Fandoms in the Lives of Gifted Individuals with Imaginational Overexcitabilities

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Abstract

Fandoms are communities, either officially or unofficially organized, that are dedicated to the love of a particular person, team, fictional series or character (Barton & Lampley, 2014). According to the Belonging theory (Gailliot & Baumeister, 2006), people yearn for belonging because it provides them with a sense of identity, self-esteem and self-worth. Gifted individuals often have unique social-emotional characteristics, such as overexcitabilities (OE), which set them apart from their non-gifted, non-OE counterparts because they actually experience life in a very different way (Neihart et al., 2002). The purpose of this study was to examine the role of fandoms in the lives of the gifted who also have an imaginational overexcitability. Using phenomenological and grounded theory methodologies, a comprehensive survey and interview were created in order to gather data in a mixed-methods study (Creswell, 2013). Through the analysis of the data, in conjunction with the theoretical framework of the Belonging theory, it was determined that gifted individuals with imaginational overexcitabilities *do* tend to join fandoms for the purposes of creating peer groups, providing themselves with a sense of belonging and community, and for acquiring opportunities for escapism.

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OVEREXCITABILITIES

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A Final Research Project Proposal Presented to the

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In Anticipated Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

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by

Jessica DeLallo

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According to the Belonging theory (Gailliot & Baumeister, 2006), people yearn for belonging

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was determined that gifted individuals with imaginational overexcitabilities *do* tend to join

fandoms for the purposes of creating peer groups, providing themselves with a sense of

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Chapter One: Introduction

Introduction

Being "gifted" is so much more than just "being smart" (Burney and Neumeister, 2010). Gifted individuals often experience the world in a very different way from their non-gifted counterparts (Fonseca, 2016). There are many common social-emotional characteristics that gifted individuals may experience during their lifetimes, and may include such challenges as: overexcitabilities and intensities, asynchronous development, perfectionism, and underachievement (Neihart, Pfeiffer & Cross, 2016). Due to these, and other challenges that people in the gifted community often face, many gifted individuals have difficulty navigating common social situations, and often feel as though they do not belong (Webb, 2013). This sentiment is not felt by all members of the gifted community; however, many gifted individuals try to surround themselves with their peers in both intellect and interests, which is more difficult for some than for others (Maisel, 2013).

There is no, one definition of "giftedness," but it is often accepted that only 2-5% of the population can appropriately be called "gifted" (Hollingworth, 1942); therefore, gifted people may not be able to access a large number of their peers (cf. NAGC, Neihart, Reis, Renzulli, et al.). Recently, due to the Internet, social media, and its many outlets for people around the world to interact, many gifted individuals have been able to join groups and communities with shared interests (Webb, 2013). One way for people to interact with others having similar interests is to join a "fandom," which is a community of people, often virtual, that is dedicated to the love of a particular person, team, fictional series or a character (Barton & Lampley, 2014). Fandoms can be either officially sanctioned and organized by the company that owns the franchise(s), or, it

can be organic, and unofficial in origin (Barton & Lampley, 2014). People who belong to

fandoms often spend copious amounts of time and money in their pursuits, some of which are

undertaken individually, while others are social by design (Davies & Davies, 2015).

The belonging theory, or "belongingness," is the theoretical construct and lens through

which social motivations should be viewed (Gailliot & Baumeister, 2006). According to Leary

and Baumeister (2000), belongingness is a fundamental, human, emotional need to be accepted

as a member of a group. Belonging, or, belongingness, is a person's

> "inclusionary status (i.e., the quality and quantity of one's social relationships
> […,] and worldview validation (i.e., the extent to which others share one's values and
> beliefs and the extent to which one fulfills or lives up to those beliefs. […] Based upon
> the importance of the need to belong, sociometer theory contends that one function or
> purpose of self-esteem is to monitor one's social inclusionary status […]. From this
> perspective, self-esteem arose as a tool for monitoring how well the person is capable of
> satisfying the need to belong. […Therefore,] one is likely to acquire or maintain strong
> social ties will increase self-esteem, whereas indications that one is not likely to fulfill the
> need to belong with decrease self-esteem" (Gailliot & Baumeister, 2006, p. 328).

Thus, the need to belong is an innate requirement that humans long to fulfill, and not having the

opportunity, or locus, to belong could actually be detrimental to people'ss sense of self, and

understanding of where they fit into the world (Gailliot & Baumeister, 2006). Indeed, Abraham

Maslow's iconic Hierarchy of Needs lists "belonging" as the third tier in his pyramid of needs

(Poston, 2009). Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs has five levels: the first two levels are for the

basic needs, the third and fourth levels are for psychological needs and the fifth level is for self-

fulfillment needs: 1) Physiological Needs: food, water, shelter, rest; (2) Safety Needs: security,

safety; (3) Belongingness and Love: friends, family, intimacy; (4) Esteem Needs: feelings of

success, contentment and fulfillment; (5) Self-Actualization: achieving a person's full potential

(Poston, 2009). Hence, the desire to belong and to feel as though people have been accepted by

a group serves a bigger purpose than entertainment—it becomes a part of their very identity (Hagerty, Williams, Coyne, Early, 1996).

Of course, there is more to belonging than just being a part of a group. Indeed, humans crave contact with others; as Lieberman (2013) explains, "it turns out that our brains have a passion of their own; we know this because the brain seems to devote nearly all of its spare time to one thing [...being social]" (p. 14). Therefore, if humans are "wired" to be social, what happens if some people are *not* able to appropriately establish social connections and peer groupings? Lieberman (2013) suggests that it is a standard practice for people (gifted or non-gifted) to belong to social groups; so, fandoms, or groups of people with similar shared passions, have the potential to fulfill both the need for belonging and socialization. According to Lieberman (2013), "almost everything in life can be better when we get more social. [... If we just] retune our institutions and our own goals just a bit we can be smarter, happier, and more productive" (p. 242). Unfortunately, there are some misunderstandings around fandoms—what they are, and why people choose to participate (Gray, Sandvoss & Harrington, 2007).

Background

The National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC) argues that there are *many* definitions of "giftedness", and, according to some (cf. Terman, Binet, Pintner, Wechsler, et al.), the top 2% of the population are intellectually gifted, whereas others would argue that up to 10% of the population is gifted (cf. Heller, Monks, Subotnik & Sternberg). No matter which definition of "giftedness" a researcher choses to use, there is no doubt that the "gifted population" is composed of a very limited number of individuals. Arguably, many people may go their entire lives without knowingly interacting with a "truly" gifted person (cf. Hollingworth,

Renzulli). This could explain why the needs of the gifted are commonly misunderstood (Rivero, 2010).

Since giftedness is uncommon, gifted individuals need a specialized resource that can help them to learn about themselves and others like them (Webb et al., 1994). The Summit Center is an organization in Northern and Southern California that offers psychological and educational services to gifted individuals and their families (Summit Center, 2016). The Summit Center is an organization that is dedicated to helping gifted individuals and their families in a variety of capacities (Summit Center, 2016). Although their facilities are located in Southern California and the California Bay Area region, people seek the expertise of the Summit Center from across the United States (Summit Center, 2016). The Summit Center provides counseling and psychotherapy, assessment opportunities, support groups, and education about a wide range of topics that may affect the gifted community, such as: anxiety, ADD/ADHD, twice-exceptionality, perfectionism, stress, creativity and overexcitabilities (Summit Center, 2016). The Summit Center was founded by Dr. Daniel Peters, a licensed psychologist, and Dr. Susan Daniels, a professor and educational consultant, in order to help members of the gifted community to live a life that is as meaningful and successful as possible (Summit Center, 2016). Other Summit Center professionals include licensed psychologists, neuropsychologists, social workers, licensed marriage and family therapists, parent consultants, coaches, and educational specialists (Summit Center, 2016). People who have had little, or no, exposure to gifted individuals are often unaware of the many challenges that the gifted community sometimes face (Davis, Rim & Siegle, 2011). One challenge that many in the gifted community must face is the presence of overexciteabilities (OEs), which can make social interactions with people who do not understand the OEs very

difficult, if not impossible, since both parties experience the world in different ways, and do not always understand the other's point of view (Daniels & Piechowski, 2009).

Research Questions

This research was focused on the role that fandoms play in the lives of the gifted with imaginational overexcitabilities. The belief that fandoms offer these gifted individuals a sense of community—a group who understands them and their interests, as well as providing an opportunity for escapism from some sense of their "real" lives—was an underlying assumption of this study. The questions that guided this research are:

1) *Which* fandoms do gifted people with imaginational OEs tend to follow?

2) What *purpose* do these fandoms fulfill within the lives of the gifted participants with imaginational OEs?

Persistent Problem of Practice

The theory behind overexcitabilities, or "OEs", stem from the work of Polish psychologist and psychiatrist Kazimierz Dabrowski (1902-1980). The Theory of Positive Disintegration (TPD) is the idea that a person's personality and development are part of a growth process based on the accumulated experiences of that person (Dabrowski, 1964). Although TPD was not specifically dedicated to the development of gifted individuals, the OEs, which are an important part of TPD, would later become instrumental in the understanding of many gifted individuals (Mendaglio, 2002). According to Dabrowski (1964), OEs are innate intensities, which indicate that the body is processing stimuli to a heightened degree—people with OEs actually *experience* the world in a different way than people who do not have an OE do. There are five main OEs: psychomotor, sensual, intellectual, emotional and imaginational, but the

emotional, intellectual, and imaginational OEs are often considered to be the most prevalent (Mendaglio, 2002). The imaginational OE is a heightened imagination, and intensities *may* include: rich associations of images and expressions; frequent use of images and metaphors, great capacity for invention and fantasy and detailed visualizations or elaborate dreams (Webb, 2013). Some of the ways that these intensities *may* manifest itself include: mixing truth with fiction; creating their own, often extremely elaborate, worlds and/or friends; having difficulty with staying engaged if the imagination is not being employed; and, being easily distracted by creative thinking and imagining (Daniels & Piechowski, 2009).

Just like their non-gifted counterparts, gifted individuals have a need for regular social interaction with their peers (Lieberman, 2013). When a person belongs to a peer group that is as limited as the gifted population—which could be as small as 2% of the population—it can be difficult to find a group of peers (Hollingworth, 1926). When gifted people also have the additional hurdle of having an imaginational overexcitability, it can become even more difficult to find a place, and group, where they feel they belong—indeed, many gifted people already do not feel that they are surrounded by intellectual peers (Hollingworth, 1926), when the social stigmatization of their interests are also called into question, it can lead people to retreat from the social scene altogether (Piirto, 2004).

There is a *perception* that gifted people, both with and without an imaginational OE, are drawn to fandoms (cf. Bennett & Kahn-Harris, Harrington & Bielby, Lewis, Maggs, Smith, Stone, et. al.), but do the data support these perceptions? If gifted people are truly drawn to fandoms, such as *Dr. Who*, *Lord of the Rings*, or Magic the Gathering, *why* do they do this? What *purpose* do the fandoms play in the lives of the gifted with imaginational OEs who choose to participate in them? Is it possible that these fandoms, an outlet for fun, fantasy and

fascination, also serve a bigger purpose than to waste time, and make the gifted seem "weird" or "quirky" (Burton & Lampley, 2014)? For those gifted people with an imaginational OE, does their involvement in fandoms mean something more than just entertainment?

Personal Relevance for the Researcher

This study had personal relevance and significance to the researcher. Growing up before the Internet and social networking was ubiquitous, in conjunction with being both gifted and having OEs (all five), was not always easy. Although I always had a lot of age-peer friends, it was not always possible to find people with the same or similar interests to mine. I was a fangirl—and a really nerdy one at that. I wore the t-shirts; I had the posters; I read the books; watched the TV shows and movies; I bought all of the magazines, etc. While most girls my age were obsessing over boys, volleyball and going to the mall, I was obsessed with professional wrestling, reading romance novels, Batman, *Highlander*, *Seaquest*, *Star Wars*, and a multitude of other Science Fiction shows, books, characters, etc.

I usually preferred to read or watch movies than to "hang out" with friends. I was active in the school plays (I was going to be a great actress one day), and I volunteered for a multitude of organizations thinking that I could *actually* change the world. I was smart, talented, funny and dorky. I fit in everywhere and nowhere. I had friends, but no community. I was alone even though I was surrounded by peers. I had a place, but I did not really belong. If I had had the opportunity to participate in a fandom (or several), my childhood could have been so much more enjoyable! Now that I am an adult who participates in many fandoms, I want others to know about the benefits of fandoms for the gifted with imaginational OEs so that, unlike me, they do not have to feel alone in a room full of people (cf. Webb, Fiedler, Jacobson, Karnes & Nugent).

Methodology of the Study

A mixed-methods study was created for this project, in order to provide a "platform [to …] bridge qualitative and quantitative research" (Yin, 2016, p. 310), so that a rich mixture of data could be gathered. The quantitative data that were gathered from the survey portion of this study allowed the voice of many participants to be heard, while utilizing standardized data collection techniques, through the survey formatting, which could then be quantified and analyzed using phenomenological data analysis techniques (Creswell, 2013). A phenomenological study was chosen as the most appropriate method for data analysis for the survey data gathered in this particular study because the purpose of phenomenology is to "focus on describing what all participants have in common as they experience a phenomenon" (Creswell, 2013, p. 76)—in this case, fandom participation. The qualitative data that were collected and analyzed for this study came from the interview data garnered from experts in the field, and were then analyzed using grounded theory coding techniques (Creswell, 2013). Grounded theory was chosen as the preferred method for data analysis for the interview data because its purpose is to "move beyond description and to generate or discover a theory, or a unified theoretical explanation" (Creswell, 2013, p.83) from the information collected from the experts in the field. While the survey respondents will have provided information about their own activities, The Summit Center clinicians will have provided information about the observations of their current and former clients and their behavior—the data from the interviews should have served to confirm and triangulate the data collected from the survey (Yin, 2016).

The quantitative portion of this study was a survey. The content of the survey was drawn from the literature with the specific purpose of eliciting information from participants about which fandoms they like to participate in, how they interact with others in their fandoms, and

why? The Summit Center, the community partner for this study, disseminated this study to all of their listserve members in a direct marketing campaign. There were only two criteria for participation in the survey: 1) informed consent had to be explicitly given, and (2) all respondents had to be at least 18 years of age.

The qualitative portion of this study gathered information from experts in the field who currently work for The Summit Center. The interviews conducted were semi-structured in nature so as to provide "reliable, comparable qualitative data […while allowing the] interviewer […the] discretion to follow leads" (Bernard, 2000, p. 191) that arise out of the natural course of the interviews, in order to gather as much pertinent information as possible based on the individual experiences and expertise of the interview subjects (Bernard, 2000). All experts interviewed have been working with the gifted for several years, and provided information based on their years of practice.

The data that were gathered from the survey and the interviews were then examined to find a better understanding of choices and motivations of the fandom participants who chose to contribute in this study. Once the data were reviewed and analyzed statistically, they were re-examined through the lens of belonging theory.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Introduction

Everyone is interested in something; how people choose to pursue their interests is very telling about the person him/herself (Lieberman, 2013). For some, participation in a fandom is more than an idle pursuit—it is a way of life (Bailey, 2005). For those gifted individuals who have an imaginational OE, they experience stimuli related to the imagination in a very different way than people without imaginational OEs (Dabrowski, 1964); why do many of these individuals choose to join fandoms?

Fandoms

What is the difference between a "fanship" and a "fandom," and why does it matter? According to Reysen and Branscombe (2010), "fanship" refers to the *interest*, itself, that a fan, or group of fans, may hold (e.g. if someone loves Dr. Who); a "fandom" refers to the *identification* that a person feels, in terms of their fanship, with other fans (e.g. those who *belong* to the Dr. Who fandom are considered to be "Whovians") (Reysen & Branscombe, 2010). There is a distinction between fanship and fandom because many people have an interest in numerous characters or series—fanship, but they have absolutely no interest in belonging to a community that is dedicated to the love of this fanship—they do not have the desire to be known by their love of a character, while those who belong to fandoms do (Reysen & Branscombe, 2010). A fan can belong to a fandom without formally filling out a membership card and belonging to an actual organization—a person can consider themselves to be a "Whovian" because they like the show, not because they joined a club or have a Whovian membership somewhere, though this might actually be the case; indeed, it is about a shared sense of understanding and kinship in the

love of a fanship (cf. Bacon-Smith, Bailey, Booth, Delano Robertson, Duffett, Hayward, Miray, Reysen, Plante, Roberts & Gerbasi, Stein, et al.).

All of these distinctions are important because, semantically, and statistically, the emotions and satisfaction levels felt by members of fandoms, that is, the sense of belonging and community, and the collective happiness, are the same as the emotions and satisfaction levels felt by sports fandoms, yet sports fandoms (e.g. football fanatics, baseball aficionados, fantasy football players) are seen as "mainstream" and socially acceptable, while many members of non-sports fandoms are perceived as being "weird", "odd", or "nerdy" (Reysen & Branscombe, 2010). Indeed, Reysen's and Branscombe's (2010) study ultimately found that "fans perceived themselves to be in a group even when they are not actively part of an organized group. Fanship and fandom were found to be positively correlated, yet distinct, constructs" (p. 176), which applied to both sports fans and non-sports fans alike. While the data show that no difference exists between sports fans and non-sports fans, there is a distinct societal feeling and understanding that there *is* a difference (Gray et al., 2007). Stanfill (2013), however, argues that many outside of the world of fandoms no longer hold views that would stigmatize those who belonged to non-sports fandoms, and would, actually, consider them to be "mainstreamed as a model for the new ideal active media consumer" (p. 117). This feeling that members of fandom communities are somehow "media consumers" does not provide the type of associative distinction that all fandom members appreciate, however; Stanfill (2013) found that, due to past negative perceptions, members of fandoms were reticent to believe that they were no longer seen in this negative light. Paradoxically, while they could not believe that they were no longer seen as "losers who behave badly" (Stanfill, 2003, p. 117), they, themselves, did not view themselves

this way. Is Stanfill (2003) arguing that being perceived as "weird" or "different" is part of the draw of a fandom; is *not* fitting in part of the culture of the fandom community?

> "These are interesting times for reception theorists, especially those who study fandom, an extraordinary form of audiencing that includes everything from emotional attachment to performers to obsessive collecting. In particular, the nature of fandom's extraordinariness has changed a great deal in the past several decades, thanks to the advent of the Internet and digital production. Previously 'abnormal' fan practices have not only become more and more accepted but also explicitly supported and nurtured by new technologies and reframed by niche marketing. We live in an age when 'following' a stranger because your 'like' her or him represents a harmless form of networking. As Twitter encourages us, 'Follow your interests'" (Cavicchi, 2014, p. 52).

According to Gray, Sandvoss and Harrington (2007), the perception of the "fan" in fandoms has morphed over the years, and the new evolution of the understanding of "fan" is quite different than it used to be. Indeed, they postulate that there have been three main waves of fan studies over the years, and the tone and findings of the studies conducted during these three epochs are rather significant in their differences (Gray et al., 2007). The first round of fan studies began in the 1980s, and was very concerned with uncovering the subversive "otherness" of fandom (cf. Fiske, Jenkins, Jensen, and Longeway). In fact, Gray et al. (2007) argue "fandom was automatically more than the mere act of being a fan of something: it was a collective strategy, a communal effort to form interpretive communities that in the subcultural cohesion evaded the preferred and intended meanings of the power bloc" (p. 2). This early research focused on the "duality of power" (Gray et al., 2007, p. 3), the feeling that one group was powerful and the other, disenfranchised group was an obvious "other" that was looking for a way to establish legitimacy within their own lives—it was seen as a way to rise up against "the man" who was oppressing those social outcasts who were unable to navigate society by accessing the mainstream channels (Gray et al., 2007).

The second phase of fan studies, Gray et al. (2007) argue, really focused on the evolving understanding of the term "fan"; indeed, by the mid-1990s, society began to see the "fan" as a clear launching pad for consumerism. According to Gray et al. (2007),

> "the public recognition and evaluation of the practice of being a fan has itself profoundly changed over the past several decades. As we have moved from an era of broadcasting to narrowcasting […] the fan as a specialized yet dedicated consumer has become a centerpiece of the media industries' marketing strategies […] Rather than being ridiculed, fan audiences are now wooed and championed by cultural industries, at least as long as their activities do not divert from principles of capitalist exchange and recognize industries' legal ownership of the object of fandom" (p. 4).

This is a marked departure from the first round of fan studies that Gray et al. (2007) described. Instead of being seen as a subversive "other" who was trying to avoid the basic structures of society, fans were now being seen as an active, and important, participant group in the economics of being a fan—indeed, the money generated from books, movies, t-shirts, bumper stickers, and posters can be sizeable. Gray et al. (2007) added the caveat that, though fandom was seen as more mainstream and acceptable at this time, the subject matter of the fandom was very important, and a clear hierarchy of advantageousness of the fan was in place; indeed, "as cultural judgment has become increasingly detached from the state of being a fan, our attention shifts to the choice of fan object and its surrounding practices, and what they tell us about the fan him-or herself" (Gray et al., 2007, p.5)—for example, those who were superfans of Shakespeare were a more desirable subset of superfans than those who followed the original *Star Trek*) (cf. Yaffe, 2013);.

The third movement of research into fandoms began in the mid-2000s and "aimed to capture fundamental insights into modern life. […] It is precisely *because* fan consumption has grown into a taken-for-granted aspect of modern communication and consumption that it warrants critical analysis and investigation more than ever" (Gray et al., 2007, p. 9). This wave

of research set out to determine, not how different those involved in fandoms are from the rest of society, but, rather to discover what the fandom *itself* can teach the world about society. Instead of fandoms being an outlet for people who do not fit into society to express themselves, fandoms were now seen as a legitimate way for people to express who they were within society, and emphasize those ideals that they held to be valuable—whether those ideals were dedicated to the pursuit of justice, dedication and love to friends and family, or the need for innovation and adventure (Gray et al., 2007). According to Gray et al. (2007), during this current research phase into fans and fandom, fans have transformed in the eyes of mainstream society from "infinitely geeky fans [who are] the quintessential losers" (p. 4) to recognizing them as normal, functioning members of society with fun interests, hobbies, and diversions.

For many fans, belonging to a fandom is much deeper than a simple pastime; their fandoms actually provide them with a sense of identity and purpose in life (Goodman, 2015); unfortunately, due to these strong attachments, strong emotions are often also tied to what happens with certain characters, and who portrays them. Goodman (2015) makes the distinction between fans and critics when she argues that

> "fan studies began as a form of cultural studies in the late 1980s and early 1990s, at the intersection of feminist criticism, queer theory, popular culture studies, and media studies, where the price of admission for attending to a subculture like fandom was, in part, reading it as counterculture, evading and resisting the dominant ideologies of popular media. […] The rule-breaking aspects of fandom have thus often been at the center of academic fan studies: indifference to copyright laws and capitalist models of artistic labor, the insistence on representing what the mainstream media refuses to represent (particularly feminine or queer forms of desire), the rejection of the distinction between author and reader—in short, the critique and the punk-like anger" (p. 663).

Fanfiction is a unique genre because it allows fans to pour out their hearts and desires about different characters that they love and loathe; yet, most characters that are being portrayed are

copy written by the authors (Tosenberger, 2008), which begs the question, if fanfiction is *not* being published for profit (e.g. on a blog), does it infringe the rights of the actual creator when fans write their own versions of the story? Does fanfiction strengthen the bond of fandoms, or does it weaken the place that authors hold (Roth & Flegel, 2014)? Similarly, if a fan posts fanfiction, which is about a character with a copyright, does that mean that the owner of the copyright has the legal authority to sell and profit from the fanfiction, or is this "poaching" (Roth & Flegel, 2014)? Can stories written about copy written characters, without the authority of the owner of the copyright, be copy written (Lothian, 2012)? This is a legal area that has captured the interest of many fanboys/fangirls, and their emotions, (Hellekson & Busse, 2006), and has become a much-contested topic of late—especially because fanfiction is usually on created for, and read by, the most ardent of fans of the character. All of the legalities aside, do the creators of these characters even *want* to know what their fans want them to do with their characters? According to Goodman (2015), it really depends:

> "a point that is easily overlooked by those who take the label 'fan' to describe someone slavishly adoring is that a lot of fan fiction is really aggressive towards the source text. One tends to think of it as written by total fanboys and fangirls as a kind of worshipful act, but a lot of times you'll read these stories and it'll be like 'What if *Star Trek* had an openly gay character on the bridge?' And of course the point is that they don't, and they wouldn't, because they don't have the balls, or they are beholden to their advertisers, or whatever. There's a powerful critique, almost punk-like anger, being expressed there" (p. 662).

Whatever the intentions of the fans and their fanfiction may be, the writers of fanfiction are passionate about their love and devotion to their fandoms, in a way that has many comparing fandoms to religions (cf. Aden, Anderson & Marchland, Miray, et al.).

According to McCloud (2003), many fandoms "look like, act like, and indeed are religions for participants" (p. 187). While many have argued that fandoms could be considered religions in the sense that a religion, or a fandom, is "a system of private, conscious and articulated beliefs, usually expressed in churches and formal creeds, and set off from other 'spheres' of life such as work, politics or leisure. […Or, religion could be seen as] the daily, lived expression of an individual's or society's most important values" (McCloud, 2003, p. 193). McCloud (2003) urges readers to not "take the bait"—the definitions usually offered, and the "evidence" provided is often so vague, as to encompass almost anything into a "religion," or the parallels drawn between the fandom and religion as to be superficial. Although it has become a "popular" move to compare different fandoms to religions, McCloud (2003) warns that

> "whether the language and activities of fans should be thought of as neo-religious or religious still comes down to definitions, methods, and approaches. Among other things, popular culture as religion scholarship reveals differences in the academy between historical/social scientific approaches and theological/perennialsit ones. While scholars working on both sides of this spectrum deal with the same subjects, they hold very different base assumptions" (P. 203).

Therefore, before the question of "is a fandom a religion or not?" can actually be answered, a standard definition of "religion" and methodological approaches need to be determined by professionals in both the fields of religious and popular cultural studies (cf. Tsutsui).

Finally, how do fandoms *actually* work? The dynamics of fandoms differ depending on the type of fandom that a fan is interested in (cf. Bennett, Cheung & Yue, Melancon, Shefrin, Xu, Turel & Yuan, et al.); *Lord of the Rings* fans may partake in writing fanfiction, cos-play, or the learning of the Elvish languages, while those who are *World of Warcraft* fans may belong to international gaming groups, attend gaming and programming conventions, cos-play, books and graphic novels—while there are some areas where interests may overlap, the culture of the

fandom is very different. In general, fandoms can be described as a "community," which could be virtual, face-to-face, in print, or in various other platforms, which has a shared interest in the same subject, and who interact, through a variety of media, with each other based on their mutual love of the subject (Hills, 2015), and which draw the interest and participation of people from all walks of life. While fandoms may hold a particular draw for all, this study is specifically interested in the fandom participation by the gifted with imaginational OEs.

Giftedness

"Giftedness" can be defined in many different ways, and the definition is often dependent on the purpose of identification—for example, if a child is being evaluated in order to receive specific academic services, then they may not be evaluated in other areas in which they will not receive services by the school system (Neihart et al., 2002). Many people are very smart, but they are on track with "normal" development for their age; a gifted individual, however, is not just smart—their development in one or more areas far exceeds the average, and this person needs to be accommodated in these areas in order to ensure that learning is occuring at a rate commensurate with abilities (Neihart et al., 2002). According to Webb et al. (2005), gifted students also have a range of social-emotional needs that are unique to gifted individuals, and that may be misunderstood by peers, teachers, and physicians, but are an integral part of the gifted child, since gifted individuals experience the world differently than everyone else.

There are many different concepts and definitions of giftedness, and the world of gifted education has not yet come to consensus as to whether *one* definition is even appropriate (NAGC). According to Davis et al. (2011), depending on which philosophy or study of giftedness a researcher has subscribed to, a gifted person may be someone with an incredibly

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high IQ (cf. Binet and Goddard), be above average IQ and have access to enrichment throughout their life (cf. Terman), have a high IQ and think and perceive the world in a different way from other children (cf. Hollingworth), or have above average intelligence and the ability or potential ability to exceed average levels of aptitude and competence in an area (NAGC). Some would argue that, to some degree, all of these definitions hold truth when looking at a gifted and talented child, but they only look at part of the phenomenon of being gifted; in order to truly *define* what an "average" gifted child looks like, a more holistic approach is necessary (cf. Renzulli and Reis).

Gifted individuals show above average development in one or more areas that far exceeds the development that their peers have had in that same area (cf. Renzulli, Reis, Gardner). These children are not just "smart"—they experience life in a way that is completely different from the way that "average" children experience life; according to Daniels and Piechowski (2009), in addition to being above average in their abilities in one or more areas, gifted children typically experience certain sensitivities, social-emotional needs and/or overexciteabilities that may impact their perception of learning and life itself. These children may also experience certain physical manifestations of giftedness, including allergies, general malaise, chronic headaches and stomachaches (Webb et al., 1994). Some of the more common traits and characteristics of giftedness include: OEs and intensities, perfectionism and underachievement, and asynchronous development (Neihart et al., 2016). Not all gifted people will experience all of these "symptoms"—or to the same degree, but it is important to keep them in mind when examining the behaviors and motivations of the gifted (Webb et al., 1994).

Behavioral and Psychological Issues

There are many different potential social-emotional characteristics, or psychological aspects, of giftedness (Piechowski & Colangelo, 1984). Not all gifted individuals experience all of these characteristics, and not all gifted individuals experience these characteristics to the same degree (Walker, 2002). While these social-emotional characteristics of giftedness are very common, some individuals may experience these psychological aspects without being gifted, just as some gifted individuals may not experience any of these aspects (Daniels & Piechowski, 2009). Gifted individuals do not just think differently from non-gifted individuals—they experience the world in a completely different way (Webb, Meckstroth & Tolan, 1994). Some of the most common of the social-emotional characteristics of gifted individuals include, but are not limited to: intensity, perfectionism, underachievement, and asynchronous development (Daniels & Piechowski, 2009).

Perfectionism is a double-edged sword, and can manifest in either positive or negative ways (Neihart et al., 2016). Positive perfectionism can present in the following ways: people wanting to do their best; enjoying challenges and new opportunities to learn; welcoming "problems" that stretch their thinking and learning to new depths; people being intrinsically motivated, and working, practicing and studying for their own pleasure; people learning from their mistakes, and generally striving for excellence (Strip and Hirsch, 2002). Negative perfectionism, on the other hand, has some very harmful manifestations, which may include: setting unrealistic goals, working hard and challenging themselves to please others and/or to avoid failure; feeling drained, anxious or depressed when facing new challenges or change; having low self-esteem and being incredibly sensitive to criticism, even constructive criticism; mistakes and failures, which could be anything that could be considered to be less than "perfect,"

are seen as humiliations and cause for embarrassment; mistakes cause anxiety, worry, underachievement, and negative physical manifestations (Webb et al., 1994, Neihart et al., 2016, Davis et al., 2011). Negative perfectionism also often leads to underachievement in gifted individuals (Siegle, 2013).

Underachievement is another characteristic of giftedness where there is no, one definition (Siegle, 2013). For the purposes of this discussion, "underachievement" will be defined as a discrepancy between ability and achievement (Siegle, 2013). When discussing underachievement in gifted children, the idea of "selective consumerism" often comes up, though it is not, technically, underachievement (Siegle, 2013). Since selective consumerism implies that students are picking and choosing what they want to do and what they do not want to do, there is no real discrepancy in ability—students just may be choosing not to perform at all (Siegle, 2013).

Underachievement is often thought of being the opposite side of the "perfectionism coin," but, there are a myriad of reasons that can lead a gifted student to become an underachiever (Fearn, 1992). Some of the most common causes of underachievement in gifted individuals are tied to motivation (Dweck, 2007). If gifted students are not engaged in the curriculum, then underachievement is very common; it is very difficult to motivate anyone, especially gifted individuals, when they are bored (VanTassel-Baska, Cross and Olenchak, 2009). Similarly, underachievement is often seen in students who are not challenged—gifted students often know exactly what they have to do in order to get an "A," and will not do one ounce of work over that expectation, which is incredibly common in gifted students that are not intrinsically motivated to learn in school (Ritchotte, Rubenstein & Murry, 2015). As the flip side of the perfectionistic coin, many students will not try because they are afraid to fail; if they do

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not know that they will succeed on their first attempt, many perfectionistic students will not even try so that they will not have to deal with the humiliation of anything less than perfection (Neihart et al., 2016).

According to Reis and McCoach (Neihart et al., 2016), underachievement is an incredibly complex issue in the field of gifted education, and there is no easy answer to "solve" the problem. When a gifted individual is identified as being an underachiever, it is necessary to work with the child in order to determine the cause of the problem (Neihart, et al., 2016). There is no one-size-fits-all solution to underachievement, and motivation is not always the solution; as Dr. Webb has said, "in over 30 years of working with gifted individuals, I have never met a child that is not motivated—they may not be motivated in anything remotely useful or relevant to the real-world, but they are not unmotivated" (Webb & Chou, 2014). Therefore, when trying to combat underachievement in gifted individuals, the gifted education professional must take a two-pronged attack: 1) work with the student on the underlying cause for their underachievement, which may include social-emotional curriculum or counseling, and (2) working with teachers and adults to help change/improve the situations that caused the underachievement to begin with (Siegle, 2013).

Asynchronous development is another characteristic of giftedness that is often seen in gifted children—especially those that are profoundly to exceptionally gifted (Neihart et al., 2016). Asynchronous development is seen in children when one area of their brain develops at a rate incommensurate with the rest of the child's development; as Linda Kreger Silverman (1995) explains, a child may be extremely developed in one area (e.g.: academics), which puts his intellectual development far ahead of his chronological development; on the other hand, in the same student, his social development may either be at the appropriate chronological development

for his age, or even a little behind, which creates a gap in development (Neihart et al., 2016).

Asynchronous development is not a "problem" per se, but it can become an issue if it is not

appropriately dealt with by adults (Strip & Hirsch, 2002).

Gifted children who are exceptionally to profoundly gifted are often promoted in school

based on academic development, and not chronological age, which data suggest is a highly

effective strategy for these students (Hattie, 2009). There is a drawback to grade promotion,

however (Southern, Jones & Fiscus, 1989). Due to asynchronous development, the students that

have been promoted based on academic need may now be among intellectual peers, but their

social-emotional development is often inappropriate for their chronological age, which can set

them apart from intellectual peers, for example: students that have been promoted in school and

are academic seniors in high school at age 10 often have the social and emotional maturity of an

average 10 year old in 5th grade, but are now interacting with 18 year old seniors (Swiatek &

Benbow, 1991). These students need to have targeted social-emotional support so that they can

be as socially successful in school as they are academically, while still having social

opportunities with their chronological peers—this is why many would argue that profoundly and

exceptionally gifted individuals should attend special schools for gifted children so that they are

able to learn in both academic and chronological peer groups (e.g.: Rick's Center for Gifted

Children at the University of Denver, or the Davidson Institute at the University of Nevada,

Reno) (Hollingworth, 1923). Adults working with these students need to remember the

chronological age of promoted students so that their immature, and often inappropriate, behavior

can be properly managed instead of being seen as a surprise—since, their behaviors may seem

inappropriate for students in their new grade level, yet it is developmentally appropriate for their

chronological grade level, and they need to be taught what is expected of them in their new environment (Neihart et al., 2016).

There is one other aspect of asynchronous development, which affects some gifted children; when children are gifted and talented in one or more areas, but not in all areas, or not to the same degree, this can also be considered asynchronous development (Colangelo and Davis, 2003). This type of asynchronous development can be very frustrating to children, teachers and parents (cf. Nilles, 2014). While their development in one academic area may be several grade levels ahead, they may be completely average in one or more other academic areas. This type of asynchronous development can be very confusing to children as they cannot understand why they are not "as smart" in one academic area as they are in another (Neihart et al., 2016). This type of asynchronous development can also cause some major problems and stresses for children when well-meaning adults underestimate this characteristic when they try to advocate on behalf of the student (Walker, 2002). A student with asynchronous academic development is not an ideal candidate for grade promotion—this student may be ready to be working at above-grade-level in one or more subjects, but not across the board; if these students are promoted to meet the need of one or more academic areas, the areas that they are *not* as developed in can suffer, and can cause the students great stress and emotional turmoil—especially if they have not yet come to grips with the fact that they are not as gifted in some areas as they are in others (Davis et al., 2011, Fearn, 1992, Hattie, 2008, et al.).

Overexcitabilities (OEs)

Polish psychiatrist and psychologist Kazimierz Dabrowski first introduced the idea of "overexcitabilities" (OEs) in his Theory of Positive Disintegration (TPD) (Dabrowski, 1964).

TPD is a theory of personality development with five different levels—each level reflects the degree to which a person has a potential for the advanced development of their personality (Mendaglio and Tillier, 2006). Dabrowski's OEs are "inborn intensities indicating a heightened ability to respond to stimuli […] Overexcitabilities are expressed in increased sensitivity, awareness, and intensity, and represent a real difference in the fabric of life and quality of experience" (Lind, 2001). Or, as Botella, Furst, Myszkowski, Storme, Da Costa, and Luminet explain (2013), OEs "refer to the capacity to be superstimulated, in the neurological sense" (p. 211). Mendaglio and Tillier (2006) continue this vein by arguing that OEs are "heightened physiological experiences of sensory stimuli resulting from increased sensitivity of the neurons. […] The "overexcitability' means that the response [experienced] exceeds the stimulus input" (p. 69). Therefore, those who experience OEs literally take in *much* more stimuli than their non-OE counterparts, and can easily become overstimulated by the neurological reaction; on the other hand, those who experience OEs may need to experience much more stimuli than the non-OE counterparts in order to function at optimal performance (e.g. those with a psychomotor OE may feel that they *must* move in order to think deeply)—while this capacity is not something that those with OEs can choose to ignore, it is something that people can learn to control with specific strategies (Dabrowski, 1964). Those who suspect that they have an OE may confirm their suspicions by taking the Overexcitability Questionnaire, version 2 (OEQ2), the results of which can be used to focus the specific types of strategies needed in order to harness the OEs, and improve the overall quality of life of the person with OEs (Botella et al., 2013).

Key to Dabrowski's TPD, is the concept of OEs. There are five OEs: psychomotor, sensual, intellectual, imaginational and emotional (Daniels & Piechowski, 2008). It is uncommon for a person to experience all five OEs to the same degree of intensity, and many

people with OEs only have a few (Daniels & Piechowoski, 2008). Psychomotor Overexcitability is an excitability of the neuromuscular system, and intensities may include: movement for its own sake and/or surplus energy, rapid speech, incredible enthusiasm, or a need for action (Webb, 2013). Some common manifestations of a psychomotor OE may include: talking compulsively, acting impulsively, intense drive/being a workaholic, compulsive organizing, or being incredibly competitive (Webb, 2013). Sensual Overexcitability is an excitability of the senses, and creates a heightened pleasure/displeasure from sensory experiences, and intensities may include: an early appreciation of aesthetics (e.g.: language, art, music, colors or sounds); a delight in tastes sounds, textures or sights; or becoming overstimulated with sensory input (Webb, 2013). Some common manifestations of a sensual OE include: overeating, buying sprees, wanting/needing to be the center of attention, or completely withdrawing from stimulation (Webb, 2013). Intellectual Overexcitability is a deep need to seek understanding and truth, and intensities may include: incredibly active minds, intense curiosity, avid readers, keen observers, tenacious in problem solving and complexity, love of logic and metacognition (Webb, 2013). Intellectual OEs may manifest itself in the following ways: strong concerns about moral and ethical issues, independent and/or divergent thinking, frustration with other peoples' inability to keep up with their thinking, making broad and deep connections, not being able to contain ideas and interrupting and/or blurting out inappropriately or at bad times (Webb, 2013). Imaginational Overexcitability is a heightened imagination, which may include the following intensities: rich associations of images and impressions, frequent use of images and metaphors, great capacity for invention and fantasy and/or detailed visualizations, elaborate dreams, or a penchant for daydreaming (Webb, 2013). Emotional Overexcitability is often the first of the OEs to be noticed, and includes: heightened/intense feelings, identification with others' feelings, great

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compassion and empathy, physical responses to emotions (e.g.: stomachaches, headaches, or blushing), concern with death and/or depression, capacity for deep relationships, or emotional attachments to things and animals (Webb, 2013). Emotional OEs may manifest in the following ways: being very aware of their own feelings and personal growth, self-judgment and self-criticism, being accused of "over-reacting" or being "too emotional," or their feelings may interfere with their ability to accomplish tasks (Daniels & Piechowski, 2009, Webb, 2013). According to Australian psychologist Lesley Sword, "emotional intensity is not a matter of feeling more than other people, but a different way of experiencing the world: vivid, absorbing, penetrating, encompassing, complex, commanding—a way of being quiveringly alive" (Sword, 2001). To some degree, this is one of the most common social-emotional characteristics of gifted individuals; people who are "intense" are often unfairly labeled as "melodramatic" and seen as emotionally unstable (Sword, 2001). They often struggle with intense inner conflict, self-criticism or anxiety; they have intense depth and range of emotions, and can have physical manifestations of intensity (Sword, 2001). They have intense fears, anxiety, feelings of guilt or feelings of being out-of-control (Sword, 2001). They often have deep emotional ties to others and/or animals, strong empathy and concern for others, or feelings of loneliness (Sword, 2001).

Imaginational OEs may manifest themselves in the following ways: mixing truth with fiction, creating their own elaborate worlds and/or friends, difficulty staying engaged when not using their imaginations, or being easily distracted by their own creative thinking (Webb, 2013). Of course, as Webb (2013) cautions that not all people with imaginational overexcitabilities are dramatic, artistic and "fantastic"; indeed, "some of them exercise their intense imagination in their heads" (Webb, 2013, p. 46). Many of the very characteristics that "classify" people with an imaginational OE—being "drawn to complex imaginative schemes, usually with great drama

[…] often enjoying a rich imagination, fantasy play, imaginary friends, animistic thinking, daydreaming, dramatic play" (Webb, 2013, p. 46)—are the very traits that can hinder some social relationships; yet they are the "perfect" traits for joining and participating in a fandom (Barton & Lampley, 2014). According to some (cf: Daniels & Piechowski, Webb, Piechowski & Colangelo, et. al), the three most common OEs are emotional, intellectual and imaginational.

Dabrowski's TPD and OE theories were not created to explain personality development and stimuli processing of the gifted alone; indeed, it was years after TPD was introduced that it was first applied to the gifted community (Brennan & Piechowski, 1991). Many researchers warn that there is a danger of taking OEs out of context, and to recognize that *many* non-gifted individuals also experience OEs; indeed, as Winkler and Voight (2016) argue, based on meta-analysis, there is no statistical difference between the numbers of gifted and non-gifted people with psychomotor OEs, and the effect sizes for those with emotional and sensual OEs were small. They did, however find that the effect sizes for those with intellectual and imaginational OEs were significant between the gifted and non-gifted (Winkler & Voight, 2016). Vuyk, Krieshok, and Kerr. (2016) also argue that there are often other plausible explanations for certain behaviors other than OEs. Indeed, they argue that one of the five-factor model's (FFM's) factors, specifically openness to experience, is incredibly similar to OEs, and behaviors could easily be understood to be either an FFM factor or an OE:

> "Individuals who are open to new experiences enjoy both outer and inner worlds, are curious, and hold novel ideas. They have high aesthetic sensitivity, intellectual curiosity, vivid imagination, and evolving value systems. This description appears extraordinarily analogous to descriptions of OEs, which describe active imaginations, enjoyment of sensory pleasures such as art and beauty, intensity of feelings, love of learning, and a pull for action" (Vuyk et al., 2016, p. 192)

Although there are many scholars who argue that the OE explanation of gifted behaviors needs to be studied further, and not just taken as a fact, there are still decades' worth of studies that do support their existence in, and impact on, the gifted community (cf. Daniels and Piechowski, Piechowski & Cunningham, Piechowski & Colangelo, Piechowski & Silverman, Brennan & Piechowski, et al.).

Diagnosis and Misdiagnosis

Unfortunately, the way that some gifted people interact with the world is grossly misunderstood, and, instead of characterizing someone with having some, or all, of the OEs, they are being diagnosed with a psychiatric or medical disorder, and then medicated for said illness/disorder (Webb, Amend, Webb, Goerss, Beljan & Olenchak, 2005). According to Webb et al. (2005), the behaviors that are very common in the OEs (e.g. day dreaming, excessive movement, rapid speech, or an intensity of emotions) are often "misdiagnosed" as other illnesses, disorders and/or diseases, such as: Bipolar Disorder, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), or Oppositional Defiance Disorder (ODD). In order to combat this growing trend, the SENG organization began the SENG Misdiagnosis Initiative (SENG), and is focused on educating as many people as possible about the dangers of misdiagnosing gifted individuals with significant learning and/or mental health issues. Webb et al. (2005) argue that many gifted individuals today who are being diagnosed with disorders such as ADHD, Bipolar Disorder, Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD), or Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASDs) are actually being misdiagnosed, and the symptoms that are leading to these improper diagnoses are actually common characteristics of giftedness. Dr. Webb et al. (2005) further argue that many of these disorders are diagnosed using observations and checklists; indeed, a person cannot take a blood

test in order to be diagnosed with Bipolar Disorder Disorder. Since many of the behaviors and characteristics of these, and other, disorders are so similar, and very few physicians, psychologists and psychiatrists have had training in gifted characteristics, they often see what they want to see—that is, specialists have spent most of their careers studying ADHD, and has not had any training in the overexcitabilities, what might be a psychomotor OE, might easily be misdiagnosed as being ADHD because that is what the doctor is *trained* to see (Gnaulati, 2013).

Not only can misdiagnoses have a devastating emotional effect on people who may already be incredibly sensitive, there are other potential ramifications of misdiagnosing the gifted (Schlesinger, 2012). According to Gnaulati (2013), many people are not only being misdiagnosed, they are being medicated for conditions that they do not have; he further argues that many are not just being overmedicated due to the fact that they do not have the condition that the medicines are supposed to be therapeutic for, they are actually being *over* medicated for the condition had they actually had it. Gnaulati (2013) further argues that medicating, and grossly over-medicating, our "best and brightest" can have devastating and/or unknown long-term effects because most of the medications that are being prescribed for these conditions have powerful chemicals that are designed to alter the chemistry of the brain. A clear and present danger arises when the gifted child is prescribed mind-altering drugs—children's brains undergo so much change as they grow and develop, and, Gnaulati (2013) argues that there is no way to yet know what long-term effects such mind-altering medications will have on the gifted—especially when they do not have the disorder to begin with, which is further exacerbated by the fact that many are medicated for long periods of time before the error is discovered, and the patient is removed from that medicinal routine.

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Therefore, in order to try to combat this threat to the gifted community, SENG has launched the SENG Misdiagnosis Initiative in an attempt to help educate the gifted, their parents, and their physicians on the risks associated with misdiagnosis of the gifted (SENG). Of course, misdiagnosing the gifted as having other disorders is not the only risk that this dearth of information on the social-emotional characteristics of the gifted poses within the medical community; according to SENG (2012),

> "In some gifted children, their complex and sometimes asynchronous development may be erroneously labeled with a mental health diagnosis. In other children, giftedness may be missed in a child with significant learning and/or mental health issues. Some gifted children may be able to over-compensate in the short-term for a learning disability or mental health disorder, thus possibly hiding both the disability and the giftedness. Without significant improvements in medical knowledge of giftedness and twice exceptionality, gifted children will inappropriately continue to be both over-diagnosed and under-diagnosed with mental health and learning issues, while their giftedness may be at risk of being entirely overlooked."

According to Webb et al. (2005), gifted individuals should be identified as being "gifted" as early as possible so that they can receive the support that they need. The longer it takes for gifted individuals to be recognized for their unique talents and traits, the longer they have to struggle with potential social-emotional characteristics, which they could be taught strategies to help them cope with, and to help them access the world easier, and the longer it takes for their true talents to be developed by professionals who know how to coax out the untamed genius within (Schlesinger, 2012).

Another key area about which the SENG Misdiagnosis Initiative is trying to educate the medical, and educational, community is the issue of twice exceptionality (2E). Twice exceptionality is when a person has two or more characteristics that set them apart as being "exceptional" (Kay, 2000). Often, twice exceptionality is when a gifted person also has a learning disability (LD) of some sort, such as: dyslexia, auditory processing disorder, or

dysgraphia (Kay, 2000). It is often difficult to identify 2E children as either gifted or as having

an LD because they often are quite adept at compensating for their deficits (Weinfeld, Barnes-

Robinson, Jeweler & Shevitz, 2013). What this means is that the children are able to "cover" for

their shortfalls because of their giftedness, but, due to their ability to compensate for one skill

they are not ever recommended for possible LD testing because they are "flying under the radar"

in their classes—until they are no longer able to compensate, which often happens in middle and

high school (Kay, 2000). This also means that, since their true skills are often dwarfed by the

fact that they are trying to overcompensate for their learning difficulty, they are often seen as

being of "average" intelligence, when, they are actually quite exceptional, and the fact that they

are doing so well despite their hidden "*disabilities*" is actually a testament to their *abilities* (Kay,

2000). Thus, these students, too, need to be identified as quickly as possible so that they can

learn tactics to leverage their talents as well as strategies to help them to conquer any hurdles

with learning that they may be encountering due to their LDs, or other exceptionalities, and, have

the potential, to find a better fit in life both socially and academically (Weinfeld et al., 2013).

Emotional Development

Mika (2005) argues that "Dabrowski believed that the most important aspect of human

development is the emotional one, since only in the area of emotional growth, transformation of

behavior and character is possible" (p. 5). In Dabrowski's Theory of Positive Disintegration

(TPD), there are five levels and two integrations of personality development—some people may

advance completely through both integrations, though rare, while some may stay in the primary

integration throughout the course of their lives (Dabrowski, 1964). Mika (2005) explains:

[Dabrowski] saw development as a progression from the level of primary integration characterized by rigid, automatic and instinctual egocentrism to conscious altruism based on empathy, compassion and self-awareness, expressed the fullest at the highest level of development, the level of secondary integration. This growth takes place through the process if positive disintegration, which is the loosening and partial, or sometimes global, dismantling of the initial character structure during the course of one's life and replacing it by consciously created personality—the goal of life-long development. […] The need and desire for inner transformation is an expression of what Dabrowski called the third factor—the drive behind autonomous, self-conscious, self-chosen and self-determined efforts at guiding one's development" (pp. 5-6).

According to TPD, all people are able to develop their personality through this five level process, during which, the components of prior integrations are broken down (i.e. disintegrated), and then the personality is reconfigured, and made stronger through the next level (i.e. reintegration) (Dabrowski, 1964). In essence, it is through the destruction of the old self/personality that the new self/personality is created (Mendaglio, 2002). Dabrowski's TPD is not unique to gifted individuals; indeed, all people are capable of both integrations in order to become a "better" and/or "more enlightened" being (Brennan & Piechowski, 1991). It is also important to note that all people, regardless of a gifted designation, can be in any level of TPD at any time; Mendaglio (2002) cautions:

"TPD is not a theory of emotional development, though it provides some useful insights into emotionality. Dabrowski's (1964) theory describes how human beings transform themselves from "self-serving, conforming individuals to self-aware, self-directed persons who transcend their primitive natures and strive to 'walk the moral talk.' Certain prerequisites are needed for the journey from egocentrism to altruism. One is […] a facilitative environment; the other, developmental potential" (p. 2).

Developmental Potential (DP) is an integral part of TPD, and is often taken out of context—especially when applied to the development of gifted individuals (Mendaglio, 2002). Dabrowski (1964) argued that each person was born with an innate potential for development and growth—a potential that cannot be increased or decreased due to environmental factors,

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intelligence and/or learning, mediation or a search for enlightenment. Each individual is born

with either a low, moderate or high level of DP. Individuals must have at least moderate or high

levels of DP in order to attain anything higher than the primary integration of TPD. DP includes

three main factors: overexcitability (OE), special talents and abilities, and the "third factor"

(Mendaglio, 2002). "Dabrowski's (1972) notion of overexcitability is anchored in the sensitivity

of the nervous system and is seen as above-average responsiveness to stimuli" (p. 2). There are

five OEs: psychomotor, sensual, imaginational, intellectual and emotional. DP is such an

integral part of TPD because it allows the participant to experience internal conflicts (Mendaglio,

2002). In order for the "disintegration" part of TPD to take place, an internal conflict must first

arise that makes the participant *want* to overcome, do better, and transcend their current state

(Mendaglio, 2002). According to Mika (2005), when those individuals with high DP

"experience internal conflicts, which in turn give a rise to efforts at self-education and self-

transformation" (p. 24), they are able to transcend into the next level of integration.

TPD is a theory that explains many of the complexities that are involved with character

development, and answers the age-old question: why do bad things happen to good people

(Mendalio, 2002)? According to TPD, people have the potential to develop into deeper, more

complex and altruistic individuals, but only if they want to—no person is required to look at the

circumstances of their lives and then become a better person (Dabrowski, 1964). Just as

intelligence is a finite potential that each person is born with (according to some, like Dabrowski

(1964)), a person's DP is also finite. Therefore, no judgment can reasonably be rendered upon a

person with a low DP who never progresses out of the primary integration, and lives a self-

centered life of indifference. Does the same hold true for those people with a moderate to high

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DP who choose not to develop along the path of TPD to the secondary integration where true enlightenment might dwell?

Those with a low DP have the distinct disadvantage that they are not able to progress through the five levels of TPD; therefore, they have not chosen to "not live up to" their potential—they are *at* their potential, and can proceed no further (Dabrowski, 1964). People with a moderate to high DP have the ability to use negative or bad situations in their lives as a catalyst for personal growth that can help them transcend from where they are now into a better person (Mendaglio, 2002). By using internal struggles, which can disintegrate a person's sense of self, and personal "soul searching" that can help to build them back up, which can help to reintegrate their sense of self, and purpose in a much stronger, more fulfilling manner, people with a moderate to high DP have the potential to become much more enlightened and altruistic people, who are able to see the world in a very different way than the low-DP people who are destined to live their lives in the primary integration (Mendaglio, 2002). In this way, TPD has the potential to provide a lot of hope—bad things do not happen *to* people, it happens *for* them, so that they can become better people; by seeing any and all situations as possible catalysts for personal change and growth, even the most despairing of events can be seen as a positive (Mendaglio, 2002).

While the presence of OEs can be very frustrating to individuals who have them (and also in those who interact with people who have them), they are a fundamental part of TPD (Walker, 2002). In order for a person to recognize certain situations, or stimuli, as being potential facilitators for inner conflict, then a person has to be particularly attuned to these stimuli (Dabrowski, 1964). OEs cannot be categorized as a "gift" to those who experience them carte blanche, however. People with OEs do have the potential to experience stimuli at a deeper, more

intense level than those who do not have OEs, and these feelings do have the potential to lead to internal conflict; however, OEs are not something that a person can "turn off or on"—people with OEs experience intense reactions to stimuli all the time—whether they are interested in participating in a cycle of positive disintegration or not (Dabrowski, 1964). Of course, not all disintegrations are positive, and negative disintegrations can lead the individual along a dark path that may ultimately lead to depression, psychosis and suicide (Mendaglio, 2002).

TPD can offer a lot of insight and clarity to those that have a moderate to high DP, who may undergo cycles of TPD that help to make them "better" people (Mendaglio, 2002). However, TPD and DP are not theories that can be manifested only during those times that the participant is interested in transcending from level to level toward the ultimate goal of secondary integration (Dabrowski, 1964). People with moderate to high DP are constantly being bombarded with inner conflicts that they must then decide if they are going to engage with, and, thus begin a cycle of disintegration and reintegration; or, if it is something that they are going to ruminate on, but not necessarily act on, which can lead to negative disintegration, or if they are going to ignore it all together (Dabrowski, 1964). It becomes easier to understand why negative disintegration can lead to such severe consequences; how does a person who has constant inner conflicts live a peaceful and happy lifestyle when they choose not to participate in the TPD process that would allow them to replace that conflict with hope and peace (Mendaglio, 2002)? When is enough enough? A person's entire life is a journey—what happens if the person chooses not to participate in the process? How does a peer, who also has a moderate to high DP, but who chooses to constantly engage in the TPD process, interact with the peer who does not? Can judgment be withheld then? Does judging the peer create a new opportunity for a TPD

cycle? In TPD, when are people "allowed" to say that they are happy with "who they are," and choose to go no further?

Dabrowski's (1064) Theory of Positive Disintegration (TPD), Developmental Potential (DP), and Overexcitabilities (OEs) are complex theories that discuss how personalities and emotions develop. Although his original intentions were not to be applied solely to the field of gifted education, these theories have found a home here (Mika, 2005). Dabrowski's theories present very clear explanations of how people's personalities develop, and how their nervous systems react to stimuli (Mendaglio, 2002). Although these theories are invaluable to understanding the minds and emotions of gifted individuals, they are not unique to gifted people. Similarly, these theories are not deterministic, that is, people are not *required* to react in a certain way to situations because of their levels of DP—indeed, TPD is a theory that explains one way that people *may* develop, but, participation in TPD is optional, and up to the person involved to decide if a TPD cycle is right for them (Dabrowski, 1964). TPD is a way to better understand all people—regardless of intelligence, gifts or talents. Dabrowski's theories bring clarity to the development of a complicated system—a person's unique personality (Dabrowski, 1964).

Intellectual Development

Although there may be some controversy over the importance of IQ in giftedness, IQ scores continue to be the standard by which the degree of giftedness is defined (cf. Hollingworth Renzulli, Reis, Neihart, Castellano & Frazier, Russell, et al.). When looking at the standard IQ bell curve, mild giftedness equates to approximately 115, moderate giftedness at 130, highly gifted at 145, exceptionally gifted at 160, and profoundly gifted at 180 (Hollingworth, 1926). While many people that are not steeped in the data and literature published in the field of gifted

education may not understand the unique needs of gifted individuals, most people are aware of the unique needs of the mentally disabled and/or retarded; that is, many people often understand the unique needs of those that are 2-4 standards of deviation *below* the norm for IQ more readily and open-mindedly than they do for those children that are 2-4 standards of deviation *above* the norm for IQ (Herrnstein & Murray, 1994). Just as a child that is 2-4 standards of deviation below the norm for intelligence would not be expected to act "normally" without special behavioral interventions and education, it is not realistic to expect children 2-4 standards above standard deviation to act "normally" without similar supports for behavior education (Webb et al., 1994).

According to esteemed researchers as Hollingworth, Terman, Gross et al., children with different degrees of giftedness have different psycho-social needs than children of average intelligence have. Data suggest that children who are mildly gifted, or approximately one standard of deviation above normal (as well as their counterparts on the opposite side of the bell curve around an IQ of 85), can, generally, adapt to their peers and surroundings rather well without the need for intensive behavioral interventions (Hollingworth, 1926). As soon as children begin to reach the two standards of deviation from normal, either above or below, psycho-social needs begin to manifest, and social-emotional supports are necessary in order to ensure that they fit in better with their peers (Hollingworth, 1926). After children begin to fall into the realm of three or four standards of deviation above or below normal they should not be expected to behave "normally"; while students 3-4 standards of deviation are regularly not expected to act "normally" (e.g.: students with severe to profound mental disabilities), students that are 3-4 standards of deviation above, often are (Hollingworth, 1926, Neihart et al., 2016).

Children that are exceptionally to profoundly gifted need more than just a social-emotional curriculum in order to ensure that they can manage their psycho-social manifestations of giftedness, the way that many mildly-moderately gifted children do (Hollingworth, 1926). According to Terman, children with exceptionally high IQs have "considerably more difficulty in making social adjustments than did the moderately gifted children with two-thirds being reported by their teachers and parents as being definitely solitary or poor mixers" (Neihart et al., p. 20, 2002). When discussing social interactions and peer relatedness for gifted individuals, the concept of asynchronous development must be a part of the conversation (Neihart et al., 2016). Mildly to moderately gifted children can usually find a peer group within their age-mates, though they will still often need support in order to manage the social-emotional characteristics of giftedness such as: OEs, intensity, perfectionism, and underachievement (Hollingworth, 1926). For the exceptionally to profoundly gifted, however, they often cannot relate to age-mates very well, if at all, which is why grade promotion based on academic readiness, not chronological age is so important; grade promotion will have additional needs for social-emotional support as students' social-development will probably be attuned to their chronological age and not their intellectual age, which, inevitably, sets them apart from their classmates, who are on track for both chronological and academic development (Hollingworth, 1926). As far back as Hollingworth's studies in the 1920s and 1930s, researchers have known that "when exceptionally gifted children who had been rejected by age peers were removed from inappropriate grade placement and permitted to work and play with intellectual peers, the loneliness and social isolation disappeared, and the children were accepted as valued classmates and friends" (Neihart et al., p. 21, 2002). Therefore, when working with exceptionally and profoundly gifted children, the creation of a peer group, in conjunction with social-emotional curriculum that would allow

them to function more "appropriately" in society, is needed for the psycho-social health of the children (cf. Lieberman, Joerdens, Peers & Fleer). Children cannot become "well-adjusted" if they cannot connect to other peers at the same level (Hollingworth, 1926). It is the responsibility of the school system to ensure that all children have an appropriate "peer group based not on the accident of chronological age, but on a commonality of abilities, interests, and values" (Neihart et al., p. 25, 2002) not only for those children that fall 2-4 standards of deviation below the norm for intelligence, but also for those children that fall 2-4 standards of deviation above the norm.

Although his theories are controversial in the field of gifted education, and, indeed, they were not originally created for gifted children, it is impossible to discuss the intellectual development of the gifted without looking at Howard Gardner's Theory of Multiple Intelligences. According to Gardner (2006), measuring intelligence using simple IQ tests is too limiting, and does not accurately represent the "true" intelligence of the test subject. Gardner (2006) argues that intelligence is domain specific, and that a person can show incredible intelligence and insight into one (or more) domains, while very limited intelligence in another. Gardner (2011) describes eight major intelligence areas:

  a. Bodily-kinesthetic (body smart),
  b. Interpersonal (people smart),
  c. Verbal-linguistic (word smart),
  d. Logical-mathematical (logic smart),
  e. Naturalistic (nature smart),
  f. Intrapersonal (self-smart),
  g. Visual-spatial (picture smart), and
  h. Musical (music smart).

According to Gardner (2011), each person's intelligence is made up of a unique combination of all of these areas, which is why the information gained from an IQ test, which may test three or four of these areas, is too limited in order to measure a person's overall intelligence.

Social Skills

As the literature would suggest, many gifted individuals have some social-emotional needs and characteristics that often set them apart from their non-gifted counterparts (cf. Daniels and Piechowski, Hollingworth, Neihart et al., Webb et al., et. al). It is important for future success in life that gifted children be taught strategies to help them to tame and leverage these manifestations of their giftedness—one particular area is the arena of social skills (Triska, McGee & Keiser, 2006). Many gifted people are highly capable of interacting with others in various social settings, and are far from "lacking" in social skills and decorum; for those who do *not* have these same skills, though, it is important that gifted individuals be taught the necessary skills so that they are a part of healthy social interactions, and not just participants on the sidelines (Kranowitz, 2005).

One cannot consider teaching social skills to the gifted without actually discussing social-emotional curriculum. While many districts across the country have developed and/or purchased specific social-emotional curricula for the elementary and middle school students (i.e. the *Second Step Curriculum*), these curricular models often fall flat for gifted students because, while they may have many of the same needs as non-gifted students, they have other needs that are often not touched on by such mainstream, "canned" programs for social-emotional development (Plucker & Callahan, 2008). According to VanTassel-Baska et al. (2009), offering a social-emotional, or "affective," curriculum in public schools presents a different set of challenges for educators, since, in this age of accountability, social-emotional skills are considered to be "soft" skills, which are necessary, but difficult to measure; similarly, a lack in economic resources might make administrators hesitant to buy or develop expensive programs that are not currently mandated. VanTassel-Baska et al. (2009) further argues that successful "strategies for schools

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with gifted students include vigorously meeting the educative needs of gifted and talented

students and possibly scheduling individual or group counseling as a part of the educational

gifted curriculum" (p. 337).

Cross (2011) also argues that gifted learners have unique social-emotional needs, and

they need to be taught how best to manage and cope with them. Of course, she argues that not

all gifted individuals have the same social-emotional needs, and, therefore, they all have different

needs, though there may be cross over (Cross, 2011). Since gifted children are so distinctive,

thorough "needs assessments" should be performed in order to provide the most relevant

curriculum as possible, which is why a "canned" or premade curriculum that can be purchased

from publishers is often not a good fit (Cross, 2011). She also argues that there are many

environmental factors that directly affect the social-emotional health and development of the

gifted, and they are often based on several myths held by those who make curriculum, instruction

and programmatic decisions about gifted learning (Cross, 2011). According to Cross (2011),

there are eight myths that are detrimental to the social-emotional development of gifted students:

> "Myth 1: Gifted students should be with students their own age. Myth 2: Gifted students should be in same-age heterogeneous classes. Myth 3: Gifted students should be perfectly well-rounded. Myth 4: Being gifted is something you are just born with. Myth 5: Everyone is an expert in giftedness. Myth 6: Adults know what gifted students experience. Myth 7: Being too smart in school is a problem, especially for girls. Myth 8: All kids are gifted/no kids are gifted" (p. 13).

Therefore, according to Cross (2011), in order to effectively provide support for gifted students,

in terms of social skills, there must first be a focused campaign for educators to explain what it is

that gifted students *actually* need in order to excel in school and life.

For those school districts that are not able to introduce formal social-emotional

curriculum into their programs either due to fiscal concerns or a misunderstanding about the need

for such a program, there are other options available—though they may not be as effective as having a full, scientifically-based social-emotional curriculum, anything is often better than nothing. When this is the case, often the best place to start is with mindsets. According to Dweck (2007), mindsets are the frames in which people experience the world and new situations, and there are two kinds: the fixed mindset and the growth mindset. According to Dweck (2007), who did not create her theory for the gifted alone, people with a fixed mindset feel that intelligence, gifts and talents are innate and fixed. The application to the field of gifted education is that students with fixed mindsets are often underachievers because they do not want to try something new that they might fail at—after all, if they are not able to do something new easily and perfectly, this might suggest that they are not *actually* gifted (Dweck, 2007). On the other hand, Dweck (2007) also discusses the growth mindset, wherein people believe that abilities, gifts and talents can be developed through hard work and dedication. With the growth mindset, failure is seen as part of the learning experience, opposed to a devastating setback that may or may not be surmounted (Dweck, 2007). Similarly, those with a growth mindset are often described as being resilient, hardworking, curious and inquisitive, dedicated, and having "grit" (Dweck, 2007).

The idea of the growth mindset being pivotal to the development of students in general, and gifted students in particular, is taken one step further when Ricci (2013) argues that the elements of a growth mindset must be infused into every aspect of the classroom in order to spark critical and curious learning. She also argues that a growth mindset classroom is incredibly conducive to effective differentiation because the students will be "trained" to see that each person should be working at their own highest level of rigor instead of doing what everyone else is doing (Ricci, 2013). Ricci (2013) further argues that a growth mindset is beneficial to

students experiencing learning as an intrinsic motivation vs. the extrinsic motivations that fixed

mindset students are often moved by, such as: getting good grades, not wanting to appear

"dumb," or wanting to please parents. In the growth mindset classroom, Ricci (2013) argues for

the need for a healthy view of failure as it will spur on the learning process:

> "When students fail or have many errors, they may look at this as a sign of
> weakness and incompetence within themselves, which can actually lead to more failure.
> They may begin to avoid anything that looks remotely challenging so that they do not
> have to face failure. On the other hand, if students look at failure or errors as a way to get
> feedback or reflect on areas that need more attention, they possess an underlying belief
> that they will, with effort, persistence, and help (that they've sought out themselves)
> eventually grasp the learning" (p. 72).

Ricci (2013) feels so strongly about the importance of mindsets in the development of students'

good affective habits and skills that she wrote a follow up book in 2016, which was aimed at

parents in supporting their children's growth mindsets at home; indeed, if a habit is going to be a

skill, it must be repeated with diligence across all areas of life, not just in the classroom.

No matter how strong the mindset, if they do not have anyone with whom to interact,

then their social skills, or lack thereof, are a moot point. Fandoms may offer a place for gifted

people--strong social skills or not—to interact socially, make friends with similar interests, or to

connect with people who are like-minded. Most importantly, fandoms can offer participants a

sense of belonging, and, perhaps, a community.

Community and Belonging

Mahar, Cobigo and Stuart (2013) define a "sense of belonging" as "a subjective feeling

of value and respect derived from a reciprocal relationship to an external referent that is built on

a foundation of shared experiences" (p. 1025). They continue by saying that "these feelings of

external connectedness are grounded to the context or referent group, to whom one choses,

wants, and feels permission to belong" (Mahar et al., 2013, p. 1025). This definition is

significant to this study because it implies that people cannot feel that they "belong" unless they

feel a subjective sense of reciprocal meaning within a community that they *chose*, and in which

they feel that they are accepted (Mahar et al., 2013). The fact that there *must* be a feeling of

reciprocity is important—people must feel that they can contribute to the group in order to feel

that they belong or else they are not a member of the group, but a passive bystander (Mahar et

al., 2013).

Sacco and Ismail (2014) argue that humans are inherently social, and social interactions

bring many benefits to all participants; however, in order to experience the ROI (return on

investment) of socialization, people must join social groups and maintain their status in the group

through interpersonal relationships:

> "Whereas belonging to groups has a variety of benefits, both acute and chronic
> social rejection are experienced by individuals as broadly aversive, thwarting basic social
> needs (e.g., belonging, self-esteem) and including negative moods […] Furthermore,
> similar areas of the brain are implicated in both social rejection and physical pain […];
> that is, social rejection is painful and motivates individuals to pursue and maintain social
> relationships" (p. 359).

The Internet and social media have allowed many to join social groups that may not be available

to them in a non-virtual medium due to geographical or other reasons. Sacco and Ismail (2014)

found that, while those engaged in virtual social groups experienced higher needs satisfaction

and positive mood to participants than those who did not have any social interactions, those who

experienced their social groups in a face-to-face format reported an even higher degree of social

needs satisfaction and positive mood. Therefore, according to Sacco and Ismail (2014), while

face-to-face interaction is necessary for optimum need fulfillment, and positive moods, people

may still experience the same sense of belonging, though need fulfilment will not be as high, within virtual groups. Hamilton and Hewer (2010), however, establish that the community that is found among the virtual communities around social-networking sites and fandoms are often very profound and actually form a "tribe" mentality. The tribal mentality of fandoms are especially important for a person's sense of belonging because, as Hamilton and Hewer (2010) argue, the tribal identity of fandoms are created because of the reciprocated passions and enthusiasms of the members, who have similar interests, fantasies and desires, which leads to an "emotional community" that can transcend the virtual barriers of the community.

Unfortunately, there is an inherent cycle for those who do not have a place where they belong. If it is imperative for healthy moods and the fulfillment of social needs to belong in a group (Leary & Baumeister, 2000), then what happens if a person does not have a place where they fit in?

According to Steger and Kashdan (2009), those who do not have social interactions, either positive or negative, often experience dysfunctional social behaviors, which has been associated with the presence of depression. Then, those with depression often experience more negative social interactions than those without depression, and, on account of their mental state, they often react much more strongly than if they were not depressed (Steger & Kashdan, 2009). Steger and Kashdan (2009) further found that the people with depression, or depressive-like symptoms, report less social need satisfaction than their non-depressed counterparts, even when the interaction was positive. "Depressive symptoms sensitize people to the subjective sense of belonging. On days when people with higher levels of depressive symptoms did feel a sense of belonging, their pattern of responses demonstrated heightened reward and punishment to social interactions" (Steger & Kashdan, 2009, p. 295). Therefore, those who do not feel as though they

belong in a social group are more likely to be depressed or feel depression-like symptoms, which

means that their reactions to both positive and negative interactions are more sensitized and lead

to a feeling of less satisfaction of their social needs, which then increases their depressive type

symptoms (Steger & Kashdan, 2009). This issue is further confounded when race is included in

the equation. According to Walton and Cohen (2007), Black students who felt that they did not

belong or felt stigmatized in a group undermined their own motivation, and they began to

achieve at much lower rates; White students, on the other hand, were unaffected by the lack of

friends and/or a social group.

  While social interactions and belonging are necessary for overall health, they also serve

another purpose. According to Yuval-Davis (2006),

> "People can 'belong' in many different ways and to many different objects of
> attachments. These can vary from a particular person to the whole of humanity, in a
> concrete or abstract way; belonging can be an act of self-identification or identification
> by others, in a stable, contested or transient way. Even in its most stable 'primordial'
> forms, however, belonging is always a dynamic process, not a reified fixity, which is only
> a naturalized construction of a particular hegemonic form of power relations" (p. 199).

  Rock (2008) argues that the brain requires "SCARF" in order to work at optimum

capacity, and SCARF comes from relationships with others. "SCARF" refers to "status",

"certainty", "autonomy", "relatedness", and "fairness" (Rock, 2008). *Status* refers to a person's

relative importance—evolutionarily speaking, everyone serves a purpose and has a place, and

they need to know what it is, and how to accomplish their goals (Rock, 2008). If a person does

not have a status, or their status is challenged or denied, then they cannot work to their true

potential, and mental process can be affected in negative ways that could damage a person's

sense of self, and activate their threat response (Rock, 2008). *Certainty* refers to the patterns that

the brain likes so that it can make accurate predictions (Rock, 2008). When the brain cannot

detect patterns, it cannot make predictions about what is to come; this can then lead to a loss of attention and concentration, and can potentially derail someone's path to a goal (Rock, 2008). Large uncertainties, such as not knowing if a person is going to be laid off or not, can be highly debilitating, and can affect mood and depression, in addition to performance (Rock, 2008). *Autonomy* refers to a person's perception of authority—to what degree does a person feel that they have the power to exert their own will or control on a situation—it is about feeling as though a person has choices and the ability to act on these choices (Rock, 2008). According to Rock (2008), "the degree of control organisms can exert over a stress factor determines whether or not the stressor alters the organism's functioning. Inescapable or uncontrollable stress can be highly destructive, whereas the same stress interpreted as escapable is significantly less destructive" (p. 5). According to Rock (2008), "relatedness involves deciding whether others are 'in' or 'out' of a social group. Whether someone is friend, or foe. Relatedness is a driver of behavior in many types of teams, from sports teams to organizational silos: people naturally like to form 'tribes' where they experience a sense of belonging" (p. 5). Finally, *fairness* refers to whether an exchange is fair or unfair—is there equivalency (Rock, 2008)? Is there reciprocity? Unfair exchanges often lead to negative emotions such as disgust, and an engagement in the threat response of the brain (Rock, 2008). Thus, if a group or social organization is not able to bring a strong sense of SCARF to the members, then they do not feel as though they are "true" members of the community, and the benefits of belonging are not being optimized, if they are being felt at all (Rock, 2008).

Escapism

"In an increasingly technological society removed from the physical needs of sustenance,

escapism is generally seen as a negative phenomenon, both within academic and popular views

[…and] is often viewed as an avoidance of the 'real,' in its varied manifestations" (Calleja, 2010,

p. 335). Conversely, according to Begum (2011), escapism occurs for many different reasons,

but, regardless of the motivations, "it is always a transformative and thus an instrumental and

functional experience" (p. 738) for those who engage in it, escapism is not always about gaining

pleasure. In fact, Begum (2011) argues that

> "The transformative effects of escapism, both subtle and direct, can manifest in
> numerous ways. They can emerge as a restructuring of self or societal views or as a
> combination of both. In many cases, the outcome of transformation may be positive, but
> the process of transformation may very well be painful. [… A study participant described
> the] difficulty of coming back to reality after living through fictional events. Dwelling in
> a comfortable, sheltered, protective environment created [by escapism may leave the
> participant] vulnerable and exposed to the challenges of the outside world" (p. 743).

Therefore, just as there are many reasons that may drive people to escapism, there is no telling

the number of benefits or rewards that these people may gain from their pursuits (Begum, 2011).

Although everyone has their own motivations for their actions, there are several common

reasons that people choose to partake in escapism (Begum, 2011). One of the most common

motivators for escapism, according to Begum (2011) is due to a desire to combat boredom and to

cope with stress. Indeed, not only does it allow the person to forget about the monotony of their

regular lives and the tasks that they dislike, Begum (2011) explains that many people use

escapism in order to "lose themselves," however, for some escapism pursuits, it can also serve to

physically restrict the person from engaging in other activities (e.g. it is very difficult to shovel

the driveway or paint the house while writing your own novel)—this is what Begum (2011) has

deemed an "emotion-focused coping strategy" (p. 741).

Another reason to pursue escapism is as a means of promoting creativity (Begum, 2011).

While many escapism activities are individual by design (e.g. reading or writing), the pursuit

"depends greatly on the reader's willingness to enter the world of ideas and events created by

another" (Begum, 2011, p. 741.). These solitary activities often spark a state of "flow," which is

described by Csikszentmihalyi (1990) as being a particularly favorable state of consciousness,

when people are so enthralled in the task at hand that they lose all sense of time and place, and is

completely absorbed in the task.

For many, Begum (2011) argues that escapism serves as a survival function within their

lives. The escapism that is sought by some people through these activities may be the only

respite that some people are able to get—for some, the harsh reality of day may include issues

such as debt, troubles with children or parents, or relationship issues, but it can also be used for

larger "issues" such as emotional or physical trauma (Hirschman, 1983). For many, this type of

escapism is the only way that people can find the time and opportunity to refresh themselves

mentally, emotionally, and sometimes physically; often, it provides them hope and inspiration,

which they use to move forward in their lives (Hirschman, 1983). Indeed, Hirschman (1983)

argues that this type of escapism provides a person with a more "desirable state of being than the

one presently experienced. Hence, an activity may be undertaken not for its intrinsic qualities,

but rather for its utility as an anxiety reduction mechanism" (p. 64).

Begum (2011) also argues that escapism can be used as a means of ascertaining reality,

by detaching the participant from the current realities of life, and can help to bring a clarity and

objectivity to the participant. Furthermore, Hirschman (1983) argues that many may directly

seek out and engage in activities which confront them with the unsavory certainties of their lives or in situations that are similar to events that have shaped their current realities, which is why Hirschman (1983) argues that Blacks and Jews were "more likely than most to watch *Roots* and *Holocaust*" (p. 63)—because it serves to tell an historical tragedy, and the format of the media (e.g. fictional TV series) can serve to provide a cathartic process for dealing with their own, personal issues, while watching the protagonists experience their own, unique, stories.

Hirschman (1983) also argues that people like to engage in activities that allow them to project themselves into the role of a character, or to live in a fantasy or augmented reality. Some people like to imagine themselves as a particular character because they embody the type of person that they would like to be, or do things that they would like to do (Hirschman, 1983). Similarly, people like to fantasize about things that they can never have or places that they can never go—not only is it pleasant, but it serves as a means of meeting a subjective, intangible need/want (Hirschman, 1983).

As was mentioned in the section on OEs, the five-factor model (FFM) of personality has many overlaps with OEs. Continuing this argument, Jeng and Teng (2008) argue that "openness was positively related to discovery and role-playing motivation, and conscientiousness was positively related to escapism motivation" (p. 1053). Jeng and Teng (2008) found that the five factors of FFM were directly linked to the motivation of the online game players that they were studying. Jeng and Teng (2008) found that those with high degrees of openness were often playing for fantastical reasons, that is, for discovering new worlds and role-playing experiences. Conscientious people were found to be motivated for the sole purpose of escaping reality; extraverted people were found to enjoy the satisfaction that they experienced from the teamwork involved with multi-player games (Jeng & Teng, 2008). Those with higher agreeableness were

motivated by the thrill of advancement within the games, and the neurotic people were not motivated by the teamwork component of the online games (Jeng & Teng, 2008). Thus, regardless of the personality type, all participants felt the need for escapism, for whatever reason, and the realm of their satisfaction from such escapism was directly in line with their main personality traits—no matter what motivated them to play, they all received exactly what it is that they needed (Jeng & Teng, 2008).

Kuo, Lutz, and Hiler (2016) offer the distinction between active and passive escapism and the different results that these genres provide the participants. According to Kuo et al. (2016), active escapism is "a unique form of experiential consumption that engages fantasy and role-playing as a means of coping. In contrast with passive forms of escapism, whereby consumers act as observers (e.g. watching a movie), active escapism provides consumers with the opportunity to directly interact with mediated realities, whether constructed in a virtual space or the real world" (p. 498). Kuo et al. (2016) make the argument that passive escapism can become active in the minds of some, while staying passive for others. Reading a book or watching a movie is a passive activity, but, as soon as the reader/watcher *projects* him/herself into one of the roles of the book or film, it takes on an active role, which fulfills different needs—for the passive observer, it could be a simple way to pass the time, while, for the projected party, it plays out a wish-fulfillment activity that provides very different results (Kuo et al., 2016). They continue by saying that the flow-like experience (cf. Mathwick & Rigdon, 2004) that some viewers/readers engage in when they are in a "psychological state of mental absorption in which their conscious-awareness processes are completely engrossed by the focal stimuli" (Kuo et al, 2016, p. 499) is a fundamental motivator by many passive escapists. In contrast, active escapism is a

"phenomenon best captured by the construct of *presence* […] or the degree to which an individual feels believably immersed within a mediated (e.g. constructed) reality. In some cases, the mediated reality can be completely virtual (e.g. the setting of a video game), or it may exist as a portion of the 'real' world transformed for the purpose of role-playing (e.g. a themed restaurant). For presence to occur, the focal stimulus must provide:

- vivid sensory cues that define and situate the mediated reality; and
- interactivity such that participants exert some degree of control and influence over the mediated reality" (Kuo et al, 2016, p. 500).

Kuo et al. (2016) ultimately argue that escapism is a mechanism for coping, and that passive escapism provides temporary relief from stressful emotions and situations through avoidance, by shifting attention away from whatever problem is causing the stress. On the other hand, they argue that the participation in active escapism provides the opportunity for self-affirmation, and the "maintenance of self-integrity and self-worth" (Kuo et al., 2016, p. 502).

Conclusion

Much has been written about fandoms, giftedness and the ancillary issues that are fundamentally tied to these phenomena. What has not been studied, however, is the specific role that fandoms play in the lives of the gifted with imaginational overexcitabilities. From the literature, it is clear that gifted individuals with imaginational OEs have different needs than those who are not gifted and/or do not have imaginational OEs because they experience the world in ways that are unique to both their OE and their giftedness (Daniels & Piechowski, 2008). Similarly, the literature has shown that the same traits that make the gifted "exceptional," such as OEs, are the very reasons that they are often misunderstood and misdiagnosed with other illnesses, ailments, and/or disorders to account for their incongruous behaviors (Webb et al., 2005). These behaviors, which can be difficult and frustrating both to the people themselves and

those around them, have the potential to set these people aside from others, and to make it more

difficult for them to make connections and lasting bonds to a peer group because they may not

have very many peers (Hollingworth, 1924). Unfortunately, no matter how rare a person's IQ

might make them in society (Hollingworth, 1924), all humans feel an innate drive to be social

(Lieberman, 2013), and to belong to someplace where their presence in the group is significant in

some way to the group (Nutbrown & Clough, 2010).

Chapter Three: Methodology

Belonging theory

The theoretical construct that formed the underlying lens through which the data collected from this study was viewed was belonging theory. According to Gailliot and Baumeister (2006), there is an inherent need that all people feel to belong. It is this very sense of belonging and communing with others that allows people to reach their highest potential in society (cf. Galliot & Baumeister, 2006, Poston, 2009, et al.). Without this undergirding of certainty, status and certainty, people may still be able to accomplish much in their lives, but their satisfaction levels will not be as high as they could have been with community participation (Rock, 2008).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to determine what role fandoms play in the lives of the gifted with imaginational overexcitabilities. After consulting the literature, much has been written on the topics of giftedness, OEs, belonging and fandoms (cf. Daniels & Piechowski, 2008, Hollingworth, 1924, Leary & Baumeister, 2000, Lieberman, 2013, Webb et al., 1994, Webb, 2013, et.al.). The topic of this study, however, has not yet been examined through the lens of the gifted with imaginational OEs.

Research Questions

There was an underlying assumption for this study that fandoms offer gifted individuals with an imaginational OE a sense of community—a group who understands them and their interests, as well as providing escapism from some aspect of their "real" lives. Therefore, the questions that were guiding this research were:

1) *Which* fandoms do gifted people with imaginational OEs tend to follow?

2) What *purpose* does the fandom fulfill within the lives of the gifted participants with imaginational OEs?

The Scope of This Project

The scope of this research study encompassed two distinct groups: the gifted individuals with imaginational OEs who participate in fandoms, and experts in the field of gifted psychology who either currently work with, or have worked with, these individuals in the past. The target population for this study included all gifted individuals with an imaginational OE, which is impossible to survey; therefore, it was necessary to sample as many members of the target population as possible for this study so that their experiences could be extrapolated out for the rest of the community members who did not have the opportunity to participate (Creswell, 2013). In order to determine the sampling frame for contributors, the study's survey protocol (cf. Appendix C) was included in a Summit Center direct marketing email campaign, and was available for participants to take for three weeks. Those who willingly chose to participate in the study, and are over the age of 18, became the selected sample for the quantitative portion of this study (Fowler, 2014).

Similarly, the target population for answering qualitative questions about gifted individuals included all experts in the field of gifted psychology, psychiatry, or gifted education, which was impractical (Yin, 2016). Therefore, this research targeted professionals at The Summit Center, which was the official community partner for this study (cf. Appendix B). The professionals at The Summit Center are considered experts in their field, and have extensive

experience with working with the target population of this study (Summit Center, 2016): gifted individuals with imaginational OEs.

Rationale for Methodology

This study was a mixed-methods study, which combined the techniques of a phenomenological study with those of a grounded theory study, and then utilized the theoretical construct of the Belonging theory (Yin, 2016). The purpose of using a mixed-methods approach for this study was that there is often a difference between the *perception* of an experience and the *actual* effects of the experience (Bernard, 2000). That is, oftentimes, people *think* that they experienced an event in one way, when, in fact, the data show that it was not as impactful as thought (Creswell, 2013); for example, a teacher may *feel* as though a particular lesson was highly effective in the classroom; the students *enjoyed* the lesson very much, and were highly engaged, but the data from the final exam reveals that the students did not actually learn what the teacher was intending to teach them. Therefore, in order to determine what role fandoms *actually* play in the lives of the gifted with imaginational OEs, it was necessary to gather both perception data from a phenomenological survey, and experiential data from interviews of experts, which were then analyzed through grounded theory techniques for overall themes and trends (Creswell, 2013).

Phenomenological techniques were chosen to be the most effective methodology for the survey portion of this study because of the underlying assumption of the study that fandoms *did* play a part in the lives of the gifted with imaginational OEs, and that it provided them a sense of community, belonging and a peer group, in addition to an opportunity for escapism. Since the purpose of the study was to try to determine if there was a shared experience, or phenomenon,

among all of the survey respondents, a phenomenological study was an appropriate choice for the study because the "basic purpose of phenomenology is to reduce individual experiences with a phenomenon to a description of the universal essence (a 'grasp of the very nature of the thing')" (Creswell, 2013, p. 76).

Grounded theory was selected as the research methodology that was the most appropriate for the interview portion of this study because the data provided from the interview would either triangulate and confirm the data provided by the survey, or it would disprove and invalidate these results (Yin, 2016). According to Creswell (2013), "phenomenology emphasizes the common experiences for a number of individuals, [but] the intent of a grounded theory study is to move beyond description and to generate or discover a theory […] for a process of an action" (p. 83). Thus, once the interview data were collected, they could be coded and analyzed for themes and trends, which could then be compared to the themes and trends that emerged from the analyzed survey data (Creswell, 2013).

Using the theoretical construct of the Belonging theory (cf. Leary & Baumeister, 2000) in order to better generalize the results from this study, which used a sample frame rather than the entire target population (Yin, 2016). According to Yin (2016), "the relevant 'theory' will point to theoretical concepts to enable a more general perspective on specific qualitative patterns" (p. 106). Belonging theorists (cf. Baumeister, Gailliot, Joerdens, et al.) argue that the need to fit into a peer group is a fundamental need in order for people to have healthy views of themselves, and to understand where they fit in to their own world, and society as a whole, which affirms the underlying assumption of this study.

Study Design

The purpose of this study was to determine what role, if any, fandoms play in the lives of the gifted with imaginational OEs. In order to determine this, a robust survey was created and disseminated to all potential partakers, which could then be quantified. Although a phenomenological study would have provided adequate data alone, it would have been too limiting, since, the overall assumption of this study was that fandoms *do* play a role in the lives of the gifted with imaginational OEs, though the *exact* role was not yet known. Therefore, a mixed-methods study was conducted that would incorporate a phenomenological approach and a grounded theory slant for this topic so that authentic themes could come through beyond the underlying assumptions of the study; also, there was some additional narrative information that was added, since experts were also contributing to the study (Creswell, 2013).

The first step for creating this study was to conduct a thorough literary review. Upon review of the published literature, it became apparent that there was a dearth of information about a relationship (or a potential relationship) between fandom participation and the gifted with imaginational OEs. Information learned in the literature review was used as the foundation for the survey, and the specific questions that were asked (cf. Table 1).

Table 1

Survey Question Creation Information :

Question Number:	Survey Question*:	Purpose of the Question	What the Literature Says:
1	Would you consider yourself to belong to any fandoms?	In order to determine whether the potential respondent is appropriate for this study, the researcher needed to know if s/he was part of the target group (i.e. fanboys/fangirls). Those who said that they did not belong to fandoms were thanked for their interest, and the survey was ended	
2	Please indicate which fandoms you currently belong to, and in which activities you currently engage for this fandom	One of the main research questions for this study was to determine *which* fandoms respondents were a part of, and *why?*	For the purposes of this study, the term "fandom" refers to the community, either officially or unofficially organized, that is dedicated to the love of a particular person, team, fictional series or a character (Barton & Lampley, 2014, Goodman, 2015, Gray, Sandvoss & Harrington, 2007, McCloud, 2003, Reysen & Branscombe, 2010, Stanfill, 2013, et. al.).
3	Please list any fandoms to which you belong that were not listed in the question above	The list of fandoms that was included was taken from the top Google searches, blogs, literature, books, fansites, and discussions, but was, by no means, an exhaustive list of the fandoms that are available for a person to participate in.	People choose to join different fandoms for a variety of reasons, in a multitude of ways, and they serve different purposes in the lives of participants (Aden, 1999, Anderson & Marchland, 2015, Bailey, 2005, Booth, 2016, Bury, 2014, Delano Robertson, 2013, Farrell, 2012, Hadas, 2013, Hayward, 1997, et. al.).
4	Please rank the activities [for fandom participation] based on your preference in participating in them	This purpose of this question was to determine *how* respondents were choosing to participate in their fandoms.	
5	If you were to combine all of the time that you spent on all of your fandoms in one week, approximately how much time do you dedicate to fandom activities?	The literature suggests that fanboys/fangirls spend a copious amount of time and energy on their fandom pursuits, and the researcher wanted to determine if this statement held true with this sample frame.	
6	If you were to combine all of the money that you spent on all of your fandoms in one week, approximately how much time do you dedicate to fandom activities?	The literature suggests that fanboys/fangirls are a growing commercial market, and the researcher wanted to determine if this statement held true with this sample frame.	The understanding of fandoms has undergone a transition over the past few decades, and fanboys and fangirls are no longer seen by the mainstream as being "weird oddities" on the fringes of society, but, rather, a growing consumer market (Cavicchi, 2014, Crawford, 2005, Gray et al., 2007, Kuo et al., 2016, Melancon, 2011, et al.).

Question Number:	Survey Question*:	Purpose of the Question	What the Literature Says:
7	Have you ever attended a city, regional, state or national "Comic-Con" type convention?	This question was posed so that respondents who do not pursue this type of participatory "audiencing" could "skip" all questions related to it.	Not all who participate in fandoms are content to view from the sidelines. Many want to *actively* participate, interact, and "audience" with their favorite fandoms (Bailey, 2005, Booth, 2016, Cavicchi, 2014, Hayward, 1997, Jensen, 1992, Lewis, 1992, et. al.).
8	How many times have you attended a "Comic-Con" type convention?	The literature suggests that participatory "audiencing" is very popular, and that people who choose to partake in it follow a type of pattern in their fandom pursuits. The researcher was trying to determine whether this was an avenue that should garner future research.	
9	In regards to your interests and participation in your chosen fandom(s), please choose all descriptors with which you *personally* identify	The researcher wanted to know in what light the respondents self-reported their personality based on their fandom pursuits.	The Theory of Belonging states that a person cannot reach their true potential, or come to their highest actualization unless they feel that they belong in a group. A person's self-reported image of themselves is very insightful as to their perceived place within a community (Gailliot & Baumeister, 2006, Joerdens, 2014, Leary & Baumeister, 2000, Malone, Nutbrown & Clough, 2010, Pillow & Osman, 2012, Poston, 2009, et. al.).
10	In regards to your interests and participation in your chosen fandom(s), please explain all "other" descriptors with which you *personally* identify	Descriptor adjectives were taken from blogs, books, conversations and articles on fandoms. The list was not exhaustive, and the researcher wanted the respondents the opportunity to provide more voice.	People choose to join different fandoms for a variety of reasons, in a multitude of ways, and they serve different purposes in the lives of participants (Aden, 1999, Anderson & Marchland, 2015, Bailey, 2005, Booth, 2016, Bury, 2014, Delano Robertson, 2013, Farrell, 2012, Hadas, 2013, Hayward, 1997, et. al.).
11	In regards to your interests and participation in your chosen fandom(s), please choose all descriptors with which you think *others* would identify you	The researcher wanted to know how respondents thought that *others* viewed them for their fandom pursuits, since there were some discrepancies in the literature.	The Theory of Belonging states that a person cannot reach their true potential, or come to their highest actualization unless they feel that they belong in a group. A person's understanding of their place within that community, and that community within the larger society, can have implications on their perceived social status (Gailliot & Baumeister, 2006, Joerdens, 2014, Leary & Baumeister, 2000, Malone, Nutbrown & Clough, 2010, Pillow & Osman, 2012, Poston, 2009, Rock, 2008 et. al.).

Question Number:	Survey Question*:	Purpose of the Question	What the Literature Says:
12	In regards to your interests and participation in your chosen fandom(s), please explain all "other" descriptors with which you think *others* would identify you	Descriptor adjectives were taken from blogs, books, conversations and articles on fandoms. The list was not exhaustive, and the researcher wanted the respondents the opportunity to provide more voice.	People choose to join different fandoms for a variety of reasons, in a multitude of ways, and they serve different purposes in the lives of participants (Aden, 1999, Anderson & Marchland, 2015, Bailey, 2005, Booth, 2016, Bury, 2014, Delano Robertson, 2013, Farrell, 2012, Hadas, 2013, Hayward, 1997, et. al.).
13	In regards to your interests and participation in your chosen fandom(s), please identify all of the types of relationships that you have encountered since joining your first fandom (and on account of your participation in these fandoms)	There was an underlying assumption in this study that people gained a sense of community and belonging through fandoms. The researcher was trying to determine what types of social bonds that respondents were able to form based on their fandom participation.	People choose to join different fandoms for a variety of reasons, in a multitude of ways, and they serve different purposes in the lives of participants (Aden, 1999, Anderson & Marchland, 2015, Bailey, 2005, Booth, 2016, Bury, 2014, Delano Robertson, 2013, Farrell, 2012, Hadas, 2013, Hayward, 1997, et. al.).
14	Why do *you* choose to participate in fandoms?	One of the main research questions for this study was to determine why respondents chose to participate in fandoms.	
15	Please list any other reasons that describe *why* you choose to participate in fandoms	The reasons for fandom participation presented in the survey were based on the literature and personal correspondence--it was not an exhaustive list.	
16	Would you like to add anything else about fandoms and/or participation in fandoms?	The researcher wanted to provide the respondents the opportunity to provide their opinions, and to let their voices be heard	Ending surveys with open-ended, optional questions provide respondents with the opportunity to add any additional information that they feel is pertinent that did not fit into any of the standardized questions on the survey (Bernard, 2000, Fowler, 2014, Gliner et al., 2009, Yin, 2016).
17	Would you like to add anything else about imaginational over excitabilities?		

* Questions regarding consent and demographics have not been featured in this chart.

Once the survey was created, it was then disseminated through the Summit Center, which gathered data related to the participants' involvement in fandoms, as well as their reasons for their association to said fandoms, and optional demographic information about the respondents (Bernard, 2000). Participation in the survey portion of this study was voluntary—respondents were required to provide informed consent, but their answers were reported anonymously (cf. Appendix E for specific IRB information). In order for the data that was gathered by the survey to be completely anonymous and confidential, the IP addresses of the respondents were not recorded, which provided more certainty about the security of respondents' information, but does mean that there is a potential that respondents *could* have taken the survey more than once—of course, online surveys always run the risk of one participant completing the survey more than once. Indeed, even if the IP address had been recorded, unless the respondents are required to login (which nullifies the possibility for anonymity), there is no real way to know that a respondent has not taken the survey more than once, since many people have access to more than one electronic device with Internet capabilities (Bernard, 2000).

In conjunction with the surveys, semi-structured interviews were conducted with experts in the field (cf. Appendix D for interview protocol). The semi-structured interview format was selected for this study because it provided a platform that would allow some leniency so that any leads and tangential threads that arose during the course of the interview could be followed, while remaining standardized enough as to provide comparable data (Bernard, 2000). The interview questions were created after the survey was constructed, and were also based on the information from the literature review (cf. Table Two).

Table 2

Interview Question Creation Information :

Question Number:	Interview Question:	What the Literature Says:
1	Please tell me about your experiences with clients, or former clients, with OEs, including possible strengths and challenges.	There are five overexcitabilities (OEs): psychomotor, intellectual, sensory, emotional and imaginational. People with OEs experience the world in a different way from those who do not have OEs because they process stimuli differently, which means that they sometimes behave in ways that are incongruous with "normal" behavior (Dabrowski, 1964, Botella et al., 2013, Daniels & Piechowski, 2008, Mendaglio, 2002, Webb, 2013, et al.)
2	Please tell me about your experiences with clients, or former clients, who have participated in fandoms.	For the purposes of this study, the term "fandom" refers to the community (either officially or unofficially organized) that is dedicated to the love of a particular person, team, fictional series or a character, etc. People choose to join fandoms for a variety of reasons, and they serve different purposes in the lives of participants (Barton & Lampley, 2014, Goodman, 2015, Gray, Sandvoss & Harrington, 2007, McCloud, 2003, Reysen & Branscombe, 2010, Stanfill, 2013, et. al.).
3	In your experience, with clients and former clients, what are the potential benefits, and possible drawbacks, of participating in fandoms?	
4	In your experience, with clients and former clients, which of the following adjectives do you think that *they* would use to describe *themselves* in terms of their involvement in fandoms? Awesome Imaginative Clever Intelligent Creative Loser Dorky Loyal Eclectic Nerdy Excitable Passionate Fantastic Spunky Fun/funny Successful Giddy Weird Geeky Well-read	The understanding of what it means to be a fanboy/fangirl has changed significantly over the years both in the perceptions of those who participate, and those who critique those who participate (Alasuutari, 1999, Craib, 1998, Crawford, 2005, Couldry, 2000, DeBacker, 2012, Farrell, 2012, Goodman, 2015, Guschwan, 2015, Harris, 2013, Jancovich, 2003, Johnson, 2015, May, 2011, Napier, 2006, Pyne, 2012, Thomas, 2002, Van den Bulck, ClaessensJelle Mast, & Kuppens, 2015, Williams, 2015, Yee, 2006, Zubernis & Larsen, 2012, et al.)

Question Number:	Interview Question:	What the Literature Says:
5	In your experience, which of the following adjectives do you think that people who are *not* involved with fandoms would use to describe those who are in terms of their involvement in fandoms? Awesome Imaginative Clever Intelligent Creative Loser Dorky Loyal Eclectic Nerdy Excitable Passionate Fantastic Spunky Fun/funny Successful Giddy Weird Geeky Well-read	The understanding of what it means to be a fanboy/fangirl has changed significantly over the years both in the perceptions of those who participate, and those who critique those who participate (Alasuutari, 1999, Craib, 1998, Crawford, 2005, Couldry, 2000, DeBacker, 2012, Farrell, 2012, Goodman, 2015, Guschwan, 2015, Harris, 2013, Jancovich, 2003, Johnson, 2015, May, 2011, Napier, 2006, Pyne, 2012, Thomas, 2002, Van den Bulck, ClaessensJelle Mast, & Kuppens, 2015, Williams, 2015, Yee, 2006, Zubernis & Larsen, 2012, et al.)
6	Would you like to add anything else about your experiences with imaginational OEs?	
7	Would you like to add anything else about clients/former clients with an imaginational OE who participate in fandoms?	

The data gathered from these interviews were then analyzed using open, axial and selective coding in order to determine themes and trends of the data using the Dedoose data analysis software (Dillman et al., 2014). These data, in tandem with the quantitative data that were

gathered from the survey provided a theoretical framework that was then fleshed out with specific, anecdotal, narrative accounts from experts (Creswell, 2013).

Community Partner

In order to conduct a thorough, mixed-methods examination of the role of fandoms in the lives of the gifted with imaginational OEs, a researcher would need to partner with an organization that has access to, and experience with, the intended population—that is, gifted individuals with an imaginational OE (Dillman et al., 2014). For this particular endeavor, formal partnership with The Summit Center was solicited and gained (cf. Appendix B). A formal partnership with The Summit Center had the potential to lend credence to the research being done, as well as allowing access to the target population, since The Summit Center's specific clientele *is* gifted individuals (Summit Center, 2016). In addition to the data that was collected from the survey, a partnership with The Summit Center also provided an opportunity to interview some influential experts in this field. The data gathered from these sources were then analyzed to determine the role that fandoms play in the lives of the respondents.

Procedures

Determining the role of fandoms in the lives of the gifted who also have an imaginational overexcitability, as well as determining *which* fandoms gifted people with imaginational OEs tend to follow, and for what purpose was the primary concern of this study. In order to answer these questions, data was gathered from a plethora of sources, including surveys and interviews, which were created based on the literature.

Surveys

Using the University of Denver's survey software, Qualtrics, a survey was designed in

order to gather quantifiable data about individual participants' involvement and motivation

with fandoms, and what purpose these activities satisfy in their lives (cf. Table One). In order

to ensure that a broad audience was reached for the survey sampling, the survey link was

distributed in a direct marketing email campaign, and was open for a period of three weeks.

Although demographic information was asked for in the survey, and optional for participants,

no identifying information was collected, and the individual responses provided remain

anonymous. The results of the survey were then analyzed using frequency analysis and

correlation t echniques, such as the chi-square test for independence, and Pearson's Correlation

Test, in order to test the association between participants' activities with fandoms and their

imaginational overexcitabilities (Bobko, 2001).

There was an optional demographic section of the survey, which was included for two

reasons. The first reason that the optional demographic section was included was so that more

information could be gained about the participants so that a deeper analysis could occur;

however, should participants feel uncomfortable providing such information, and not wanting

to disqualify them from the study. The second reason for including the demographic

information was to determine where more research should be conducted in the future (e.g. if

85% of participants identify themselves as being "female", then perhaps more research should

be conducted as to why there is such a discrepancy) (Yin, 2016).

This was a thorough survey, which included multiple choice questions, Likert-Scale,

and optional, open-ended questions at the end (Dillman et al., 2014). Fortunately for the

participants, they did not all have to answer *all* included questions. The survey was designed

to only show the participants the questions that specifically pertained to their experience with

imaginational OEs and/or fandoms. For example, if participants chose not to answer

demographic information, then these questions were not shown. Similarly, if the participant was not interested in Comic-Con type conventions, then the questions related to this genre were not shown.

This unique feature that allows participants to only see the questions that were applicable to them served another, more practical, purpose as well. At the beginning of the survey, the Consent Form for Participation for Research was posted, and participants were required to either select "Yes, I consent to participate in this survey" or "No, I do NOT consent to participate in this survey." If participants chose "No, I do NOT consent to participate in this survey," then the survey would be ended—there were zero instances of survey participants beginning the survey, and then denying consent. If participants chose "Yes, I consent to participate in this survey," then they were taken to the second question, which requested affirmation that the participant was at least 18 years of age. If the participant selected "Yes, I am at least 18 years of age," then the survey could begin. If the respondent selected "No, I am not at least 18 years of age," then the survey ended—there was only one potential participant who did not meet the age requirement for the survey. There were only two inclusion/exclusion criteria for the survey: a) respondents were required to provide informed consent to participate, and (b) participants had to be at least 18 years of age.

When creating the survey for this study, specific fandoms had to be chosen, certain platforms for participation decided, and relevant terms selected. Of course, there are thousands of fandoms to be sifted through, and a multitude of media platforms that fans interact through and with, and the adjectives that actually describe the fans had to be selected. For the purposes of this study, countless blogs, articles, fan-sites, books, posts, and conversations about different fandoms were consulted, and specific fandoms, platforms, and descriptors came up time and

time again. While the possibilities were seemingly endless, the patience of the participants

would not be, and the massive number of options had to be culled down. Thus, while there are

thousands of active fandoms, the following were chosen (fandoms are listed in alphabetical

order, not in any ranking for interest):

1. Anime
2. *Avatar: The Last Airbender*
3. Avengers (only, not all of Marvel)
4. DC Universe
5. Dr. Who
6. Dungeons and Dragons (D&D)
7. *Family Guy*
8. *Final Fantasy*
9. *Firefly*
10. *Fullmetal Alchemist*
11. *Grimm*
12. Harry Potter
13. *Homestuck*
14. *Hunger Games*
15. Jane Austin (all works)
16. Justice League (only, not all of DC)
17. *Legend of Korra*
18. *Lord of the Rings*
19. Magic the Gathering
20. Manga
21. Marvel Universe
22. *My Little Ponies*
23. Narnia
24. Naruto
25. Pokemon
26. Professional Wrestling
27. Sherlock
28. *South Park*
29. Star Trek (all)
30. Star Trek (classic only)
31. *Star Wars* (all)
32. *Star Wars* (original only)
33. *Supernatural*
34. *Twilight*
35. *Walking Dead*
36. *World of Warcraft*
37. *Xena: Warrior Princess*

Similarly, while fans, and survey respondents, may choose to play a part in various activities,

the only platforms for participation that this study considered are:

1. Blogging
2. Facebook (for fandom purposes)
3. Fanfiction (reading)
4. Fanfiction (writing)
5. Gaming
6. Participating in cos-play
7. Reading books
8. Reading comic books
9. Tweeting (for fandom purposes)
10. Watching movies
11. Watching TV series
12. Other

Finally, there are a plethora of ways that any one person could possibly describe themselves,

but, for this study, the following adjectives were chosen (presented in alphabetical order):

1. Awesome	8. Fun/Funny	15. Nerdy
2. Clever	9. Giddy	16. Passionate
3. Creative	10. Geeky	17. Spunky
4. Dorky	11. Imaginative	18. Successful
5. Eclectic	12. Intelligent	19. Weird
6. Excitable	13. Loser	20. Well-read
7. Fantastic	14. Loyal	21. Other

Once the survey had been created (cf. Table 1), and disseminated, the next question really became: how long should the survey stay open? According to Zheng (2011), the bulk of the results that are collected from an online survey are gathered within the first week (approximately 80%), with another 11% being gathered in week two. While this would lead a researcher to believe that a two-week duration would be adequate for gathering the necessary data for this study, new participants contributed to this study each day during the second week. Therefore, the decision was made to leave the survey open for a total of three weeks before the survey was closed, the data were collected, and the results were analyzed.

Although the survey remained open for a total of three weeks, two weeks longer than the time period recommended by Zheng (2011) because respondents were still completing surveys, it was important to determine whether enough surveys had been completed in order to make the data meaningful. According to Bernard (2000), ensuring there is an appropriate sample size is incredibly important, and depends on several factors, specifically:

> "Sample size depends on (1) the heterogeneity of the population or chunks of population (strata or clusters) from which you choose the elements, (2) how many population subgroups (that is, independent variables) you want to deal with simultaneously in your analysis, (3) the size of the phenomenon that you're trying to detect, and (4) how precise you want your sample statistics (or parameter estimators) to be" (p. 161).

In terms of the criteria put forth by Bernard (2000) in order to determine if the sample size for this study was large enough to be relevant, and thus, possible to extrapolate generalities from the participants, and then apply them to the entire population of gifted individuals with imaginational OEs—all factors were met. Thus, using the demographic data that participants willingly chose to provide, the sample group was deemed to be "heterogeneous" (Bernard, 2000) (cf. Table Three). Similarly, there were two subgroups in this analysis: participants who are gifted, and those who are gifted and also have an imaginational OE. As for the size of the subgroups, according to Bernard (2000), subgroups should be represented by at least the percentage that they would be found in the entire population; that is, at least 5% of target group would need to be gifted (which was a mean between the more restrictive 2% and more generous 10% of the population that is often suggested by researchers such as Hollingworth, Binet, Terman, Renzulli, et al.), and, according to Leo (2016), at least 20% of the target group would need to have an imaginational OE, since Leo (2016) argues that 1 in 5 have an OE. Based on the data that was provided by Constant Contact (the contracted company that disseminated the survey on behalf of The Summit Center), the survey was sent to 1,413 people; therefore, at least 110 of the actual survey participants would need to be gifted, and at least 22 would need to have an imaginational OE; based on the data provided in Table 3, 110 of the survey participants are gifted, while 40 have an imaginational OE. Finally, according to Bernard (2000), the precision of the study was based on a confidence level of 95%. Therefore, according to Bernard (2000), the sample size of 157 participants *is* an appropriate number of responses to make up the sample size for this study.

Table 3

Self-Reported Demographic Information of Survey Respondents :

Type of Data Requested	Information Provided	Number of Participants to Whom the Question was Applicable	Percentage of Participants to Whom the Question Was Applicable
Consent	Consent	156/156	100%
Consent	18 years or older	155/156	99.36%
Demographic*	Provided demographic information	136/152	89.47%
Demographic	Race	129/136	94.85%
Demographic	Age range	132/136	97.06%
Demographic	Level of education	132/136	97.06%
Demographic	Marital status	133/136	97.79%
Demographic	Gender	130/136	95.59%
Demographic	Gifted	110/133	82.71%
Demographic	Those with an OE	58/64**	90.63%
Demographic	Those with an imaginational OE	40/64**	71.43%
Demographic	Those who are active in fandoms	100/143	69.93%

* All Demographic information was optional for participants
** Note: Only participants to whom this question was applicable were shown this question.

Interviews

The partnership that was developed with The Summit Center allowed for both the possibility and the opportunity to interview several individuals who have had extensive interaction with the target group of this study—gifted individuals with an imaginational OE. The interviews were semi-structured interviews, which included the possibility of individualized questions personalized for the specific experts being interviewed (Bernard, 2000). These interviews were then coded for themes and trends using the Dedoose coding software. There were only three inclusion/exclusion criteria for the interview: a) respondents were required to provide informed consent to participate, (b) respondents had to be at least 18 years of age, and (c) respondents needed to have had extensive interactions with gifted individuals with imaginational OEs through their connection with The Summit Center.

There are over twenty-five professionals who work at The Summit Center (Summit Center, 2016); therefore, Summit Center personnel who work in Northern California were targeted for this study, since the physical location was close enough to the location of the

researcher to accommodate face-to-face interviews. The second criterion for selecting interview candidates was that the participants had to be established experts—The Summit Center has several doctoral students, and interns on staff. Finally, all of those who were interested in participating had to return a signed consent form.

Thus, 13 different experts, who are currently on staff at The Summit Center, were solicited to participate in the interview portion of this study. The experts at the Northern California facility were targeted, since it is close enough (geographically) to interview subjects in person. All 13 experts were sent a personalized letter, a copy of the consent form, and a stamped return address envelope. Two weeks after the letters were mailed out, a follow up email was sent out to all potential interviewees reminding them of the mailing, and asked if they needed any further information. One specialist responded to the mailing, and two responded to the reminder email. According to Yin (2016), a mixed-methods study should have at least three interview participants so that data can be appropriately triangulated and authenticated. For this study, all interview participants will be referred to by pseudonyms to protect the anonymity and confidentiality—and *perceived* anonymity and confidentiality—of the professionals themselves, as well as their current and former clients (Yin, 2016). Once the interviews were conducted, information was member checked for accuracy and precision (Yin, 2016).

Validity and Reliability

It is not enough to simply collect data, and then report out on it. A thorough analysis of the data must be performed by the researcher, which actually measures what the researcher is trying to measure (e.g. making sure that the data are valid), and that the results can then be replicated in further studies (e.g. making sure that the data are reliable) (Fowler, 2014).

Since this study extrapolated the perceptions of the sampling frame, and applied it to the target population, it was necessary to gather as many responses from the sample frame as possible—the larger the sample size, the more likely, statistically, it was to be reliable (Bernard, 2000). Therefore, this study used a confidence interval of 95% in order to establish that the data presented could then be appropriately applied to the target population with a strong confidence level (Yin, 2016). The data was then analyzed using correlation techniques (e.g. chi-squared test for independence and Pearson's Correlation test) in order to determine if the participation in fandoms was *truly* related to the imaginational OE of the gifted participants (Bobko, 2001).

Similarly, in order to ensure that the data that were collected were reproducible, not only was it necessary to have a large sample frame, but the tool itself, in this case the survey, needed to have adequate opportunities for the respondents to provide data that could answer the underlying research questions, while not being *so* laborious as to drive prospective participants away from the study. Therefore, the survey endeavored to be succinct, rather than short, and focused on multiple choice, ranking, and Liker-scale type questions, with some open-ended, optional responses at the end (Dillman et al., 2014). The optional questions on demographics were not counted in the overall length of the survey because the responses to these questions were not necessary for the overall results of the study (Dillman et al., 2014).

Data Integration

This study examined many different sources of data, and various types of data sets. In order to determine in which fandoms gifted individuals with imaginational OEs choose to

participate and why, and what purpose their participation fulfills, both the qualitative and

quantitative data was gathered and integrated into one coherent narrative (Yin, 2016).

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to determine what role fandoms play in the lives of the gifted with imaginational OEs, which fandoms, and why. In order to gather the data needed to answer these questions, a mixed-methods study was conducted that incorporated the data from a survey and from interviews of experts in the field. Based on these results, basic generalities and assumptions about the target population of this study could then be extrapolated out to the larger population of gifted individuals with imaginational OEs (Yin, 2016).

Using a phenomenological approach, a survey was created, which was based in the literature, that was then disseminated to potential constituents (cf. Table 1). A phenomenological methodology was ultimately chosen so that the themes and trends that came from the analyzed data would point to *which* fandoms the gifted with imaginational OEs preferred, and for what purpose. In order to provide additional data that could either support or refute the trends that came forth from the survey data through triangulation (Yin, 2016), grounded theory, semi-structured interviews of experts in the field of gifted were conducted (Creswell, 2013).

Survey Data Analysis

Introduction

Based on the data provided by Constant Contact, the marketing company through which The Summit Center is contracted, the survey for this study was distributed to 4,259 people in a direct marketing campaign. Of the 4,259 emails that went out to listserve members, only 1,413 emails were actually opened by recipients. After leaving the survey open for a period of three weeks, 157 people started the survey, and 156 people completed the survey—one person was

under the age of 18, and the survey ended before any other questions could be asked, and 136

people chose to complete the optional demographic questions (cf. Table Three).

Project Participant Data

According to the demographic data that was collected from the 136 participants who

chose to provide personal information, the sample would fall into the "heterogeneous" category

that Bernard (2000) advocated for, though the presence of some subgroups are more significant

than others. According to the data, 87.97% of respondents identify as being White, while 6.02%

identified as Asian, and 2.26% identified as "Other Race" (cf. Figure 1). Of the 87.97% of

respondents who identified themselves as White, only 9.02% identified themselves as being of

Hispanic, Latino or Spanish origin. While these numbers do uphold the stereotype that fandoms

are largely made up of White, middle-class, single, males (cf. blogs, personal conversations,

television shows and novels), the respondents were overwhelmingly female. Of the 133

participants who provided demographic information on the question, 112 (or 84.21%) identify as

female, while only 13.53% identify as male (cf. Figure 2). Likewise, the stereotype of the lonely

or "single," White, male fanboy (cf. blogs, personal conversations, television shows and novels)

was nullified (in this study, at least) by the fact that 66.17% of respondents reported that they are

married, while 10.53% report that they are in a committed relationship (but not married), and

only 17.29% are currently single, never married (1.50% are separated, and 4.51% are currently

divorced) (cf. Figure 3). The majority of the participants fell into the 35-44 years of age range

(35.34%) and 45-54 years of age range (30.83%) (cf. Figure 4). Finally, 73.43% of participants

who provided demographic information report that they have some type of a college degree with

43.61% of the total participant pool (who provided demographic information) having a Master's
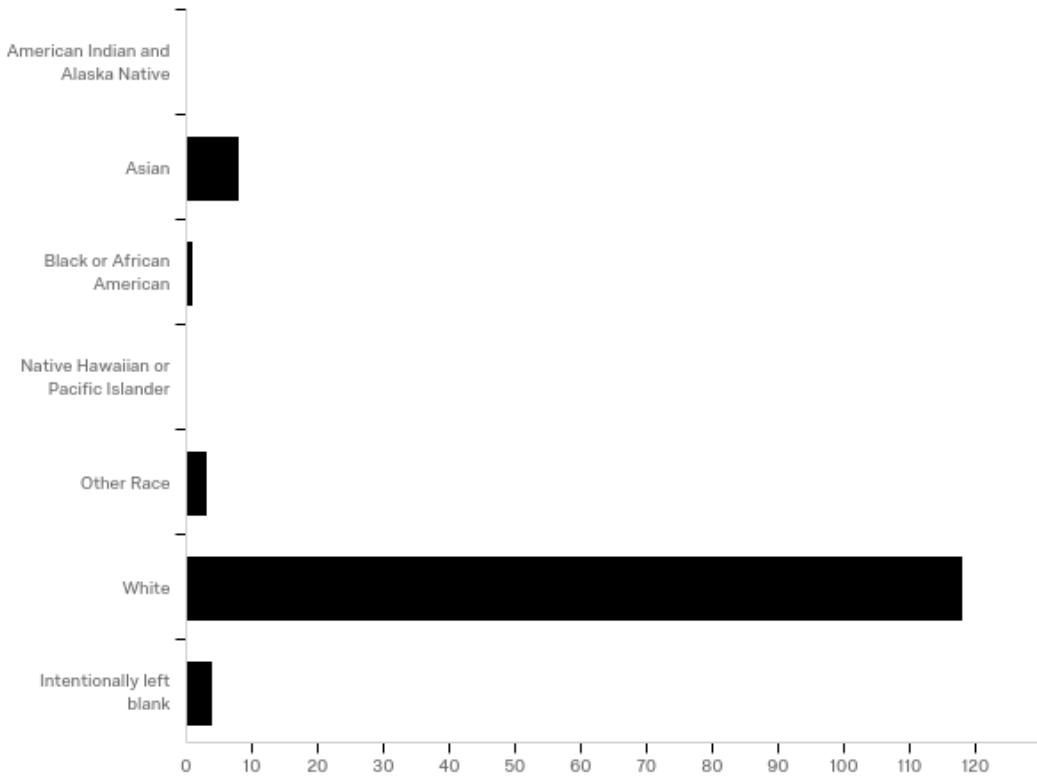
Degree or higher (cf. Figure 5).

Figure 1: Demographic Information: Self-Reported Race of Survey Respondents
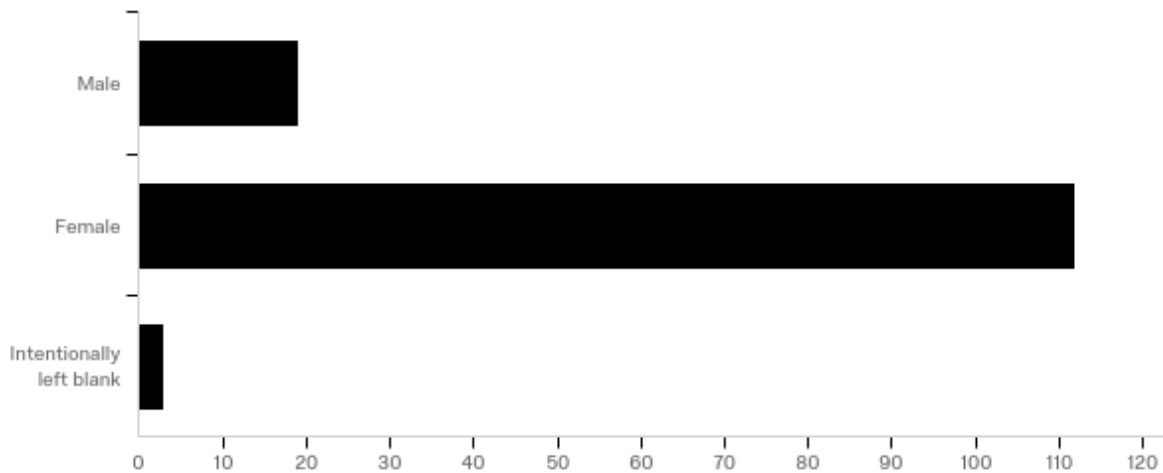

Figure 2: Demographic Information: Self-Reported Gender of Survey Respondents

Figure 3: Demographic Information: Self-Reported Marital Status of Survey Respondents
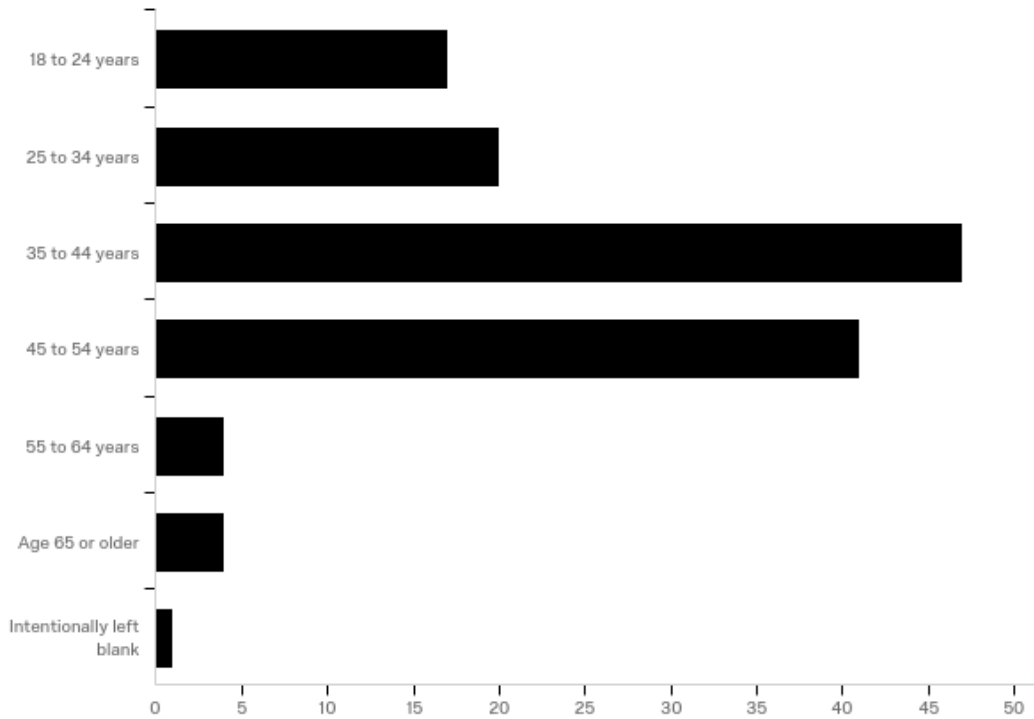
Figure 4: Demographic Information: Self-Reported Age of Survey Respondents
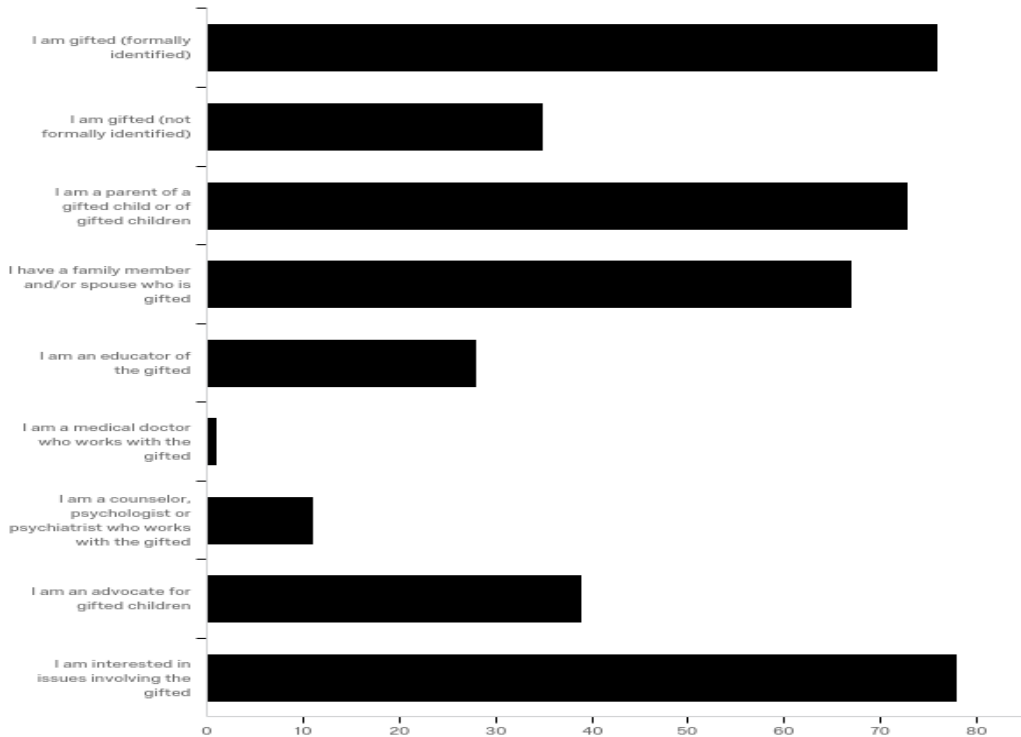
Figure 5: Demographic Information: Self-Reported Gifted Identification Information of Survey Respondents

For the purposes of this study, there were a few demographic categories that provided crucial information—specifically, the question about giftedness (cf. Figure 5), and the questions about OEs (cf. Figure 6). All of the demographic questions regarding OEs and giftedness were asking for self-reported information—that is, respondents were not required to provide proof of their "classification" for the study. Also, recognizing that respondents who were identified by their connection to The Summit Center would likely have many connections to giftedness, respondents were not given the category of "other" (since this would have made the information potentially difficult to quantify on this type of question), and the option of "advocate for gifted children" was added for all adults who may not personally identify with being gifted, nor do they have gifted children, nor work with them directly. Therefore, according to the data, 82.71% of

respondents reported that they were gifted; while this is an incredibly high number considering

that approximately 5% of the population can be considered gifted (cf. Hollingworth, Terman,

Binet, etc.), 110 respondents (or 82.81%) makes up exactly 5% of the 1,413 people who opened

their direct market email advertising the survey. Similarly, if 20% of the population has at least

one OE, as Leo (2016) argues, then at least 32 of the respondents should have an OE, and 64

actually reported that they do. According to Neihart et al. (2016), it is very common for people

with OEs to have more than one, and the participants in this study similarly tended toward

multiple OEs. According to the data, 80.36% of the 64 with OEs have an intellectual OE,

78.57% have an emotional OE, 71.43% have an imaginational OE, 60.71% have a sensual OE,

and 21.43% report having a psychomotor OE. Therefore, although only 11.04% of those who

opened their direct market campaign email chose to participate in the study, the diversity of the

demographics, and the number of participants within the subgroup would support Bernard's

(2000) requirement for an adequate sample size for this study.

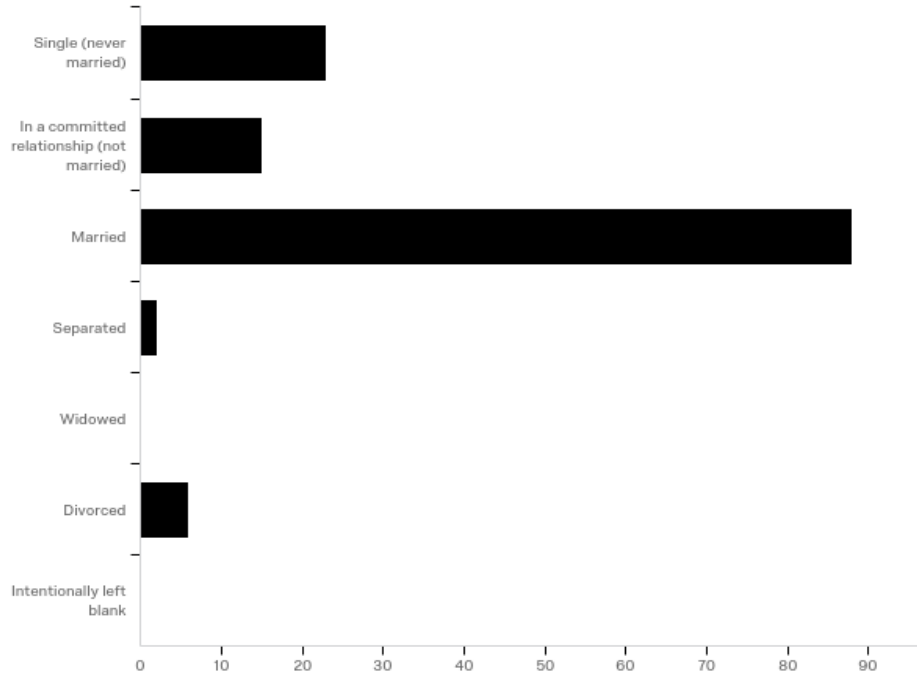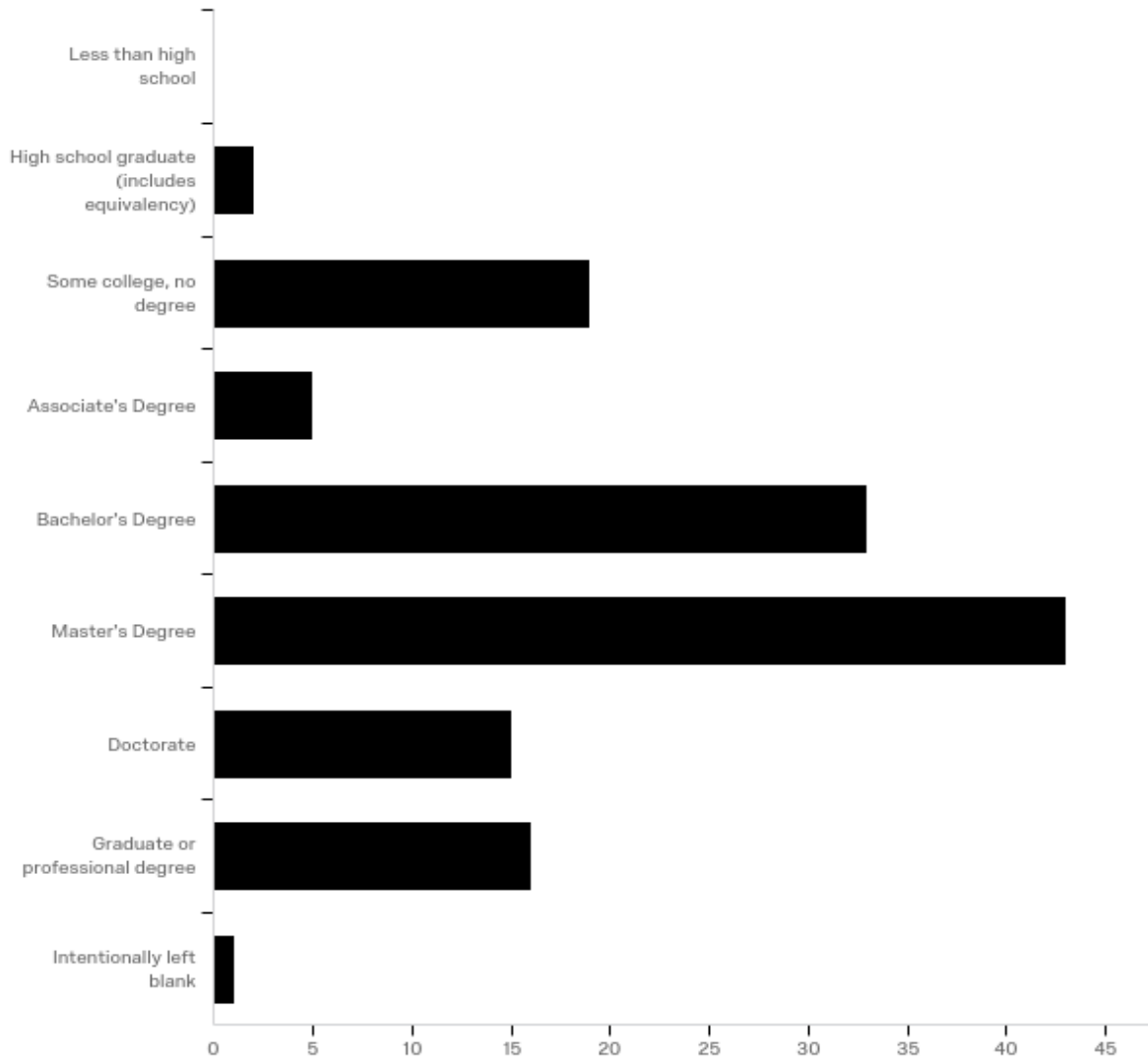*Figure 6:* Demographic Information: Self-Reported Education Level of Survey Respondents
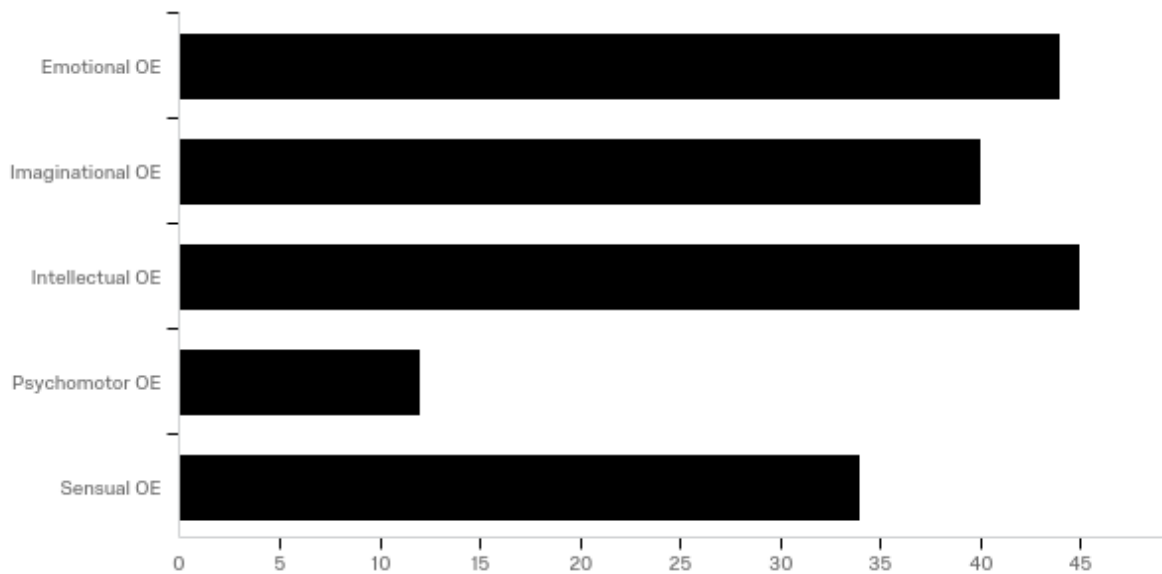
Figure 7: Demographic Information: Self-reported Overexcitability (OE) Information of Survey Respondents

Now that the sample frame of participants has been identified, and several stereotypes about fandom participants have been nullified based on the data of this survey, what do the data say that participants think about themselves (cf. Table 4), and what they think that others, outside

of their fandoms, think about them (cf. Table 5), since the literature seems to be mixed

(Goodman, 2015). Among the three main groups within the sample frame: 1) all participants, (2)

gifted participants, and (3) gifted participants who also have an imaginational OE), all three

groups had a positive view of themselves. Indeed, the top three adjectives chosen by participants

to describe themselves are: 1) "intelligent" (all participants group: 88.89%; gifted participant

group: 89.71%; gifted participants with an imaginational OE: 91.30%), (2) "imaginative" (all

participants group: 71.60%; gifted participant group: 72.06%; gifted participants with an

imaginational OE: 86.96%), and, (3) "passionate" (all participants group: 67.90%; gifted

participant group: 69.12%; gifted participants with an imaginational OE: 82.61%); the group that

included all participants actually had a tie for their third category between "passionate", and

"creative. All of these adjectives are very favorable in their connotations.

Table 4

Self-Reported Words That Survey Respondents Would Use to Describe Themselves for Their Involvement in Fandoms

Words	Participants Who Are Gifted with an Imaginational OE	Gifted Participants (with and without an OE)	All Participants
Awesome	43.48%	42.65%	44.44%
Clever	43.48%	45.59%	46.91%
Creative	65.22%	67.65%	**67.90%**
Dorky	26.09%	16.18%	19.75%
Eclectic	56.52%	47.06%	45.68%
Excitable	34.78%	32.35%	32.10%
Fantastic	43.48%	35.29%	35.80%
Fun/Funny	65.22%	63.24%	62.96%
Giddy	4.35%	7.35%	7.41%
Geeky	73.91%	63.24%	64.20%
Imaginative	**86.96%**	**72.06%**	**71.60%**
Intelligent	**91.30%**	**89.71%**	**88.89%**
Loser	0.00%	1.47%	4.94%
Loyal	34.78%	42.65%	50.62%
Nerdy	60.87%	57.35%	61.73%
Passionate	**82.61%**	**69.12%**	**67.90%**
Spunky	13.04%	11.76%	16.05%
Successful	8.70%	30.88%	28.40%
Weird	39.13%	47.06%	46.91%
Well-read	47.83%	54.41%	54.32%
Other	4.35%	2.94%	6.17%

While the participants, largely, had a favorable view of *themselves*, there was a discrepancy in how they felt others viewed them for their fandom proclivities. According to the data, while "passionate" and "intelligent" were still in the top three descriptors, two new terms made their way to the top: "weird" and "nerdy". The number one descriptor for all three groups was "intelligent" (all participants group: 66.25%; gifted participant group: 71.64%; gifted participants with an imaginational OE: 78.26%). The second adjective of choice was split between "nerdy" (all participants group: 63.75%, and the gifted participant group: 61.19%), and "weird"

(participants with an imaginational OE: 65.22%). The third word that was chosen to describe

how participants felt that others viewed them was "passionate" (all participants group: 58.75%;

gifted participant group: 59.70%; gifted participants with an imaginational OE: 60.87%).

Therefore, while they felt that non-fangirls/fanboys had a generally positive view of themselves,

participants definitely felt that there was a possibility of negativity; although some may embrace

the titles of "nerdy" or "weird", the common connotation of these words in American society

does not "shout" the feeling of "mainstream" or "normal" (Reyson & Branscombe, 2010).

Table 5

Self-Reported Words That Survey Respondents Think *Others* Would Use To Describe Them Because of Their Involvement in Fandoms

Words	Participants Who Are Gifted with an Imaginational OE	Gifted Participants (with and without an OE)	All Participants
Awesome	13.04%	13.43%	15.00%
Clever	52.17%	34.33%	38.75%
Creative	43.48%	41.79%	43.75%
Dorky	26.09%	34.33%	35.00%
Eclectic	26.09%	28.36%	28.75%
Excitable	43.48%	37.31%	40.00%
Fantastic	8.70%	11.94%	12.50%
Fun/Funny	52.17%	49.25%	52.50%
Giddy	8.70%	7.46%	8.75%
Geeky	52.17%	50.75%	52.50%
Imaginative	47.83%	43.28%	43.75%
Intelligent	**78.26%**	**71.64%**	**66.25%**
Loser	13.04%	11.94%	12.50%
Loyal	30.43%	28.36%	30.00%
Nerdy	56.52%	**61.19%**	**63.75%**
Passionate	**60.87%**	**59.70%**	**58.75%**
Spunky	21.74%	14.93%	16.25%
Successful	21.74%	28.36%	25.00%
Weird	**65.22%**	49.25%	55.00%
Well-read	47.83%	52.24%	51.25%
Other	4.35%	7.46%	7.50%

Fandom Data

According to the data collected, the *type* of fandom media platforms that participants chose to interact with definitely depended upon the group in question (cf. Table 6). When analyzing the data from all participants, the three main media that they preferred were: blogs (24.78%), watching TV (16.52%), and Twitter (for fandom purposes, at 13.21%). For the gifted subgroup, the three preferred media were: watching movies (20.86%), watching TV (18.05%), and reading books (14.71%). For those who belong to the subgroup of being both gifted and having an imaginational OE, the three top media pursuits were: blogs (25.67%), watching TV (18.90%), and reading comic books (13.89%). Of the six interactive media types included in this survey (namely, blogs, cos-play, Facebook, writing fanfiction, games, and Twitter), the category of "all participants" had two interactive media types in their top three forms, while the gifted group had zero; meanwhile, the group that contained the gifted with imaginational OEs had one interactive media form.

Table 6

Self-Reported Results of Preferred Media Platforms for Fandom Participation by Survey Respondents

Types of Fandoms	Participants Who Are Gifted with an Imaginational OE	Gifted Participants (with and without an OE)	All Participants
Blogs	**25.67%**	5.71%	**24.78%**
Books	5.02%	**14.71%**	4.86%
Comic Books	**13.89%**	5.85%	10.76%
Cos-Play	2.22%	4.23%	4.95%
Facebook	4.32%	8.17%	4.14%
Fanfiction (read)	6.42%	5.41%	5.61%
Fanfiction (write)	4.08%	1.72%	3.97%
Games	0.35%	7.77%	1.70%
Movies	6.89%	**20.86%**	6.65%
TV	**18.90%**	18.05%	**16.52%**
Twitter	10.50%	3.30%	**13.21%**
Other	1.75%	4.23%	2.85%

There are literally thousands of different fandoms that a person could choose to belong to, but, for the purposes of this study, 37 specific fandoms were evaluated based on the top Google searches, frequency of mention in blogs and personal communication, and literature

research. The data from this survey show some striking similarities among the three groups (cf. Table 7). Indeed, the first and second choice of all three groups were the same: the top fandom across subgroups was the *Harry Potter* fandom, and the second choice was the *Lord of the Rings* fandom. The findings for the third choice of fandoms across subgroups was surprising: for the group that included all participants, the third choice was *Dr. Who* (5.29%); for the gifted subgroup, the third choice was the *StarWars* (all) fandom (5.60%); finally, the subgroup that included the gifted with imaginational *OEs*, it was a tie—to the hundredth of a percentage point—between the *Dr. Who* fandom (5.58%) and *Star Wars* (all) fandom (5.58%). The numbers for the fandom calculations may seem low, but they were calculated using frequency analysis; that is, they were calculated by adding every time a participant reported fandom interest (e.g. whether their interests were in blogs, books, comic books), these sums were then divided by the total number calculated across all fandoms.

Table 7

Self-Reported Results of Preferred Fandoms for Participation By Survey Respondents

Which Fandoms	Participants Who Are Gifted with an Imaginational OE	Gifted Participants (with and without an OE)	All Participants
Anime	3.65%	3.63%	4.00%
Avatar: The Last Airbender	2.31%	2.57%	2.94%
Avengers (only, not all of Marvel)	3.08%	3.18%	3.52%
DC Universe	2.69%	2.87%	2.71%
Dr. Who	**5.58%**	5.30%	**5.29%**
Dungeons and Dragons (D&D)	2.69%	3.03%	2.71%
Family Guy	0.77%	0.61%	0.71%
Final Fantasy	1.73%	1.82%	1.65%
Firefly	3.65%	3.48%	3.41%
Fullmetal Alchemist	0.96%	0.91%	1.53%
Grimm	0.96%	0.91%	1.77%
Harry Potter	**7.69%**	**7.56%**	**6.82%**
Homestuck	0.58%	0.76%	0.59%
Hunger Games	4.81%	4.24%	3.53%
Jane Austin (all works)	3.65%	3.03%	2.82%
Justice League (only, not all of DC)	2.12%	2.27%	2.11%
Legend of Korra	1.54%	1.97%	1.77%
Lord of the Rings	**5.77%**	**5.75%**	**5.88%**
Magic the Gathering	0.77%	0.76%	0.94%
Manga	1.54%	1.51%	1.88%
Marvel Universe	4.04%	4.24%	4.59%
My Little Ponies	0.96%	1.06%	1.29%
Narnia	3.46%	3.48%	3.53%
Naruto	0.96%	0.91%	1.06%
Pokemon	2.12%	2.12%	2.12%
Professional Wrestling	0.77%	0.91%	1.06%
Sherlock	5.19%	4.99%	4.82%
South Park	2.12%	1.82%	1.65%
Star Trek (all)	5.00%	5.45%	4.94%
Star Trek (classic only)	3.46%	3.63%	3.53%
Star Wars (all)	**5.58%**	**5.60%**	5.06%
Star Wars (original only)	3.85%	4.24%	4.12%
Supernatural	1.92%	1.82%	2.00%
Twilight	0.77%	0.76%	0.94%
Walking Dead	1.15%	1.06%	1.18%
World of Warcraft	2.12%	1.82%	1.53%
Xena: Warrior Princess	0.77%	0.76%	0.94%

Note: Percentages were based on a frequency analysis

Reasons for Participation

Seeing as this study has identified who fandom participants are, which fandoms people choose to join, and how they partake in their fandoms, the next question really becomes: *why*? Why do these (often highly educated) people choose to participate in fandoms? It was an underlying assumption of this research that gifted people with imaginational OEs chose to become fangirls/fanboys because fandoms offer them a sense of community—a group who understands them and their interests, as well as providing escapism from some sense of their

"real" lives. While the statistical data has affirmed the initial assumptions of the study (cf. Table

8), these were not the *main* reasons that respondents identified as motivations for choosing to

belong to a fandom. According to the data, of the three areas that the study's underlying

assumption touches, the top ranking factor was "to be a part of a community," which was a

factor for 34.78% of the gifted with imaginational OE group, 43.29% from the gifted group, and

42.50% from all participants. The desire to "escape from my 'real' life" held a factor of 34.79%

from the gifted with imaginational OE group, 31.34% from the gifted group, and 37.50% from

all participants. Meanwhile, the category of "to feel 'accepted'" only received the attention of

8.70% of the gifted with imaginational OE group, 10.45% from the gifted group, and 15.00%

from all participants. Therefore, while these areas *do* impact the fandom experience of many of

participants, it is not a primary, *conscious*, impetus.

Table 8

Self-Reported Results as to the Purpose of Fandom Participation for Survey Respondents

Reasons for Fandom Participation	Participants Who Are Gifted with an Imaginational OE	Gifted Participants (with and without an OE)	All Participants
To interact with people with similar interests	**69.57%**	**65.67%**	**62.50%**
Entertainment	**82.61%**	**89.55%**	**86.25%**
There are free options	26.01%	31.34%	28.75%
To meet friends	21.74%	28.36%	28.75%
The idea/character/storyline captured my imagination	**95.65%**	**83.58%**	**85.00%**
To live out a fantasy	21.74%	16.42%	20.00%
For people to really know me	13.04%	14.92%	15.00%
To be my own hero	4.35%	7.46%	11.25%
To escape from my "real" life	34.79%	31.34%	37.50%
To experiment in a safe environment	17.39%	22.39%	23.75%
To strengthen relationships	13.04%	14.93%	18.75%
To feel "accepted"	8.70%	10.45%	15.00%
To be a part of a community	34.78%	43.29%	42.50%
The opportunity to "get out of my head"	47.82%	47.76%	52.50%
The chance to feel like an extrovert even though I am actually an introvert	30.43%	26.87%	31.25%
The loss of inhibitions	8.70%	5.97%	8.75%
To experience a new adventure	34.78%	44.78%	47.50%
Other	4.35%	4.48%	6.25%

As with the data regarding the preferred media for participation, there were some

significant similarities among the three groups in this study when the reasons for participation

were analyzed. All three groups had the same top three reasons, but the order and percentages were different (cf. Table 8). The top factor for the gifted group and all participants were both "entertainment" (the gifted group had a factor of 89.55% and the group including all participants held a factor of 86.25%), while the top factor for the gifted group with an imaginational OE was that "the idea/character/storyline captured my imagination," which is fitting for the group (cf. Webb, 2016), and had an unexpectedly high factor of 95.65%. The second most common factor for the gifted group and all participants were both "the idea/character/storyline captured my imagination" (the gifted group had a factor of 83.58% and the group including all participants held a factor of 85.00%), while the second factor for the gifted with imaginational OE group was "entertainment" (at 82.61%). All three groups shared the same third highest factor, which was "interacting with people with similar interests," with the gifted group having a factor of 65.67%, the group with all participants had a factor of 62.50%, and the gifted with imaginational OE group reported 69.57%.

Statistical Analysis of the Data

The data presented so far is interesting, but is there any *actual* correlation between being gifted with an imaginational OE and belonging to a fandom? Typically, researchers use a null hypothesis in order to determine a relationship by using a chi-squared test for independence (Bobko, 2001). If the results of the chi-squared test forced the null hypothesis to be rejected, then there *is* a relationship between the factors that moves beyond mere coincidence or random variance (McCormick, Salcedo, and Poh, 2015).

When conducting a null hypothesis in terms of the media platforms that participants chose to participate in, the null hypothesis could *not* be rejected, which means that there is no

statistical relationship between a person's giftedness with the presence of an imaginational OE and their preferred way to interact with their fandoms. Indeed, according to the chi-squared test, while there are differences in the data among subgroups, these differences in numbers could be due to random variation (cf. Figure 8).

Hypothesis Test Summary

	Null Hypothesis	Test	Sig.	Decision
1	The distribution of Participants Who Are Gifted with an Imaginational OE is normal with mean 8.33% and standard deviation 7.646.	One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test	.051[1]	Retain the null hypothesis.

Asymptotic significances are displayed. The significance level is .05.

[1]Lilliefors Corrected

Figure 8: Survey Data Analysis: Preferred Media Platforms for Participation by Survey Respondents: Chi-Square for Independence

When running the chi-squared diagnostic to test the null hypothesis that there is a correlation between a person being both gifted and having an imaginational OE and the specific fandoms in which they choose to participate, the null hypothesis needed to be rejected, which means that the differences *were* related, and were *not* due to random variation (cf. Figure 9) (McCormick et al., 2015).

Hypothesis Test Summary

	Null Hypothesis	Test	Sig.	Decision
1	The distribution of Participants Who Are Gifted with an Imaginational OE is normal with mean 2.72% and standard deviation 1.805.	One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test	.049[1]	Reject the null hypothesis.

Asymptotic significances are displayed. The significance level is .05.

[1]Lilliefors Corrected

Figure 9: Survey Data Analysis: Preferred Fandoms for Participation by Survey Respondents: Chi-Square for Independence

Since the null hypothesis was rejected, a Pearson Correlation was performed in order to determine *how* closely these factors were tied together; indeed, the chi-squared test proved that there *was* a connection, but the Pearson Correlation would determine how *strong* that connection was (Bobko, 2001). According to Bobko (2001), the factors for Pearson's Correlation range from -1 to +1, and can show either a negative or a positive correlation—the closer the number is to zero, the weaker the connection, with zero meaning that there is no correlation at all. According to the Pearson Correlation, there is a significant correlation between a person's giftedness, both with and without an imaginational OE, and the fandoms in which they choose to engage (cf. Figure 10).

		Participants Who Are Gifted with an Imaginational OE	Gifted Participants (with and without an OE)	All Participants
Participants Who Are Gifted with an Imaginational OE	Pearson Correlation	1	.898**	.887**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000
	N	37	37	37
Gifted Participants (with and without an OE)	Pearson Correlation	.898**	1	.976**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000
	N	37	37	37
All Participants	Pearson Correlation	.887**	.976**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	
	N	37	37	37
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).				

Figure 10: Survey Data Analysis: Preferred Fandoms for Participation by Survey Respondents: Pearson's Correlation

Similarly, the null hypothesis was rejected for a relationship between a gifted participant with an imaginational OE and the reasons that they chose to participate in the fandom (cf. Figure 11).

Figure 11: Survey Data Analysis: Purpose of Fandom Participation by Survey Respondents: Chi-Square for Independence

Just as with the fandom choices above, the Pearson Correlation test to determine whether there was a correlation between a person being gifted with an imaginational OE and the reason that they chose to participate in that fandom was also very strong (cf. Figure 12) (Bobko, 2001).

		Participants Who Are Gifted with an Imaginational OE	Gifted Participants (with and without an OE)	All Participants
Participants Who Are Gifted with an Imaginational OE	Pearson Correlation	1	.978**	.982**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000
	N	18	18	18
Gifted Participants (with and without an OE)	Pearson Correlation	.978**	1	.995**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000
	N	18	18	18
All Participants	Pearson Correlation	.982**	.995**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	
	N	18	18	18
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).				

Figure 12: Survey Data Analysis: Purpose of Fandom Participation by Survey Respondents: Pearson's Correlation

Neither of the null hypotheses could be rejected when looking for a relationship between the words that participants used to describe themselves (cf. Figure 13) or the words that participants thought others may use to describe them (cf. Figure 14) based on their involvement in fandoms. This finding would support the argument made by Gailliot and Baumeister (2006) that a person's sense of self and identity is closely bound to their identification with a group—if a group was solidly united, the demographics and subgroups should not affect the perceptions of self and the group in terms of their connection with that group.

Hypothesis Test Summary

	Null Hypothesis	Test	Sig.	Decision
1	The distribution of Participants Who Are Gifted with an Imaginational OE is normal with mean 44.10% and standard deviation 27.951.	One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test	.200[1,2]	Retain the null hypothesis.

Asymptotic significances are displayed. The significance level is .05.

[1] Lilliefors Corrected

[2] This is a lower bound of the true significance.

Figure 13: Survey Data Analysis: Self-Reported Words That Survey Respondents Would Use to Describe Themselves for Their Involvement in Fandoms: Chi-Square for Independence

Hypothesis Test Summary

	Null Hypothesis	Test	Sig.	Decision
1	The distribution of Participants Who Are Gifted with an Imaginational OE is normal with mean 44.10% and standard deviation 27.951.	One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test	.200[1,2]	Retain the null hypothesis.

Asymptotic significances are displayed. The significance level is .05.

[1] Lilliefors Corrected

[2] This is a lower bound of the true significance.

Figure 14: Survey Data Analysis: Self-Reported Words That Survey Respondents Think *Others* Would Use to Describe Them Because of Their Involvement in Fandoms: Chi-Square for Independence

Survey Discussion

While all of the data that was collected from the survey provided insight into the subgroups of this study, it was not all statistically relevant. The gathered data may have shown some differences across the preferred media platforms that participants chose to interact with their fandoms through, statistically speaking, according to the chi-squared test, however, these

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differences could be attributed to random coincidence and variation (McCormick et al, 2015). Similarly, how respondents viewed themselves and thought that others might view them in return, due to their participation in fandoms, had some variations, but they were proven to be uncorrelated. The lack of a correlation between the data offers some insight into the fandoms, themselves—there are some significant aspects of fandom life that are consistent across subgroups, which would suggest that there is a stronger bondage among participants in this "community" than amongst the differences between the unique needs of those in demographic subgroups. Meanwhile, according to Pearson's Correlation test (McCormick et al., 2015), the specific fandom that was chosen, and the reasons for participating in said fandoms, are strongly related. This would suggest that there are some fandoms which hold a larger draw, and potential percentage, to certain subgroups based on their intellect (i.e. their giftedness) and their OEs (or lack thereof).

When looking at the data through the lens of the theoretical construct, that is, the theory of belonging, the analyzed data become much more relevant. According to Gailliot and Baumeister (2006), when people feel "true" belonging within a group, their entire identity and self-worth begin to change, and their association with the group becomes central to who they are as people. In light of this frame, certain trends become apparent: 1) The ways in which the people in the fandom/group interact would be consistent across subgroups—that is, if the community largely participates through blogging, then demographics should not change this propensity (cf. Table 6). (2) There should be a difference in the specific fandoms that people choose to participate in based in subgroup—people tend to congregate toward those who are like themselves (cf. Hollingworth), so demographic significance is understandable—the choice is not what makes people feel that they belong, it is the choice that gets them into the proper setting,

with the "right" people, for them to make their social connections and bonds (cf. Figures 9 and 10). (3) There should also be a difference in the reasons behind the participation in fandoms— people are motivated to do things for very different reasons, usually based on their own, unique needs (Poston, 2009), therefore, it should be significant across subgroup as to what has motivated different groups to act in a particular way (cf. Figures 11 and 12). (4) The words that a group uses to describe the traits of members, on account of their participation in that group, should be rather similar, if not completely static—similarly, understanding the basic values and tenets of the group, members should be able to predict not only what others in the group think of them, but what non-members would think about them based on the perceptions of the group in the larger community (cf. Figures 13 and 14).

Interview Data Analysis

Introduction

Even though the data provided by survey participants is very insightful into the topic at hand, it is incomplete. Unfortunately, sometimes people involved in a "phenomenon," such as being engrossed with fandoms, do not see all aspects of the experience clearly because they are "too close" to the situation (Creswell, 2013). Therefore, it can be invaluable to also gather information from a non-biased third party who does not have an interest in either the fandom or the perceptions of fandoms, but who have the ability to provide relevant and reliable information about the topic, and the people involved (Bernard, 2000). In order to gain this unbiased information, semi-structured interviews via phone conversation were conducted with three clinicians from The Summit Center who have had extensive experience with the gifted, and the gifted with imaginational OEs, and are featured in this study under pseudonyms (Yin, 2016).

Project Participant Data

Dr. Nancy Webster is a licensed clinician who has been working at The Summit Center for the past five years. Presently, Dr. Webster uses her expertise at The Summit Center by providing assessments of the gifted, at their request (N. Webster, interview, April 13, 2017).

Dr. Rebecca Schaffer has been a clinical psychologist for The Summit Center for the past three years. She provides neuropsychological and educational assessments as well as counseling to children, adolescents and families; "she has a background in the humanistic, cognitive behavioral, behavioral medicine, existential and Eastern psychological traditions" (Summit Center, 2016). She also has two gifted children, and her father is both a professor and published author with some intense fandom interests—specifically in H.P. Lovecraft, Hannibal and the Punic Wars (R. Schaffer, interview, April 14, 2017).

Dr. Joseph Ramirez has been a clinical psychologist since 2003, and has worked for The Summit Center for the past six years. In addition to conducting assessments, and providing counseling to clients, and mentoring doctoral students, he also conducts research into the field of twice exceptionality (2E) and giftedness. Dr. Ramirez is also an adjunct professor (J. Ramirez, interview, April 21, 2017).

Interview Trends

After interviewing these three clinicians, portions of each interview were transcribed, and uploaded into the Dedoose data analysis program. Portions of the interview that were important for the interview, but not for the coding and disaggregating of data, such as confirming consent, were not transcribed. Using this program, the transcription could then be coded for themes using axial and open coding (Fowler, 2014); whereby categories were identified, and words, phrases,

and quotations were given a code based on what the word, phrase or quote was referencing. Once the interviews were coded, an analysis could then be conducted for major themes and trends (Yin, 2016). There were five main trends that came through in the interview data analysis: 1) Fandoms provide the gifted with imaginational OEs a community. (2) Fandoms provide gifted members with imaginational OEs a sense of belonging. (3) Fandoms provide the gifted with imaginational OEs access to peer groups. (4) The gifted with imaginational OEs often have a favorable view of themselves, but feel that others might have a more pejorative viewpoint of their pursuits. (5) There are some drawbacks to fandoms—namely, the potential for isolationism.

Ultimately, those interviewed felt that fandoms provided a positive addition to the lives of their current and former clients, though some instances of hindrances were discussed. While there may be some clear benefits to fandoms, these experts did not, specifically, declare that they endorse or urge clients to participate in them as a course for therapy.

According to Dr. Webster (N. Webster, interview, April 13, 2017), for some, participating in fandoms "would provide a sense of community with like-minded peers", which is particularly important since she sees many clients with the "social challenges of fitting in and finding peers." Not surprisingly, she cautions that some of the gifted that she has worked with in the past had very restrictive interests sometimes, which "can be both a blessing and a curse" since having a restrictive area of interest, such as only wanting to read Science Fiction genre books, or only being interested in *Star Wars*, can exclude the possibility of other things or genres, which can be very frustrating to parents and teachers, who really want to see them branch out in their "absorptions." On the other hand, Dr. Webster (2017) argued that, depending on their openness to experiences, this devotion to a fandom may lead to friendships with others with

the same interests. Incidentally, Dr. Webster did point out that, based on the age of the participant, many often go through periods of really intense fandoms, and then move on to something else (i.e. a different fandom) as they get older—though the attachment to *Harry Potter*, if one is present, seems to transcend age; occasionally, she noticed, they do grow out of fandoms altogether, but oftentimes, they are seriously "into" fandoms their whole lives. Unfortunately, due to the nature of her work, she does not often have the opportunity to check in with former clients 5-10 years down the line in order to see longitudinal growth and changes in interests. Finally, Dr. Webster (2017) felt that those involved with fandoms had a relatively positive view of themselves, while those not involved with fandoms might have a more mixed view of those who do participate in fandoms. Indeed, when given the same list of adjectives that were provided to fanboys/fangirls in the survey (cf. Table 4), the only words that she felt that her clients would *not* use to describe themselves were: "eclectic" (unless they were older, or a part of "giftedland" where the nomenclature often used to describe gifted people and pursuits are well-known by all), "excitable", "loser", "loyal", "spunky" and "well-read" (with the disclaimer that "I have not heard them use this term, but they *are*" (Webster, interview, April 13, 2017). Next, when given the same list, and asked how she thought that those not involved in fandoms would categorize fangirls/fanboys by using all of the adjectives on the list, with the exception of "loyal" (N. Webster, interview, April 13, 2017).

Likewise, Dr. Schaffer felt that participation in fandoms provided a positive outlet for the gifted with imaginational OEs. According to Schaffer (2017), gifted individuals with imaginational OEs "often tend to be passionate idealists, […] and they often really identify with actors, characters and series, and can be intensely impacted by behaviors—both good and bad" (R. Schaffer, interview, April 13, 2017); such as finding out that the *actor* who plays a beloved

character does not live up to the ideals of "their" character, "which can be very disheartening" (R. Schaffer, interview, April 13, 2017). She, too, asserted that fandoms "provide community, and relationships with other kids interested in the same topic" (R. Schaffer, interview, April 14, 2017). Moreover, while fandoms "provide the benefit of a community, and the opportunity to be less isolated [socially]," she warns that "one of the potential drawbacks is being exposed to the general population and people who are not very nice—not everyone has the best interest of others at heart, and when someone is socially naïve, this is a concern" (R. Schaffer, interview, April 14, 2017). While Dr. Schaffer does not advocate for isolationist behavior in order to avoid potentially unsafe situations, being aware and taking steps to ensure personal safety when meeting new people, or going to new places, is always a good practice.

In the same way that Dr. Webster found that her clients and/or former clients primarily had a positive opinion of themselves and their fandom pursuits, Dr. Schaffer (2017) also agreed that her clients and former clients had a relatively favorable view of themselves. When given the list of adjectives found in Table 4, she felt that the words that past and present clients who are fanboys/fangirls might use to describe themselves included: "clever", 'creative', (possibly) "dorky", "eclectic", (possibly) "fantastic", "fun/funny", (possibly) "geeky", "imaginative", "intelligent", "loyal", "nerdy", "passionate", "spunky", (possibly) "weird", and "well-read". When asked how she thought that those not involved with fandoms might describe fanboys and fangirls, she said that this was an incredibly difficult question to answer because she would be answering the question on what others would say about the gifted with OEs who participate in fandoms—if answering the question based on the general, non-gifted population, she would be relying on stereo types—however, many people she has interacted with in the gifted population would largely think that this behavior was normative, and an outlet for creativity, imagination,

and connection. (R. Schaffer, interview, April 14, 2017). Finally, Dr. Schaffer wanted to remind readers of this study that, no matter what the motivations to join fandoms might be, the source of community and inspiration that is often found by belonging can lead to interesting developments in personality, as well as personal and professional pursuits—such as opportunities for travel, speaking engagements, conference and symposium attendance (R. Schaffer, interview, April 14, 2017).

Dr. Joseph Ramirez made it clear that the OEs that his current and past clients may have are often a benefit, not just a potential challenge—indeed, he argued that "it is all about how they utilize their OEs. Some can channel their OEs into something delightful and productive for themselves" (J. Ramirez, interview, April, 21, 2017). On the other hand, Dr. Ramirez (2017) did lament the challenges for those with OEs when they are misdiagnosed, or if it precludes them from joining a community. Dr. Ramirez (2017) was excited to discuss the possibilities that fandoms offer to his current and former clients with imaginational OEs stating that in fandoms, "people are able to find community—a place where you belong, where [people] feel drawn for a particular reason—a place where [you] can find [your] people" (J. Ramirez, interview, April 21, 2017). Similar to Webster and Schaffer, Ramirez observed that "the draw to fandoms usually comes from a desire to see or express themselves, their intelligence and creativity, in a book, a movie, or an adventure" (J. Ramirez, interview, April 21, 2017). Fandoms are a place for the creative to spread their wings and to embrace all aspects of who they are.

Fandoms do not offer a cure-all for those with imaginational OEs who have a difficult time finding their place in the world, however. Dr. Ramirez (2017) warns that one of the potential drawbacks to fandoms is that participants, especially children, can become isolated (e.g. withdrawing from other social opportunities so that they can devote more time to their fandom

pursuits), or, quite often, they can be ridiculed by age peers not in the fandoms for what they like to do and who they are. Dr. Ramirez (2017), different from Dr. Webster and Dr. Schaffer, did not feel that those participating in fandoms had a particularly stellar view of themselves, yet he did feel that they saw themselves in a better light than their non-fandom-participating peers might. Of the adjectives listed in Table Four, Dr. Ramirez (2017) felt that the only words that the gifted with imaginational OEs in fandoms would use to describe themselves include: "awesome", "creative", "dorky" (though he thought that this was a "baited" term), "fun/funny", "geeky", "imaginative", "loyal", "nerdy", "passionate", "weird", and "well-read". Dr. Ramirez only thought that non-fandom participating peers would use a total of 11 of the 20 adjectives to describe their fanboy/fangirl peers, and those words included: "creative", "dorky", "excitable", "fun/funny", "geeky", "imaginative", "loser", "nerdy", "passionate", "weird", and "well-read".

Interview Discussion

After considering the information provided by the clinicians, it is evident that many gifted individuals with imaginational OEs are drawn to participate in fandoms for a variety of reasons; chief among those is the desire to find community, belonging, and to find a peer group with similar interests. While the clinicians interviewed did bring up some very real potential drawbacks to the participation in fandoms, such as relying on the goodness of others when interacting with people in "real life," becoming immersed in one genre to the exclusion of others, or social isolation, the benefits of the fandoms seem to outweigh the potential drawbacks. For this reason, it can be surmised that the participation in fandoms by gifted individuals with imaginational OEs is undertaken, either consciously or subconsciously, for the purposes of finding a community and a peer group where participants feel that they belong, and where they

can interact with a social peer group with similar interests, and which serves as an important addition to their lives.

Response to Research Questions and Discussion of Themes

Introduction

This study was undertaken with the underlying assumption that there *was* a reason that gifted individuals with imaginational OEs chose to belong to fandoms, and that the main reason for this participation was for a sense of community and belonging, and for an opportunity for escapism. In order to test whether these underlying assumptions were reasonable, the data were gathered from a survey and interviews from clinicians in the field. According to the data (cf. Table 7 and Table 8), gifted people with imaginational OEs *do* tend to follow different fandoms than participants who are *not* gifted with imaginational OEs, and they do it for different reasons, though there is some cross-over.

Research Question One

Which fandoms do gifted people with imaginational OEs tend to follow?

In order to determine which fandoms the gifted with imaginational OEs chose to participate in, a comprehensive survey was created that was grounded in the literature on the topics of fandoms, giftedness, OEs, and belonging (cf. Table 1). Once the survey was completed, it was distributed through The Summit Center's marketing company, Constant Contact, to their listserve in a direct marketing campaign to all of their members. According to the Constant Contact data, 1,413 people who received the email actually opened it, and, of those, 156, or 11%, actually completed the survey, which was kept open for three weeks. The

methodology used for the survey was phenomenology, the experiences of all survey respondents were trying to be distilled down to measurable phenomena (Creswell, 2013).

Recognizing that the data gathered from the surveys would be valuable, yet incomplete, an interview with a grounded theory methodology was also created, which was to be used when conducting semi-structured interviews with several of the experts who are currently working with The Summit Center. In order to confirm and triangulate the themes that emerged from the survey, the interview data were analyzed using open and axial coding (Fowler, 2014), and the data from the interviews matched the data that were gathered from the survey.

According to the data from the survey, the top three fandoms for the gifted with imaginational OEs were the *Harry Potter* fandom, the *Lord of the Rings* fandom, and the *Dr. Who* fandom (cf. Table 7). People with imaginational OEs tend to have intense imaginations, they create elaborate ideas and worlds, they may have imaginary friends, they live and dream in vivid intensity, create their own languages, and revel in the fantastic (cf. Dabrowski, Webb, Neihart, et al.). Therefore, it comes as no surprise that the top three fandoms chosen by the gifted with imaginational OEs who took the survey all have elaborate worlds with foreign languages (created for the individual "universe"), new and diverse species (which all have their own histories and ethnogeneses), planets and universes, epochs, and economic and political systems. In order to be truly immersed in any of these three fandoms, the participants must lose themselves in worlds that are parallel to the "real" universe, but uniquely separate from it. Fanboys and Fangirls join their favorite worlds by watching movies and TV shows, writing and reading fanfiction, writing and reading blogs, dressing up and participating in cos-play, Tweeting and following people on Facebook, and in a myriad of other ways (cf. Table 6). Not only do these fans get to fantasize about these worlds, they get to actually, *tangibly* participate and

interact with their favorite characters in a plethora of ways with others who enjoy the same things that they do and to the same degree (Barton & Lampley, 2014)—what better way to indulge the overactive imagination?

When looking at the statistical data through the filter of the theoretical construct for this study—the belonging theory—the analyzed results of both the survey and the interview were relevant. According to belonging theory (cf. Gailliot & Baumeister, 2006, Hagerty et al., 1996, Leary & Baumeister, 2000, et al.), belonging to a group and/or a community is necessary for the healthy development of the person, self-esteem, and feelings of self-worth; finding a place where people feel they belong is needed for the overall health of the person—not just their social and emotional health. The concepts espoused in belonging theory were upheld by the statistical analysis of the data. The demographic subgroup of the gifted with an imaginational OE, according to the experts (cf. Neihart et al., 2016, Webb, 2016, Daniels and Piechowski, 2008, et al.), have a similar set of social-emotional characteristics and needs, which are not often met by those who do not have OEs, since they process stimuli in different ways, which can be very confusing to those without OEs. That being said, people tend to look for grouping options that will meet certain needs that they find lacking in other areas of their lives (Gailliot and Baumeister, 2006); accordingly, the data that show that gifted people with an imaginational OE tend to seek out the same fandoms as other gifted people with imaginational OEs, which tend to differ from the choices of other demographic groups. Similarly, once in a group, if people are truly invested and bonded with their peers, they should have a similar understanding of the qualities and character traits that embody the members of the group on account of their membership in the group. Therefore, while the data may show that the gifted with the imaginational OEs tend to choose to participate in different fandoms than people who are not

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gifted with an imaginational OE, belonging theory suggests that this was an appropriate conclusion because people tend to seek out peer groups based on their own unique needs (Hollingworth, 1926). Conversely, the data showed that there was no correlation between subgroups and the words that they used to describe themselves, or how they thought that others would describe them (in terms of their association with the fandom group) because it was a phenomenological trend that transcended demographics within the group.

Research Question Two

What purpose does the fandom fulfill within the lives of gifted participants with imaginational OEs?

In order to answer this second research question, the same methodological steps were followed as were taken when answering the first research question. After analyzing the data that were collected from both the survey and the interviews, a clear theme emerged—people join fandoms for a community and a sense of belonging; unfortunately, the *way* that the data from the survey that show these results is not linear. The survey data show that the top three reasons for the gifted with imaginational OEs to participate in fandoms include: "the idea/character/storyline captured my imagination," "entertainment," and "to interact with people with similar interests." Although the categories of "to escape from my 'real' life" (34.79%) and "to be a part of a community" (34.78%) received slightly more than one third of the "votes," the top three categories do hint at the ideas of community, belonging, and social peer groups. On the other hand, while the notions of community, belonging and social peer groups were merely hinted at with the survey data, they were some of the first "positives" that The Summit Center clinicians listed when recounting possible values of fandom participation. Therefore, while it might not be

the primary occurrence sought by participants, it *is* the primary advantage received from participation in fandoms.

Finally, does the way in which people participate in fandoms make a difference? According to this study, there were clear differences among participant groups as to how each group preferred to interact with their fandoms, for example with blogs, watching movies, fanfiction, or cos-play (cf. Table 6), the statistics showed that this was due to random variance, and not from any correlation to demographics (McCormick et al., 2015). These findings also stand up under the scrutiny of belonging theory. If a fandom is a group that interacts with each other in some way (cf. Table 6), then it is logical to assume that the majority of the members of that fandom would participate in the same *types* of interaction; indeed, if people prefer to read and write fanfiction, and they joined a fandom that interacted largely through cos-play, then they would not have as high of a satisfaction rate and/or sense of belonging as if they were in a fandom that primarily specialized in fanfiction (Reysen and Branscombe, 2014).

Discussion

Based on the results of the data provided by data collected from a phenomenological study and a grounded theory semi-structured interviews, it is evident that fandoms offer the gifted with imaginational OEs something very tangible and important in their lives. Not only do the fandoms provide participants with a community, and a peer group with shared interests, they also provide entertainment and a form of escapism for those who choose to partake. Be this as it may, not all participants are aware of the positive attributes that are afforded by their fandom pursuits; indeed, while participants may not *know* that they have joined a community, and that they have networked with peers with similar interests, which may be a circumstance that is rare

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in their non-fandom lives, they do recognize that they have made new friends, and that they have found satisfaction in these peer bonds (cf. Reysen & Branscombe, Scacco & Ismail). By the same token, they seem to have a rather positive view of themselves as fanboys and fangirls; yet, many still feel that others (i.e. non-fanboys and non-fangirls) may have a less than stellar viewpoint of them, even though the literature would suggest that this stereotyping of the fandom culture is, by and large, a thing of the past (cf. Gray, Sandvoss, Harrington, et al.).

The data that was gathered in the survey has revealed that there *are* differences in the reasons that people have chosen to participate in fandoms, as well as which fandoms they have chosen to engage in, based on their giftedness and/or the presence of imaginational OEs. This is very important in light of the interview data because, based on the data from the surveys, fandom participants who are gifted with imaginational OEs did not *specifically* list the need for a community, a sense of belonging, or wanting a peer group as reasons for their fandom participation, yet the ancillary reasons that they listed all point to these very motives (e.g. "interacting with people with similar interests"); meanwhile, the two primary benefits of fandoms that all three clinicians from The Summit Center offered were a "sense of community" and a "peer group with like-minded individuals."

Chapter Five: Summary

Overview of Study

      This study tried to get at the heart of the fandom "problem" for gifted individuals with imaginational OEs who choose to participate in them—*why* do these people participate, in *which* fandoms are they active, *how* do they choose to interact in their fandoms, and *what* does their participation mean for them personally? In order to appropriately conduct this study, many steps were methodically undertaken, which commenced with a thorough review of the literature on fandoms (cf. Barton & Lampley, 2014, Gray et al., 2007, et al.), giftedness (cf. Hollingworth, 1924, Renzulli and Reis, et. al.), OEs (cf. Neihart et al., 2016, Webb, 2016, et al.), and belonging and community (cf. Gailliot & Baumeister, 2006, Leary & Baumeister, 2000, et al.). Next, partnership with the local organization, The Summit Center, which provided access to a gifted community as well as experts in the gifted field, was initiated. A comprehensive survey was then created, grounded in the literature (cf. Table One), and then utilized phenomenological methods (Creswell, 2013). This mixed-methods study used data gathered from the survey, which was marketed by The Summit Center, as well as from data gathered from interviews (Bernard, 2000) from expert clinicians from The Summit Center. One hundred fifty-six people completed the survey, which provided the quantitative data for this study, which was then analyzed for themes and trends (Creswell, 2013). Three Summit Center clinicians were interviewed for the qualitative aspect of this study, and this data was analyzed using the Dedoose data analysis software (Creswell, 2013).

      The Summit Center, the community partner for this study, is an organization that is dedicated to helping gifted individuals and their families in a variety of capacities (Summit

Center, 2016). The Summit Center provides counseling and psychotherapy, assessment

opportunities, support groups, and education about a wide range of topics that may affect the

gifted community, including Dabrowski's overexcitabilities (Summit Center, 2016). Summit

Center professionals include licensed psychologists, neuropsychologists, social workers, licensed

marriage and family therapists, parent consultants, coaches, and educational specialists (Summit

Center, 2016). Often, people who have had limited contact with gifted individuals are often

unaware of the many characteristics that gifted people often exhibit (Neihart et al., 2016).

One of the more common social-emotional characteristics of giftedness is the presence

of overexcitabilities (OEs); there are five main OEs: psychomotor, sensual, intellectual,

emotional and imaginational (Dabrowski, 1964). The imaginational OE is a heightened

imagination, and intensities may include: rich associations of images and expressions; frequent

use of images and metaphors, great capacity for invention and fantasy and detailed

visualizations, and elaborate dreams (Webb, 2013). People with imaginational OEs often mix

truth with fiction; create their own worlds and/or imaginary friends; it is difficult for them to

stay actively engaged if their imagination is not being utilized; and they are easily distracted by

their own creative and fantastic thinking (Webb, 2013). The gifted with imaginational OEs are

often misunderstood because people who are unfamiliar with OEs do not understand that the

manifestations of OEs are a permanent "condition" that, while it can be controlled and directed,

it cannot be "cured" or "remedied" (Neihart et al., 2016).

The literature on fandoms suggests that there is a strong and profound bond that is created

by the members of fandoms (Barton & Lampley, 2014). For all participants, not just those who

are gifted with imaginational OEs, there is the offering of community, a peer group,

understanding, and escapism for those who choose to partake, which, according to Lieberman

(2013), is necessary for any healthy human to have a happy, vibrant life. While the reasons for participation in fandoms have not changed greatly over the years, the perception of those who are immersed in this world—no longer are fanboys and fangirls seen as social "oddities" on the fringes of society (Gray et al., 2007). Now, that there is no longer any "real" social stigma attached to belonging to fandoms, and any stereotypes that allude to such are outdated and false, there is evidence, according to Gray et al. (2007), that some fanboys and fangirls embrace the idea of "otherness", and do not want to be seen as a part of a "mainstream" phenomenon; rather, their involvement provides them a sense of identity and belonging, which is a part of the draw to their community.

Purpose and Need for the Study

The purpose of this study was to determine and understand the role that fandoms play in the lives of the gifted with imaginational overexcitabilities. People spend a lot of time and money on the pursuits of fandoms (Gray, Sandvoss & Harrington, 2007), but what are they getting in return? Although mainstream America finds nothing wrong with the millions of dollars that people spend each year in the pursuit of watching their favorite sporting teams, which could be also considered to be "fandoms," those who are involved in non-sports fandoms are often seen as "odd", and "weird"—why is this (Gray, Sandvoss & Harrington, 2007)? If it is possible to expose why gifted people with imaginational OEs are willing to devote so much time and money to fandoms (Gray, et al., 2007), could it lend legitimacy to fandoms everywhere? Of course, there are plenty of people around the world who participate in fandoms who are not gifted—how *does* giftedness with the presence of an imaginational OE effect participation?

According to Lieberman (2013), belonging to a social group is vital to being healthy and vibrant. What options are available for those who are not able to make social connections easily (Walker, 2002)? Some of the very impediments to making social bonds (i.e. memorizing and categorizing vast amounts of information (and speaking about it incessantly), obsessions with fictional characters, engaging in elaborate fantasy worlds, etc.) are the very characteristics that make these individuals who they are (cf. Webb, Neihart et al., Daniels and Piechowski, etc.). According to Barton and Lampley (2014), these traits that often set the gifted with imaginational OEs apart from others, and even lead to some possible social anxieties and/or difficulties with fitting in (Silverman and Maxwell, 1995), are seen as an actual *benefit* in fandoms; therefore, perhaps if researchers knew *why* gifted people with imaginational OEs tended to participate in fandoms, then professionals could use this information to help non-fanboys/non-fangirls who are gifted with imaginational OEs to join as well?

Implications for Practice

Fandoms are fun and exciting (Scully, ul-Haq, Halladay, Bow-Spence, Wilson, Walker & Popplewell, 2015), and, according to *this* research, offer the opportunity for participants to find a community, a sense of belonging, and a peer group. This research is really exciting because social bonds are so important to a person's overall health and stability (cf. Lieberman, and Gailliot & Baumeister, 2006), yet many gifted people have social issues and/or awkwardness that precludes them from making friends and social connections easily (Neihart et al., 2016). If, however, they are exceptionally or profoundly gifted, then the chances of them meeting peers in their geographical area, even in a large city, can be very rare. If Hollingworth (1924) is correct, then there is one exceptionally gifted person (IQ of 160-179) in 10,000; and, there is one

profoundly gifted person (IQ of 180 or above) in 1,000,000; then how likely is it that an exceptionally or profoundly gifted person in a city, or worse, a town, might find an intellectual peer? If they do manage to find an intellectual or age peer, does it matter if they are age-peers (Luftig & Nichols, 1990)? If they cannot find intellectual peers, then the next best option for these unique individuals might be to find peers who share their same interests—no matter how "mainstream" or "quirky" they may seem (Gary et al., 2007).

People who choose to participate in fandoms often are looking for social interaction with people who have the same interests, or obsessions, as their own. They want to talk about it, play games about it, go to conferences about it, or write stories about it, and they want someone to share in their entertainment and adventure with them. They want to *experience* the world of "it," and they want someone else to be able to share in the joy of "it" with them. Fandoms allow people this very type of social interaction and peer group.

It is interesting that those who participated in the survey, by and large, did not list "joining a community" or "finding a peer group" as one of the reasons that they chose to participate in the fandom, yet, the actions that they described doing indicated just that—when they are blogging, writing/reading fanfiction, playing games, dressing up and going to conferences, doing research and following people of Facebook and Twitter they are interacting with others in specific, and social, ways, and are eager for reciprocal interaction from others in the fandom—there is an *expectation* of understanding and acceptance and *belonging* among those who interact in these groups. It is this very expectancy of reciprocity of giddy excitement that is the hallmark of fandom participation.

Some of the very characteristics that make the gifted with OEs so undesirable as friends, and in "normal" (non-fandom) social situations, are the very things that make them so valuable

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in fandoms (cf. Schneider, Clegg, Byrne, Ledingham & Crombie, Streznewski). Obsessive behavior, memorizing vast amounts of information, learning obscure (and created) languages, analyzing trends and finding anomalies in behaviors and patterns, or having a "one-track-mind,"—all of these behaviors and activities are highly prized within the world of fandoms, while they can be seen as vexing, annoying and irritating to those who do not share in the love of a particular fandom. Indeed, everyone has had the unfortunate experience of being "trapped" with "that one guy" who only talks about "that one topic" that nobody knows (or cares) anything about. Fandoms are the havens and social refuges for these people—the gifted with imaginational OEs are the ideal fit for fandom participation.

While the survey respondents did not overtly list "joining a community" or the need for "belonging" as reasons for wanting to join a fandom, these were the most influential benefits of fandom participants that all three clinicians enumerated. Does this lack of understanding of their "true" motives hint at a lack of understanding about themselves? While there was a large number of respondents who knew that they had an imaginational OE, do they truly know what this *means* and what the implications are? As one clinician said, the way that the person is able to leverage the OEs determines how successful and happy they will be in life—what if the person does not know that the manifestations of OEs are something that can be advantageous, and not just a hindrance? What if fandoms could be used as the platform for people to get to know themselves better than ever before? People tend to flock toward those who are like them (Hollingworth, 1926)—if those involved with fandoms with imaginational OEs were able to inform their fanboy/fangirl friends and peers about OEs, what they are, how they might manifest, and why it is important, then many more people would be able to learn about themselves from the very people that they trust and enjoy the most—their peer group.

This begs the question: if, as Hollingworth (1926) argues, gifted individuals need to interact with social peers of equal or similar intellect, and, as Webb (2013) has noticed, gifted individuals often have difficulty making effective social bonds with others, then what are the gifted supposed to do? It is not feasible to expect gifted individuals to go their entire lives without social groups simply because they cannot find a place where they fit in intellectually; indeed, Lieberman (2013) argues that this would be detrimental to the individual. What if, though, there were a "place" where the gifted could congregate with people with similar interests, and pursuits? Indeed, a place where they would not be judged for their "quirky" or "nerdy" interests, but, rather, they would be embraced for them? This is a scenario where a fandom *could* become very meaningful and impactful in the lives of the gifted.

The data presented in this study is potentially significant to the gifted community in another way: if gifted individuals with an imaginational OE are drawn to fandoms for particular reasons, how do gifted people with imaginational OEs fulfill these same needs in their lives if they are *not* participating in fandoms? If 95.65% of the gifted participants with imaginational OEs are drawn to fandoms because the "idea/character/storyline captured my imagination," how are non-fanboys/fangirls indulging their imaginative "obsessions"? Similarly, if 69.57% of participants who are gifted with an imaginational OE participate in fandoms in order to interact with people with similar interests, how are non-fanboys/fangirls interacting with their peers with similar interests? If fandoms are the locales where they are able to find and interact with people with similar interests, does this make it a "community"? If 69.57% of a subgroup participates in fandoms for the purpose of interacting with people with similar interests, does this not constitute the need to be a part of a community?

The data presented in Table Nine, in regards to the preferred platforms for fandom interaction has some interesting implications for the future of gifted educational programming. If the top three choices for interaction for both the gifted and the gifted with imaginational OEs are largely introverted pursuits (blogging, watching TV and movies, and reading), then what does this mean for appropriate educational programming? If students are interested in blogging—indeed, it was the top choice for the gifted with imaginational OEs at 25.69%--how useful could blogging, discussion boards, and other forms of social interaction be? Similarly, these are the preferred outlets for creative and social participation, therefore, how might they be leveraged, worldwide, to best enhance the educational landscape for the most creative of the gifted? Likewise, knowing what preferred methods for communication are, should this be informing the decisions of educators and legislators when they discuss Common Core standards for Career and College Readiness? How does introversion and extroversion play into educational and career planning choices currently? Knowing how important they are, how should they play into these areas?

Limitations of the Study

The results of this study suggest that the gifted with imaginational OEs who participate in fandoms in order to belong to a community, find a peer group, because the idea/character/ storyline caught their imagination. Regrettably, this study was limited in its scope—while the 156 survey participants met Bernard's (2000) requirements for sample size, it is rather limiting. In addition to the sample size, participants were limited to those who have subscribed to The Summit Center's listserve. While the partnership with The Summit Center access to a community that would have not had accessible without the support of an organization in the

field, having only one community partnership does put a limit on the access to potential participants. If more than one outside organization (or perhaps organizations in different states) had been linked to the study through partnership, then the potential participant pool would have been expanded greatly, which would have created that larger sample size.

The inclusion of minors is not currently a parameter of this study due to constraints, by IRB (Buss & Zambo, 2014). Since the researcher was bound to limit this research to those protocols and potential subjects that were presented to IRB as potential participants before the study was permitted to begin, she was not able to adjust the constituents of the participant pool based on new sources or leads provided by data sources that became available after receiving IRB approval for the study. Once the survey was disseminated by The Summit Center, potential contributors began to reach out, offering their time to be interviewed and to contribute to the study in some way because they felt that this study was important for those who could benefit from fandom participation. Potential participants who came forward after the survey was disseminated included: fanboys/fangirls, programmers, gamers, game writers, novelists, group fanfiction writer facilitators, parents of fanboys/fangirls, actors and actresses, directors, etc. Since these possible study constituents were not listed on the original scope and sequence of the study's protocols that were submitted to the University of Denver's IRB, however, IRB policies and procedures do not allow for these unplanned, potential resources (despite the rich data that would have been provided).

Need for Further Research

So much data was gathered during the course of this research that could not be reported out because, due to limitations of the IRB parameters, the data would have been incomplete. The

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foundations of this study could easily be taken and launched into a dozen more because the terrain is so rich, and the topics are so ripe for data collection. With the appropriate resources, namely, time and access to the appropriate sample frames, a researcher could delve into a range of topics that are all rooted in this foundational research.

Should further research be performed, an expanded the sample base would be beneficial. Of course, it would be ideal to present this survey to fandom participants on a large-scale—perhaps at a Comic-Con type event, which would have the potential to reach thousands of fanboys and fangirls. By targeting the fanboys and fangirls themselves, and *then* noting if they are gifted (with or without an imaginational OE), it should not only produce a larger "n" for the study, but could possibly provide some new insights, and additional themes could possibly come forth.

Similarly, the opportunity to interview, not only, more clinicians, but also fanboys and fangirls themselves, and other professionals who work with them (e.g. authors, game designers, and artists), fanboys and fangirls under the age of 18, and their parents and teachers would provide valuable data, which were unable for this study. The data gathered from these additional sources could shed light on new themes, and/or confirm and triangulate the new data provided by the additional data provided by the larger survey participant pool.

Future research into this topic would allow the potential to tease out some of the intricacies that arose during the disaggregation of the data gathered in this study. One of these intricacies is the differences that are inherent between adolescent and adult respondents. Not only is there the potential for differences in fandom preferences, but also in the platforms, and why they participate. This, of course, begs the question as to timing—a different possible area of study—how does the age of the respondent correlate to the fandoms that they are interested in?

That is, what do the data say in terms of the age of the respondent at the time that the topic that the fandom both imprinted on them and when it came out in the media. For example, would a man who was a 12-year old boy at the time of the release of the original *Star Wars* movie have a stronger attachment to the *Star Wars* franchise than a boy who is *now* 12 years old, and interested in *Star Wars*? Similarly, does the age of the respondent, in conjunction with the media type, affect devotion to the fandom? For example, does a *Harry Potter* fan who first became a fan by reading the books before the movies were ever made, have a stronger attachment than a fan who became loyal through the movie franchise?

When teasing out complexities based on semantics, the language of the study could be refined based on a new purpose. After the data were collected using the current survey protocol, it became apparent that additional questions could have been added that would have led to a much more meaningful understanding of the data. For example, the survey asked respondents "reasons" that they chose to participate, but what about "benefits" of participation? While a particular motivation might not have been an overt impetus to join the fandom (i.e. joining a community), it may have been the chief benefit of participation. Similarly, one of the research questions of this study asked for "which" fandoms, but an additional study could also determine "what type" of fandom. During the course of research, a myriad of fandom "types" surfaced including: Science Fiction, Fantasy, Shakespeare, Chaucer, LARPers (Live Action Role Players), furries, etc. Does the *type* of fandom being sought affect the actual fandom chosen?

Fandoms are evolving to meet the needs of participants every day. According to fanboys and fangirls (cf. blogs, personal communications, and fansites) the social scene of fandoms is beginning to change. An potential area of future research could cover the changing racial

composition of fandoms, and why they are changing. Also, what does "community" and "belonging" specifically mean to the fandom participants themselves?

Given some of the current controversies in the gifted field regarding the place of OEs and FFMs, future research that could be done to tease out the differences and subtlties between the two would be useful—both to the field of gifted and the field of fandom studies. A study that determined whether or not a distinction between OEs and FFMs needs to be made when studying fandom participation by the gifted could bring insight into other areas of gifted studies where the differences are more ambiguous.

Closing Comments

The purpose of this study was to examine the role of fandoms in the lives of the gifted who also have an imaginational OE. There was an underlying assumption of this study that fandoms offered gifted individuals with an imaginational OE a sense of community, and a peer group that understands their and their interests, as well as providing opportunities for escapism from some sense of their "real" life. According to the results of the survey and the interviews, fandoms *do*, indeed, provide a sense of community, as well as providing escapism and entertainment for participants, though the former does not seem to be the primary (conscious) reason they choose to participate.

Participation in fandoms fulfils a very real and important purpose in the lives of the gifted with imaginational OEs. In addition to this fact, it is obvious that the perceptions of those who belong to fandoms have changed over the past few decades, and the stereotypical stigma that goes along with being a fanboy/fangirl is no longer relevant. Be that as it may, people (including marketers, artists, and writers) may find it interesting to know about some of the characteristics

of imaginational OEs in order to cater to their needs more appropriately. The literature has made it clear that fanboys and fangirls are a very specific (and profitable) consumer market category—should marketers understand the needs, desires and wants of those who experience life in this uniquely intense way, perhaps both sides would benefit greatly. Finally, most of the survey participants did not list belonging to a community as a main factor in joining fandoms, yet it is undoubtedly one of the greatest benefits to participation; therefore, if more gifted people with imaginational OEs understood the rewards of joining fandoms, maybe more would join and partake in the communities, thus finding places where they truly felt that they belonged. Or, given the data, perhaps practitioners might see participation in fandoms as a possible "remedy" (or potential option) for those who have no peer group or place where they feel they belong.

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Appendix A: Definition of Terms

The terms below are used throughout this study. This list of terms is, by no means, exhaustive of the nomenclature that exists in the realms of fandoms, giftedness, quantitative or qualitative methodologies. Therefore, these terms are being included so that the reader will have some background and context when domain-specific vocabulary is used throughout this study.

Alternative hypothesis. An alternative hypothesis is a statistical test that is used to demonstrate that there is a real difference between variables that is not due to random variation (McCormick, Salcedo and Poh, 2015).

Anime. Anime is an animated style of Japanese film and TV, which is typically aimed at adults (Davies & Davies, 2015).

Asynchronous development. Asynchronous development is seen in children when one area of their brain develops at a rate incommensurate with the rest of the child's development. As Linda Kreger Silverman (1995) explains, children may be extremely developed in one area, such as academics, which puts their intellectual development far ahead of their chronological development; on the other hand, in the same students, their social development may either be at the appropriate chronological development for their age, or even a little behind, which creates a gap in development (Neihart et al., 2016).

Asymptotic significance. The asymptotic significance test is used in statistics in order to determine whether the sample drawn from the population is actually from the population or from a chance factor (McCormick et al., 2015).

Blog. A blog is a website or webpage that is updated regularly by a person, group or organization. The overall tone is conversational and informal (Duffett, 2013).

Categorical variable. A categorical variable is a variable used in statistics that has a finite number of possible values (McCormick et al., 2015).

Cf. Cf. is an abrieviation for "compare with" or "consult"—it is short for the Latin *confero, conferre, contuli, collates*: discuss, debate, confer (Whitaker, 2016).

Chi-square test for independence. The chi-square test for independence tests the association between two variables—that is, by comparing the data gathered with the data that the researcher is expecting to obtain (Gliner, 2009).

Coding. Coding is a process of disaggregating the data into smaller categories so that they can be classified, quantified, and analyzed for themes and trends (Creswell, 2013).

Comic-Con. Comic-Con is a trademarked event hosted by Comic-Con International. Comic-Con is a convention that is dedicated to multi-genre entertainment and fandoms, such as: comic books, anime, TV series, or cos-play (Sage Tree Productions, 2017).

Comic Book. A comic book is an animated magazine that consists of sequential panels of art, which may or may not include text, that represent the individual scenes of a story (Bury, 2014).

Confidence interval. The confidence interval is "a range of values within which there is a predetermined probability (95%) that the population parameters may fall" (Gliner, 2009, p. 408).

Continuous variables. Continuous variables are variables that have an infinite number of possible values (McCormick et al., 2015).

Cos-play. Cos-play is the practice of dressing up and acting like a character from a movie, book or TV show. Although it is not limited to the Japanese genres of anime and manga, it is very frequently associated with them (Davies & Davies, 2015).

Data integration. Data integration is the culminating synthesize of the trends, patterns and implications of many data sources, such as surveys and interviews (Creswell, 2013).

Df. The abbreviation "df" stands for "degree of freedom". In statistics, the degree of freedom of a calculation is the number of values that are able to vary, while still remaining true (McCormick et al., 2015).

Differentiation. Differentiation is a teaching strategy and pedagogy that allows the teacher to tailor the curriculum for the individual needs of the learners so that all students receive the most rigorous curriculum and learning experience as is appropriate for them (Heacox, 2009).

E.g. E.g. is an abbreviation for the Latin idiom "for example"—it is short for the Latin *exempli gratia* (Whitaker, 2016).

Escapism. Escapism is a tendency to engage in distraction from (often unpleasant) reality by seeking out different types of entertainment—often engaging in fantasy (Calleja, 2010).

Facebook. Facebook is a social network and media platform that allows users to follow others' posts, which may include text, pictures, and videos.

Fanboy/fangirl. According to Davies and Davies (2015), a fanboy/fangirl is "a passionate fan of various elements of geek culture, whom usually allows passion to override social graces, depending on severity may either be obsessed with or admire a specific fictional character or actor and are prone to congregating […]" (p. 5) with others with similar interests and loyalties.

Fandom. For the purposes of this study, the term "fandom" refers to the community, either officially or unofficially organized, that is dedicated to the love of a particular person, team, fictional series or a character (Barton & Lampley, 2014).

Fanfiction. Fanfiction is any piece of fiction that was written about a particular character or series by a fan to continue the story past the ending the author intended (Davies & Davies, 2015).

Fanship. According to Reysen and Branscombe (2010), a fanship is the interest that a person holds in a character, series, genre, etc.

Five-factor model of personality. The five-factor model (FFM) of personality is a very widely accepted typology of personality traits. The five factors are: (a) openness (e.g. tendency to be curious, creative and imaginative), (b) conscientiousness (e.g. the tendency to be methodical, meticulous, and efficient), (c) extraversion (e.g. the tendency to be loquacious, sociable, ambitious—the "type A" personality in other typologies), (d) agreeableness (e.g. the tendency to be kind, considerate, cooperative, and tolerant), and (e) neuroticism (e.g. the tendency to experience negative emotions) (Jeng and Teng, 2008).

Fixed mindset. A fixed mindset is the underlying understanding that a person's intelligence, abilities and talents are fixed at birth—a person has what they have, and there is no way to grow or expand upon this (Dweck, 2007).

Gifted. There is no, one definition of giftedness, and the definition may change (within an organization) depending on the purpose of identifying a person's "giftedness." According to the National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC),

> "Gifted individuals are those who demonstrate outstanding levels of aptitude (defined as an exceptional ability to reason and learn) or competence (documented performance or achievement in top 10% or rarer) in one or more domains. Domains include any structured area of activity with its own symbol system (e.g., mathematics, music, language) and/or set of sensorimotor skills (e.g., painting, dance, sports)" (2016).

Gifted community. Throughout this study, the term "gifted community" comes up again and again, and encompasses a wide group of people, including: gifted individuals, their families and friends, school and professional people and entities who serve, support and interact with the gifted, and anyone who is interested in the unique needs of gifted individuals. This is not an official community that "members" must apply to join; indeed, their very interest in the field of gifted, is enough to gain anyone *entré* (NAGC).

Graphic Novel. A graphic novel is a novel, and contains all of its components, that is presented in a comic book format (Davies & Davies, 2015).

Grounded theory. Grounded theory is a qualitative research methodology that seeks to generate a "unified theoretical explanation […of] a process or action" (Creswell, 2013, p. 83) from many sources of data. All data sources are generated from participants in the "process or action," but their experiences are analyzed in an objective manner using different coding techniques.

Growth mindset. A growth mindset is an underlying theory that says that intelligence, abilities and talents can be developed and grown with hard work, determination and grit (Dweck, 2007).

Impact. For the purposes of this study, "impact" refers to a strong effect of one "thing" on another in some way.

Interview. For the purposes of this study, "interview" refers to a formal conversation, in which respondents are asked a series of pre-determined questions that are asked of all interviewees for consistency. Additional questions, based on the expertise of the person being interviewed, may be added, but the addition will be noted in the data, as a "semi-structured" interview (Yin, 2016).

IQ. IQ refers to the intelligence quotient that all people have. Although the methods and

tools used to measure intelligence (e.g. the Stanford-Binet Test of Intelligence) are often

qualitative in nature, they offer a quantifiable way to measure intelligence, and compare the

intelligences of others (Terman, 1916).

IRB. The Institutional Review Board (IRB) is a committee that oversees the ethical

treatment of research participants when research specifically involves humans. For this study,

the University of Denver's Office of Research and Sponsored Programs will oversee the IRB

process (Buss & Zambo, 2014).

Likelihood ratio. A likelihood ratio is a statistical test used to test the goodness of fit

between either a null hypothesis test or an alternative hypothesis test (McCormick et al., 2015).

Linear-by-linear association. The statistical program SPSS labels the results of the

Mantel-Haenszel Test of trend as the "linear-by-linear association". The Mantel-Haenszel Test

of trend measures the association between the binary predictor and the binary outcome

(McCormick et al., 2015).

Manga. Manga is a style of Japanese comic book or graphic novel that is aimed

primarily at adults (Davies & Davies, 2015).

Member checking. Member checking is when the researcher consults the interviewees,

once the interviews have been completed, and verified that the information gathered by the

researcher accurately represents what the respondent was trying to say.

Null hypothesis. The null hypothesis is a statistical test that is used to prove that there is

no effect of one variable on the other, and that any differences seen are due to random variation

(Fowler, 2014).

Overexcitabilities (OEs). Dabrowski's Overexcitabilities (OEs) are "inborn intensities indicating a heightened ability to respond to stimuli […] Overexcitabilities are expressed in increased sensitivity, awareness, and intensity, and represent a real difference in the fabric of life and quality of experience" (Lind, 2001). There are five OEs: psychomotor, sensual, intellectual, imaginational and emotional (Dabrowski, 1964).

Pearson Correlation. The Pearson Correlation is a statistical test used to show if there is a relationship between two variables, either positive or negative. Values should range between a -1 (for negative relationship) and a +1 (for a positive relationship). If the value is equal to zero, it does not have a correlation (Bobko, 2001).

Perfectionism. Perfectionism is a social-emotional characteristic that some people experience wherein they feel an intense need and drive to perform perfectly at all times (Daniels & Piechowski, 2009).

Phenomenological study. A phenomenological study is a qualitative research methodology that seeks to determine and emphasize a common "phenomenon" from the experiences of a group of people. A transcendental phenomenological study will be conducted for this project, in which the "investigators set aside their experiences […] to take a fresh perspective toward the phenomenon under examination" (Creswell, 2013, p.80). The data is then analyzed for themes and trends.

Primary data collection. Primary data collection refers to data that the researcher has collected herself with known methods (Dillman, Smyth & Christian, 2014).

Protocol. For the purposes of this study, a "protocol" is the instrument being used to measure something (e.g. the actual survey or interview questions).

Pseudonyms. A pseudonym is a fictional name that is often assigned to respondents in order to provide and/or maintain anonymity and confidentiality, or the *perception* of these things, of the respondent and/or the people or group the respondent represents (Yin, 2016).

Qualitative data. "Qualitative data […] are said to be *subjective*, which indicates that they could be hard to classify or score. […] Usually these data are gathered from interviews, observations, or documents such as biographies" (Gliner, 2009, p. 9).

Quantitative data. "Quantitative data are said to be *objective*, which indicates that the behaviors are easily classified or quantified, either by the participants themselves or by the researcher" (Gliner, 2009, p.9).

Reliability. Reliability refers to whether or not the results of a study are able to be replicated in further studies (Dillman et al., 2014).

Sampling frame. The sampling frame is "the accessible population, [which is] the group of participants to which the researcher has access" (Gliner, 2009, p.146).

SENG. SENG refers to the international organization Supporting the Emotional Needs of the Gifted (SENG).

Selected sample. The selected sample is "the smaller group of participants who are selected from the larger [sampling frame] by the researcher and asked to participate in the study" (Gliner, 2009, p.117).

Ship. A ship is the concept of a romantic relationship between a fictional couple. Fans will often write fanfiction about characters that they "ship," but are not together in the original storyline (Hadas, 2013).

Social-emotional. For the purposes of this study, "social-emotional" refers to the experiences, expressions and management of emotions, and how the person articulates these emotions (Neihart et al., 2016).

Survey. For the purposes of this study, a "survey" is a standardized set of questions that all survey participants are asked. The data from their responses can then be quantified and analyzed. Surveys may include options for short answer responses from participants (Dillman et al., 2014).

Target population. The target population "includes *all* of the participants of theoretical interest to the researcher and to which he or she would like to generalize" (Gliner, 2009, p.146).

Triangulation. According to Yin (2016), triangulation "points to the ideal situation when evidence from three different sources or separate occasions converge" (p. 160-161) to validate the data that has been collected from multiple sources.

Twice exceptionality (2E). Twice exceptionality refers to people who have more than one characteristic that makes them "exceptional," and may be physical, emotional, intellectual, or sensory in nature. Often, "twice exceptionality" is applied to gifted individuals who also have some type of learning disability, such as: dyslexia, auditory processing disorder, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), or Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD)); although this is not the only manner in which a person could be considered "twice exceptional" (Kay, 2000).

Twitter. Twitter is a social media platform that allows users to post comments and pictures, and to follow other users' accounts. Text is limited to 140 characters per post. When a user posts something on Twitter, the post is a "tweet" and the act of posting is "tweeting". The logo for the company is a small song bird.

Underachievement. There is no, one definition for underachievement. For the purposes of this study, "underachievement" refers to a discrepancy in the products that a person is capable of creating, and what is actually produced (Ford, 2010, and Rimm, 2006).

Validity. Validity is an indicator that the study is *actually* measuring what it is purporting to measure (Creswell, 2013).

Appendix B: Proof of Formal Community Partnership

SUMMIT CENTER
Reach New Heights

Assessments · Consultation · Treatment

February 1, 2017

Stephen H. Chou, Psy.D.
Director of Training and Research
700 Ygnacio Valley Rd
Walnut Creek, CA 94596

Jessica DeLallo
Doctoral Student
The University of Denver
1300 Softwood Cir
Reno, NV 89506

Dear Ms. Jessica DeLallo:

RE: Community Partnership for Doctoral Project

It is my pleasure to engage in a community partnership between you and The Summit Center for your proposed University of Denver Doctoral Project: *Fandoms as a way of life: The role of fandoms in the lives of the gifted with imaginational overexcitabilities.*

We are willing to support your research in any way we are able. Before any research can ensue, we require official proof of approval for the project by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of the University of Denver, which will include any restrictions that you are required to adhere to during your research. Once we receive the decision of the IRB, we would like to support you by:

1. Disseminating the IRB approved survey for this project either on The Summit Center's website, in a newsletter, in a direct marketing campaign, or some combination of these three, for research purposes.
2. Allowing you to interview Summit Center professionals using an IRB approved semi-structured interview for research purposes.
3. Allowing you to proclaim partnership with The Summit Center on this project.

Although we cannot officially commit to attending your Doctoral Project Defense (either in person or virtually) on May 8, 2017 at 10:00 MST, we would like to thank you for this opportunity as your Community Partner.

It is our understanding that your research is fully funded, and that we are not required to provide additional funding for your participation in this project.

Thank you, and we look forward to working with your on your project.

Sincerely,

www.summitcenter.us | **San Francisco Bay Area** Walnut Creek · Napa · Burlingame · Cupertino
Daniel B. Peters, Ph.D., Executive Director | 700 Ygnacio Valley Rd., Ste. 320, Walnut Creek, CA 94596 · **925.939.7500** · fax 925.939.7501
Licensed Psychologist, PSY 19025 | **Southern California** Los Angeles · Torrance · Pasadena · Costa Mesa
Susan Daniels, Ph.D., Educational Director | **310.478.6505, Ext. 0**

Stephen H. Chou, Psy.D.
The Summit Center
Director of Training and Research

Appendix C: Survey Protocol with Qualtrics

Consent Form for Participation in Research

Title of Research Study: Fandoms as a way of life: The role of fandoms[1] in the lives of the gifted with imaginational overexcitabilities
Researcher: Jessica DeLallo, M.A., M.Ed., Doctoral Student with the University of Denver
Research Advisor: Dr. Norma Hafenstein, University of Denver
Study Site: Virtual

Purpose:
You are being asked to participate in a research study for a doctoral research project at the University of Denver in Denver, CO. The purpose of this research is to examine the role of fandoms in the lives of the gifted who also have an imaginational overexcitability.

Procedures:
Voluntary Participation:
Participating in this research study is completely voluntary. Even if you decide to participate now, you may change your mind and stop at any time. You may choose to stop, pause or discontinue the survey for any reason, at any time, without penalty or other benefits to which you are entitled.
Potential Risks:
This is a low-risk survey. Should data become compromised, there will be no identifying information attached to the raw data.
Benefits of Participation:
Possible benefits of participation in this study include providing awareness of, and information about, imaginational overexcitabilities, and how the participation in fandoms can be productive and constructive. Once people have a better understanding of what imaginational overexcitabilities are, and how beneficial they can be, then this study could bring legitimacy and purpose to fandom pursuits by the gifted community, instead of seeing participation as a "weird quirk" in which some gifted people engage.
Incentives to Participate:

You will not receive any compensation, reimbursement, or incentives for participating in this research project.

Confidentiality:

The researcher will keep the data collected from this survey safe by collecting and storing your data in the University of Denver's Qualtrics survey database and in her personal repository only. Your answers will be reported anonymously, and all demographic information is optional. While answering the final, open-ended questions are optional, please note that comments provided here may be quoted in the final research project report.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria:

In order to participate in this study, participants must be at least 18 years of age. The only other inclusion and exclusion criteria that will be used for subjects desiring to participate in this study is the acknowledgment of their consent to participate in the study.

Disclosure:

The research records are held by researchers at an academic institution; therefore, the records may be subject to disclosure if required by law. The research information may be shared with federal agencies or local committees who are responsible for protecting research participants, including individuals on behalf of the University of Denver.

Some things we cannot keep private and must report to proper authorities. If you disclose information about child abuse or neglect or that you are going to harm yourself of others, we have to report that to the appropriate state agency as required by law.

Questions:

If you have any questions about this project or your participation, please feel free to ask questions now or

contact Jessica DeLallo at JessicaDeLallo@gmail.com, or the project adivsor, Dr. Norma Hafenstein at Norma.Hafenstein@du.edu, at any time.

If you have any questions or concerns about your research participation or rights as a participant, you may contact the DU Human Research Protections Program by emailing IRBAdmin@du.edu or calling (303) 871-2121 to speak to someone other than the researcher.

[1] For the purposes of this study, the term "fandom" refers to the community (either officially or unofficially organized) that is dedicated to the love of a particular person, team, fictional series or a character, etc.

Acknowledgment of Consent to Participate in the Study:

By clicking "yes", I acknowledge the potential risks and benefits of participating in this research study, and I choose to consent to participate.

By clicking "no", I have acknowledged the potential risks and benefits of participating in this research study, and I choose NOT to consent to participate.

Yes, I consent to participate in this survey.   No, I do NOT consent to participate in this survey.

Verification of Age:

By clicking "yes", I acknowledge that I am at least 18 years of age, and would like to participate in this research study.

By clicking "no",I acknowledge that I am NOT at least 18 years of age, and am not able to participate in this research study.

Yes, I am at least 18 years of age   No, I am not at least 18 years of age

This next section includes demographic information. All demographic information is optional. The results of the survey will not be impacted by either your choice to include this information or your choice to exclude it. The data will be used for statistical purposes only.

Would you like to answer some demographic information?

Yes   No

Please note: All demographic information is optional--if you choose not to include your information, please mark "Intentionally left blank." The results of the survey will not be impacted by either your choice to include this information or your choice to exclude it. The data will be used for statistical purposes only.

What is your race?

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Less than high school

High school graduate (includes equivalency)

Some college, no degree

Associate's Degree

Bachelor's Degree

Master's Degree

Doctorate

Graduate or professional degree

Intentionally left blank

Please note: All demographic information is optional--if you choose not to include your information, please mark "Intentionally left blank." The results of the survey will not be impacted by either your choice to include this information or your choice to exclude it. The data will be used for statistical purposes only.

What is your marital status?

Single (never married)

In a committed relationship (not married)

Married

Separated

Widowed

Divorced

Intentionally left blank

Please note: All demographic information is optional--if you choose not to include your information, please mark "Intentionally left blank." The results of the survey will not be impacted by either your choice to include this information or your choice to exclude it. The data will be used for statistical purposes only.

With which gender do you identify?

Male

Female

Intentionally left blank

Please note: All demographic information is optional--if you choose not to include your information, please mark "Intentionally left blank." The results of the survey will not be impacted by either your choice to include this information or your choice to exclude it. The data will be used for statistical purposes only.

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How do you identify in the gifted community (please check all that apply)?

I am gifted (formally identified)	I have a family member and/or spouse who is gifted	I am a counselor, psychologist or psychiatrist who works with the gifted
I am gifted (not formally identified)	I am an educator of the gifted	I am an advocate for gifted children
I am a parent of a gifted child or of gifted children	I am a medical doctor who works with the gifted	I am interested in issues involving the gifted

For the purposes of this survey, a "fandom" refers to to the community (either officially or unofficially organized) that is dedicated to the love of a particular person, team, fictional series or a character, etc.

Please note: The researcher recognizes that there are *many* other fandoms that are not featured here. In order to ensure that many of the most popular fandoms were featured (without making the survey too cumbersome), it was necessary to choose a sample selection of fandoms. If you do not see your favorite fandom listed, *please* include it in the "other" category.

Are you familiar with Dabrowski's Overexcitabilities (OEs), and the imaginational OE, specifically?

I am familiar with Dabrowski's OEs, and I am also familiar with the imaginational OE

I have heard of the OEs, but I don't remember what they are

I am unfamiliar with the OEs

Have you, or anyone you know, ever suspected (or had it confirmed by a professional) that you have an OE?

Yes, it was confirmed by a professional that I have at least one OE

It has not been confirmed, but I am pretty sure that I have at least one OE

Someone close to me has told me that I may have an OE

I never really thought about the possibility that I might have an OE

I definitely do not have an OE, nor have I ever been suspected of having one

If you have, or are suspected of having, an OE, please indicate with which OEs you do/would identify: *(Check all that apply)*

Emotional OE   Psychomotor OE

Imaginational OE   Sensual OE

Intellectual OE

It is common for people with an imaginational OE to be very creative, like to fantasize and/or are interested in the arts; please indicate if you participate (now or in the past) in any of the below activities: *(Check all that apply)*

Act   Debate   Sculpt

Analyze art   Design   Shop

Analyze music   Draw   Sew/knit/crochet

Analyze literature   Game   Sing

Attend themed parties   Get tattoos   Tattoo others

Choreograph   Listen to music   Throw themed parties

Compose   Paint   Write music

Conduct   Play music   I am not interested in any of these things

Cook   Program   Other

Dance

Would you consider yourself to belong to any fandoms?

(For the purposes of this survey, a "fandom" refers to to the community (either officially or unofficially organized) that is dedicated to the love of a particular person, team, fictional series or a character, etc.)

Yes, I currently belong to 1 or 2 fandoms   Yes, I currently belong to 11+ fandoms

Yes, I currently belong to 3-5 fandoms   No, I am not a part of any fandoms at this time, but I am interested in them

Yes, I currently belong to 6-10 fandoms   No, I am not a part of any fandoms at this time-- they aren't really my "thing"

Please indicate which fandoms you currently belong to, and in which activities you currently engage for this fandom: *(Please select all that apply. List is part one of three.)*

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Please note: The researcher recognizes that there are many other fandoms that are not featured here. In order to ensure that many of the most popular fandoms were featured (without making the survey too cumbersome), it was necessary to choose a sample selection of fandoms. If you do not see your favorite fandom listed, please include it in the "other" category. Also, fandoms are listed alphabetically, not by the researcher's preference.

	Blogs	Books	Comic Books	Cos-Play	Facebook	Fanfiction (read)	Fanfiction (write)	Games	Movies	TV
Avatar: The Last Airbender	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Avengers (only, not all of Marvel)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
DC Universe	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Dr. Who	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Family Guy	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Firefly	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Fullmetal Alchemist	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Grimm	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Harry Potter	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Homestuck	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Please indicate which fandoms you currently belong to, and in which activities you currently engage for this fandom: *(Please select all that apply. List is part two of three.)*

Please note: The researcher recognizes that there are many other fandoms that are not featured here. In order to ensure that many of the most popular fandoms were featured (without making the survey too cumbersome), it was necessary to choose a sample selection of fandoms. If you do not see your favorite fandom listed, please include it in the "other" category. Also, fandoms are listed alphabetically, not by the researcher's preference.

	Blogs	Books	Comic Books	Cos-Play	Facebook	Fanfiction (read)	Fanfiction (write)	Games	Movies	TV	Twitt
Hunger Games	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

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	Blogs	Books	Comic Books	Cos-Play	Facebook	Fanfiction (read)	Fanfiction (write)	Games	Movies	TV	Twitt
Jane Austin (all works)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Justice League (only, not all of DC)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Legend of Korra	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Lord of the Rings	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Magic the Gathering	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Marvel Universe	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
My Little Ponies	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Narnia	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Pokemon	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Please indicate which fandoms you currently belong to, and in which activities you currently engage for this fandom: *(Please select all that apply. List is part three of three.)*

Please note: The researcher recognizes that there are many other fandoms that are not featured here. In order to ensure that many of the most popular fandoms were featured (without making the survey too cumbersome), it was necessary to choose a sample selection of fandoms. If you do not see your favorite fandom listed, please include it in the "other" category. Also, fandoms are listed alphabetically, not by the researcher's preference.

	Blogs	Books	Comic Books	Cos-Play	Facebook	Fanfiction (read)	Fanfiction (write)	Games	Movies	TV	T
Professional Wrestling	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	
Sherlock	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	
South Park	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	

	Blogs	Books	Comic Books	Cos-Play	Facebook	Fanfiction (read)	Fanfiction (write)	Games	Movies	TV	T
Star Trek (all)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	
Star Trek (classic only)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	
Star Wars (all)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	
Star Wars (original only)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	
Supernatural	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	
Twilight	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	
Walking Dead	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	
Xena: Warrior Princess	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	

Please list any fandoms to which you belong that were not listed in the three questions above.

[   ]

Please rank the activities below based on your preference in participating in them. *"1" is for your favorite activity, and "11" is your least favorite activity (though you may still enjoy it).*

Blogging

Reading books

Reading comic books

Participating in cos-play

Facebook (for fandom purposes)

Reading fanfiction

Writing fanfiction

Watching movies

Watching TV series

Tweeting (for fandom purposes)

Gaming

If you were to combine *all* of the time that you spent on *all* of your fandoms in one week, approximately how much time do you dedicate to fandom activities in one week?

Blogging	▼
Reading books	▼
Reading comic books	▼
Participating in cos-play	▼
Facebook (for fandom purposes)	▼
Reading fanfiction	▼
Writing fanfiction	▼
Watching movies	▼
Watching TV series	▼
Tweeting (for fandom purposes)	▼
Gaming	▼

If you were to combine *all* of the money that you spent on *all* of your fandoms in one week, approximately how much money do you dedicate to fandom activities in one week?

Blogging	▼
Reading books	▼
Reading comic books	▼
Participating in cos-play	▼
Facebook (for fandom purposes)	▼
Reading fanfiction	▼
Writing fanfiction	▼

Watching movies	▼
Watching TV series	▼
Tweeting (for fandom purposes)	▼
Gaming	▼

Have you ever attended a city, regional, state or national "Comic-Con" type convention?

Yes, I have attended 1-3 events   Yes, I have attended 10+ events

Yes, I have attended 4-5 events   I have not yet had the opportunity to participate in a "Comic-Con" type convention

Yes, I have attended 5-10 events

How many times have you attended a "Comic-Con" type convention?

City	▼
Regional	▼
State	▼
National	▼

In regards to your interests and participation in your chosen fandom(s), please choose all of the descriptors below with which you *personally* identify:

Awesome	Excitable	Imaginitive	Passionate
Clever	Fantastic	Intelligent	Spunky
Creative	Fun/Funny	Loser	Successful
Dorky	Giddy	Loyal	Weird
Ecclectic	Geeky	Nerdy	Well-read

In regards to your interests and participation in your chosen fandom(s), please choose all of the descriptors below with which you think *others* would identify you:

Awesome	Excitable	Imaginitive	Passionate
Clever	Fantastic	Intelligent	Spunky

Creative Dorky	Fun/Funny Giddy	Loser Loyal	Successful Weird
Ecclectic	Geeky	Nerdy	Well-read

In regards to your interests and participation in your chosen fandom(s), please identify all of the types of relationships that you have encountered since joining your first fandom (and on account of your participation in these fandoms):

Growing closer in a friendship	Growing further away in a friendship
Growing closer in a romance	Growing further away in a romance
Meeting new friends	Losing friends
Meeting a network/community of friends	Losing a network/community of friends
Meeting a significant other	Losing a significant other
None of the above	None of the above

In regards to your interests and participation in your chosen fandom(s), please identify any ways that co-workers, friends, and/or loved ones have urged you to abandon your participation in fandoms:

A formal intervention

Fighting

Ultimatum/Threats

Written/electronic request

Other

This question is not applicable to me

In regards to your interests and participation in your chosen fandom(s), please describe any *other* ways that co-workers, friends, and/or loved ones have urged you to abandon your participation in fandoms:

> [   ]

Why do *you* choose to participate in fandoms? *(Please check all that apply)*

Entertainment	There are free options	To feel "accepted"
For people to really*know* me	To be a part of a community	To interact with people with similar interests
The chance to feel like an extrovert even though I am actually an introvert	To be my own hero	To live out a fantasy
The idea/character/storyline captured my imagination	To escape from my "real" life	To meet friends
The loss of inhibitions	To experience a new adventure	To strengthen relationships
The opportunity to "get out of my head"	To experiment in a safe environment	Other

Please list any other reasons that describe *why* you choose to participate in fandoms:

Would you like to add anything else about fandoms and/or participation in fandoms?

Would you like to add anything else about imaginational overexcitabilities?

If you would like to share any other information, or have any questions, please feel free to contact the researcher, Jessica DeLallo at jessicadelallo@gmail.com.

Powered by Qualtrics

Appendix D: Interview Protocols

Demographic Sheet for Interview

Name: _____

Current Position: _____

How long have you been in this position? _____

How long have you been in the field of Psychology and/or Gifted Education? _____

_____

Brief description of your current position at The Summit Center *(Optional)***:**

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Interview Protocol

Please remember that all of the following questions are being asked in a generalized fashion. The researcher is not asking that you think of a particular case or person when answering these questions. The more detail that you can provide in your answers, without breaking confidentiality or anonymity of current or former clients, would prove most useful for the purposes of this research. Recognizing that you have probably not had the opportunity to study the data from all of your clients and former clients who have had an imaginational OE, some questions will ask for your professional *opinion, based on your past experiences and knowledge of the field. For the purposes of this study, a "fandom" refers to the community (either officially or unofficially organized) that is dedicated to the love of a particular person, team, fictional series or a character, etc.*

1. Over the course of your career, both private practice and working with The Summit Center, I am sure that you have worked with a number of people with overexcitabilities (OEs). Of the five OEs, how prevalent has the imaginational OE been in your practice? (*e.g. very common, common, not common, infrequent, etc.*)

2. What are some of the different types of challenges that people with imaginational OEs have exhibited? Why were these seen as "challenges", and by whom (*e.g. themselves, spouses, parents, et*c.)?

3. In your opinion, approximately how many (*e.g. some, many, most, etc.*) of your clients/former clients with an imaginational OE have had interests in different fandoms, and which ones were the most common? Do you know why?

4. In your opinion, to what extent (*e.g. mild, moderate, excessive, obsessive, etc.*) did your clients/former clients with an imaginational OE participate in fandom activities (e.g. reading, watching movies/TV, attending events, cos-play, etc.)? What are some of the more common participatory activities?

5. In your opinion, what would be appropriate interventions for clients/former clients with an imaginational OE who participated in fandoms *excessively* or *obsessively*? Why? Do you think interventions are appropriate for *mild* or *moderate* participation in fandoms?

6. In your opinion, did the age of your clients/former clients with an imaginational OE contribute to the degree in which they participated in the fandoms? How? Why?

7. In your opinion, do/did your clients/former clients with an imaginational OE exhibit a desire to seek out, find, meet or otherwise socially engage with others with their same fandom interests? To what degree (*e.g. lesser, same, greater, etc.*) would you say that they sought this social criteria out in others opposed to different criteria (e.g. intellect, profession, religion, etc.)?

8. In your opinion, in this regard only, do you think that your clients/former clients with an imaginational OE were understood by family, friends, colleagues and peers, society, etc.? Or do you think that they were misunderstood? Why do you think that this was?

9. In your opinion, in this regard only, do you think that your *clients/former clients* with an imaginational OE felt that they were understood by family, friends, colleagues and peers, society, etc.? Or do you think that they felt they were misunderstood? Do you think that *they* thought they were "weird", "quirky", "nerdy", etc. for participating in these fandoms? Why do you think that this was?

10. In your opinion, are/were clients/former clients with an imaginational OE typically *also* interested in more "mainstream" fandoms such as sporting events, pop culture figures, etc.

11. In your opinion, what are some of the reasons that your clients/former clients with an imaginational OE have chosen to participate in fandoms?

12. Have you ever encouraged a client/former clients with an imaginational OE to look into possible fandoms? (Which ones?) Why or why not?

13. Would you like to add anything else about your experiences with imaginational OEs?

14. Would you like to add anything else about clients/former clients with an imaginational OE who participate in fandoms?

Appendix E: IRB Documents

Project Overview

[1008316-1] Fandoms as a way of life: The role of fandoms in the lives of the gifted with imaginational overexcitab..

You have Full access to this project.	(Edit)
Research Institution	University of Denver (Colorado Seminary), Denver, CO
Title	Fandoms as a way of life: The role of fandoms in the lives of the gifted with imaginational overexcitabilities
Principal Investigator	DeLallo, Jessica, M.A., M.Ed.
Sponsor	Dr. Norma Hafenstein

The documents for this project can be accessed from the Designer.

Project Status as of: 03/15/2017

Reviewing Board	Initial Approval Date	Project Status	Expiration Date
University of Denver (DU) IRB, Denver, CO	02/17/2017	Active	02/16/2018

Package 1008316-1 is: 🔒 Locked   ◀◀ ◀ Package 1 of 1 ▶ ▶▶ | Jump ▼ |

Submitted To	Submission Date	Submission Type	Board Action	Effective Date	
University of Denver (DU) IRB, Denver, CO	02/01/2017	New Project	Approved	02/17/2017	| Review Details |

Shared with the following users:

User	Organization	Access Type
DeLallo, Jessica	University of Denver (Colorado Seminary), Denver, CO	Full
Hafenstein, Norma	University of Denver (Colorado Seminary), Denver, CO	Full

DATE:	February 17, 2017
TO:	Jessica DeLallo, M.A., M.Ed.
FROM:	University of Denver (DU) IRB
PROJECT TITLE:	[1008316-1] Fandoms as a way of life: The role of fandoms in the lives of the gifted with imaginational overexcitabilities
SUBMISSION TYPE:	New Project
APPROVAL DATE:	February 17, 2017
EXPIRATION DATE:	February 16, 2018
RISK LEVEL:	Minimal Risk
CONTINUING REVIEW:	Expedited Review
REVIEW PERIOD:	12 months
REVIEW TYPE:	Expedited Review
ACTION:	APPROVED
REVIEW CATEGORY:	Expedited category # 6 & 7

Category 6: Collection of data from voice, video, digital, or image recordings made for research purposes.
Category 7: Research on group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.

Thank you for your submission of the New Project materials for this project. The University of Denver IRB has granted FULL APPROVAL for your submission. This approval is based on an appropriate risk/ benefit ratio and a project design wherein the risks have been minimized. All research must be conducted in accordance with this approved submission. The IRB determined that the criteria for IRB approval of research, per 45 CFR 46.111, has been met.

This submission has received an Expedited Review based on applicable federal regulations. Please note that the following documents were included in the review and approval of this study:

- Advertisement - Information for Survey, dated 1/25/17
- Informed Consent Document, dated 1/25/17
- Appendix A: Waiver of Written Documentation of Informed Consent, dated 1/25/17
- DU IRB Application Form, dated 1/25/17
- Community Partner Letter--Summit Center, dated 1/25/17
- Expedited Review Request Form, dated 1/25/17
- Research Involving the Internet Form, dated 1/25/17

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- Recruitment Letter—Interview, dated 1/25/17
- Interview Protocol, dated 1/25/17
- Protocol Narrative, dated 1/25/17
- Questionnaire/Survey, dated 1/25/17

Please remember that informed consent is a process beginning with a description of the project and the assurance of the participant understanding. Informed consent must continue throughout the project via a dialogue between the researcher and research participant. Federal regulations require that each participant receives a copy of the consent document. Forms used beyond the expiration date stamped on the document are not valid.

Please note that any revision to previously approved materials must be approved by the DU IRB prior to initiation. Please use the appropriate revision forms for this procedure.

All UNANTICIPATED PROBLEMS involving risks to subjects or others (UPIRSO's) and UNEXPECTED adverse events must be reported promptly to the IRB. Please use the appropriate reporting forms for this procedure. All FDA and sponsor reporting requirements should also be followed.

All NON-COMPLIANCE issues or COMPLAINTS regarding this project must be reported promptly to this office.

This project has been determined to be a Minimal Risk project. Based on the risks, this project requires continuing review by the DU IRB no less than annually. Please use the appropriate forms for this procedure. Your documentation for continuing review must be received with sufficient time for review and continued approval before the expiration date of 02/16/18.

Please note that all research records must be retained in a secure location for a minimum of three years after the completion of the project.

If you have any questions, please contact the DU Human Research Protection Program at (303) 871-2121 or IRBAdmin@du.edu. Please include your project title and IRBNet number in all correspondence with the IRB.

This letter has been electronically signed in accordance with all applicable regulations, and a copy is retained within University of Denver (DU) IRB's records.

Generated on IRBNet

Project Title: Fandoms as a way of life: The role of fandoms in the lives of the gifted with imaginational overexcitabilities
Principal Investigator: Jessica DeLallo
Faculty Sponsor: Dr. Norma Hafenstein, University of Denver
DU IRB Protocol #: 1008316-1
Version Date: January 15, 2017

I. **Background:** The Summit Center is an organization that is dedicated to helping gifted individuals and their families in a variety of capacities. Although their facilities are located in Southern California and the California Bay Area region, people seek the expertise from the Summit Center from across the country. The Summit Center provides counseling and psychotherapy, assessment opportunities, support groups, and education about a wide range of topics that may affect the gifted community[1] (i.e. anxiety, ADD/ADHD, twice-exceptionality, perfectionism, stress, creativity, overexcitabilities, etc.). The Summit Center was founded by Dr. Daniel Peters, a licensed psychologist, and Dr. Susan Daniels, a professor and educational consultant, in order to help members of the gifted community to live a life that is as meaningful and successful as possible. Other Summit Center professionals include many licensed psychologists, neuropsychologists, social workers, licensed marriage and family therapists, parent consultants, coaches, educational specialists, etc. Many people who have had little (or no) exposure to gifted individuals are unaware of the many challenges that the gifted community often faces. One of the more obvious challenges that the gifted community must face is the presence of overexciteabilities.

Overexcitabilities, or "OEs", stem from the work of Polish psychologist and psychiatrist Kazimierz Dabrowski. Although Dabrowski's work on the Theory of Positive Disintegration, or "TPD", (i.e. the idea that a person's personality and development are part of a growth process based on the accumulated experiences of that person) was not specifically dedicated to the development of gifted individuals, the OEs, which are an important part of TPD, would later become instrumental in the understanding of many gifted individuals. According to Dabrowski (1964), OEs are innate intensities, which indicate that the body is processing stimuli to a heightened degree—people with OEs actually *experience* the world in a different way than people who do not have an OE do. There are five main OEs: psychomotor, sensual, intellectual, emotional and imaginational. The imaginational OE is a heightened imagination, and intensities may include: rich associations of images and expressions; frequent use of images and metaphors, great capacity for invention and fantasy and detailed visualizations, elaborate dreams, etc. Some of the ways that these intensities may manifest itself include: mixing truth with fiction; creating their own (often extremely elaborate) worlds and/or friends; it is difficult for them to stay engaged if their imagination is not being used; they are easily distracted by their own creative thinking, etc.

The purpose of this research is to examine the role of fandoms[2] in the lives of the gifted who also have an imaginational overexcitability. It is the hypothesis of the researcher that fandoms offer the gifted individual with an imaginational OE a sense of community—a group who understands him/her and his/her interests, as well as providing escapism from some sense of his/her "real" life.

Research questions include:
1. What types of fandoms do gifted people with imaginational OEs tend to follow

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[1] For the purposes of this study, the term "gifted community" refers to a wide group of people, and includes: gifted individuals, their families and friends, school and professional people and entities who serve, support, and interact with the gifted, and anyone who is interested in the unique needs of gifted individuals.
[2] For the purposes of this study, the term "fandom" refers to the community (either officially or unofficially organized) that is dedicated to the love of a particular person, team, fictional series or a character, etc.

and why?

    2. What *purpose* does the fandom fulfill within the lives of the gifted participants?

II. **Collaborative Research and Performance Sites:** This study has two components: a survey and interview portion. The survey will take place in a virtual setting. Once permission to collect data has been received from IRB, the Summit Center will post the survey on their website (http://summitcenter.us/) for a period of two weeks, and information about the study (including the survey link) may also be included in their newsletter and/or in a direct email campaign. The survey will collect quantifiable data about what types of fandoms (if any) participants are devoted to and why, as well as what purpose it fulfills within their lives.

    The interview portion of this study will be targeted to the two co-founders of the Summit Center, Dr. Daniel Peters and Dr. Susan Daniels, as well as the Director of Training and Research for the Summit Center, Dr. Stephen Chou, licensed psychologist. By interviewing these professionals who have been so integral to the success of the Summit Center, and who have worked with a large number of gifted individuals who have had imaginational overexcitabilities, the researcher would like to gather qualitative information about the topic, that can be analyzed using a grounded theory approach. All interview participants will be over the age of 18.

III. **Human Subjects Involvement**

    a. **Study Population:** The target population of this study is the gifted community. Since it would be impossible to survey and interview all members of the gifted community, a sampling frame will be used. Currently, the sampling frame for the survey is unknown ("n" cannot be determined until the surveys have been collected). Although the Summit Center is physically located in the state of California, people from around the country subscribe to their newsletter and participate in their webinars, trainings and other services. The sampling frame for the interviews is three (3): the co-founders of the Summit Center, Dr. Daniel Peters and Dr. Susan Daniels, and the Director of Training and Research, Dr. Stephen Chou.

        Participation by members of special vulnerable populations is not being sought. There are only two inclusion/exclusion criteria for this study: 1) participants must provide consent, and (2) participants must be at least 18 years of age.

    b. **Recruitment Plan:** The survey will be available on the Summit Center's website for two weeks, and may also be included in their newsletter and/or in a direct email marketing campaign. At the beginning of the survey, the Consent Form for Participation for Research will be posted, and participants must either select "Yes, I consent to participate in this survey" or "No, I do NOT consent to participate in this survey." If participants choose "No, I do NOT consent to participate in this survey," then the survey will be ended. If participants choose "Yes, I consent to participate in this survey," then they will be taken to the second question of the survey, which is requesting affirmation that the participant is at least 18 years of age. If the participant selects "Yes, I am at least 18 years of age," then the survey will begin. If the participant selects "No, I am not at least 18 years of age," then the survey will end.

        The interview portion of this study will be targeting the co-founders of the Summit Center, Dr. Daniel Peters and Dr. Susan Daniels, and the Director of Training and Research, Dr. Stephen Chou. All three of these participants have had extensive interactions with gifted individuals with imagination overexcitabilities through their work with the Summit Center,

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and should be able to provide specific insights and information regarding gifted individuals and their interests in fandoms. Of course, due to their professional requirements for confidentiality, information sought will not target any specific person or persons. All participants must sign a Consent Form for Participation before interviews will be set up. Interviews will not be conducted for subjects who have not completed and signed the Consent Form for Participation in Research, or who are under the age of 18.

IV. **Informed Consent Process:** All research will be conducted in English, since this is the only language that the researcher speaks, reads and writes fluently. The survey will be available on the Summit Center's website for two weeks, and may also be included in their newsletter and/or in a direct email marketing campaign. At the beginning of the survey, the Consent Form for Participation for Research will be posted, and participants must either select "Yes, I consent to participate in this survey" or "No, I do NOT consent to participate in this survey." If participants choose "No, I do NOT consent to participate in this survey," then the survey will be ended. If participants choose "Yes, I consent to participate in this survey," then they will be taken to the second of the question, which is requesting affirmation that the participant is at least 18 years of age. If the participant selects "Yes, I am at least 18 years of age," then the survey will begin. If the participant selects "No, I am not at least 18 years of age," then the survey will end.

The interview portion of this study will be targeting the co-founders of the Summit Center, Dr. Daniel Peters and Dr. Susan Daniels, and the Director of Training and Research, Dr. Stephen Chou. All three of these participants have had extensive interactions with gifted individuals with imaginational overexcitabilities through their work with the Summit Center, and should be able to provide specific insights and information regarding gifted individuals and their interests in fandoms. Of course, due to their professional requirements for confidentiality, information sought will not target any specific person or persons. All participants must sign a Consent Form for Participation before interviews will be set up. Interviews will not be conducted for subjects who have not completed and signed the Consent Form for Participation in Research, or who are under the age of 18.

Once interview participants have consented to participate in the interview, they may either scan and email their consent forms back to the researcher, or they can mail them to the researcher via USPS.

V. **Procedures:** This study will attempt to determine the role of fandoms in the lives of the gifted who also have an imaginational overexcitability, as well as determining what types of fandoms gifted people with imaginational OEs tend to follow and why? And, what *purpose* the fandoms fulfill within the lives of the gifted participants? In order to answer these questions, data will be gathered from a plethora of sources, including the literature, surveys and interviews.

Surveys: Using the University of Denver's survey software, Qualtrics, a survey will be designed in order to gather quantifiable data about individual participants' involvement and motivation with fandoms, and what purpose these activities satisfy in their lives. In order to ensure that a broad audience is reached for the survey sampling, the survey link will be posted on the Summit Center's website for a period of two weeks, and information about the study (including the survey link) may also be included in their newsletter and/or in a direct email campaign. Although demographic information will be asked in the survey (and optional for participants), no identifying information will be collected, and the individual responses provided will remain anonymous. The results of the survey will then be analyzed by using correlation and regression techniques (i.e. the chi-square test for independence) in order to test the association between participants' activities with

fandoms and their imaginational overexcitabilities.

There is an optional demographic section of the survey, which has been included for two reasons. The first reason that the optional demographic section was included is so that the researcher can gain more information about the participants so that a deeper analysis can occur; however, should a participant feel uncomfortable providing such information, the researcher does not want to disqualify them from the study. The second reason for including the demographic information is to determine where more research should be conducted in the future (i.e. if 85% of participants identify themselves as being "female", then perhaps more research should be conducted as to why there is such a discrepancy).

This is a robust survey, which includes multiple choice questions, Likert-Scale, and optional open-ended questions at the end. Fortunately for the participants, they will not all have to answer *all* included questions. The survey is designed to only show the participant the questions that specifically pertains to his/her experience with imaginational OEs and/or fandoms. For example, if participants choose not to answer demographic information, then these questions will not be shown. Similarly, if the participant is not interested in video games, then the questions related to this genre will not be shown. This unique feature that allows the participant to only see the questions that are applicable to them serves another purpose as well. At the beginning of the survey, the Consent Form for Participation for Research will be posted, and participants must either select "Yes, I consent to participate in this survey" or "No, I do NOT consent to participate in this survey." If participants choose "No, I do NOT consent to participate in this survey," then the survey will be ended. If participants choose "Yes, I consent to participate in this survey," then they will be taken to the second of the question, which is requesting affirmation that the participant is at least 18 years of age. If the participant selects "Yes, I am at least 18 years of age," then the survey will begin. If the participant selects "No, I am not at least 18 years of age," then the survey will end. There are only two inclusion/exclusion criteria for the survey: a) participants must consent to participate, and (b) participants must be at least 18 years of age.

Interviews: The partnership that was developed between the researcher and the Summit Center will allow the researcher the opportunity to interview several individuals who have had extensive interaction with the target group of this study—gifted individuals with an imaginational OE. The interviews will be semi-structured interviews, which may also include individualized questions tailored for the specific experts being interviewed. These interviews will then be coded for themes and trends using the Dedoose coding software. There are only three inclusion/exclusion criteria for the interview: a) participants must consent to participate, and (b) participants must be at least 18 years of age, and (c) participants must have had extensive interactions with gifted individuals with imaginational OEs.

Data Integration: This study will examine many different sources of data, and various types of data sets. In order to determine in which fandoms gifted individuals with imaginational OEs choose to participate and why, and what purpose their participation fulfills, both the qualitative and quantitative data will be gathered and integrated into one coherent narrative.

Validity and Reliability: It is not enough to simply collect data, and then report out on it. A thorough analysis of the data must be performed by the researcher, which actually measures what the researcher is trying to measure (i.e. making sure that the data are valid), and that the results can then be replicated in further studies (i.e. making sure that the data are reliable).

Since this study is extrapolating the perceptions of the sampling frame and applying it to the target population, it is necessary that the researcher gather as many responses from the sample frame as possible—the larger the sample size, the more likely (statistically) it is to be reliable. Therefore, this study will be using a confidence interval of 95% in order to establish that the data presented can then be appropriately applied to the target population

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with a strong confidence level. The data will be analyzed using correlation techniques (i.e. chi-squared method) in order to determine if the participation in fandoms is related to the imaginational OE of the gifted participants.

Similarly, in order to ensure that the data that are collected are reproducible, not only is it important to have a large sample frame, but it is also imperative that the tool itself, in this case the survey, have enough questions to answer the underlying research question, while not being so laborious as to drive prospective participants away from the study. Therefore, the survey will be succinct, rather than short, and focus on multiple choice, ranking, Liker-scale type questions with some open-ended, optional responses at the end (optional questions on demographics will not be counted in the overall length of the survey because the responses to these questions will not be necessary for the overall results of the study).

VI. **Materials and Devices:** The scope of this research study encompasses two distinct groups: the gifted community as a whole, and the co-founders and Director of Training and Research for the Summit Center. The target population for this study is the entire gifted community, which is impossible to survey. Therefore, it is necessary to sample as many members of the target population as possible for this study so that their experiences can be extrapolated out for the rest of the community members who did not participate in the study. In order to determine the sampling frame for the gifted community, a survey will be posted on the Summit Center website for two weeks, and may also include information (and the survey link) in the Summit Center's newsletter and/or a direct email campaign; those who willingly choose to participate (and meet the participation criteria) will become the selected sample for the quantitative portion of this study.

Similarly, the target population for the qualitative portion of this study, the interview, will include only three practitioners in the gifted community, however, due to their roles in the Summit Center, and their extensive backgrounds in the field, this data, too, should be able to be extrapolated into a generalization, which should provide more context to the quantitative data provided by the survey.

VII. **Risk Assessment:** The survey is a low-risk survey. Should data become compromised, there will be no identifying information attached to the raw data.

Although the interview, is also low-risk, there are some potential risks and/or discomforts that *may* be experienced by participants. If the participant feels uncomfortable at any time, the interview may be stopped, and participants may request that certain quotes not be used in the final research project report.

V. **Potential Benefits:** Possible benefits of participation in this study include providing awareness of, and information about, imaginational overexcitabilities, and how the participation in fandoms can be productive and constructive. Once people have a better understanding of what imaginational overexcitabilities are, and how beneficial they can be, then this study could bring legitimacy and purpose to fandom pursuits by the gifted community, instead of seeing participation as a "weird quirk" in which some gifted people engage.

VI. **Confidentiality:** The researcher will keep the results and the data collected from the survey safe by collecting and storing the data in the University of Denver's Qualtrics survey database, and in her personal repository only. All answers will be reported anonymously, and demographic information is optional.

The researcher will keep the results and the data collected from the interviews safe by

storing this data in her own personal repository and in the secured database of the Dedoose Data-management System. Participants' identities will be kept private when information is presented or published about this study, unless they have expressly allowed the researcher to publish this information with a specific purpose.

References: Dabrowski, K. (1964). Positive disintegration. Boston: Little Brown.

Daniels, S., & Piechowski. M. M. (2009). *Living with intensity*. Tucson, AZ: Great Potential Press.

Summit Center. (2016). In *Summit Center*. Retrieved January 4, 2017, from http://summitcenter.us/

APPENDIX A – INFORMED CONSENT WAIVERS
FOR SOCIAL BEHAVIORAL RESEARCH ONLY

Waiver of Documentation of Informed Consent

In some instances, the written consent of subject increases risk of exposure or embarrassment. The IRB may in some specific instances waive documentation per 45 CFR 46.117

1. An IRB may waive the requirement for written documentation of consent but still require that consent be obtained if either of the following conditions exist: (select the conditions that apply)

   ☑ The only record linking the subject and the research would be the consent form and the principle risk of the research would be the potential harm from a breach of confidentiality; (the IRB may allow an option to sign or decline)

   ☐ The research involves minimal risk and includes no procedures for which written consent is normally required outside the research context.

Note: The IRB may, in either case, require the researcher to provide the participant with a written statement about the research.

2. Describe process for "providing pertinent information" to subjects.

   At the beginning of the survey, the Consent Form for Participation for Research will be posted, and participants must either select "Yes, I consent to participate in this survey" or "No, I do NOT consent to participate in this survey." If participants choose "No, I do NOT consent to participate in this survey," then the survey will be ended. If participants choose "Yes, I consent to participate in this survey," then they will be taken to the second question of the survey, which is requesting affirmation that the participant is at least 18 years of age. If the participant selects "Yes, I am at least 18 years of age," then the survey will begin. If the participant selects "No, I am not at least 18 years of age," then the survey will end.

Waiver of Informed Consent

The IRB may, in some specific instances, waive the requirement for informed consent in accordance with 45 CFR 46.116(d)

1. Select the following that apply to this research:

   ☑ The research involves no more that minimal risk to the subjects.

   ☑ A waiver will not adversely affect the rights and welfare of the subjects.

DU HRPP/IRB – Office of Research Integrity & Education
Appendix A: Waiver of Informed Consent / Waiver of Documentation of Informed Consent, v2, 9/2/16

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√ The research could not practicably be carried out without waiver or alteration.

(All answers must be checked to qualify for a waiver)

√ And:

Where appropriate, the subject will be provided with additional pertinent information after participation.

2. Describe process for "providing pertinent information":

At the beginning of the survey, the Consent Form for Participation for Research will be posted, and participants must either select "Yes, I consent to participate in this survey" or "No, I do NOT consent to participate in this survey." If participants choose "No, I do NOT consent to participate in this survey," then the survey will be ended. If participants choose "Yes, I consent to participate in this survey," then they will be taken to the second question of the survey, which is requesting affirmation that the participant is at least 18 years of age. If the participant selects "Yes, I am at least 18 years of age," then the survey will begin. If the participant selects "No, I am not at least 18 years of age," then the survey will end.

The page that posts the Consent Form for Participation for Research, which appears at the beginning of the survey, will also have the contact information of the researcher and the research advisor, should anyone have any other questions, or want more information about the project.

DU HRPP/IRB – Office of Research Integrity & Education
Appendix A: Waiver of Informed Consent / Waiver of Documentation of Informed Consent, v2, 9/2/16

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Jessica Beth DeLallo

1300 Softwood Cir Reno, NV 89506

JessicaDelallo@gmail.com

(H) 775-828-5350 · (C) 530-386-2786

Consent Form for Participation in Research

Title of Research Study: Fandoms as a way of life: The role of fandoms in the lives of the gifted

with imaginational overexcitabilities

Researcher: Jessica DeLallo, M.A., M.Ed., Doctoral Student with the University of Denver

Research Advisor: Dr. Norma Hafenstein, University of Denver

Study Site: In person or virtual

Purpose

You are being asked to participate in a research study. The purpose of this research is to examine

the role of fandoms[1] in the lives of the gifted who also have an imaginational overexcitability. It

is the hypothesis of the researcher that fandoms offer the gifted individual with an imaginational

OE a sense of community—a group who understands him/her and his/her interests, as well as

providing escapism from some sense of his/her "real" life.

> Research questions include:
> 1. What types of fandoms do gifted people with imaginational OEs tend to follow and why?
> 2. What *purpose* does the fandom fulfill within the lives of the gifted participants?

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[1] For the purposes of this study, the term "fandom" refers to the community (either officially or unofficially organized) that is

dedicated to the love of a particular person, team, fictional series or a character, etc.

Procedures

If you participate in this research study, you will be asked to be interviewed by the researcher (either in person, via Skype, telephone, email, mail, etc.).

Voluntary Participation

Participating in this research study is completely voluntary. Even if you decide to participate now, you may change your mind and stop at any time. You may choose to stop, pause or discontinue the interview for any reason, at any time, without penalty or other benefits to which you are entitled.

Risks or Discomforts

Although this interview is low-risk, there are some potential risks and/or discomforts that *may* be experienced by participants. If the participant feels uncomfortable at any time, the interview may be stopped, and participants may request that certain quotes not be used in the final research project report.

Benefits

Possible benefits of participation in this study include providing awareness of, and information about, imaginational overexcitabilities, and how the participation in fandoms can be productive and constructive. Once people have a better understanding of what imaginational overexcitabilities are, and how beneficial they can be, then this study could bring legitimacy and purpose to fandom pursuits by the gifted community, instead of seeing participation as a "weird quirk" in which some gifted people engage.

Incentives to participate

You will not receive any compensation, reimbursement, or incentives for participating in this research project.

Alternatives (if applicable)

If you would like to participate in the study, but not in an interview, please complete the attached, anonymous survey about your (more general) experiences with gifted individuals with imaginational overexcitabilities and their interests/involvements in fandoms.

Confidentiality

The researcher will keep your information safe throughout this study by collecting and storing your data in her personal repository, and the secured Dedoose Data-management System. Your individual identity will be kept private when information is presented or published about this study, unless you have expressly allowed her to publish this information for a specific purpose.

The research records are held by researchers at an academic institution; therefore, the records may be subject to disclosure if required by law. The research information may be shared with federal agencies or local committees who are responsible for protecting research participants, including individuals on behalf of the University of Denver.

Some things we cannot keep private and must report to proper authorities. If you disclose information about child abuse or neglect or that you are going to harm yourself of others, we have to report that to the appropriate state agency as required by law.

Questions

If you have any questions about this project or your participation, please feel free to ask questions now or contact the principle researcher, Jessica DeLallo at JessicaDelallo@gmail.com, or the project advisor, Dr. Norma Hafenstein, at Norma.Hafenstein@du.edu at any time.

If you have any questions or concerns about your research participation or rights as a participant, you may contact the DU Human Research Protection Program by emailing IRBAdmin@du.edu or calling (303) 871-2121 to speak to someone other than the researcher.

Options for Participation

Please initial your choice for the options below:

___The researcher may contact me again to participate in future research activities.

Please take all the time you need to read through this document and decide whether you
would like to participate in this research study.

_____   _____
           Participant Signature   **Date**

Jessica Beth DeLallo

1300 Softwood Cir
Reno, NV 89506
JessicaDelallo@gmail.com
(H) 775-828-5350 · (C) 530-386-2786

Dear *[insert name],*

My name is Jessica DeLallo, and I am a doctoral student from the Morgridge College of Education at the University of Denver. I am writing to invite you to participate in my research study about the role of fandoms[2] in the lives of the gifted who also have an imaginational overexcitability. You are being asked to participate in this study because of your extensive expertise in this area as well as your affiliation with The Summit Center.

If you decide to participate in this study, you will be interviewed either in person or virtually. I would like to either video or audio record all interviews so that the transcriptions can later be coded for trends and themes. Unfortunately, there will be no compensation for your participation in this study.

Remember, participation in this study is completely voluntary. If you would like to participate, please sign and return the attached consent form. If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to call me or email me. Please also feel free to contact my faculty advisor, Dr. Norma Hafenstein, at Norma.Hafenstein@du.edu.

Thank you very much for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Jessica B. DeLallo

Enclosures (1)

JBD

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[2] For the purposes of this study, the term "fandom" refers to the community (either officially or unofficially organized) that is

dedicated to the love of a particular person, team, fictional series or a character, etc.

DU IRB - PROTOCOL SPECIFIC FORMS

INSTRUCTIONS:

1) Go to FILE, and then SAVE AS to save this document to your computer. If you cannot save the form, contact the DU IRB Office (irbadmin@du.edu) before proceeding.

2) This document should be used to access and complete DU IRB's "Protocol Specific Forms". **TO ACCESS FORMS, PLEASE CHECK THE APPROPRIATE BOX(ES) AND THEN SCROLL DOWN.**

3) Check all that apply and complete corresponding forms.

4) Save finished Form. (Make sure you aren't saving to the Temp, or Downloads folder)

5) Upload to IRBNet by going to the Project Designer page and then clicking "Add Documents".

NOTES:

1. IF YOU ARE LOOKING FOR THE DU IRB APPLICATION FORM, please do so by going to the Designer page in IRBNET, click on "Add Documents", scroll down, and then "Add Online Document". For more information, see the "All Human Subjects Researchers - READ ME FIRST" document in the DU IRB Forms and Templates Library.

2. IF YOU ARE LOOKING FOR OTHER FORMS NOT LISTED HERE (i.e. the Multi Site/ Non-DU Collaborators Form), then the forms are currently being edited/ are likely unavailable. Please proceed without them at this time.

☒ Expedited Review Form

☐ Secondary Data Use Form *(for research involving existing data)*

☒ Waivers of Full or Partial Consent *(this is also used when written signature will not be obtained)*

☒ Research Involving the Internet *(for internet surveys or data collected online)*

☐ International Research

☐ Research Involving Minors

EXPEDITED REVIEW FORM

Instructions: To qualify for Expedited Review, the research *must be no more than minimal risk* and qualify under one of the Expedited Review categories below.
Please note that Expedited does not mean "faster" review; it simply means that your submission does not need to be reviewed by the Full Board at a convened IRB meeting.

I. Does this project meet the definition of minimal risk? ☒ Yes ☐ No

(A risk is minimal where the probability and magnitude of harm or discomfort anticipated in the proposed research are not greater, in and of themselves, than those ordinarily encountered in daily life or during the performance of routine physical or psychological examinations or tests.)

If no, your research is not eligible for expedited review.

II. Does this study involve any of the following:

a. Research Involving Prisoners as subjects: ☐ Yes ☒ No

b. Research that includes genetics testing with direct or indirect Identifiers: ☐ Yes ☒ No

c. Research involving Major Deception: ☐ Yes ☒ No

Major Deception: Mislead subjects about their health status, the researchers, or the research purpose
Minor Deception: Incomplete disclosure of some purpose of the study to avoid biasing results

d. Research involving consent via proxy: ☐ Yes ☒ No

e. Research involving emergency waiver of consent: ☐ Yes ☒ No

f. Classified Research involving human subjects: ☐ Yes ☒ No

g. Requests for non-significant risk determination for devices: ☐ Yes ☒ No

h. Prospectively validating greater than minimal risk health care: ☐ Yes ☒ No

If yes to any of the above, your research is not eligible for expedited review.

I. **Instructions:** Check all of the following categories that apply to his research. More than one category may be checked. If the research does not fit any of the categories below, it must be reviewed at Full Board even if it is minimal risk.

☐ Category 1: Clinical Studies of drugs and medical devices ONLY when conditions (a) OR (b is met.
 a. Research on drugs for which an investigational new drug application (21 CFR Part 312) is not required. (Note: Research on marketed drugs that significantly increases the risks or decreases the acceptability of the risk associated with the use of the product is not eligible for expedited review.)
 b. Research of medical devices for which
  i. an investigational device exemption application (21 CFR Part 812) is not required; OR
  ii. the medical device is cleared/approved for marketing and the medical device is being used in accordance with its cleared/approved labeling.

DU IRB - PROTOCOL SPECIFIC FORMS

IRBNET ID #: 1008316-1

PI NAME: Jessica DeLallo

☐ **Category 2:** Collection of blood samples by finger stick, heel stick, ear stick, or venipuncture as follows:
  - a. from healthy, non-pregnant adults who weigh at least 110 pounds. For these subjects, the amounts drawn may not exceed 550 ml in an 8 week period and collection may not occur more frequently than 2 times per week; OR
  - b. from other adults and children considering the age, weight and health of the subjects, the collection procedure, the amount of blood to be collected, and the frequency with which it will be collected. For these subjects, the amount may not exceed the LESSER of 50 ml or 3ml per kilogram in an 8 week period and collection may not occur more frequently than 2 times per week.

☐ **Category 3.** Prospective collection of biological specimens for research purposes by noninvasive means.
  - a. Hair and nails clippings in a non disfiguring manner
  - b. deciduous teeth at time of exfoliation or if routine patient care indicates need for extraction
  - c. permanent teeth if routine patient care indicates need for extraction
  - d. excreta and external secretions (including sweat)
  - e. uncannulated saliva collection either in an unstimulated fashion or stimulated by chewing gumbase ow wax or applying a dilute citric solution to the tongue
  - f. placenta removed at delivery
  - g. amniotic fluid obtained at the time of rupture of the membrane prior to or during labor
  - h. supra- and subgingival dental plaque and calculus provided the collection procedure is not more invasive than routine prophylactic scaling of the teeth and the process is accomplished in accordance with accepted prophylactic techniques
  - i. mucosal and skin cells collected by buccal scraping or swab, skin swab, or mouth washings
  - j. sputum collected after saline mist nebulization

☐ **Category 4.** Collection of data through noninvasive procedures (not involving general anesthesia or sedation) routinely employed in clinical practice, excluding procedures involving x-rays or microwaves. Where medical devices are employed, they must be cleared/approved for marketing. (Studies intended to evaluate the safety and effectiveness of the medical device are not generally eligible for expedited review, including studies of cleared devices for new indications.)
  - Examples:
    - a. physical sensors that are applied either to the surface of the body or at a distance and do not involve input of significant amounts of energy into the subject or are an invasion of the subject's privacy.
    - b. weighing or testing sensory acuity.
    - c. magnetic resonance imaging.
    - d. electrocardiography, electroencephalography, thermography, detection of naturally occurring radioactivity, ultrasound, electroretinography, diagnostic infrared imaging, doppler blood flow, and echocardiography.
    - e. moderate exercise, muscular strength testing, body composition assessment, and flexibility testing where appropriate given the age, weight and health of the individual.

☐ **Category 5.** Research involving materials (data, documents, records, or specimens) that have been collected, or will be collected, solely for non-research purposes (such as medical treatment or diagnosis) (Note: Some research in the category may be exempt from HHS Regulations for the protection of human subjects 45 CFR 46.101(b)(4). This listing refers only to research that is NOT exempt.)

☒ **Category 6.** Collection of data from voice, video, digital, or image recordings made for research purposes.

☒ Category 7. Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including but not limited to research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavioral) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies. (Note: Some research in this category may be exempt from the HHS Regulations for the protection of human subjects. 45 CFR 46.101(b)(2) and (b)(3). This listing refers only to research that is not exempt)

WAIVERS OR ALTERATIONS OF INFORMED CONSENT

Instructions: Except as provided below, written documentation of informed consent that embodies all the required elements of informed consent, as described in 45 CFR 46.116, is required for all research participants. (See "DU IRB Resource: Informed Consent Guidance" for more information).

With sufficient justification, the IRB may approve a consent process that does not include or alters some or all of the elements of informed consent, provided that it finds and documents specific requirements. If requesting a **waiver of consent** or a **waiver of documentation of consent**, justify such in accordance with the criteria established under 45 CFR 46.116(d)(1-4) or 45 CRF 46.117(c)(1 or 2).

NOTE: The research must involve no more than minimal risk to the participants. Minimal risk means that the probability and magnitude of harm or discomfort anticipated in the research are not greater in and of themselves than those ordinarily encountered in daily life or during the performance of routine physical or psychological examinations or tests.

This request is for (check all that apply):

☒ Waiver or Alteration of Informed Consent

☒ Waiver of Written Documentation of Consent

☐ Waiver of Parental Permission

Waiver of consent: If requesting a waiver or alteration from the requirements for obtaining informed consent, provide **protocol-specific responses** to items below that describe why the waiver or alteration is being requested for this research.

An IRB may approve a consent procedure which does not include, or which alters, some or all of the elements of informed consent set forth above, or waive the requirement to obtain informed consent provided the IRB finds and documents that one of the following conditions are met:

(Please clarify regarding application of consent waiver and then select one of the options below and answer each of the corresponding items)

Briefly clarify scope of the proposed waiver:

> For those participants who are completing a survey, they will see the the Consent Form for Participation for Research, and participants must either select "Yes, I consent to participate in this survey" or "No, I do NOT consent to participate in this survey." If participants choose "No, I do NOT consent to participate in this survey," then the survey will be ended. If participants choose "Yes, I consent to participate in this survey," then they will be taken to the second question of the survey, which is requesting affirmation that the participant is at least 18 years of age. If the participant selects "Yes, I am at least 18 years of age," then the survey will begin. If the participant selects "No, I am not at least 18 years of age," then the survey will end.
>
> If participants were required to sign a consent form, it would be the only identifying information that would link them to the study.

☒ **Meets criteria under 45 CFR 46.116(d)** (more common):

1. Describe why the proposed waiver poses no more than minimal risk to the participants:

The data gathered from the survey will be completely anonymous. If participants were required to sign a consent form, it would be the only identifying information that would link them to the study.

2. Describe why the waiver or alteration will not adversely affect the rights and welfare of the participants:

The waiver will actually protect the anonymity of the participants, rather than providing adverse affects.

3. Describe why the research could not practicably be carried out without the waiver or alteration of informed consent:

If participants were required to sign a consent form, it would be the only identifying information that would link them to the study.

4. Debriefing

4a. Do you plan to debrief subjects after study completion? (i.e. for research involving deception)

☐ Yes ☒ No

4b. Do you expect that additional pertinent information will become available during or after the research?

☐ Yes ☒ No

4c. If yes to either, describe how the information will be provided to subjects:

☐ **Meets criteria under 45 CFR 46.116(c) (rarely applies):**

1. The research or demonstration project is to be conducted by or subject to the approval of state or local government officials and is designed to study, evaluate, or otherwise examine: (i) public benefit or service programs; (ii) procedures for obtaining benefits or services under those programs; (iii) possible changes in or alternatives to those programs or procedures; or (iv) possible changes in methods or levels of payment for benefits or services under those programs. **Please Justify:**

2. Describe why the research could not practicably be carried out without the waiver or alteration of informed consent:

Waiver of written [or signed] documentation of consent: If requesting a waiver or alteration from the requirements for written documentation of informed consent, justify such in accordance with *at least* one of the criteria established under 45 CFR 46.117(c)(1 *or* 2).

(Please provide a description of the proposed consent procedure and then choose one of the justifications below.)

Briefly describe the proposed consent procedure:

For those participants who are completing a survey, they will see the the Consent Form for Participation for Research, and participants must either select "Yes, I consent to participate in this survey" or "No, I do NOT consent to participate in this survey." If participants choose "No, I do NOT consent to participate in this survey," then the survey will be ended. If participants choose "Yes, I consent to participate in this survey," then they will be taken to the second question of the survey, which is requesting affirmation that the participant is at least 18 years of age. If the participant selects "Yes, I am at least 18 years of age," then the survey will begin. If the participant selects "No, I am not at least 18 years of age," then the survey will end.

If participants were required to sign a consent form, it would be the only identifying information that would link them to the study.

Submit a copy of the information sheet or written script of the information to be provided orally to participants during the consent process. You may simply use the DU IRB consent template and remove the signature lines at the bottom. This must include ALL ELEMENTS OF INFORMED CONSENT as described in the DU IRB Informed Consent Guidance.

If you would like to omit any required element of consent, besides the signed documentation, you must also submit for a "Waiver or Alteration of Informed Consent".

☒ **Meets Criteria under 45 CFR 46.117(c)(1)**
(SIGNATURE WOULD NOT BE REQUIRED FOR NON-RESEARCH - USED OFTEN FOR MINIMAL RISK SURVEYS)
The only record linking the participant and the research would be the consent document and the principal risk would be potential harm resulting from a breach of confidentiality. *(Provide Justification below)*

For those participants who are completing a survey, they will see the the Consent Form for Participation for Research, and participants must either select "Yes, I consent to participate in this survey" or "No, I do NOT consent to participate in this survey." If participants choose "No, I do NOT consent to participate in this survey," then the survey will be ended. If participants choose "Yes, I consent to participate in this survey," then they will be taken to the second question of the survey, which is requesting affirmation that the participant is at least 18 years of age. If the participant selects "Yes, I am at least 18 years of age," then the survey will begin. If the participant selects "No, I am not at least 18 years of age," then the survey will end.

If participants were required to sign a consent form, it would be the only identifying information that would link them to the study.

NOTE: In this case, each participant will be asked whether s/he wants documentation linking the particip with the research, and the participant's wishes will govern.
Describe this process and attach a copy of consent form:

☒ **Meets Criteria under 45 CFR 46.117(c)(2)**
(PRIMARY RESEARCH RISK IS ASSOCIATED WITH BREACH OF CONFIDENTIALITY, AND NO OTHER IDENTIFIERS ARE BEING COLLECTED)
The research presents no more than minimal risk of harm to participants and involves no procedures for which written consent is normally required outside of the research context. *(Provide Justification below)*

For those participants who are completing a survey, they will see the the Consent Form for Participation for Research, and participants must either select "Yes, I consent to participate in this survey" or "No, I do NOT consent to participate in this survey." If participants choose "No, I do NOT consent to participate in this survey," then the survey will be ended. If participants choose "Yes, I consent to participate in this survey," then they will be taken to

the second question of the survey, which is requesting affirmation that the participant is at least 18 years of age. If the participant selects "Yes, I am at least 18 years of age," then the survey will begin. If the participant selects "No, I am not at least 18 years of age," then the survey will end.

If participants were required to sign a consent form, it would be the only identifying information that would link them to the study.

DATA COLLECTION INVOLVING THE INTERNET

Instructions: This form should be completed for studies that collect data via the internet. This may involve internet-based surveys (including Qualtrics survey tool), data collection from social networking sites, or monitoring a subject's internet activity.

Do not use this form for if you are only planning to use the internet to transmit case report files (CRF's) electronically between sites or investigators, store data over the internet, or to communicate with participants via email.

Please make sure that information here is consistent with information included in your protocol summary and consent form.

I. Use of the Internet:

A. How is the internet being used in this research? Please provide general description.

1. Will you be observing internet activity (e.g., chatrooms, social media, web browsing)? ☐ Yes ☒ No

2. Will you be collecting data over the internet (e.g., survey tools)? ☒ Yes ☐ No

   a) What website or survey tool will you be using?
      ☒ Qualtrics   (If checked, the form will auto-populate some field below based on DU's contract with Qualtrics.)

      ☐ Other (please Specify)

   b) Informed Consent: Does the software provide a record that captures that a respondent has consented to the survey before survey initiation? ☒ Yes ☐ No

   QUALTRICS Users: *Qualtrics has the capability of creating questions that have to be answered before respondents continue on to the survey, provided that you include a "forced response" and "skip logic" on the consent page of your survey. This force response allows the user to confirm that the participant has agreed to participate. Skip logic can be used if a participant declines to participate to take them to the end of the survey. If you plan to use these functions.*

   (NOTE: Except in cases when a username and password are required for access to a survey, all expedited and full board submission should also include a request for waiver of documentation of informed consent for electronic surveys.)

   If yes, please describe:

   For those participants who are completing a survey, they will see the the Consent Form for Participation for Research, and participants must either select "Yes, I consent to participate in this survey" or "No, I do NOT consent to participate in this survey." If participants choose "No, I do NOT consent to participate in this survey," then the survey will be ended. If participants choose "Yes, I consent to participate in this survey," then they will be taken to the second question of the survey, which is requesting affirmation that the participant is at least 18 years of age. If the participant selects "Yes, I am at least 18 years of age," then the survey will begin. If the participant selects "No, I am not at least 18 years of age," then the survey will end.

   There is an optional demographic section of the survey, which has been included for two reasons. The first reason that the optional demographic section was included is so that the researcher can gain more information about the participants so that a deeper analysis can occur; however, should a participant feel uncomfortable providing such

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> information, the researcher does not want to disqualify them from the study. The second reason for including the demographic information is to determine where more research should be conducted in the future (i.e. if 85% of participants identify themselves as being "female", then perhaps more research should be conducted as to why there is such a discrepancy).
>
> This is a robust survey, which includes multiple choice questions, Likert-Scale, and optional open-ended questions at the end. Fortunately for the participants, they will not all have to answer all included questions. The survey is designed to only show the participant the questions that specifically pertains to his/her experience with imaginational OEs and/or fandoms. For example, if participants choose not to answer demographic information, then these questions will not be shown. Similarly, if the participant is not interested in video games, then the questions related to this genre will not be shown.

c) Secure Transmission: Information sent to and from web sites can either be transmitted in clear text that could be read if the information was intercepted by a third party (**http** protocol) or encrypted so that a third party could not read the intercepted information (**https** protocol).

    II. Are there controls in place to prevent a respondent from accidentally entering survey data via the **http** protocol instead of the **https** protocol (i.e. does the server display an error message or automatically re-route the respondent to an https page)? ☒ Yes ☐ No

    I. Does the survey tool use https encryption? ☒ Yes ☐ No

d) Database Security

    I. Do researchers have access to their data in the database via a username and password?
    ☒ Yes ☐ No

    II. Has the software company maintaining the database signed confidentiality agreements preventing them from improperly accessing or disclosing information contained in those databases? ☒ Yes ☐ No

e) Server Security:

    I. Are the servers containing research data located in a data center, with physical security controls and environmental controls? ☒ Yes ☐ No

f) Back-ups:

    I. Are the data backed up nightly? ☒ Yes ☐ No

    II. Is there a finite period of time in which a deleted dataset can still be retrieved? (It is recommended that the investigator inquire about the length of that period) ☐ Yes ☒ No - can be restored indefinitely

g) IP Addresses

    I. Is the respondent's IP address masked from the researcher? ☐ Yes ☒ No

University of Denver
Morgridge College of Education
Is Conducting a Research Study on:

Fandoms as a way of life: The role of fandoms in the lives of the gifted with

Survey Link

There is no compensation for participation.

Researcher: Jessica DeLallo, M.A., M.Ed.
Research Advisor: Dr. Norma Hafenstein
For more information, email
JessicaDeLallo@gmail.com or
Norma.Hafenstein@du.edu