilities to perform and play. He also enjoys designing for tabletops and natural user interfaces and empowering people to grow from their use of technology. Before growing up with the design program at Indiana University, he graduated with a degree in Electronic Media, Arts, and Communication from Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute. He also graduated from the same university with a degree in

Computer Science. Within these realms, he enjoys tinkering with code to create games and music for the game *Dance Dance Revolution*. After this Capstone, he has found a new joy in cosplay and will be continuing to be a part of this welcoming and fun community. You can find him at your nearest arcade exercising and welcoming you to join in a fun round of exercise and a good time.

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