The Well-Dressed Geek: Media Appropriation and Subcultural Style

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Abstract

In a new media environment characterized by sharing and creative repurposing, some fan practices and texts once labeled as "geeky" or "nerdy" seem much less stigmatized. Now, self-identified geeks and nerds must negotiate between a subculture built in part on marginalization and a new-found acceptance by the cultural mainstream. A particularly notable site of this negotiation is in fashion, where t-shirt designers, online cartoonists, and computer programmers have constructed a market of identity apparel for their fellow geeks. This paper takes an ethnographic and textual analytic approach to the clothing marketed to and worn by the "smart masses," to quote one online store's tagline.

Introduction

The geekiest shirt in my wardrobe is an esoteric reference wrapped in an homage, pleasantly coated in a familiar parody. At first glance, it looks like any of a number of riffs on the iconic image of Che Guevara, sporting a high-contrast, black-on-red image of a man in a beret (see Figure 1). Those who follow game industry news might recognize the star-shaped icon on this particular beret, or even the man's face: he is Shigeru Miyamoto, famed designer of the *Super Mario Brothers* games, and spokesman for Nintendo's new Wii console, formerly codenamed "Revolution." While the style of the shirt might not seem out of place in youth culture fashion chains like Urban Outfitters or Hot Topic, the joke behind it may be lost to all but the most serious video game fans. That, of course, is largely the point: I purchased this shirt from a web comic company through a site called ThinkGeek, which designs and distributes merchandise related to computers, games, Japanese culture, caffeine, and other nerdy staples.[1] While this might sound like quite a narrow niche market, ThinkGeek represents

Figure 1. "Viva Miyamoto," a shirt by Penny Arcade.

one of many product lines overtly targeting self-identified geeks and nerds, alongside comics

about science and computers, nerdcore hip-hop acts,[2] and books and magazines such as *Geek*

Chic,[3] *She's Such a Geek!,*[4] and *Geek Monthly.* Such products represent a shift in how fans

identify themselves and how traditionally denigrated media use practices have diffused into

mainstream culture more broadly. This paper thus offers an ethnographic perspective of geek

cultures, focusing on an area which some have declared beyond the realm of interest for geeks –

fashion and style – as a way of exploring shifting meanings in subculture and identity in a group known for both social marginalization and intellectual abilities.

It is important to understand that the term 'geek' was an insult long before it was an overtly-named niche market or personal badge of pride. In fact, it remains an insult among many: elementary and middle school students are still derided as "nerds" and "geeky" for being unusually studious, "dressing weird," and not playing sports.[5] High school social hierarchies have been likened to caste systems, with students' status displayed and maintained largely through consumptive practices.[6] Students who "publicly challenge the norms and mock the identity of the school's popular crowds," such as the "Goths, Freaks, and Punks," share the lowest rung of the student social hierarchy with "Nerds, Geeks, Dorks … and other studious, nonaggressive, socially unskilled students."[7] In some cases, the mental scars from torment by peers can last into adulthood. The nerds are in the minority; popular kids are the "dominant" crowd that sets the norms.[8]

Some students figure out how to shed their geek image by becoming more social according to school norms[9]; others resign themselves to their status or come to willingly self-identify as nerds, geeks, freaks, and so on.[10] Through connections made over the internet or in social situations after high school, some may identify themselves as part of a broader geek subculture. Earlier work on subcultures has noted that groups maintain a sense of identity and solidarity by defining themselves in opposition to some definition of 'the mainstream,'[11] represented in geek culture by the jocks, the rich kids, the uncaring administrators, or the adult-world analogs thereof (sports fans, unethical corporations, misguided politicians, etc.). Nevertheless, by adulthood, the social boundaries between groups are not necessarily as distinctly drawn as they were between high school cliques. Many self-proclaimed geeks may still

define themselves in terms of certain ideals and keep track of 'geek cred' – a form of what Sarah Thornton called subcultural capital[12] – though they must also inhabit a variety of cultural contexts in the adult world, adopting different roles as needed.[13] Even as geeks have a sense of what constitutes authentic behavior and in-group membership in geeky contexts, such as at fan conventions, they must also be aware of what is considered acceptable behavior in other social contexts.

In American culture at large, some geeky interests and groups do retain the negative stigmas long associated with media fandom, such as immaturity, obsession, isolation, and disconnection from reality.[14] On the other hand, recent years have seen geeky media attain wider commercial success, and the geek image grow somehow more acceptable – even hip – by broader cultural standards. Microsoft unveiled its Xbox 360 video game console on MTV with movie celebrities partying to pop bands; mainstream fashion magazines declare that "geek" is "in"[15] (or, more frequently, "chic"[16]); and Fox promoted its remake of *Revenge of the Nerds* at last year's Comic Con International by giving away free t-shirts proclaiming the wearer "nerd."[17] The wealth associated with computer expertise offers a way for the non-athletic and non-aggressive (or those labeled as such) to reclaim masculinity.[18] The sorts of media appropriation and creative participation long stigmatized as geeky[19] now fuel widely-used online destinations such as YouTube, MySpace, and Wikipedia. No longer just the antisocial, unkempt loser, the geek is now (also) a successful, brilliant, iconoclastic trendsetter. This changing role may be a source of some tension: according to one author, the geek is both "a member of the new cultural elite" and "universally suspicious of authority."[20] Can one remain resistant to authority and also occupy a position among the elite?

Given the scattered and amorphous nature of what media fans and computer enthusiasts refer to as "geek culture," this phenomenon may be best studied through consideration of multiple sites and methodologies. I employed an ethnographic approach, focusing largely around participant observation and informal talk at fan conventions that featured a variety of geeky interests. These included Comic Con International 2006, the Penny Arcade Expo 2006, and South by Southwest Interactive 2007. I selected the conventions I attended sometimes because they market themselves as geek-oriented, and sometimes because they are widely known for being geeky: Comic Con International is commonly known among many attendees and bloggers as "nerd prom." Web comics creator Jerry Holkins referred to his Penny Arcade Expo (PAX) video game convention as a celebration of "the social pariah outcast aesthetic," with musical acts "specifically relevant to the geek experience."[21] The South by Southwest Interactive Festival, a spin-off from a popular music and film festival, "appeals to uber-geeks and digital creatives who push the cutting edge of technological change."[22] I also followed up with convention attendees (sixteen men and eleven women) to conduct loosely structured phone interviews, and sought interviews with representatives of geek-oriented businesses. A few of those with whom I spoke actively denied the label of geek or nerd, but most happily identify as such.

Personal interaction with fans and professionals has been particularly useful in offering specific examples of how people situate themselves as geeks (or not), though the most apparent examples of geek culture may be in its material objects. As such, this paper also presents a qualitative textual analysis of t-shirts and clothing retailers. Some of these explicitly market products to self-identified geeks and nerds, such as ThinkGeek ("Stuff for the smart masses"), J!NX ("Clothing for gamers and geeks," formerly "Clothing for gamers, geeks, and hackers"), and NerdyShirts ("The most awesome shirts in the world"), among others. Others implicitly

market shirts to geeks, or market geeky stuff alongside other merchandise to broader audiences–by selling a t-shirt that only says "Geek," for example – such as Busted Tees, Noisebot, Hot Topic, Urban Outfitters, and others. I located most of these stores through conversation with geeks, via banner ads and links from well-trafficked nerd-oriented sites like Slashdot, Boing Boing, and Kotaku, and via popular t-shirt blogs such as Preshrunk and Tcritic.

Fashion offers a fruitful site for observing expressions of identity and belief. By making in-jokes and deploying the kind of "textual poaching"[23] characteristic of particularly engaged media fans, geeks maintain a sense of resistance without fully endangering assimilation into mainstream culture and style.

Pride, Power, and Politics

Geeks and nerds are well aware of the stereotypes surrounding their interests, and they have their own ways of addressing stigmas. One common approach is to embrace their outsider status and assert "geek pride" as an exercise of power and resistance. Identification with a marginalized position may be desirable to some extent, as such feelings can help maintain group solidarity and a sense of belonging among like-minded individuals, united around or against certain values. Robert Khoo, business manager for Penny Arcade, noted, "Geeks are a very tight knit group – we've all suffered the same indignities in high school, the same problems with the mainstream, the same stigma in society." Sean Gailey of J!NX similarly credited the sense of community among geeks in part to "a certain awkwardness that I think geeks […] all share," himself included. Even among those who consider themselves geeks now, the term still recalls negative associations; as one interviewee noted, "Being called a geek in school is a pejorative term." The slogans and jokes on t-shirts sold through geek specialty stores address the

powerlessness that geeks may have felt or are supposed to feel, offering a site to establish subcultural capital and a sense of belonging.

Several of my interviewees indicated that geeks do not have a reputation for being stylish, and that they tend to dress pretty casually. Accordingly, many geek t-shirts are printed on black. As Sean Gailey of J!NX explained, this may be the color of choice for someone who just wants to throw on a t-shirt and spend the day in front of a computer. He indicated that J!NX carries a lot of black shirts because they are "kind of what everybody wants." Similarly, Robert Khoo of Penny Arcade wrote, "We keep trying to make different colors but they just don't sell very well." Black is not only the color of those unconcerned with fashion, however: as Sean Gailey also suggested, black is the universal color of anti-establishment sentiment and disaffected youth countercultures such as punks and goths, who often share negative school experiences with geeks. Both of these functions highlight how these shirts act to set geeks apart from "mainstream" culture.

One motif used to signal outsider status is to jokingly acknowledge and reclaim negative stereotypes. This is performed in a similar vein as the reclamation of racist or homophobic slurs. ThinkGeek and J!NX, for example, both feature shirts playing off the stereotype of the pasty, shut-in nerd, with slogans like "Keep out of direct sunlight"[24] and "The sun is trying to kill me."[25] ThinkGeek in particular carries a number of shirts simultaneously suggesting the power that professional geeks wield (in the form of technical expertise) but also the subordinate position they must occupy (as tech support staff, or in dealing with ignorant managers).[26] While demonstrating dominance in certain areas may assert masculine identity and subcultural capital, geeks can also signal group membership by sympathizing and making light of shared experiences, suggesting a kind of insider authority and humility.

Much more frequently, however, geeky designs on black typically imply or state outright a sort of "us/them" dichotomy in which the geek is presumably superior. One of the most common motifs is a boast of superior skills, particularly related to multiplayer games or coding ability. A shirt from ThinkGeek makes the us/them distinction particularly apparent, stating: "There are only 10 types of people in the world: Those who understand binary and those who don't"[27] (10 is the binary notation for two). Another shirt, sold by J!NX, refers to the power one can exercise through knowledge of code: the shirt reads "chown" on the front, referring to the "change ownership" command in UNIX which could wreak havoc in the hands of malicious hackers. In particular, shirts related to multiplayer gaming aggressively assert traditional masculine identities. J!NX, ThinkGeek, Geeklabel, and other geek apparel sites sell a variety of shirts boasting dominance in first-person shooter video games, sporting threatening boasts and gamer slang associated with defeating less experienced opponents (e.g., "I see fragged people" and "I eat n00bs"), as well as iconography including guns and skulls (see Figure 2).[28]

In addition to these shirts' ability to indicate in-group status to fellow geeks, their obtuseness or self-denigration is also presumed to help cultivate an image of the eccentric outsider to culture at large – a source of pride among geeks who foreswear conventional modes of popularity. J!NX's description of the "chown" shirt reads: "We don't need to explain this one. If you know what it means, you get the joke. If you don't have a clue, you should probably ask someone." J!NX's web site allows comments from users on each shirt's page, and at least one user comment indicates that a visitor wants the shirt just for the blank stares it will draw.[29]

It may seem reductive to characterize some of the above statements as assertions of masculine power, as women can wear these shirts too. It is worth noting, however, that the shirts made in women's sizes frequently specify dominance over men, such as "i PWN boys."[30] As
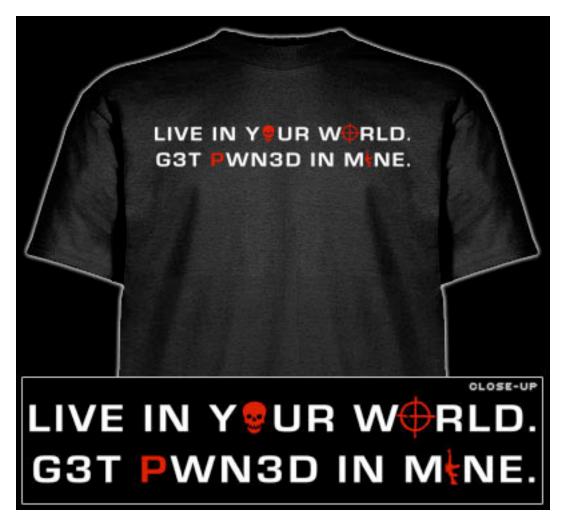
Figure 2. "Live in Your World," a shirt by J!NX.[31]

Lori Kendall's work notes, male is typically the default gender coding for nerds, and woman are

often defined only in relation to men.[32] Many shirts on geek-branded apparel sites are only

available in men/unisex sizes, with a smaller selection available in women's (a.k.a. "girls,"

"ladies" and "babydoll") sizes. Some shirts become available in women's sizes only after people

request them, as suggested in comment threads and elsewhere. The limited stock of clothing

specifically cut for women, even with the same designs on them as the men's shirts, presumes

and potentially ensures that the main market for such clothing is male.[33]

Among shirts in women's sizes, much more common than dominance-themed designs are designs and slogans casting the wearer as the adoring girlfriend. The most commonly-worn geek shirt I have seen on women at fan conventions is some variation of the "I ♥ Geeks" slogan. Unlike most other geek shirts, these reverse the statement on the shirt from a statement about the self to a statement (potentially) about the spectator. One shirt I saw on multiple women at Comic Con, for example, said "I ♥ Nerds" with a picture of Clark Kent in the heart, pulling open his overshirt, suggesting the power that nerdy men hide beneath their deceptive exteriors.

The "I ♥ Geeks" slogans thus allow women to outwardly challenge the stereotype of geeks as romantically or sexually undesirable. One purpose of this could be to flatter current or potential partners who belong to a social category known for its shyness and awkwardness. Another purpose could be to turn away wooers (in an environment where single women may be scarce) by signaling attachment to another, such as in the case of the "I ♥ My Geek"[34] variant. Finally, a purpose unrelated to actual romantic interest could be to unthreateningly assert the wearer's own membership in a culture that can seem unwelcoming to women. While men's versions do exist of these shirts, such as the one made "by popular demand" in the wake of the women's version on ThinkGeek,[35] I have never seen one on a man in public or at a convention. Thus, though the function of "I ♥ Geeks" shirts differs somewhat from shirts more commonly targeting male geeks, they still act to cast the wearer as somehow outside or resistant to the mainstream, in spite of popular negative stereotypes.

Another claim to power on geek shirts comes in the form of idealistic or political assertions. Some such assertions are particularly explicit, such as the J!NX shirts declaring the wearer a "Music Pirate"[36] or proclaiming "F the RIAA / support file and mp3 sharing / save independent music."[37] One ThinkGeek shirt challenges gamer stereotypes and video game

regulation, featuring a skull with a video game controller and the ironic text, "Guns don't kill people. Kids who play videogames kill people." The page featuring the shirt also quips: "And if you believe that, we also hear that Bill Gates is switching to Linux and making all M$ code Open Source."[38] Cultivating a countercultural image signals subcultural capital to fellow geeks, though this is not to say that these sentiments are insincere. Such shirts suggest a broader anti-corporate ethos among geeks, hostile toward any who seem to prioritize profits or corporate interests over consumer freedom and creativity.

These statements fit into a broader discourse among geeks on intellectual freedom, including the right to refer to and reuse elements from popular culture. One pointed example comes from a shirt sold through ThinkGeek, made by online gamer comic PVP, calls issues of ownership directly into question by asserting that "Han Shot First," written in the font used for the *Star Wars* logos.[39] This refers to a scene in the *Star Wars Special Edition* which Lucasfilm changed from the original. Han Solo shoots at a bounty hunter first in the original, but shoots in self-defense in the revised edition; the slogan on the shirt refers to fans' protest of this change. The statement on this unauthorized shirt implies that, to some extent, *Star Wars* belongs not just to a corporation, but to its fans. Offline T-Shirts (http://www.offlinetshirts.com) also features a number of "Han Shot First" shirts of its own, further suggesting shared ownership. Moreover, when fans are denied the ability to practice this ideal, it can inspire bitterness or feelings of betrayal. When Universal clamped down on *Serenity* fans for making t-shirts to help promote the movie, it prompted the creation of a fan-made shirt reading: "I am a fan of a particular science fiction television show and/or movie. Legal and copyright regulations prevent me from revealing which one(s)."[40]

Fans do not just appropriate material and make references to express discontent with the original artists, however: they are looking to connect with fellow geeks, establish their own subcultural capital, and even promote their favorite material to the unconverted. Geek cultures, after all, are largely based around their members' shared affinities. Most references are in a positive (if joking or light-hearted) context.. As many of the above examples illustrate, geek shirts signal in-group membership by making references to things only fellow geeks would be likely to recognize. While many of these esoteric references deliberately draw attention to the wearer's outsider or nonconformist status, some are more subtle, even less exclusive and resistive. Perhaps not coincidentally, many of these kinds of shirts are marketed to more fashion-conscious wearers.

Authenticity and Assimilation

Analyzing an online "Nerdity Test," Lori Kendall notes that it asks about "several of the stock features of the nerd stereotype: uncoordinated clothing, pocket protectors, lack of personal hygiene, too short ('high-water') pants, and glasses, especially with ad hoc repairs (i.e. held together with tape or glue)."[41] A more recently circulated test along these lines, "The Nerd? Geek? or Dork? Test" at OkCupid.com, also asks about hygiene, but the only questions about specific fashion items are about clothing "that makes reference to some aspect of popular culture" or "nostalgia."[42] This test yields not only a score, but a potentially flattering label such as "Modern, Cool Nerd." While geeks may sometimes embrace their outsider status to address their stigmas, other times call for a redefinition of 'geek' entirely, defining the parameters of what is an acceptable level or type of geekiness.

Even among adult geeks, there remains a sense of hierarchy or distinction between different types of geeks, or between 'geek' and 'nerd.' Reviewing some of the more nit-picky

definitions and distinctions surrounding these terms, Lars Konzack suggests that the difference is "not that interesting – unless of course you are a part of these ongoing murky debates about geeks vs. nerds."[43] He thus chooses to use the words interchangeably, as I have done so far, and as many self-identified geeks and nerds do as well. The fact that many other geeks and nerds do recognize shades of meaning, however, is quite relevant to understanding how people construct identities, even if one set of meanings never quite emerges as most preferable.[44]

The deliberate parsing of definitions allows self-identified geeks and nerds to claim ownership of some positive stereotypes while avoiding negative stereotypes. One programmer at South by Southwest Interactive, for example, told me, "A lot of people are calling themselves geeks who aren't really geeks," as he reserved the term for hackers and tinkers, not media fans who "just write stories with other people's characters." Many of the less technologically-inclined geeks with whom I spoke, meanwhile, similarly applied positive, creative connotations to the way they applied the 'geek' label to some of their own media use practices, while casting negative, antisocial connotations on other practices. One interviewee admitted, "I have to be wary about what [games] I admit to people I play"; video games are generally acceptable, but role-playing games like *Dungeons & Dragons* still carry more of a stigma. Many of those with whom I spoke said that they have a number of different geeky interests, but draw the line at cosplay or live-action role-playing games (LARPs), hobbies in which players might dress in costume and act as a character. Some geeky interests may have achieved a greater sense of cultural acceptability thanks to their associations with wealth (computers), sports and competition (video games), and even art and literature (comic books, or rather, "graphic novels"). Other interests, however, still too closely resemble a child's game of "let's play pretend" to outside observers, thus standing on the less acceptable side of the divide "between

the people who *do* these things and the people who *live* these things," as phrased by one of my interviewees.

The most outwardly apparent way to distinguish which side of the line one stands on may be through fashion. Speaking broadly about geeky interests, J!NX co-founder and designer Sean Gailey suggests one way to compartmentalize the positive from negative qualities associated with identifying terms:

> 'Geeks' used to be a bad word and now it's a good word. 'Nerd,' however…. If a non-geek calls a geek a nerd, that's offensive, but we can call each other nerds…. I don't really consider nerds as being geeks…. [Nerds are] annoying…. A nerd doesn't necessarily have geek interests….
> Unfortunately, some of that comes down to clothes that they wear…. If you saw a guy dressed nice, with good hygiene, you're never going to think he's a nerd. And even after he reveals his true colors … you're never necessarily going to call him a nerd. It's really outward appearance that's going to determine that, and in some cases, it's out of their control, like acne or something along those lines.

An acceptably geeky person, then, would be unacceptably nerdy if not for having certain interests, wearing the right clothing, practicing personal hygiene – a distinction oddly reminiscent of the one made by popular kids to denigrate their peers in high school. Elevating one of these terms has enabled adult geeks to claim a label suggesting certain positive qualities, still within arm's length of 'mainstream' culture's notions of appearance and social etiquette.

Certain stereotypes about nerd fashion still circulate in the popular imagination, even find some truth in the black t-shirts thrown on in a spirit of apathy or resistance, but a growing market of stylish shirts allows fans to display that they are nerds without looking *too* nerdy. Geeks (and the self-proclaimed geeks who market to them) have taken notice to this phenomenon, as the "photo essays" in *Geek Monthly* demonstrate. Mirroring fashion magazine spreads, these feature young, attractive, and usually white models in slim-fitting clothes and stylish accessories, with text blurbs identifying where on the web one can purchase such items (see Figure 3).
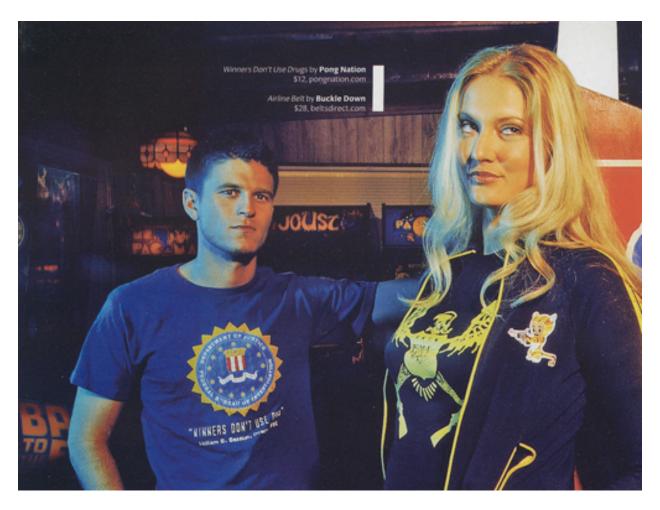
Figure 3. Selection from a photo essay in the *Geek Monthly* "Style" section.

To some extent, this sort of apparel represents an attempt to tap a broader market than the outsider-themed shirts allow for. At a panel on marketing for web comics at Comic Con 2006, for example, creators of popular, geek-oriented comics agreed that it was not sufficient to simply make shirts with the comics' characters or logo, as those tend not to sell as well as expected. While such references should be sufficient to signal who a fan is to other fans, the consensus among the creators was that they also need to be good shirts. This may help explain why Penny Arcade's creators stopped making their own shirts and hired the designer behind

Gameskins.com, who brought over his complete line of colorful shirts more broadly related to gaming culture.

Similarly, in addition to the strong-selling black t-shirts, J!NX makes colorful t-shirts for more fashion-conscious customers. Video game and pop-culture apparel constitute something of a "geek brand," explains J!NX's Sean Gailey, in much the same way that Quicksilver is a surfer brand. You don't have to be a huge nerd to participate, he explained, as long as you agree with what they stand for: "Our brand is basically being proud of who you are, being proud of being a geek, and kind of celebrating all the different interests that geeks have." J!NX distributes its shirts through both X-treme Geek, a catalog for gifts and gadgets, and Hot Topic, a mall chain store.

As adult geeks occupy a variety of social contexts, this fashion-conscious, geek-branded apparel enables wearers to avoid negative stereotypes rather than confronting or embracing them. For many, working geeky references into a wardrobe may be a welcome means of revealing interests important to lifestyles and identities. For others, this sort of apparel may simply reflect the reality that geeks cannot be fully in a playful "geek-out mode" all the time. Adult lives bring responsibilities that may lead us into a variety of contexts, some seemingly less chosen than others. One ThinkGeek necktie makes this plain: featuring rounded squares and lines arranged in a tasteful pattern, the it secretly spells out "ties suck," coded in binary.[45]

Not everyone can read code at a glance, of course, so a slightly more visible way to signal subcultural affiliation is to hide pop culture references in apparel that does seem geeky at first glance. ThinkGeek and J!NX, for example, feature shirts displaying the number "42" without further explanation; ThinkGeek's in particular is fashioned to look like a sports jersey, though the number is actually a reference to a series of science-fiction novels (see Figure 4).[46]

Figure 4. "42 Ringer Shirt," a shirt by ThinkGeek.[47]

Geeklabel similarly hides a comic book joke in a t-shirt with an unassuming "Kent Farm" logo, referring to the place where Superman grew up. As these examples suggest, and in a similar fashion to the apparel described earlier, fashion-oriented shirts by small, online, geeky businesses maintain "geek cred" through subtle, unauthorized use of characters and phrases appropriated from popular culture.

Some apparel makes these references more overtly, playing upon the recent hipness accorded to the geek image while distancing the wearer from what might look like too earnest a statement of fan identity. Playing upon nostalgia value is one way to openly reference geeky

material without seeming on the wrong side of the "living" versus "doing" divide. These sorts of references declare affinity with some item shared in popular culture, again with a lower barrier to understanding than knowledge of binary or UNIX commands. Some such shirts do occasionally make computer references, such as an orange shirt from Insanely Great Tees featuring the pixilated bomb from the error messages of early Macintoshes; blown-up, pixilated imagery, whether referring to computers or games, frequently acts as a visual shorthand for "nostalgia value."[48] Most geeky nostalgia shirts, however, refer to images traditionally associated with television and movies, and particularly children's popular culture from the late '70s and early '80s, such as cartoons, comic books, and video games. A shirt from Tees My Body (a site for "dirty, nerdy geeks") depicts Cobra Commander, a villain from the 1980s cartoon *G.I. Joe*, offering a bizarre public service announcement parodying those that aired at the end of each episode.

By the time people reach their twenties and have their own disposable income, such nostalgic items can be worn sincerely as common reference points for a generation, and distant enough from more recently produced media to not actually seem geeky. Notably, the more colorful and elaborately designed shirts sold on geeky stores tend to reference 1980s Atari and arcade games more frequently than recent hit games like *Halo* and *Grand Theft Auto.* Images from media associated with childhood may seem inappropriately geeky to teenagers trying to assert more adult identities, but some nostalgic references may have value for teenagers as long as the references seem old enough to be "retro." Several of the teens at events I attended wore *Pac-man* shirts, for example, even though that game was already considered somewhat dated before they were born.

In addition, nostalgic items and shirts with more overt jokes may be worn ironically, distancing the wearer from a too-earnest identification with geek culture. Even if someone does in fact personally identify as a fan of the subject of a t-shirt, making fun of the hobby or the wearer herself signals that that interest is not taken too seriously. Examples of ironic distancing techniques on shirts include "I put the bad in badminton" from Geekfitters[49] and "Reading is for awesome people" from Nerdy Shirts.[50] This gentle self-deprecation avoids the assertions of power and reclamation of more hyperbolic stereotypes displayed in the black t-shirts described above, which might imply that too much of one's identity is tied into meaning derived from geek culture. Another sort of playful irony on geek shirts is to parody the shirts sold at more mainstream and trendy clothing retailers, suggesting a knowing sense of fashion but a willfully nonconformist attitude. Penny Arcade, for example, sells a "Jesus is my guild leader"[51] shirt parodying the "Jesus is my homeboy" shirts sold at major fashion chains, simultaneously referencing a running joke from its own comic strips.

Recent trends in fashion make it relatively easy to embed appropriated geeky references in seemingly non-geeky t-shirts. Various trendy and mainstream fashion outlets such as Urban Outfitters, The Gap, H&M, and Express sell t-shirts with highly stylized but functionally meaningless designs (see Figure 5). Many shirts sold by these retailers feature logos and slogans for non-existent businesses and places the wearer may have never visited. Like t-shirts sold in east Asia with gibberish resembling English, they carry connotations not in the message or object that seems literally signified, but in their visual style and broader cultural associations. Somewhat ironically, shirts with hidden geeky references actually do confer a message to those in the know, may mislead casual observers into thinking that they are no different from widely sold, seemingly meaningless shirts.

Figure 5. Photo of a shirt in Express, a clothing store.

As such geek-oriented clothing stores multiply online, what was once a relatively narrow niche market has become so large that some decry it for co-optation or a loss of authenticity. As fan-oriented blogs occasionally link shirts their writers find interesting, readers voice their opinions in the comments threads ranging from amusement to derision: "This is a poser shirt. Only posers wear it," one reader notes of a shirt sold at ZeStuff[52]; on another major blog, a reader comments on a tee from Nerdy Shirts:

> The whole idea behind these quirky shirts was that they were rare finds. That's what made the irony funny. Now that you can buy them en mass [*sic*] at 1,000 different websites they just make you look like a geek in uniform.[53]

These concerns about conformity mirror a broader shift underway in what it means to call oneself a geek, or even to tap into markets of traditionally geeky interest. As some geeky interests seem less embarrassing in American culture more broadly, geek references increasingly find their way beyond sites for hackers, gamers, and web comics fans, and into mainstream fashion outlets.

"Geek Chic" and Geek Practice in Mainstream Fashion

As described earlier, many adults consider geekiness to be an important part of their identity. At the same time, however, some of my interviewees also noted that the term 'geek' (and, to a lesser extent, 'nerd') can be broadly applied nowadays, coupled with any specific personal interest. One can be a music geek, a sports geek, a Home and Garden Television geek. When used in this way, people do not seem to consider these forms of 'geekiness' central to their identity; rather, they mean it as a lighthearted acknowledgement of their own esoteric interests. They are identifying themselves as fans of the most common and least involved variety.[54] Tracy Cross recognized a similar phenomenon when doing research on talented students, noting that the stereotypes around words like 'geeky' and 'nerdy' are dropping away as children see "being nerdy" as a temporary choice with desirable outcomes.[55]

Even among those who do not consider themselves hardcore geeks, then, these are not always the insults they once were. My observations suggest that the most commonly sold and worn geek shirts are those simply featuring straightforward labels, such as "geek" or "nerd" in relatively plain text. Online geek stores such as ThinkGeek and J!NX typically have their own versions of these shirts, but dozens, if not hundreds of less established vendors sell generic "geek" and "nerd" shirts in their own small CafePress stores; major corporations such as AOL and Fox give them away as promotional items at conventions; and, most tellingly, Urban

Outfitters sells its own "nerd" t-shirt alongside shirts featuring the periodic table of elements and other touch points of geek culture.

These and other shirts sold through larger fashion chains and businesses with a broader customer base take advantage of "geek chic" style and the image of the nonconformist intellectual without making an especially strong bid for subcultural capital. Much like the shirts described above, they typically imply an ironic and/or a nostalgic tone, both as a distancing technique and in keeping with common fashion trends over the last several years. Shirts from these stores frequently feature an artificially worn look through faded fabrics and distressed images, sometimes playing up nostalgia value further in the design, such as in a shirt sold recently through Urban Outfitters which featured a character from the 1980s cartoon *Transformers* with the number (year) "84" above him. Perhaps originally aiming for a authentic, thrift-store aesthetic and a heightened sense of nostalgia value, these techniques are now so ubiquitous as to simply be the dominant style in many stores. The references on shirts sold through nationwide chains tend to be even more broadly accessible than those featured on the fashionable geek-store shirts noted above, and the pop culture references are more likely to be licensed than appropriated. Other examples include a series of shirts featuring DC comics heroes and villains at Urban Outfitters and shirts featuring Nintendo game logos at Hot Topic (see Figure 6).

Admittedly, it is problematic to claim a division between shirts sold in geek-oriented stores and shirts sold in more mainstream or trendy brick-and-mortar stores. Stores like Urban Outfitters act as distributor for a variety of manufacturers who also sell their shirts online, such as Busted Tees and Noisebot; and, as noted earlier, J!NX sells some of its shirts through Hot Topic. Arguably, this is indicative of a collapse of the borders between what is "geeky" and what

Figure 6. A shirt by Nintendo sold at Hot Topic.

is "normal." At the same time, some fans do understand or imagine a distinction between these sorts of retailers: ThinkGeek and J!NX, small businesses started by geeks for geeks, are often spoken of with appreciation among fans at conventions, whereas Hot Topic and Urban Outfitters are spoken of more as faceless corporations for conformists. In addition, we do see some differences between the creative practices of online retailers that actively bill themselves as geeky or nerdy and those that make no such claim, even as we see some traditionally geeky media use practices making their way into t-shirt sale and production more broadly.

Online shirt retailers like Noisebot and Busted Tees (a subsidiary of collegehumor.com) exist in something of a middle ground between the geek-marketed sites and more mainstream stores. Both distribute through Urban Outfitters but also do business online. Like the geek stores described earlier, both sell generic "geek" shirts, and both make unauthorized appropriation from popular culture sources ranging from the relatively obscure to the widely popular. Both sites are also clearly angling for a broader audience than just geeks. Noisebot, for example, organizes shirts into categories, including a "Geek" category, but while categories of shirts on more geek-oriented sites include labels such as "Coding & Hacking" and "Comics," Noisebot features categories unlikely to show up on geek sites, such as "Sports" and "Ethnic." Busted Tees and Noisebot also offer all of their shirts in women's sizes, suggesting a more gender-balanced and fashion-conscious market.

The designs of the shirts themselves seem at times quite similar to those at more geek-oriented sites. The "Numbers Are Bad"[56] shirt at Noisebot lists a series of seemingly random numbers which is actually a reference to the television series *Lost*. The "Blow Me"[57] shirt at Busted Tees couples an irreverent joke with a 1980s Nintendo cartridge, which gamers in their twenties and older would recognize as a reference to the common method of cleaning glitchy games. Not all the geek-themed shirts on these sites may have self-identified geeks in mind, however, as they may be more closely aligned to the ironic shirts one might see in large fashion chains. Noisebot's "Trust Me I'm a Trekkie" shirt,[58] a parody of the "Trust Me I'm a Doctor" shirt long sold through Urban Outfitters, seems unlikely to be worn by Star Trek fans (who may prefer "Trekker" or simply "fan" over the oft-derisive "Trekkie").[59]

Some other designs are similarly obscure to those shirts sold on geek sites, though less associated with geek interests. Both Noisebot and Busted Tees feature "Speaker City"[60] shirts,

for example, sporting a logo worn by a character in *Old School,* a relatively recent comedy movie starring Luke Wilson and Vince Vaughn. In text reminiscent of the description of the "chown" shirt on J!NX, Busted Tees writes of this shirt: "We definitely don't need a description for this. If you get it, you'll buy it. If you don't, you won't." Shirts with references such as this still indicate esoteric knowledge (an in-joke for those who have seen the movie), though with an even wider appeal than shirts requiring coding knowledge or recognition of less popular movies and television shows. As neither Noisebot nor Busted Tees can solely lay claim to the "Speaker City" image or various other appropriated images referencing popular movies, many other web sites feature their own versions.

The internet makes it particularly easy to trade goods featuring appropriated material, as stereotypically geeky fans have been doing for years with fan fiction and other amateur creative endeavors. As niche-market apparel manufacturers have demonstrated, this principle applies not only to information-based material such as text and images, but also to stylized commodities. Busted Tees and Noisebot allow users to print designs on any of a number of cloth goods, and Noisebot also allows users to choose from a number of colors. Their business models also allow them to quickly respond to current events of interest to web surfers. Noisebot quickly made available a "Series of Tubes" shirt,[61] referencing a quote from a senator which was widely mocked among bloggers and tech enthusiasts; Busted Tees similarly made a "Dick in a Box" shirt,[62] referencing a *Saturday Night Live* skit which quickly became a hit on YouTube.

Internet-based business also influences the way shirts are made by encouraging participation from consumers. Nearly every online t-shirt site described here, geek-oriented and not, offers a small reward for suggesting slogans or designs. One site in particular, Threadless (www.threadless.com), has become known for applying the model of user-generated content

sites to apparel production. Visitors submit designs for community review, and the most highly rated submissions are considered for production. Its products have become particularly popular among fashionable web designers and graphic artists, and were frequently visible on attendees at the South by Southwest Interactive, Film, and Music Festivals.

Threadless is not a geek site per se, but given its reliance on dedicated web audiences, it should not be surprising that a number of relatively esoteric geek references make it to print. Examples include "Rollin Hatin,"[63] featuring a skull formed out of the polyhedral dice used for role-playing games; "Dark Side of the Garden,"[64] featuring Darth Vader trimming a hedge to look like the Death Star; and "Nerds Unite!,"[65] featuring an assortment of awkward-looking kids and band geeks forming into a robot-like shape to menace an athlete in a letter jacket. As this last example suggests, no matter how cool geeks may be getting, there is still a market for those who identify with the uncool.

Conclusion

What it means to be called a geek or a nerd is changing, faster for some than for others. These terms continue to accompany more obvious harassment among children and still remain associated with the memories of past harassment among adults, though some have claimed more positive meanings based on nonconformity, creativity, and intelligence. Meanwhile, the relatively new-found respectability lent to some traditionally geeky media makes it easier to claim an interest without conjuring stereotypes of juvenility: one can now be a geek without being a freak. This shift brings with it a more visible subcultural identity proclaimed in word and in dress. Some are wary of co-optation or conformity, but most with whom I have spoken see it more as the long-awaited revenge of the nerds.

Given the different functions and potentially different markets implied by the clothing described so far, it is fair to ask whether it is even sensible to talk about "geeks" or "nerds" as a distinct subculture. The boundaries of geek culture may be even more difficult to demarcate than some other cultural groups not only because members are not identifiable by any physical or innate qualities, but also because the term 'geek' itself implies unresolved contradictions and crossovers: geeks are both cool and uncool, interested in any of a variety of media and technologies that may be only loosely related. Terms might be understood as floating signifiers, more useful as words than accurate as descriptive of a real, concrete phenomenon. The establishment of a geek identity apparel market is one way that some attempt to more clearly define a nebulous label.

In an environment where people maintain identities online and offline, and where geeks can self-identify as both socially awkward and reasonably popular, geek identity can be highly contextualized. Here I have described three general areas of broadly geeky apparel – the outsider-themed black shirts, the more colorful and fashionable geek store shirts, and the more mainstream, less geek-specific shirts – but this division is not to suggest that these are three wholly distinct markets. While some people do only shop in one or two of these three areas, many choose from all three (and more, of course) to build their wardrobes. Geek apparel may be selected for contextual appropriateness, just as the geeky aspects of one's identity may be more salient at a fan convention than in the workplace.

Adding fashion to the list of the geek's potential concerns may have different meanings depending on one's perspective. For some, geek apparel offers a public yet understated means to express oneself without embarrassment. To those whose nonconformist ideals are necessarily anti-corporate, however, some of the businesses and products discuss here likely seem like co-

optation and corporate encroachment. Even the "Han Shot First" slogan, it is worth noting, has

been re-appropriated by Lucasfilm, who used the phrase to promote the limited release of the

original trilogy on DVD.[66] Resistive fans may still find more seemingly authentic expressions of

their ideals on any of the hundreds more fan-run (and perhaps even fan-participatory) sites still

featuring irreverent and esoteric apparel. It is possible, however, that recent developments

indicate that certain resistive branches of geek culture may be going the way of punk culture.

This is not to say, however, that the figure of the geek has been wholly redeemed and

assimilated into mainstream culture. Certain groups of fans have yet to be recognized by the

most popular of the broadly geek-branded stores, such as live-action role-players and comic book

speculators. The LARPers may seem, as some of my interviewees would suggest, too geeky (i.e.,

too freely creative and immersed in media, too focused on use-value), whereas the collectors

may seem too nerdy (i.e., too concerned with details and appraisal of media objects, too focused

on exchange-value). Their noticeable absence in the geek identity apparel market could suggest

any of a few things. Their hobbies may be next to be recognized more broadly; geek culture may

be more exclusive than self-styled underdogs might typically acknowledge; or their interests may

represent markets too small to be worth targeting, though they may also share in the recent

developments in geek identification. "Geekdom as fan culture" may have already begun its

inexorable move to the mainstream, but "geekdom as outsider culture" is likely to persist –

largely online and at occasional conventions – as long as educational systems encourage social

hierarchies and certain hobbies still draw chuckles from adults.

The groups that may have been most left out of the geek identity market, however, are

those who have been less welcome or less interested in geek culture more broadly: women and

racial minorities. To these groups, recent developments in geek identity and fashion may

represent a chance to get more involved with computers and more integrated into fan

communities – or, at the very least, to get quirky clothing that actually fits.

Notes

[1] The "Viva Miyamoto" shirt is copyrighted by Penny Arcade, which is now selling its own merchandise.

[2] The term "nerdcore hip-hop" has been popularized by MC Frontalot, MC Chris, and other predominantly white males who rap about computers, science-fiction, and other interests associated with geek culture.

[3] Neil Feineman, *Geek Chic: The Ultimate Guide to Geek Culture* (Corte Madera, CA: 2005).

[4] Annalee Newitz and Charlie Anders, ed., *She's Such a Geek! Women Write About Science, Technology, and Other Nerdy Stuff* (Emeryville, CA: Seal Press, 2006).

[5] Tiffani Chin and Meredith Phillips, "The Ubiquity of Oppositional Culture," unpublished paper (2005): 18–22.

[6] Murray Milner, Jr., *Freaks, Geeks, and Cool Kids* (New York: Routledge, 2004).

[7] John H. Bishop, Matthew Bishop, Lara Gelbwasser, Shanna Green, and Andrew Zuckerman, "Nerds and Freaks: A theory of Student Culture and Norms," in *Brookings Papers on Education Policy*, ed. Diane Ravich (Washington, D.C.: Brookings): 153–4.

[8] Ibid., 182.

[9] David A. Kinney, "From Nerds to Normals: The Recovery of Identity among Adolescents from Middle School to High School," *Sociology of Education* 66 (1993): 21–40.

[10] Mary Bucholtz, "'Why Be Normal?' Language and Identity Practices in a Community of Nerd Girls," *Language in Society* 28 (1999): 203–23.

[11] For more on how subcultures define themselves in opposition to a 'mainstream,' see Sarah Thornton, *Club Cultures* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1996): 87–114.

[12] For more on subcultural capital, see Sarah Thornton, *Club Cultures*: 11–14.

[13] For more on the fluid and overlapping boundaries of subcultures, see Rupert Weinzierl and David Muggleton, "What Is 'Post-subcultural Studies' Anyway?" in *The Post-subcultures Reader,* ed. David Muggleton and Rupert Weinzierl (Oxford: Berg, 2004).

[14] Henry Jenkins, *Textual Poachers* (New York: Routledge, 1992): 9–10.

[15] "Geek" is "in," according to (among others) Anna Nordberg, "Nerd Up: Geek Hall of Fame 2004," *InStyle*, December 1, 2004, 346.

[16] "Geek" is also "chic," according to (among many others) Wendy Dennis, "Geek Chic," *Chatelaine*, April, 2007, 49.

[17] To offer another example of a mainstream company reaching out with a positive understanding of "nerds," AOL promoted its Developer Network by giving away t-shirts boasting the word "nerd" at the South by Southwest Interactive trade show, 2007.

[18] Lori Kendall, "Nerd Nation: Images of Nerds in U.S. Popular Culture," *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 2, issue 260 (1999).

[19] Henry Jenkins, *Textual Poachers* (London: Routledge, 1992).

[20] Jon Katz, *Geeks: How Two Lost Boys Rode the Internet Out of Idaho* (New York: Broadway, 2001), front matter.

[21] Stephen Totilo, "An E3 for Everybody: Penny Arcade Expo Doubles in Second Year," MTV.com, http://www.mtv.com/news/articles/1508895/20050902/index.jhtml?headlines=truev (accessed March 1, 2007).

[22] "South by Southwest Interactive Festival FAQ," South by Southwest Festivals and Conferences, http://2007.sxsw.com/interactive/faq/ (accessed March 1, 2007).

[23] Henry Jenkins, *Textual Poachers.*

[24] "Keep out of Direct Sunlight," ThinkGeek, http://www.thinkgeek.com/tshirts/generic/7029/ (accessed March 1, 2007).

[25] "The Sun is Trying to Kill me T-shirt," www.jinx.com/scripts/details.asp?affid=-1&productID=484 (accessed March 1, 2007).

[26] ThinkGeek has an entire line of shirts related to geek "frustrations" at http://www.thinkgeek.com/tshirts/frustrations/374d/ (retrieved March 1, 2007).

[27] "Binary People," ThinkGeek, www.thinkgeek.com/tshirts/frustrations/5aa9/ (accessed March 1, 2007).

[28] "Live in your world T-Shirt," J!NX, www.jinx.com/scripts/details.asp?affid=-1&productID=279 (accessed March 1, 2007).

[29] "Hacker Shirt - Collusion - chown T-Shirt," J!NX, www.jinx.com/scripts/details.asp?affid=-1&productID=21 (accessed March 1, 2007). Though this shirt and the user comments that follow offer a handy example of an assertion of power and the celebration of outsider status, the back of

this shirt mixes messages somewhat with an image of a kick-me sign that instead reads "HACK ME." The commenters then disagree about whether this compromises statement of power implied on the front, which at least indicates that they do agree that it should be read as an assertion of power.

[30] "i pwn boys Babydoll Tee," ThinkGeek, http://www.thinkgeek.com/tshirts/ladies/85d1/ (accessed March 1, 2007). "Pwn" is gamer slang for "beat," an intentional typo integrated into internet lexicon.

[31] "Live in Your World" image is taken from http://www.jinx.com/images/products/279bgBlack.jpg.

[32] Lori Kendall, "Nerd Nation": 262.

[33] J!NX allows site visitors to comment on each shirt, which helps offer some indication of demand for shirts in "girl" sizes. See comments following "The Sun is Trying to Kill Me" for multiple requests for a girl version (which did eventually get made): http://www.jinx.com/scripts/details.asp?productID=484 (accessed March 1, 2007).

[34] "I Love My Geek Babydoll Tee," ThinkGeek, http://www.thinkgeek.com/tshirts/ladies/5981/ (accessed March 1, 2007).

[35] ThinkGeek does sell a "men's version" of the shirt that only followed the women's version "by popular demand." See http://www.thinkgeek.com/brain/whereisit.cgi?t=I+love+my+geek&x=0&y=0 (accessed March 1, 2007).

[36] "Music Pirate T-Shirt," J!NX, www.jinx.com/scripts/details.asp?affid=-1&productID=232 (accessed March 1, 2007).

[37] "Music Shirt - F the RIAA Shirt," J!NX, www.jinx.com/scripts/details.asp?affid=-1&productID=181 (accessed March 1, 2007).

[38] "Guns Don't Kill People," ThinkGeek, www.thinkgeek.com/tshirts/gaming/713e (accessed March 1, 2007).

[39] "Han Shot First," ThinkGeek, http://www.thinkgeek.com/pvp/swag/712c/ (accessed March 1, 2007).

[40] "New Copyright-friendly Shirts," SerenityStuff, http://www.serenitystuff.com/2006/10/29/new-copyright-friendly-shirts/ (accessed March 1, 2007).

[41] Lori Kendall, "Nerd Nation," 263.

[42] "The Nerd? Geek? or Dork? Test," OkCupid, http://www.okcupid.com/tests/take?testid=9935030990046738815 (accessed March 1, 2007).

[43] Lars Konzack, "Geek Culture: The 3rd Counterculture" (paper presented at Fun 'n Games 2006, Preston, England, June 26–28, 2006).

[44] In "Nerd Nation," 264, Lori Kendall suggests that preference for 'geek' or 'nerd' may vary regionally, but my conversations in various settings suggest that even people in the cities, if they do not travel in the same groups of friends, might understand these terms differently. The majority of people I spoke to preferred 'geek' over 'nerd,' however, so I opted to use that term in my title, as I am focusing on the positive shift in connotations. For more on this, see Lori Kendall, "Nerd Nation: Images of Nerds in U.S. Popular Culture," *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 2, issue 260 (1999).

[45] "The ThinkGeek 'Ties Suck' Tie." ThinkGeek, http://www.thinkgeek.com/apparel/hats-ties/57ff/ (accessed March 1, 2007).

[46] "42 Ringer Shirt," ThinkGeek, http://www.thinkgeek.com/tshirts/generic/68e2/ (accessed March 1, 2007). In Douglas Adams's humorous science-fiction novel *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy,* "42" is the meaning of life.

[47] "42 Ringer Shirt" image taken from http://www.thinkgeek.com/tshirts/generic/68e2.

[48] "The Bomb," Insanely Great Tees, http://www.insanelygreattees.com/shirt/thebomb (accessed March 1, 2007).

[49] "I Put the Bad in Badminton Shirt," Geekfitters, http://geekfitters.com/badinbadminton.html (accessed March 1, 2007). Badminton is presumably a geek sport because it is not very physical and it is particularly associated with white people, as suggested in Weird Al Yankovick's recent "White and Nerdy" video.

[50] "Reading is for Awesome People," Nerdy Shirts, http://www.nerdyshirts.com/productdetails.aspx?id=100088761 (accessed March 1, 2007).

[51] "Jesus is My Guild Leader Tee," Penny Arcade, http://www.pennyarcademerch.com/pat070171.html (accessed March 1, 2007).

[52] Cap'n Jack, comment on "Tell Gamestop 'no reserves' with this geek chic shirt," Joystiq, http://www.joystiq.com/2007/04/30/tell-gamestop-no-reserves-with-this-geek-chic-shirt/ (accessed May 1, 2007).

[53] Boxelder, comment on "Mii Shirt Finally Brings Wii Puns to Torsos," Kotaku, http://www.kotaku.com/gaming/shopping-channel/mii-shirt-finally-brings-wii-puns-to-torsos-256816.php (accessed May 1, 2007).

[54] For consideration of different levels of fan involvement, see Cornel Sandvoss, *Fans: The Mirror of Consumption* (Cambridge: Polity, 2005).

[55] Tracy Cross, "Nerds and Geeks: Society's Evolving Stereotypes of Our Students with Gifts and Talents," *Gifted Child Today* 28, issue 4 (2005): 26–7.

[56] "The Numbers Are Bad (4 8 15 16 23 42) T-Shirt, Hoodie, or Tote Bag," Noisebot, http://www.noisebot.com/the_numbers_are_bad_4_8_15_16_23_42_t-shirt (accessed March 1, 2007).

[57] "Blow Me," Busted Tees, http://www.bustedtees.com/shirt/blowme/male (accessed March 1, 2007).

[58] "Trust Me I'm a Trekkie T-Shirt, Hoodie, or Tote Bag," Noisebot, http://www.noisebot.com/trust_me_im_a_trekkie_t-shirt (accessed March 1, 2007). This shirt has been removed from Noisebot since the last access date.

[59] Henry Jenkins, *Textual Poachers*: 21.

[60] "Speaker City," Busted Tees, http://www.bustedtees.com/shirt/speakercity/male (accessed March 1, 2007). Also see "Speaker City T-Shirt, Hoodie, or Tote Bag," Noisebot, http://www.noisebot.com/speaker_city_t-shirt (accessed March 1, 2007).

[61] "The Internet Is Not a Truck! It's a Series of Tubes! T-Shirt, Hoodie, or Tote Bag," Noisebot, http://www.noisebot.com/the_internet_is_not_a_truck_its_a_series_of_tubes_t-shirt (accessed March 1, 2007).

[62] "Dick in a Box," Busted Tees, http://www.bustedtees.com/shirt/dickinabox/male (accessed March 1, 2007).

[63] Cody Hudson, "Rollin Hatin," Threadless, http://www.threadless.com/product/813/Rollin_Hatin (accessed May 1, 2007).

[64] Glenn Jones, "Dark Side of the Garden," Threadless, http://www.threadless.com/product/256/Dark_Side_of_the_Garden (accessed May 1, 2007).

[65] Rocky Davies, "Nerds Unite!," Threadless, http://www.threadless.com/product/389/Nerds_Unite (accessed May 1, 2007).

[66] Buttons handed out at Comic Con 2006 proclaimed that in the upcoming release, "Han Shoots First," clearly acknowledging fan discontent over the revisions in the *Star Wars Special Edition.*