Dissertation Research Proposal

Information Literacy in a Blended Affinity Space

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Abstract

People of all ages need to use information literacy to evaluate the veracity and usefulness of the material they encounter in all media formats. Most information literacy education is based on frameworks or models that are expertise-based rather than evidence-based, treat information literacy as confined to school or work, individual, linear, and skill-based. People need to use information literacy, however, not just at school or work, but in all settings. Information literacy education that is empirically grounded and focuses on areas where people already exhibit information literacy, such as in the pursuit of personal interests, has the potential to facilitate the transfer of information literacy practices across contexts. This study explores the information literacy practices in the cosplay affinity space, a blended physical and online space where individuals who dress up as admired characters from fictional narratives interact with one another. To gather data on individual practices, information horizon mapping interviews will be conducted with at least 10 cosplayers, transcribed, and analyzed using qualitative coding and a variation on social network analysis. To gather data on collective practices, posts, comments, and profiles from the online affinity space and observations and field notes from physical conventions where cosplayers gather will be analyzed using qualitative coding. This data will explore whether Martin's (2012a) findings that information literacy is a cognitive process, both individual and collaborative, and flexible rather than linear, apply in the cosplay affinity space. This study has the potential to add stability to Martin's (2012a) framework of information literacy. The study's findings will be valuable for furthering our understanding of information literacy in a natural setting and finding ways to design information literacy education so that it

enhances individuals' and groups' ability to transfer their personal information literacy practices across a variety of settings.

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Introduction

In the summer of 2017, Pew Research Center and Elon University's Imagining the Internet Center canvassed technologists, scholars, practitioners, strategic thinkers and others about the future of the online information environment in the post-truth age (Pew Research Center, 2017). They asked:

> In the next 10 years, will trusted methods emerge to block false narratives and allow the most accurate information to prevail in the overall information ecosystem? Or will the quality and veracity of information online deteriorate due to the spread of unreliable, sometimes even dangerous, socially destabilizing ideas? (Pew Research Center, 2017, p. 3)

Respondents were asked whether they believed the information environment would improve or would not improve and to explain their answers. Responses were split almost evenly: 51% of participants responded that the information would not improve, while 49% responded that it would. One of the major themes evident in their explanations of their answers was that technology alone could not solve the problem; "the flaws in human nature and still-undeveloped norms in the digital age are the key problems that make users susceptible to false, misleading and manipulative online narratives" (Pew Research Center, 2017, p. 32). Respondents suggested that "better information literacy among citizens will enable people to judge the veracity of material content and eventually raise the tone of discourse" (p. 4) and that to achieve this will require "an education effort that reaches out to those of all ages, everywhere" (p. 82).

Most information literacy education relies on one of a number of traditional models of information literacy (American Association of School Librarians, 1998; American Library

Association (ALA) Presidential Committee of Information Literacy, 1989; Association of College and Research Libraries, 1998; Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL), 2000; Bruce, 1997; Bundy, 2001, 2004; Candy, 2002; Clausen, 1997; Doyle, 1992; Edwards, 2006; Lau, 2006; Spitzer, Eisenberg, & Lowe, 1998; Zurkowski, 1974). These models restrict information literacy to the domain of work or school, treat it as a linear sequence of steps that can be checked off as if on a checklist, and are derived not from empirical or naturalistic research, but from the recommendations of information professionals (Martin, 2012a; Tuominen, Savolainen, & Talja, 2005; Webber & Johnston, 2000). These frameworks of information literacy operate on a deficit model, as if information literacy is something that information professionals have and lay people do not, that can only be transmitted via direct instruction by an information professional (Martin, 2011). These approaches, in spite of their lack of consensus, treat information literacy as a universal process that will be the same for every information seeker in every context.

A growing body of research reconceptualizes information literacy not as a universally applicable set of skills or techniques possessed by an individual, but as a set of personal and social practices situated in a particular context (Annemarie Lloyd, 2007; Tuominen et al., 2005). Most studies in this vein examine information literacy in the workplace (Anne Lloyd, 2005; Annemaree Lloyd, 2004, 2006, 2009, 2010a, 2010b, 2011; Annemarie Lloyd, 2007; M. Olsson, 2010, 2016; M. R. Olsson, 2010). A few studies take this perspective in other settings or with other populations, such as refugees or pregnant women (Annemaree Lloyd, Kennan, Thompson, & Qayyum, 2013; Papen, 2013). Others investigate information literacy as it relates to a hobby or lifestyle (Harviainen, 2015; Annemaree Lloyd & Olsson, 2019). This emphasis on information

literacy in a social context where people share a common goal, in the case of the workplace, or interest, in the case of refugees, pregnant women, and hobbyists, point to a specific set of spaces where information literacy can be studied: affinity spaces, "loosely organized social and cultural settings in which the work of teaching tends to be shared by many people, in many locations, who are connected by a shared interest or passion" (Gee, 2018, p. 8).

Only a few studies of information literacy are set in affinity spaces and framed as such (Bebbington, 2014; Bebbington & Vellino, 2015; Martin, 2012a, 2012b, 2013; Martin et al., 2012; Martin & Steinkuehler, 2010). These studies examine a subset of the gaming affinity space, focusing either on *World of Warcraft* or *Minecraft,* and focusing exclusively on the information practices of youth. The proposed study takes a sociocultural perspective of information literacy in an as-yet-unstudied affinity space: that of cosplay, "the portrayal of a character or object from a media property such as a Japanese anime or a video game through costuming and performance" (Bender, 2017, p. 155). The study also expands research on affinity spaces to include adults. Adults are present in many affinity spaces, and many of the young people studied in early affinity space research are now adults who may have brought their earlier practices with them into adulthood or gained new practices as they have grown.

Earlier studies of information literacy for hobbyists or in affinity spaces focus either on the physical environment (Harviainen, 2015; Annemaree Lloyd & Olsson, 2019) or the online environment (Bebbington, 2014; Bebbington & Vellino, 2015; Martin, 2012a, 2012b, 2013; Martin et al., 2012; Martin & Steinkuehler, 2010). This study explores both the physical and the online environment and the relationship between them, as cosplay is an activity that crosses both contexts.

This study is significant for several reasons. It fills a gap in the library and information science literature by exploring information literacy practices in an under-researched environment, a blended affinity space. Its approach uses a novel way of thinking about human-information interaction, focusing on information practices in a sociocultural context rather than information behaviors (Annemaree Lloyd, 2010a). It will offer insight for information literacy educators into the ways the people they serve might enact information literacy in domains of their own interest. These findings can inform future directions for information literacy education, providing both an understanding of the types of information literacy practice that might be worth teaching and ideas for how to cultivate educational environments that leverage the features of affinity spaces for improved information literacy. Finally, it has the potential to strengthen and expand an empirically-derived framework of information literacy (Martin, 2012a), adding to that framework's stability and value in future research. As it is strengthened, this framework might be adopted by professional organizations and policymakers to update their conceptions of information literacy.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study will be to explore the information literacy practices of cosplayers participating in the blended cosplay affinity space, as constituted through conventions, meetups, online profiles and comments, and forum posts. At this stage in the research, information literacy practices will be generally defined as the individualized practices people "use to help them successfully fulfill their information needs" (Martin, 2012a, p. 108) and the related information practices of groups of people in an affinity space "that encompasses cultural norms, discourses, and implemented practices" (Martin, 2012a, p. 109).

Research Question

What are the forms of information literacy practices engaged in by participants in a blended affinity space?

Specifically:

SubRQ 1. How do cosplayers situate themselves within the constellation of information available around their affinity space?

SubRQ 2.How are information literacy processes practiced in the affinity space?

SubRQ 3. How does collective intelligence happen in these affinity spaces?

Methodology

Data Sources

The overarching research question will be answered through a synthesis of the analyses from the sub-research questions. SubRQ 1 will be explored through information horizon mapping interviews, involving both the participant generating a graphic representation and a semistructured interview. SubRQs 2 and 3 will be explored through participant observation, both online and in-person, and artifact analysis. The relationships between the research questions, data sources, and analytic methods is summarized in Table 1.

Research Design

This study uses a research design that draws on ethnographic methodology, especially connective and affinity space ethnography (Lammers, Curwood, & Magnifico, 2012; Leander, 2008; Leander & Mckim, 2003; Magnifico, Lammers, & Curwood, 2013). Developed in the field of anthropology in the early 20th century, ethnography became a popular method of inquiry for educational research in the 1980s and for library and information science research in the 2000s

Table 1. *Proposed Data Sources and Methods of Analysis*

Research Question	Data	Analytic Method
SubRQ1 Cosplayers' perception of information literacy in context	Information horizon maps and structured interviews	Analysis of maps and structured interviews, using methods based on Sonnenwald (1999), Sonnenwald et al. (2001), and Martin (2012)
SubRQ2 Information literacy processes in practice	Online posts and comments, forum discussions, observation of convention panels and meetups	Coded using Martin's (2012) analytic framework
SubRQ3 Degree of usefulness of information when using collective intelligence of community[1]	Online posts and comments, forum discussions, observation of convention panels and meetups	Coded using modified version of Martin's (2012) collective intelligence coding scheme.

(Khoo, Rozaklis, & Hall, 2012; Lassiter & Campbell, 2010; Metz, 1983; Yon, 2003) .

Ethnography is a research design intended to describe the shared practices of a cultural group, usually relying on participant observation in a naturalistic setting, interviews, and artifact analysis for its data collection (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Lichtman, 2012). As the Internet became more widely available, scholars turned their attention to capturing the social dynamics being built there, adapting ethnography for online use (Androutsopoulos, 2008; Bridges, 2016;

[1] Martin uses accuracy rather than usefulness as a metric here, because in *World of Warcraft*, information can be correct or incorrect and can be confirmed against the Wikis to check accuracy. In cosplay, any problem can be solved with a wide variety of approaches. The study relies on the assumption that collective intelligence can be assessed by whether cosplayers indicate that they find the information useful or actually implement the information they gain in their crafting of costumes.

Donkin, Holloway, & Green, 2016; Hine, 2000; Kozinets, 2002; Puri, 2007). Early studies treated online spaces as distinct and disconnected from offline spaces and focused on settings with clear boundaries, but as computer-mediated communication (CMC) became ubiquitous, scholars sought new approaches for investigating the increasingly complex relationships between online and offline life (Baym, 1998; Hine, 2000). Connective ethnography and affinity space ethnography, which extends connective ethnography, are two such approaches.

Both connective ethnography and affinity space ethnography were developed in the field of education, specifically to study adolescents' literacy practices (Lammers et al., 2012; Leander, 2008; Leander & Mckim, 2003; Magnifico et al., 2013). These approaches require researchers to focus not on a single site of study, as in traditional ethnography, but on a "field of relations," beginning with a single site or participant in mind, then exploring connections both online and offline from that site or participant to other sites or participants (Hastrup & Olwig, 2005; Hine, 2000; Lammers et al., 2012; Leander & Mckim, 2003). These connections might include interactions between participants and sites (both offline and online), interactions between sites themselves (for example, hyperlinks), and how cultural meanings, objects, and identities circulate in the field of relations (Leander & Mckim, 2003; Marcus, 1995). Exploring the boundaries of the field under study is part of the ethnographic work.

Connective ethnography tends to focus on one-to-one correspondences between an individual's offline life and their interaction on a single online site, while affinity space ethnography involves not just a blurring of the separation between online and physical spaces, but also collaboration across a variety of online portals. Affinity space ethnographers must not only broadly map the varied ways participants in affinity spaces communicate (e.g. instant

messages, tweets, Tumblr posts, artwork, videos) but also "(a) reconstruct artifacts' travel and evolution across portals, and (b) use such findings to further theorize the collaborative nature of online texts and how they support learning and participation" (Magnifico et al., 2013, p. 82).

Connective ethnography and affinity space ethnography have many applications beyond the literacy studies in which they were first conceived. They have been used to investigate social practices that take place entirely online, how skills and resources travel between online and offline spaces, how online practices shape offline practices and identities and vice versa, how offline social relationships are extended by online interaction, how national identities are expressed and claimed both online and offline, and the ways in which online and offline spaces are co-constructed and interpolated (Prince, 2019). As ethnographic approaches, they are designed to capture shared practices and norms in a cultural group.

The proposed study does not have the scope of a full ethnography; rather than provide an in-depth portrait of the people, practices, and norms in the cosplay affinity space, it focuses on a single set of practices (information literacy practices) and seeks to capture how these practices occur at both the individual and collective level. Ethnographic techniques are appropriate for this type of study, as they can provide detailed insights into a set of shared cultural practices, even if they do not result in the creation of a complete ethnography of a cultural group (Wildemuth, 2009). They are appropriate for a study designed to investigate these practices in a naturalistic setting. Connective and affinity space ethnography are especially appropriate for this study, as the affinity space being investigated spans online and offline environments and involves participants in the affinity space interacting across a variety of online portals.

Taking a naturalistic, ethnographic approach to the proposed study impacts the study design in many ways. The research problem, extending a model of information literacy based on naturalistic research, necessitates a naturalistic approach. Taking that approach prompts open-ended research questions such as those used in this study, focusing on what practices are present in the affinity space, how individuals situate themselves within the space, and how they work together within the space. The data collection will use participant observation, interviews, and collection of digital artifacts such as online profile posts and comments and forum posts, while the analysis will involve coding the data using both *a priori* and emergent coding. While the final report of the study's findings will not take the form of an ethnography, it will involve dialogue between myself as the researcher and the participants and findings, the use of a distinctive authorial voice, and some elements of narrative form (Humphreys & Watson, 2009).

The Role of the Researcher

In qualitative research, the researcher herself is the instrument. As such, it is important that I disclose my biases, values, and background as they relate to the study. First, as a former school librarian who has myself provided information literacy education, I have my own views on what information literacy is, how it is best practiced, and how it is best taught. To mitigate this bias, I will use codes drawn from Martin's (2012a) study of the information literacy practices of *World of Warcraft* players to analyze the data generated in this study.

With respect to cosplay, my position is that of a lonely novice. By novice I mean that while I have, for twenty years or more, created costumes from ready-to-wear clothing and items I could craft myself using my knowledge of crochet or minor alteration, I do not have experience with advanced techniques such as crafting armor, sewing elaborate costumes, or creating props.

The kind of cosplay I do is often called “closet cosplay” or “casual cosplay.” By lonely, I mean that I did this primarily for parties at home and charity film screenings I attended with my family and close friends; I did not attend my first convention in costume until October 2017, and have only attended two other conventions in costume since that time. I have admired more advanced cosplayers for years, but have not interacted with them significantly online or in person. I have only recently begun engaging more deeply with the cosplay affinity space, rather than simply being an audience for other cosplayers.

My relative inexperience with cosplay as a social phenomenon places me in a position that has both benefits and drawbacks. As a novice, I am not in a position of power within the cosplay affinity space itself. There is no concern that potential participants will worry that I might, for example, judge them harshly in a cosplay contest if they refuse to participate in my study, as I am not experienced enough to be a contest judge. I am an insider to the community in some ways, and an outsider in others. I have gained familiarity with cosplay-specific vocabulary such as *costest* (trying a cosplay at home before performing it), *crossplay* (cosplaying a character of a different gender than your own), *genderbending* or *Rule 63* (cosplaying a character of a different gender than your own as if that character was your gender), and *racebending* (cosplaying a character of a different race than your own as if that character was your race). I am still learning other norms and practices, however, such as what platforms cosplayers use to interact online and how they organize group photographs. As I remain somewhat of an outsider to this community, I need to take care that I am not violating the community’s cultural norms and values as I undertake this research.

Data Collection Procedures

Emergent design. As is the case for most qualitative research, this study uses an emergent design (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Some parts of the study may shift over time, especially with respect to sampling and data collection. Data collection in affinity space ethnography occurs in three phases (Magnifico et al., 2013). The first step consists of *sustained, systematic observation*. The researcher undertakes this observation in order to understand the organization of the space, mapping connections between portals and gaining insight into how participants use each portal. For the purposes of this study, the results from this stage may inform sampling and data collection decisions such as which online platforms will be the most information-rich and whether it would be most fruitful to narrow the scope of the study to focus on a particular segment of the cosplay subculture, e.g. Marvel cosplayers. The other two phases, *analyzing artifacts* and *repeated contact with participants*, will be undertaken simultaneously or iteratively. To the extent possible, the rest of this section about data collection procedures details my plans, but as Creswell and Creswell point out, in the case of qualitative research "the initial plan for research cannot be tightly prescribed" (Creswell & Creswell, 2017, p. 182).

Sampling, site selection, and recruiting. "Cosplayers create individual and shared environments and communities both online and in person" (Winge, 2018, p. 11). This study seeks to capture both individual and shared information literacy practices in both online and face-to-face environments. To capture individual information literacy practices, I will conduct information horizon interviews with at least 10 cosplayers in person either at fandom conventions or at a location and time of the participant's choosing. I have chosen this number based on Martin's (2012a) sample size. I will use purposive sampling "to identify those

participants who can provide [me] with the richest data" on cosplayers' information literacy practices (Wildemuth, 2009, p. 130); the primary qualification for inclusion in the study is that a potential participant must be currently working on a cosplay project or have cosplayed in the past. To achieve some representativeness of cosplayers' experiences and maximize the variability in my sample (Wildemuth, 2009, p. 130), I will select participants with a range of experience, both in terms of the amount of time they have been cosplaying and the types of cosplay they tend to conduct. Whether this sample will be further restricted based on participation in a particular part of the cosplay subculture (e.g. Marvel cosplayers), age (e.g. only adults age 18 - 25), or duration of experience (e.g. whether a participant is an adult who cosplayed as a teenager) will be determined based on the results of the sustained, systematic observation. To capture shared information literacy practices, I will engage in participant observation at cosplay-themed panels at fandom conventions and conduct qualitative data analysis on online posts and comments on platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, Twitch.tv, Reddit, and Instructables.

In connective and affinity space ethnography, boundaries are explored through the course of the ethnography" (Hine, 2000, p. 64) and the researcher's attention is turned "from 'being there' to 'getting there' (Clifford, 1997)" (Hine, 2000, p. 62). As such, I have identified possible platforms for exploring the shared information literacy practices of cosplayers, but determining precisely which platforms and accounts to analyze will be part of the ethnographic activity itself. I will take a two-pronged approach to beginning my exploration of the cosplay affinity space. To capture an information-focused perspective, I will begin by exploring resources mentioned in professional literature targeted at information professionals who support cosplay as part of their work. Examples of this sort of literature include Elyssa Kroski's book *Cosplay in Libraries: How*

to Embrace Cosplay in Your Library (2015), Robin Brenner's blog post "How to Plan a Cosplay Workshop for Teens" (2017), and Eden Grey's article "Cosplay and Libraries" (2017). To include a current perspective from cosplayers who are not necessarily information professionals, I will also explore the accounts, profiles, and websites of cosplayers I have met or who have been guests at local conventions, then follow their connections to other websites and with other cosplayers. I intend to follow these connections, iteratively collecting and analyzing data, until I reach conceptual saturation, generating no new insights (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Wildemuth, 2009).

Interviews and participant observation will take place initially at conventions within a 50-mile radius of my home in Durham, NC, for reasons of convenience and cost. Such conventions might include Oak City Comicon (Raleigh, NC; April, 2020), Animazement (Raleigh, NC; May 2020), Cosplay America (Cary, NC; June 2020), and GalaxyCon Raleigh (Raleigh, NC; July/August 2020), among others. If I obtain additional funding, I may extend my research to larger conventions that are farther afield, such as Dragon Con (Atlanta, GA; September 2020).

As Lammers, Curwood, and Magnifico point out (Lammers et al., 2012; Magnifico et al., 2013), participants in an affinity space may have different communication preferences. Participants will be recruited one of three ways: via public posts on social media platforms that are tagged with relevant hashtags such as #cosplay, #cosplayer, and #cosplayersofinstagram (Figure 1) or posted in relevant groups such as the NC Cosplay Club on Facebook; via an online communication preference that they have expressed through their own websites or profiles such

as email or Instagram Direct Message (Figure 2); or through a face-to-face invitation to participate (Figure 3).

Figure 1. Sample recruitment post designed for Instagram.

Hi [insert cosplay name],

My name is Kimberly Hirsh and I am a doctoral student from the School of Information and Library Science at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. I also go by Luna Wednesday Cosplay. I am writing to invite you to participate in my research study about how cosplayers find, evaluate, use, and share information. You're eligible to be in this study because you are a cosplayer I encountered [at name of convention or via online platform]. I obtained your contact information from [describe source].

If you decide to participate in this study, you will participate in an interview that will take about one hour. I would like to record your interview and then we'll use the information to ensure I understood your answers to my interview questions correctly.

Remember, this is completely voluntary. You can choose to be in the study or not. If you'd like to participate or have any questions about the study, please email or contact me at kimberlyhirsh@unc.edu or @lunawednesdaycosplay.

Thank you very much.

Sincerely,

Kimberly Hirsh

kimberlyhirsh@unc.edu

@lunawednesdaycosplay

Figure 2. Sample recruitment message for use via email or direct message.

Hello!

My name is Kimberly Hirsh and I am a doctoral student from the School of Information and Library Science at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. I also go by Luna Wednesday Cosplay. I wanted to talk to you about participating in my research study about how cosplayers find, evaluate, use, and share information. You're eligible to be in this study because you are a cosplayer. I obtained your contact information from [describe source].

If you decide to participate in this study, you will participate in an interview that will take about one hour. I would like to record your interview and then we'll use the information to ensure I understood your answers to my interview questions correctly.

Remember, this is completely voluntary. You can choose to be in the study or not. If you'd like to participate, we can go ahead and schedule a time for me to meet with you to give you more information. If you need more time to decide if you would like to participate, you may also DM or email me with your decision.

Do you have any questions for me at this time?

If you have any more questions about this process or if you need to contact me about participation, I may be reached at kimberlyhirsh@unc.edu or @lunawednesdaycosplay.

Thank you so much.

Figure 3. Sample verbal recruitment script.

Information horizon maps and interviews. To address SubRQ 1, "How do cosplayers situate themselves within the constellation of information available around their affinity space?", I will conduct information horizon interviews with at least 10 cosplayers (D. H. Sonnenwald, Wildemuth, & Harmon, 2001). The information horizon map and interview methodology is designed to capture the following data about human information behavior:

- decisions made and activities undertaken during the information seeking process;
- when and why information resources, including individuals, are accessed (and not accessed);
- relationships or interconnectedness among information resources;
- individual preferences and evaluation of information resources;
- the proactive nature of information resources;
- and the impact of contexts and situations on the information seeking process. (D. H. Sonnenwald et al., 2001, p. 68) (bullets added)

These interviews will ask participants to create information horizon maps using the following instructions:

> "I would like you to draw an information horizon map. Locate yourself somewhere on the map and mark resources you use when you have an information need around cosplay or non-cosplay situations, as well as connections you see between the information sources. The map can be whatever you want it to be; it is your visualization of your information horizon." (Modified from Martin, 2012, p. 44)

I will encourage the participant to talk about the map as they create it, using a think-aloud technique (Wildemuth, 2009). After the participant creates a map, I will ask the participant "to

talk through the map, explaining their information seeking process" (Martin, 2012a, p. 44). If necessary, I may prompt participants using the semi-structured interview protocol in the Appendix. I will take notes on and record these interviews, transcribing them or having them transcribed in preparation for data analysis. See Figure 4 for an example of an information horizon map from Martin's study (2012a).

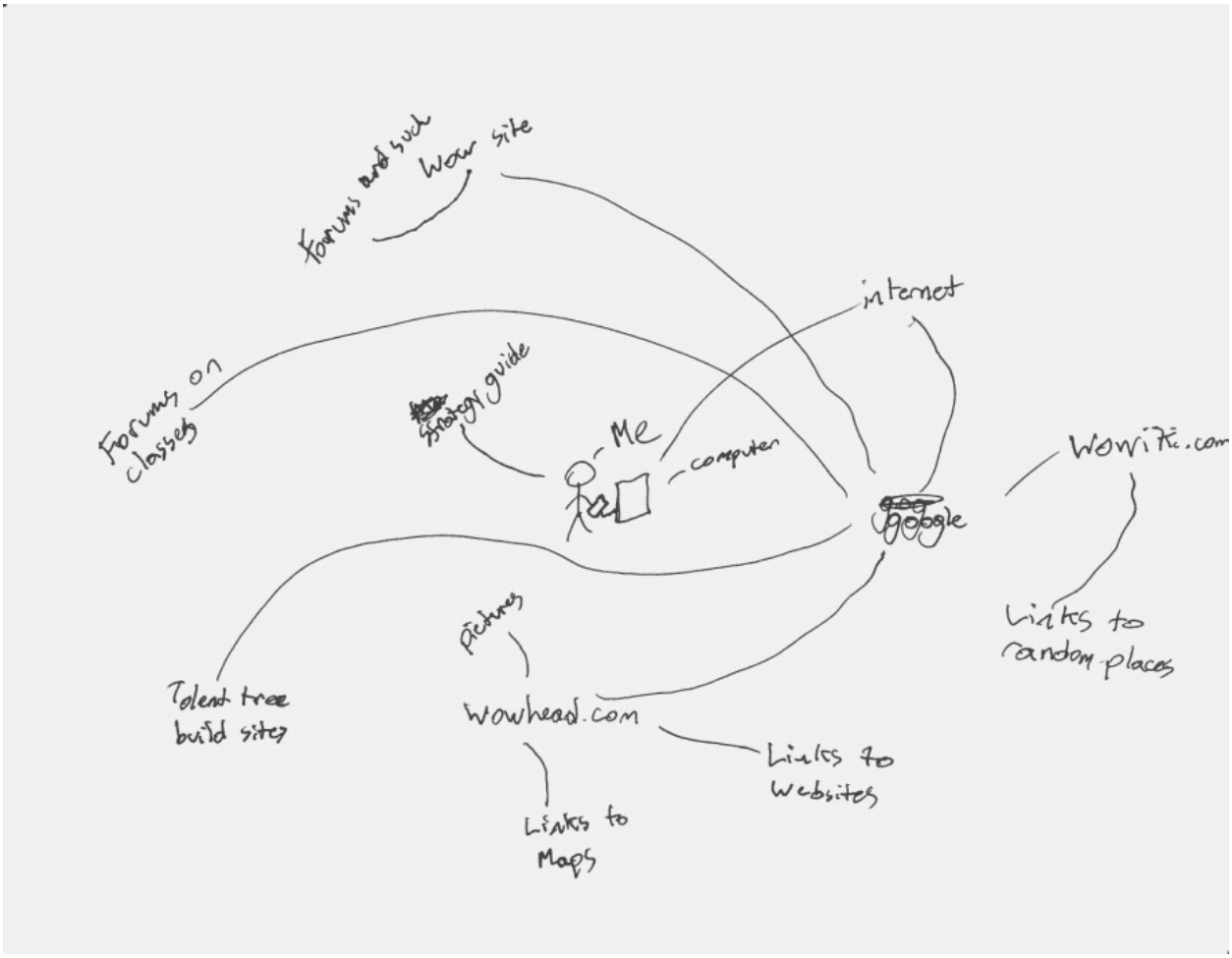

Figure 4. Information horizon map from one of the participants in Martin's study (2012a, p. 51).

Sonnenwald and colleagues (2001) originally performed the interview before the graphical task of having the participant draw the information horizon map, but Sonnenwald

(2005) later suggested that researchers should conduct the graphical task and think-aloud activity first. Martin (2012a) conducted the interviews in this order, with the graphical task/think-aloud first and the semi-structured interview second. Conducting the interview in this order reduces the likelihood that the interviewer will influence the creation of the map.

Online participant observation. I will engage in two months of sustained, systematic observation of online spaces in the cosplay affinity space in order to map connections between portals and determine the best data sources to analyze for potential evidence of collective information literacy practices. I will take notes using the online observational protocol in the Appendix.

Digital artifact collection. Based on my findings from the online participant observation, I will select portals to serve as sites for artifact collection. My initial informal investigations have suggested that social media sites such as Instagram, Twitch.tv, YouTube, and Tumblr may be fruitful for these purposes, as may dedicated portals such as The Replica Prop Forum, which claims to be "the Internet's oldest and most well-known source for information on the latest props, costumes and models seen in movies, television, video games and other entertainment media" ("RPF costume and prop maker community," n.d.). I will collect this data in the spring, when cosplayers tend to increase their activity in anticipation of the summer convention season (Orange County Library System, 2019). I will continue to collect this data through the summer or until I reach conceptual saturation.

Face-to-face participant observation. Because the cosplay affinity space is a blended affinity space, I will also collect data at conventions. I will attend panels devoted to cosplay, taking field notes on the panels using the face-to-face observational protocol in the Appendix and

recording panels as I am able or permitted. I will transcribe or have the recordings transcribed in preparation for data analysis. It is impossible to predict how many hours of observation this will involve, as convention programs for 2020 have not been published yet and I cannot estimate how much of my time at a given convention will be used for interviews.

Figure 5. Data collection timeline.

Data Analysis Procedures

Data analysis will proceed simultaneously with data collection. I will write analytic memos during the sustained observation phase. I will code interview data and perform information horizon network analysis (see below) on each interview as it is collected and across interviews as each new interview is added to the corpus of data. I will analyze artifacts and face-to-face observation field notes as soon as they are collected, revisiting them with each new piece of data. The data collected will likely be very dense and rich (Creswell & Creswell, 2017),

so I will focus on how the data specifically informs my understanding of information literacy practices.

I will use MaxQDA qualitative analysis software to analyze the data. This software will allow me to incorporate both text and multimedia data including images, audio, and video recordings. Audio and video recordings will be able to be viewed and coded alongside their transcripts. I will be able to quickly locate data according to its code and identify relationships among codes.

Information horizon maps and interviews. As in Martin's (2012a) study, the data will be analyzed both as an aggregate and by participant. The first step in data aggregation will be to create a list of all the terms participants used in the information horizon maps with the frequency of use (Figure 6). The next step will include creating categories from this list and tallying their frequency of use (Figure 7). Then, I will create a matrix with resource categories as rows and participant names as columns, placing in each cell the order in which the participant mentioned that particular resource (Figure 8). Based on this matrix, I will create an aggregated information horizon map combining the maps of the participants (Figure 9). When participants indicate a directional relationship between resources, those resources will be connected on the map by an arrow. If there is not a specific directional flow between resources, they will be connected by a line.

Resource	Number of References
Wowhead	4
gnilo (guild website)	1
Elitist Jerks	1
Forums on Classes	1
Wow site	1
Wow site forums	1
Strategy guide (paper)	1
internet	1
google	3
wowwiki.com	5
links from wowwiki.com	1
links from wowhead.com to maps	1
links from wowhead.com	1
talen tree build sites	1
knowledge compendium	1
speculation sites	1
guides	1
wowprofessions	3
opinion sites	1
mmochampion	1
game wikis	3
wow class guides	1
Game development blogs	1
youtube	1
video guides & tutorials on youtube	1
Friends	2
Chats	1
game forums	1
Experimenting in game	1
In game people	1
Trade Chat	1
internet	1

Figure 6. Tally of information terms used in Martin's study (2012a, p. 55).

Resource	Total Times Mentioned
Knowledge Compendium	19
General Search	6
Chat	5
In-Person	4
links from preferred sites	4
Forums	3
Guides	3
Opinion Sites	3
In-game resources	3
blog	3
Guild Websites	2
Youtube	2
Corporate Site	1
Speculation Sites	1
Strategy Guide	1

Figure 7. Total resources by category from Martin's study (2012a, p. 56).

Resource	Noel	Nick	Neil	Aidan	Brandon	Roger	John	Walton	# Students
Knowledge Compendium	1	2	1	3	1	3	2	1	8
Forums		2				4			2
Corporate Site		2							1
Guild Websites			2						1
General Search		1			2	1	3		4
Speculation Sites	4								1
Guides	2								1
Opinion Sites	3								1
Chat						5			1
In-Person				2		2	1		3
Strategy Guide		4							1
links from preferred sites		3							1
In-game resources				1			4		2
blog								3	1
Youtube								2	1

Figure 8. Aggregated resources by participant from Martin's study (2012a, p. 57).

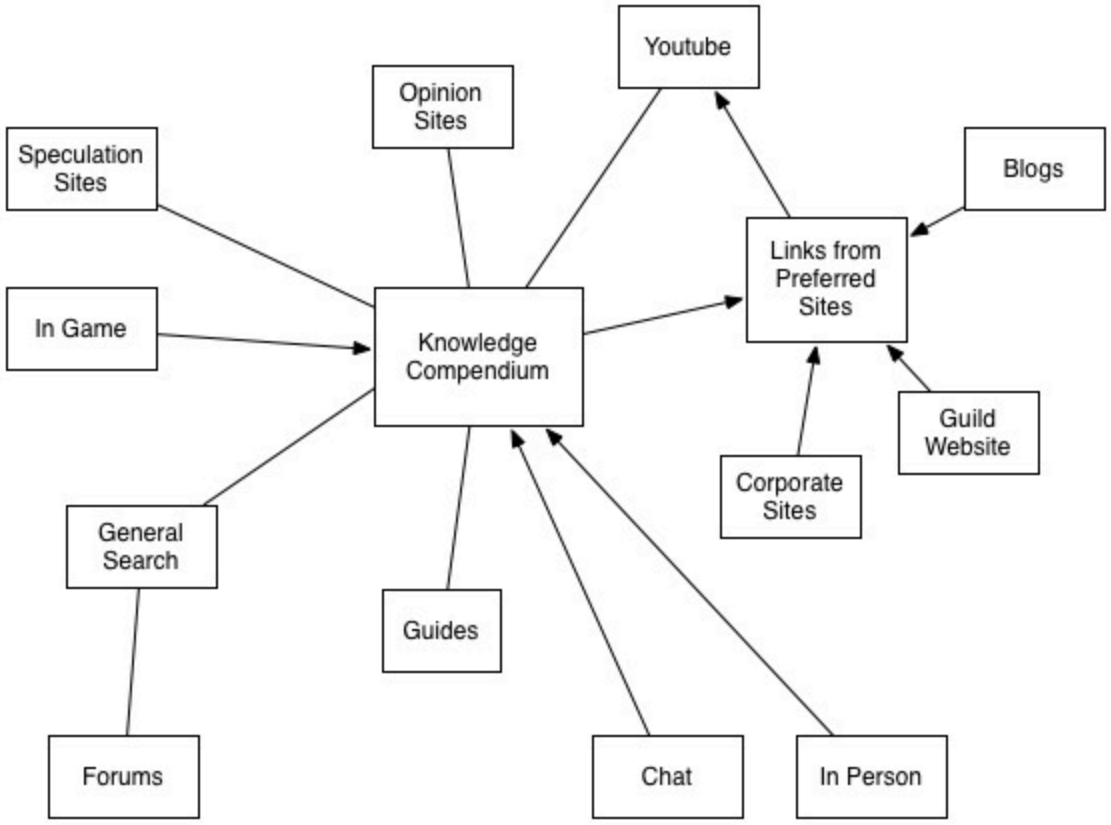

Figure 9. Master information horizon map from Martin's study (2012a, p. 58).

If the data allows, I may conduct further analysis as Sonnenwald and colleagues (2001) suggest. This would include several possible types of analysis. First is looking for information seeking patterns in the data. Sonnenwald and colleagues (2001) identify four patterns: sequential chain, breadth-first, cyclic, and branching/fan. In the sequential chain pattern, participants use resources sequentially. In the breadth-first pattern, participants prefer to access multiple resources initially, having more than one resource in their first or second tier. In the cyclic

pattern, participants move through multiple loops of using information resources. In the branching or fan pattern, participants have multiple resources at multiple levels of preferences.

Another type of potential analysis is to examine what types of nodes are present in the information horizon maps. This involves creating a matrix with the information categories as the rows and the following columns: total times mentioned, total number of links, unique links, outgoing links, and incoming links (Figure 10). By examining this matrix, the types of nodes can be identified. Sonnenwald and colleagues (2001) identify five types of nodes: ending resource, starting resource, balanced resource, recommending resource, and focusing resource. An ending resource has connections coming into it but none going out from it. A starting resource has connections going out from it but none coming into it. A balanced resource has connections both coming into it and going out from it. A recommending resource has more connections going out from it than coming into it, while a focusing resource has more connections coming into it than going out from it.

A third type of analysis involves examining places on the map where links are absent. A matrix can be created to examine this that has the categories as rows and the following columns: no connections with, no outgoing connections with, no incoming connections with, incoming and outgoing connections with (Figure 11). This type of analysis can reveal gaps where relationships might be built in the future. For all three of these additional types of analysis, I may identify information seeking patterns or node types that were not present in Sonnenwald and colleagues' (2001) data when they first developed this method. Martin did not use these types of analysis because "most participants viewed all connections as non‐directional" (2012a, p. 45).

	Total times mentioned	Total # links	Unique links	Outgoing links	Incoming links	Node type
Internet	14	20	8	13	7	Recommending
Faculty	9	19	7	7	12	Focusing
Friends	6	13	6	7	6	Balanced
Univ Library	6	11	6	3	8	Focusing
Experts	6	12	8	4	8	Focusing
"Info Places"	7	14	9	5	9	Focusing
Family	4	8	6	6	2	Recommending
Other Univ Libraries	3	7	5	5	2	Recommending
Employer	4	6	4	3	3	Balanced
Local Library	2	2	1	0	2	Ending
Popular Magazines	2	4	4	1	3	Focusing
TV	1	1	1	1	0	Starting
Univ Catalogs	1	3	3	3	0	Starting

Figure 10. Links between nodes as representing node types in Sonnenwald and colleagues' study (2001, p. 75).

In addition to these types of analysis, I will remain open to analytical possibilities that are unique to this study. One possibility is that participants may indicate using different information sources for different purposes; information focused on identifying all the elements of a costume may come from different sources than information focused on how to construct a costume. Because the research design is emergent, there is space for unexpected analyses to be included.

Resource	No Connections with:	No Outgoing Connections with:	No Incoming Connections with:	Incoming & Outgoing Connections with:
Faculty	Employers Local libraries Other univ libraries TV Popular magazines	Experts Univ catalogs		Info places Internet Univ library Friends Family
Internet	Univ catalogs Other univ libraries Local libraries TV	Family Friends	Info places Popular magazines Univ library	Faculty Experts Employers
Info Places	TV Popular magazines Local library	Employers Internet Other univ libraries Univ catalogs	Univ library Experts	Faculty Family Friends
Friends	TV Local library Other univ libraries Family Univ catalogs	Popular magazines	Univ library Internet	Experts Info places Employers Faculty
Experts	TV Popular magazines Local libraries Employers	Univ catalogs Other univ libraries Info places Family	Faculty Univ library	Friends Internet
Univ Library	TV Popular magazines Local libraries Employers Family Univ catalogs	Experts Info places Friends Internet	Other univ libraries	Faculty

Figure 11. Relationships among resources and incoming and outgoing connections in Sonnenwald and colleagues' study (2001, p. 77).

Artifact analysis and face-to-face observation. Posts from websites, social media profiles and comments, forums, and other portals that may be identified during the period of

sustained observation, as well as field notes and transcripts from face-to-face observations of cosplay panels, will be analyzed for both information literacy practices and indicators of collective intelligence in action. This analysis addresses both individual and shared practices. For this type of analysis, qualitative coding is the most appropriate data analysis method. I will use both *a priori* and emergent coding (Chi, 1997; Saldana, 2015). The unit of analysis for the coding schemes used in this part of the analysis will be *turn of talk*. A *turn of talk* "is defined as each time a person starts to speak" (Martin, 2012a, p. 77). After data is coded, I will analyze it for patterns and quantify it using analytic description, "an analysis method to illustrate transforming qualitative data into numbers and coupling that with qualitative description" (Martin, 2012a, p. 78). A secondary coder will code both artifact and observation data to achieve interrater reliability.

The first coding scheme applied to this data will identify patterns of information literacy (Table 2). The scheme is one that Martin (2012a) proposed as an emerging information literacy coding scheme. Martin developed an initial information literacy scheme based on the information literacy literature available at the time of her study, used it for her data analysis, and then revised it to reflect the analytic framework she developed based on her data. Martin also developed a coding scheme to capture interactions that reflect the presence of collective intelligence in the World of Warcraft affinity space (Table 3); I have slightly modified this coding scheme to be more relevant to the cosplay affinity space (Table 4), where answers are more likely to be considered useful or unhelpful rather than correct or incorrect, as there are many potential ways to approach a given problem or question.

Table 2. *Martin's (2012) Information Literacy Coding Scheme (p. 84)*

Code	Definition
Recognize information need	To recognize needed information for a particular problem
Construct strategy	To construct a strategy in order to locate and access needed information to fulfill the information need
Determine extent of need	To determine the extent of information and the resources needed to fulfill the information need
Disseminate information	To disseminate information to others who have an information need or as a way of sharing results of the information literacy process
Construct new concepts	To apply prior and new information to construct new concepts or understanding
Evaluate information and source	To evaluate information both for its applicability to fulfill the information need and the reliability of the source itself
Use information effectively	To use information effectively to fulfill the information need

Table 3. *Martin's Original Collective Intelligence Coding Scheme (2012, p. 99)*

Code	Definition
Question	A request for help, information, or opinion.
Correct Responses	A response that was deemed correct by the community and cross-checked by me on an established community created game wiki.
Incorrect Responses	A response that was deemed incorrect by the community and cross-checked on an established community created game wiki.
Agreement Responses	A response of agreement that does not add new information to the discussion.
Acknowledgement Responses	A response that recognizes another response but does not necessarily agree.
Subversive Responses	A response that is intentionally negative or demeaning toward another participant on the forum or a response that is intentionally antagonistic. The response may or may not add new information to the discussion.
Superfluous Responses	A response that was given that had nothing to do with the discussion, though it may be good information.

Table 4. *Modified Collective Intelligence Coding Scheme, derived from Martin (2012, p. 99)*

Code	Definition
Question	A request for help, information, or opinion.
Useful Responses	A response that was deemed useful by the community and/or implemented by the questioner.
Unhelpful Responses	A response that was deemed unhelpful by the community and/or was not implemented by the questioner.
Agreement Responses	A response of agreement that does not add new information to the discussion.
Acknowledgement Responses	A response that recognizes another response but does not necessarily agree.
Subversive Responses	A response that is intentionally negative or demeaning toward another participant on the forum or a response that is intentionally antagonistic. The response may or may not add new information to the discussion.
Superfluous Responses	A response that was given that had nothing to do with the discussion, though it may be good information.

Validity and Reliability

This study uses a variety of methods to enhance validity. I will spend a prolonged time "in the field," collecting data over the course of six months. I will triangulate my data, drawing on multiple data sources including graphic representation, interviews, artifact analysis, and observation. I will also use member checking, sharing my findings with a wide audience of cosplayers, requesting input on whether the participants and other cosplayers feel my analysis is accurate. I will provide rich, thick descriptions of the settings in which I conduct observation and analysis. I will maintain a set of reflective notes throughout the data collection process, and use these notes and reflective memos to write about my own bias, reflexivity, and positionality in relationship to the research. I will use peer debriefing to have a colleague review the study and ask questions about my analysis.

In the initial study using information horizon maps, Sonnenwald and colleagues determined the validity of the information horizon map method by comparing the maps with "the interview data concerning most recent, most satisfying and easiest information seeking situations" (2001, p. 81), looking for information sources mentioned in the interviews that were not included on the maps. They found that "the information horizon maps captured approximately 93% of information sources mentioned by study participants," providing a high level of validity. I will perform a similar comparison on my data.

I will also use multiple methods to ensure reliability. I will review interview transcripts to make sure they do not contain errors and invite participants to review the transcripts as well. I will maintain a code book complete with definitions and coding memos to ensure that the meaning of the codes does not shift during the coding process. I will cross-check my codes with

Martin's (2012a) findings and I will also have a second coder code the data to check for inter-rater reliability.

Limitations and Future Research

Like Martin's (2012) research, this research seeks to describe an information ecology, incorporating both individual and collective practices. It balances breadth and depth, using methods that study both individuals and the population at large. Because of this, it is limited in its ability to provide a rich description of cosplayers' information practices and its generalizability to the cosplay affinity space and especially to other affinity spaces. As Martin (2012) suggests for her study, future research based on this study might focus "in depth on the information literacy practices of a few individuals for a specified time period, framing the study as an ethnographic study or possibly a case study." For example, a case study might follow a particular cosplayer through the process of creating a specific costume, documenting the information literacy practices the cosplayer uses during that process. A second study "would have to focus on the group level; it could possibly look at a much larger number of randomly sampled forum posts… in order to examine large scale aggregate patterns" (p. 107).

Another limitation of this study is that it relies on visible traces of activity for its data sources. In affinity spaces, there are lurkers, who view information but do not post themselves, and people who may stop by a particular portal but not spend a significant amount of time there. Because this study relies on posts and comments, it cannot capture the experiences or practices of lurkers or transient visitors. This is a limitation of most affinity space research and, to some extent, most online qualitative research.

The study focuses on the experiences of cosplayers themselves, but cosplay has both supporters, such as cosplay medics who are on site at conventions and available to repair costumes, and spectators, whether they are people in the convention halls, people in the audience of a cosplay contest or masquerade, or people like I used to be, enjoying photographs of cosplayers online but not interacting with them otherwise. Future studies might find ways to capture the information literacy practices of these members of the cosplay scene.

Finally, this study focuses on information literacy and does not address information seeking more specifically. Information seeking is widely studied in LIS, and everyday life information (ELI) seeking includes cosplay information seeking, as it is a form of leisure. Studies of ELI tend to focus on the finding of information, sometimes mentioning use and sharing but rarely mentioning evaluation (Savolainen, 2017). Future studies might narrow in on this aspect of cosplay rather than looking at the entire information literacy process; in particular, they might investigate the extent to which theories and concepts related to ELI in social spaces apply to information seeking in affinity spaces. One potentially fruitful theory for studying affinity spaces is information grounds theory (Fisher & Naumer, 2006), with its focus on the relationship between people, place, and information.

Conclusion

This study has the potential to impact both information literacy theory and information literacy instruction. While other studies have looked at information literacy as a sociocultural practice in either online affinity spaces or physical affinity spaces, none have investigated information literacy in a blended affinity space. The unique quality of cosplay as an embodied expression of fandom has potential to connect the concept of embodied information literacy, in

particular, to information literacy practices in affinity spaces. Cosplayers learn a variety of skills and draw on a number of information sources to support their participation in this affinity space, as well as generating a large amount of information that they share with their fellow travelers in the affinity space. It is my hope that this study will strengthen scholars' understanding of information literacy practices in a naturalistic setting and practitioners' understanding of how they can design information literacy instruction to leverage the features of affinity spaces across both face-to-face and online environments.

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Appendix

Data Collection Instruments

Information Horizon Map Interview Protocol

(Modified from Sonnenwald, et al., 2001; Martin, 2012)

I would like you to draw an information horizon map. Locate yourself somewhere on the map and mark resources you use when you have an information need around cosplay or non-cosplay situations, as well as connections you see between the information sources. The map can be whatever you want it to be; it is your visualization of your information horizon.

1. Could you think about when you recently needed information about cosplay?

   Follow-up questions to elicit additional details about the situation:
   - What information or type of information did you need?
   - Why? [Try to learn about the context of that information need and the situation that gave rise to it.]
   - Who did you go to for help or what resource(s) did you use to find the information you needed?
   - What did you do next? [Try to learn about their information seeking process and how they used the information they found, e.g., if they successfully resolved their information need.]
   - Were you satisfied with the outcomes? How did you use the information?
   - Would you do it this way again (if you needed similar information at a later point in time)? If not, what would you do differently? [trying to learn about if their information seeking process/information horizon changed as a result of this experience.]

2. Could you think about a time when it was particularly difficult to find information you needed?

   Alternative wording: In general, what type of information is hardest for you to obtain? Why?

   Use follow-up questions from Question 1.

3. When it was particularly easy?

   Alternative wording: In general, what type of information is easiest for you to obtain? What makes it easy to get?

   Use follow-up questions from question 1.

4. When looking for information was particularly dissatisfying? I.e., a dissatisfying experience
   Use follow-up questions from question 1.

5. When getting information (finding information you wanted/needed) was very satisfying?

   Use follow-up questions from question 1.

6. Do you share information about cosplay? How? Why?

7. Is there anything I should have asked that I didn't?

8. Is there anything else you would like to tell me?

9. Please answer the following demographic questions, if you feel comfortable doing so:
   a. How long you've been cosplaying?
   b. Your gender?
   c. Your age?
   d. Your level of education?
   e. Your race or ethnicity?
   f. The type of place where you live: urban, suburban, rural, college town?

Online Observational Protocol

Time:

Date:

Portal name:

Portal URL:

Descriptive Notes	Reflective Notes

Face-to-Face Observational Protocol

Convention:

Date:

Time:

Panel title:

Panelists:

Descriptive Notes	Reflective Notes