

THE GIRL, THE FILM, AND THE WARDROBE: A STUDY OF TEXTS, TENSION, AND  
APPROACHABILITY IN PUNK CLOTHING AND THE GIRL WITH THE DRAGON  
TATTOO

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**Title**

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Approachability in Punk Clothing and the Girl with the Dragon Tattoo

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## ABSTRACT

The present study investigates how the modern re-authoring of Punk clothing styles through the character of Lisbeth Salander in Steig Larsson's novel *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*, its American film adaptation, and the subsequent H&M Dragon Tattoo collection works rhetorically within fiction and reality. A close reading of the novel and hybrid semiotic analysis of the film reveal a problematic characterization of Salander that overshadows the overwhelmingly positive response to her character from readers and viewers of the film. Conclusions from a rhetorical analysis of the original H&M press release and five articles that reported on the announcement, and analysis of data from a mixed methods survey include that the tensions and complexity in the fiction can lead to a contradictory and potentially dangerous understanding of how Punk clothing styles found in the H&M Dragon Tattoo collection function rhetorically in the lived experiences of women in Western society.

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## INTRODUCTION

Many people around the world face the decision of what to wear every day. In spite of how unconscious or inconsequential these decisions may seem at times, clothing is a complex and powerful force that influences social processes like how identities are shaped. Clothing also effects how people interact with each other in various communities and situations. Clothes help us make sense of our experiences by providing a frame of reference that facilitates and expedites our understanding of the world and the people in it. In short, clothes mean. What and how clothes mean, though, is largely informed by when and where. For the many scholars who have investigated the significance clothing has in our lives, understanding the cultural context from which a particular style emerges is an important component of the analysis. As Marilyn J. Horn and Lois Gurel state in their book *The Second Skin*, styles “in clothing are not random and purposeless. They reflect the cultural patterns of the times...[and] tend to parallel to some extent the larger events of history” (12). Moreover, because there is a symbiotic relationship between the products a society generates and the beliefs and values of that society, cultural works, like clothing, shape, are shaped by, and sometimes subvert the prevailing viewpoints and standards of the time. As a feminist with an awareness of the relationship between culture and clothes and an above average interest in clothing, I was intrigued when H&M announced in 2011 that they were releasing a collection based on the U.S. film version of *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*.

It was less than two months prior to the highly anticipated release of the U.S. film *The Girl With the Dragon Tattoo* in December of 2011, that clothing retailer H&M announced that the film’s costume designer, Trish Summerville, had created a 30 piece capsule collection<sup>1</sup> for

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<sup>1</sup> The collection consists of a leather motorcycle jacket, long wool overcoat, long draped cardigans, T-shirt collection, grey jeans, faux leather pants, three different shoes, a pair of earrings, one belt and a bracelet that doubles as a choker.



their women's division based on the wardrobe of the eponymous central character, the girl with the dragon tattoo herself, Lisbeth Salander<sup>2</sup>. The film is based on the internationally bestselling first novel of the same title in the late Stieg Larsson's Millennium Series, which was released in 2005 and has sold over 30 million copies worldwide. In the context of this research project, the H&M Dragon Tattoo collection is significant in two ways. First, the collection is comprised of slightly tweaked pieces made specifically for and as seen on actress Rooney Mara, who plays Salander in the film. The collection, therefore, represents an unprecedented level of access for fans and the public to essentially own a piece of the film by way of this unique collaboration. Second, both novel and film characterize Salander with a look that is reminiscent of Punk clothing styles<sup>3</sup> first donned by British youth in the 1970s, complete with dark tones, frayed edges, and industrial spikes. As such, the collection also represents a marked departure not only for H&M customers who are accustomed to finding clean, preppy styles in the retailer's 2,500 stores, but also from what is generally accepted as "fashionable" by Western society today and at the time of Punk's inception. In spite of the ostensibly limited appeal of such clothing, the H&M Dragon Tattoo collection, which was expressly marketed by that name in conjunction with the film, sold out in every market in a matter of hours after its release. The incongruity between the

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<sup>2</sup> Summerville won the award for Excellence in Contemporary Film at the 2012 Costume Designers Guild Awards for her work on the film.

<sup>3</sup> A word on terminology: I use the term "clothing style" when referring to an overall composite look of a person's appearance, including Punk aesthetic, throughout my argument based on a combination of the conceptual definitions for both "clothing" and "style" from Susan B. Kaiser's *The Social Psychology of Clothing: Symbolic Appearances in Context*. Kaiser defines clothing as "Any tangible or material object connected to the human body," and style as "A distinctive characteristic or way of expression"; my definition of clothing style is "any tangible or material object or other detectible modification with distinctive characteristics connected to the human body" (4). The purpose in merging these terms was to accommodate for written descriptions or visuals of both the physical garments as well as the composite context that includes any alterations or decorations of the body, such as hairstyle and makeup.

relative unpopularity of Punk clothing styles among consumers and the popularity of the collection deepens when considering the roots of Punk subculture.

Dick Hebdige traces the roots and meanings of youth subcultures in Britain after the Second World War in his foundational text *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*, and primarily focuses on Punk subculture. Punk subculture emerged as a response to complex tensions between race, class, gender, and other societal issues like joblessness and changing moral standards that was dubbed “Britain’s decline” (87). Hebdige argues that Punk subculture “eloquently condemned” what was seen as a “divided and unequal society” (115). As a subculture, Punk was unafraid of challenging societal norms of class and gender; indeed, those kinds of confrontations were specifically sought out and intentionally provoked. The most accessible way individuals within the subculture communicated their genuine aggression, frustration, and anxiety was through their clothing and other body manipulations, which deviated sharply from arguably any other prior clothing style. Those who did not engage in the subculture often found the look of Punks to be undeniably aggressive and otherwise inappropriate and, as such, much of the response to Punk clothing styles was typified by widespread criticism and scorn, even at first glance. Though the specifics of its origins may have been obscured over time and the clothing style assimilated by commercialized consumer culture, the rhetoric embodied by Punk clothing styles is arguably alive and well even though the styles themselves are still not ubiquitously worn. As a modern re-authoring of Punk clothing styles, the H&M Dragon Tattoo collection retains the historical rhetoric of the subculture, and is further informed by a variety of texts.

The present study investigates holistically how the Punk clothing style as depicted in *The Girl*, the film, and the H&M Dragon Tattoo collection works rhetorically in its varied manifestations. The approaches to a diversity of texts include a close reading of the novel, a

hybrid semiotic analysis of the film, a rhetorical analysis of the original H&M press release and five articles that reported on the announcement, and analysis of data from a mixed methods survey. While the study aims to understand the rhetoric of Punk clothing styles in the various texts, based on the research, I also consider whether women can address larger societal issues of street harassment and rape culture<sup>4</sup> through clothing choices. Thus, this investigation of what the clothing style communicates extends toward the potential the H&M Dragon Tattoo collection has to impact the lives of real women. Overall, each rhetorical element that informs the H&M Dragon Tattoo collection exhibits a tension or disconnect on some level that adds layers of complexity to the issue of what clothing communicates. In the fiction, the result is a problematic characterization of Salander that overshadows the overwhelmingly positive response to her character from readers and viewers of the film. In reality, these layers of tension and complexity can lead to a contradictory and potentially dangerous understanding of how Punk clothing styles found in the H&M Dragon Tattoo collection function rhetorically in Western society.

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<sup>4</sup> As defined by Ann Burnett et. al., rape cultures are “environments that support beliefs conducive to rape and increase risk factors related to sexual violence” (466).

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Clothing and clothing choices are very closely tied to one's identity, both when perceived in the real world and when used to depict fictional characters like Salander. Historical and literary figures like St. Jerome, William Shakespeare, and Honoré de Balzac were the first to articulate the importance of clothing. Beginning in the early twentieth century, scholars like sociologists Georg Simmel, Herbert Spencer and Erving Goffman, philosopher Thomas Carlyle, anthropologist Alfred Louis Kroeber, psychologist J.C. Flugel, to name just a few, have undertaken studies into the complexities of what we wear everyday, and added considerably to our understanding of clothing and its significance in our lives. Many scholars who have studied it agree that clothing facilitates, expedites, and simplifies how one's identity is perceived by society, unfairly or otherwise. Because clothing has the ability to so deftly communicate information to others in the same culture, it is often considered to be a language of its own.

Using Ferdinand de Saussure's foundational linguistic sign system, Roland Barthes was the first to systematically equate clothing to language via the use of semiotics, and he demonstrates that clothing does in fact possess linguistic properties. Since then, other scholars have added their voices to Barthes', lending further weight to the presence of linguistic features in clothing. Alison Lurie asserts "human beings have communicated with one another first in the language of dress" in *The Language of Clothes* (3). In *Fashion and Its Social Agendas*, Diana Crane echoes Lurie when she argues that clothing is a form of "nonverbal, visual" and, most importantly, "symbolic communication" (235, 100). Moreover, Horn and Gurel state in their book cited in the introduction that fashion and clothing "as a nonverbal language... communicates to others an impression of social status, occupation, role, self confidence, intelligence, conformity, individuality and other personality characteristics" (2).

As the study of linguistics has progressed, many scholars have come to believe that language is inherently imbued with the ideology of the culture from which it sprang. One of the most common misconceptions of Saussure's work is that he theorized and studied the science of signs, wherein the signifier is the sound of signs and the signified is the mental concept to which that signifier refers (Barnard 78). In fact, Saussure defines of his branch of linguistics, semiology, as "a science that studies the life of signs *within society*" (emphasis mine, qtd in Barnard 78). Linguist and Marxist Valentin Voloshinov furthered the notion that signs and societal beliefs and values align when he claimed that "the domain of ideology coincides with the domain of signs... Whenever a sign is present, ideology is present too" (qtd in Barnard 90). The cultural ideology intrinsic to language can be seen, for example, in the use of dialects. In their book, *American English: Dialects and Variation*, Walt Wolfram and Natalie Schilling-Estes claim that the speech patterns "associated with socially favored groups become established as standard... while those associated with low-status groups remain nonstandard" (51). Their use of the titles "socially favored" and "low status," to refer to different groups of people seem to coincide with socially dominant groups and socially subordinate groups, and it seems reasonable to read the author's use of "standard" and "nonstandard" as powerful and less powerful in terms of each groups' ability to influence.

If one buys into the notion that clothing constitutes a language, it follows that there is an ideology embedded there as well, one which mimics the hierarchical nature of language. Scholars like Ruth P. Rubinstein, in *Dress Codes*, agree and claim, "like words, clothing images...are signifiers that carry meaning and value" by "function[ing] as signs...or as symbols" (8). Malcolm Barnard states in *Fashion as Communication* that "fashion, clothing, and dress constitute signifying systems in which a social order is constructed and communicated" (69).

Moreover, Barnard, like others, argues that “[f]ashion and clothing...may be the most significant ways in which social relations between people are constructed, experienced, and understood” (7). This line of inquiry is relevant to the present study given that the focus is on the rhetoric and semiotics surrounding a specific clothing style in codex and filmic texts, as well as the actual H&M Dragon Tattoo collection because all three mediums constitute a language of their own and as such contain important clues for deducing what the clothing communicates. The field of social cognition helps to explain the implications for what it means to “read” clothing in fictional and real worlds.

In their review of social cognition research literature, Leslie L. Davis and Sharron J. Lennon define impression formation as “the manner in which diverse bits of information about a person are integrated into a general impression” (177). Solomon Asch was the first to theorize the concept in a series of landmark studies beginning in 1943, wherein he attempted to ascertain how initial impressions are established and what, if any, principles regulate the impression formation process. His experiments investigated how certain pieces of information impacted impressions by reading to study participants “a number of discrete characteristics [words], said to belong to a person, with the instruction to describe the impression [the study participant] formed” (260). Among his conclusions, Asch determined that people form impressions in a “[specific] process of organization in the course of which the [character] traits order themselves into a structure,” or worldview based on that person’s previous experiences (284). Since Asch’s time, the impression formation process has been tested using multiple variables, the most significant of which for the present study is clothing. Researchers interested in the impact clothing has on impression formation, using similar research methods, have largely confirmed that clothing does have an effect on the formation of impressions in various situations. It stands

to reason that this effect is at least in part a result of the non-verbal language and ideology inherent in clothing, as established in the previous section.

Individuals tend to form impressions almost immediately upon seeing or interacting with another person. This tendency could be explained by the human predilection to mentally categorize our perceptions of the world and the frequent need for mental efficiency when presented with new information, as theorized by Susan Fiske and Shelley Taylor in their book, *Social Cognition*. While Fiske and Taylor suggest that such categorizing makes the intake and processing of new information easier and less draining, an unfortunate outcome of this process can be the formation, and sometimes the perpetuation, of stereotypes. Distinct styles of clothing, it turns out, are more likely to communicate consistent stereotypes than faces alone, as Paul Hamid reports in his article, “Style of Dress as a Perceptual Cue in Impression Formation.”

Evidence of this mental phenomena, i.e. forming first impressions of people based on the stereotypical personality traits associated with distinct clothing styles, can be found in numerous studies conducted in the years since Asch’s work. For example, researchers J. Paull Nielsen and Anne Kernaleguen, and Barbara Hunt Conner, Kathleen Peters, and Richard H. Nagasawa, concluded that clothing has a significant influence on first impressions formed in social settings, including the perception of socio-economic status. In the context of the criminal justice system, Aldert Vrij found that a person suspected of committing a crime is more likely to evoke a “more aggressive impression...[and] the most irritation” when dressed in black clothing in their mugshot than when dressed in light clothing (52). Clothing also affects a person’s beliefs about another’s sexual attitudes and behaviors. Eugene W. Mathes and Sherry B. Kempher found that study participants “believed that a large number of items and styles of clothing are indicative of

liberal sexual attitudes and behavior,” even though “only a few items and styles” were associated with reported attitudes and behaviors (498).

This economical yet flawed mental process is at work when we form immediate first impressions, particularly those that rely heavily on visual cues like clothing and appearance, and occur with little or no prior information about the individual. In light of the abundant research confirming the influence the language of clothing exerts on impression formation, it’s important to consider how distinct clothing styles and the stereotypical personality traits associated with them, as those used to depict Salander in the multiple iterations of *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*, enter into a culture’s consciousness and get perpetuated for generations. While clothing influences impressions of individuals, it may also be part of a larger cultural process often referred to as public pedagogy.

Public pedagogy, as defined by Jennifer A. Sandlin, Michael P. O’Malley, and Jake Burdick in their literature review and synthesis of public pedagogy research, is “educational activity and learning in extrainstitutional spaces and discourses,” or the ways in which learning takes place outside or independent of formal education locations, like schools, and curriculum (338). Scholars interested in this subgenre of education research often rely on the field of cultural studies, which “emphasizes...the socially reproductive” nature of public pedagogy (339). While the authors freely admit that the “public pedagogy construct is often undertheorized and ambiguously presented in education research literature,” their definition of public pedagogy springs from having identified five related categories of research on the topic, so there is some consensus within the discipline (338). The two most relevant categories for the present study are informal institutions and public spaces, and popular culture and everyday life.



In much the same way that clothing functions as a language, researchers Sara Wilson McKay and Karen Keifer-Boyd argue in their chapter from *Semiotics and Visual Culture: Sights, Signs, and Significance* that public pedagogy particularly in public spaces is semiotic in nature. Through the negotiation of signs, they state, “cultural signifiers create metaphors that teach the public commonsense ways of viewing reality” (30). Since I’ve established that ideologies are inherent to languages, it may be reasonable to assume that those “commonsense ways” largely reflect those of the dominant cultural ideology. There is, however, more fluidity to the public pedagogy of public spaces when it’s viewed as a sign system in that it is able to traverse nationalistic boundaries. For example, in their article “Global Flows as Gendered Cultural Pedagogies: Learning Gangsta in the ‘Dirt South,’” Glenn C. Savage and Anna Hickey-Moody found that gangsta culture, commonly associated solely with the United States, “[appears] everywhere global media texts form part of local communities,” including Melbourne Australia, where their study took place (288). In other words, public spaces are teaching or reproducing knowledge that, by virtue of being a sign system, is instilled with the predominant mindset of a given culture. And, because this type of public pedagogy is able to permeate conventional cultural boundaries, the ideology of the originating culture is able to infiltrate and spread into other cultures. In this way, the public pedagogy of public spaces is perhaps more influential than any other because of the potential for widespread impact.

Though many scholars agree that virtually all forms of media, like newspapers, music, and television, constitute public pedagogy, the most popular line of inquiry has focused on the role films play in creating and perpetuating public knowledge. Henry Giroux is perhaps the most well known of these theorists, having begun his exploration into the subject in the mid-1980s. Giroux views films in particular, which he argues must be “understood within a broader network

of cultural spheres, social formations, and institutions rather than read as isolated texts,” as a means of socialization where dominant ideologies are reproduced and sometimes challenged (“Hollywood Film” 9). He argues in “Breaking into the Movies: Pedagogy and the Politics of Film” that films carry “a kind of pedagogical weight that other media do not” and further explains by claiming:

“Film does more than entertain; it offers up subject positions, mobilizes desires, influences us unconsciously, and helps to construct the landscape of American culture. Deeply imbricated within material and symbolic relations of power, film produces and incorporates ideologies that represent the outcome of struggles marked by the historical realities of power and the deep anxieties of the times... The power of its reach and the extent of its commodification can be seen as film references are used to sell tee-shirts, cups, posters, bumper stickers, and a variety of kitsch... [Film] now represents a new pedagogical text, one that does not simply reflect culture but actually constructs it” (585, 587, 589).

Using costumes in a film to create a character’s personality is one of the most common ways filmmakers perpetuate stereotypes through first on screen impressions, and thereby pass on a specific reading of that clothing style to the next generation of viewers. Bonnie L. MacDonald argues in her article “Genre Films as Cultural Pedagogy: The Enduring Myth of Star-Crossed Lovers” that “one of the long-standing practices of Hollywood directors has been to rely on stereotypes to establish a character’s identity” (45). Moreover, she contends that, over time and drawing on previous film experiences, viewers learn how to read “costume codes,” until the viewer eventually comes to believe that these codes “reveal universal truths” (44). Having established the widespread agreement that clothing functions as a language of its own, which,

because it contains the ideology from its originating culture, conveys a specific and often stereotypical initial impression, public pedagogies in the form of films and other media work to perpetuate stereotypical impressions through a precise rhetoric that can be disseminated in many ways, including public spaces.

Long before Coco Chanel turned the little black dress into a fashion phenomenon in the 1920s, black dresses were referred to as widow's weeds, and communicated that the person wearing these items was in a period of mourning. In fact, since the Roman Empire, the color black has been associated with death and evil and so the negative associations of the color have existed in the cultural memory for centuries. Punk clothing styles, and its myriad offshoots, are the most recent iterations of black clothing being used to communicate similar negative associations at first glance. The rhetoric of Punk clothing styles as seen through various media has been clearly delineated in popular culture; indeed, Hebdige claims that one reason Punk subculture and clothing styles have been so successfully diffused in our collective minds is because it uses “a language which was generally available” (87). In effect, the contemporary public perceptions of Punk clothing styles, including those used to characterize Salander, are often generally associated with the movement, i.e. aggressive music, anti-establishment political viewpoints, and direct, sometimes hostile, action. As a clothing style, Punk is therefore easy to recognize not only in Britain but also, like Savage and Hickey-Moody found, everywhere global media texts are found. In the process of educating the masses about this clothing style, and by extension the person wearing it, Punk has arguably lost many of its ideological roots and has basically become synonymous with Goth, or Emo more recently, and sometimes S&M. Though the terminology may have become muddled, the public at large has come to believe we know

what kind of personality and behavior to expect from a person dressed in Punk clothing styles and, accordingly, how we should act when in the midst of said person.

Ideologically, Punk subculture stems from the need or desire to disrupt societal norms, and the clothing style represents a tension between socially acceptable behaviors and what the public has been taught through stereotypes to expect from someone garbed in Punk clothing styles. As detailed in the next section, Larsson provides extended characterizations of Salander by using a clothing style with a deliberately dark aesthetic reminiscent of 1970s Punk subculture. Since the film echoes the characterization of Salander begat by Larsson, the H&M Dragon Tattoo collection therefore consists of Punk clothing styles. The first step towards understanding what and how the H&M Dragon Tattoo collection “means” to the public is to examine both the codex and filmic texts and determine how this clothing style works to characterize Salander and what this characterization may mean within that context. It turns out that the incongruity between a retailer like H&M offering a collection based on Punk clothing styles mentioned earlier represents only the first layer of disconnect or tension found within the present study.

## THE NOVEL AND FILM

On the surface, *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* is a present day crime thriller centering on a journalist, Mikael Blomkvist, cracking the decades old case of the disappearance of a young woman, Harriet Vanger. However, lurking not so subtly underneath is an intentional and pointed commentary about how society at large views and treats women. The original title for the novel as it was published in Sweden was “Men Who Hate Women”; the title was changed for its international release. Additionally, Part I is prefaced by the statement, “Eighteen percent of the women in Sweden have at one time been threatened by a man.” As the novel progresses, so does the theme of sexualized violence against women and at the heart of it all is Lisbeth Salander, whose role it is to help Blomkvist solve the mystery of Vanger’s disappearance.

As a fictional character, Salander is almost universally viewed in a favorable light, and many fans and critics of the novel consider her to be a heroine in spite of the fact that Larsson depicts her as an anti-social deviant who is by turns violent, revenge-driven, and arguably borderline psychotic. Since it is the first novel in a three part series, Larsson provides large swaths of background information on Salander in the beginning of the novel and it is clear to the reader that Salander’s life has been a series of traumatic events, largely brought on by her interactions with men. For example, Larsson writes about the fact that she has been under guardianship since she was a teenager, having being declared mentally incompetent by the courts for intentionally setting her father on fire after he viciously assaults her mother in an event Salander calls “All The Evil” (183). Larsson also makes it understood that she has been the victim of several assaults, sexual and otherwise, before the time the novel takes place (182). Salander’s formative life experience, as crafted by Larsson, has been a “hostile condition,” and he portrays her decisions regarding clothing as though it acts as her armor against the cycle of

violence towards women that she now considers to be “the natural order of things” (182). With that context in mind, it may be understandable why Larsson uses the ideology of Punk subculture to further his characterization.

Larsson spends a substantial portion of the book characterizing Salander through clothing and, while he never specifically references Punk, he invokes the narrative associated with Punk subculture and clothing styles. Notably, he does so using a distinct mix of both offensive and defensive terminology, indicating Larsson’s awareness of the cultural unease that surrounds Punk clothing styles. One of the first instances of an extended description of her appearance comes from Salander’s employer, Dragan Armansky, who notes:

“[She] was a pale, anorexic young woman who had hair short as a fuse, and a pierced nose and eyebrows. She had a wasp tattoo about an inch long on her neck, a tattooed loop around the biceps of her left arm and another around her left ankle... She was a natural redhead, but she dyed her hair raven black” (32).

Later, when required to meet with a client for her job at the security firm, Armansky says:

“Salander was dressed for the day in a black T-shirt with a picture on it of E.T. with fangs, and the words I AM ALSO AN ALIEN. She had on a black skirt that was frayed at the hem, a worn-out black, mid-length leather jacket, rivet belt, heavy Doc Marten boots, and horizontally striped, green-and-red knee socks. She had put on make-up in a colour scheme that indicated she might be colourblind” (40).

Returning to Hebdige’s *Subculture* helps to understand how the clothing style Larsson uses to characterize Salander derives directly from Punk subculture. Hebdige states that Punk subculture valued “the perverse and the abnormal” when it came to clothing styles which, when worn all together, were often perceived as “directly offensive...and threatening” (106, 107).

Hebdige also notes that “conventional ideas of prettiness were jettisoned” in Punk subculture, an important consideration given the cultural context and that Salander is female (107). He provides a catalogue of essential items frequently found in Punk clothing styles like leather jackets, vivid socks, “bovver boots,” and “belts, straps, and chains,” items similar to what Larsson uses to describe Salander in the example passages (26, 108). Further, within Punk subculture, Hebdige asserts “make-up...was worn to be seen,” and “hair was obviously dyed...jet black” (107). Again, these features of Punk clothing styles from Hebdige align with Larsson’s characterization of Salander. Additionally, according to Hebdige some body modifications, like wearing safety pins through parts of the face, were also common in Punk subculture (107). In the example passages, Larsson includes not only multiple piercings in his characterization of Salander, but also several tattoos in highly visible places, one notably depicting an insect with a defense mechanism and a reputation for being aggressive. Overall, the reader is left with the impression that Salander dresses in a contemporary Punk clothing style without Larsson having to use the word even once, further evidence of how effectively stereotypical Punk clothing styles have been disseminated into our culture.

Yet Larsson ensures that readers are aware Salander is not a so-called “fashion victim.” He writes about her clothing and manipulating her appearance purposefully and with a clear agenda. For example, while working on collecting information for a client, Larsson describes what Salander wears to case an apartment in an upper class part of town like this:

“black jeans, heavy winter boots, a warm polo shirt, a dark pea jacket and matching kitted gloves, cap, and scarf. She took the rings out of her eyebrows and nostril, put on a pale pink lipstick...She looked like any other woman out for a weekend stroll...” (85).

Significantly, Larsson describes Salander's mentality about these clothes as "appropriate camouflage for an expedition behind enemy lines" (85). The use of militarized language simultaneously adds a layer of implicit violence to an otherwise non-Punk ensemble and subtly references the anti-capitalist roots of Punk subculture. In painting her viewpoint on clothing as the reverse of what one would consider normal, Larsson demonstrates that Salander not only understands the power of clothing, but that she can deftly wield that power. Towards the end of the novel, Larsson further establishes Salander's skill with clothing when he writes about her stealing millions of Swedish kronor from a corrupt businessman. For that task, Larsson has Salander put together a whole new "combat uniform" (446). With a blond page-boy style wig, fake nails and eyelashes, powder, rouge, and lipstick to go with "black boots, a sand-coloured skirt with matching blouse, black tights, a waist-length jacket, and a beret," Larsson has Salander once again create an incredibly effective guise to go to what he calls a "battle" (442).

However, despite the power implied in the intimidation inherent to the clothing style Larsson employs to describe her attitude and appearance, her employer concludes that Salander ultimately "seemed the perfect victim for anyone who wished her ill" (46). She is brutally assaulted twice by her new guardian and once by a stranger on the subway during the events of the novel. Ultimately, Larsson's depiction of Salander and her motivations for dressing in Punk clothing styles demonstrates a disconnect between what he implies that Salander clearly wants to communicate to others through her clothing style, i.e. unapproachability, and the brutality of the assaults he conveys explicitly and implicitly in the book. The resulting tension for the reader is in the knowledge that her efforts with this clothing style to keep people away in order to keep herself safe are largely in vain. The U.S. film adaptation echoes this phenomenon of tension but



the semiotics of the film also work to characterize Salander as a less powerful member of society.

The U.S. film adaptation remains mostly true to the novel, and particularly to Salander; her clothing reflects the depictions in the novel and she is portrayed as the same extremely intelligent anti-social deviant who is by turns violent, revenge-driven and, arguably borderline psychotic. Yet the film communicates Salander's role as a relatively powerless character in society when her clothing is analyzed through a semiotic lens that accounts for both the rhetoric of the clothing and the medium. In order to analyze the semiotics of the film, I chose a series of screenshots from the film and use a framework (see Table 1) derived from two separate but connected works: first, Lawrence M. O'Toole's framework for applying his argument in *The Language of Displayed Art* that meaning making systems used for verbal language can be applied to the visual arts; and second, Monica Owyong's framework for analyzing how clothing helps to reproduce the social relations of subjects in a number of paintings and other cultural images from various times in history from her article titled "Clothing Semiotics and the Social Construction of Power Relations." These author's frameworks can be found in Appendix A and Appendix B, respectively. The framework for analysis in the present study utilizes concepts from O'Toole's visual arts and Owyong's clothing framework in order to accommodate a holistic perspective that explores how Salander's clothing works within the composition of the film itself to construct both her character and power relations.

Screenshots were chosen because a version of the clothing Salander is wearing in it appeared in the H&M Dragon Tattoo collection and/or because the scene represents a crucial moment in the arc of her character. Each scene from which the screenshots were taken will be discussed as part of the context of Salander's clothing style and the work it is doing in the film.

Moreover, the analysis for each screenshot includes a discussion of how her clothing works in tandem with the filmic attributes to contextualize each shot, and how lighting, composition, set design, and props all work to create a semiotic reading of her character and her role in society. The logic for presenting additional context extends from Owyong, who advocates for researchers to study fashion “texts” not as isolated abstract units, but as part of a larger semiotic system since “clothing semiotics is intimately entwined with body semiotics, gestures and facial expressions in the creation and communication of meaning” (192). The purpose here is not to attempt to outline a single definitive reading of Salander or her clothing in the film. Semiotics as a method of analysis, as stated by O’Toole, “does not aim to produce closed-off, final readings...[rather] it helps to establish a range of feasible readings, to map a ‘semiotic space’ and, in the process...generates new alternatives” (140). Instead, the goal in this analysis is to understand how the clothing functions rhetorically in the film since many of these pieces are featured in the H&M Dragon Tattoo collection made available to the public.

Table 1. Adapted Film and Clothing Semiotic Analysis Framework

<b>Unit/Function</b>	<b>Representational</b>	<b>Modal</b>	<b>Compositional</b>
Screenshot	Scene Stance/Gesture	Framing Light Perspective	Proportion Color
Overall Attire	Functionality	Color Contrast Layers Body Coverage	Proportion Complexity Symmetry
Apparel/Accessory	Upper Body Lower Body	Color Cut Texture Body Coverage Design	Material Shape

Sources: O’Toole, Lawrence M. *The Language of Displayed Art*. 2nd ed. London: Routledge, 2011. Print.

Owyong, Yuet See Monica. "Clothing Semiotics and the Social Construction of Power Relations." *Social Semiotics* 19.2 (2009): 191-211. Print.

## Screenshots



Figure 1. Salander's First Appearance

This scene marks Salander's first appearance in the film: she has arrived at the security firm for which she works at the behest of her boss, Dragan Armansky, to meet with a client for whom she has just completed an investigation. Viewers see how Salander's clothing is functional, covering her body and providing protection from wind or worse since the viewer can clearly see a helmet in her hands for riding her motorcycle. Her leather studded jacket, hoodie, pants and backpack are in varying shades of muted black and seem to fit fairly close to her body. The primary color contrast actually comes from the pale skin of her hands, face, and neck. The viewer can also see that Salander's hair is styled in a modern Mohawk and that she wears a number of accessories, including black studded bracelets on each wrist and at least one necklace that looks as though it is made from a razor blade. Overall, Salander's clothing here projects an aura of intimidation and latent aggression stereotypical of Punk clothing styles, both of which are

arguably powerful things to communicate. That perception may diminish, however, when scrutinized within the context of the scene and the frame of the screenshot. Though Salander seems to be actively coming into a space, in the moments that precede this one the viewer sees Armansky gesture to her to come in, and Salander is seen looking in through the vertical blinds, hinting at her status as an outsider that again reflects Punk subculture. The majority of the room is painted white, the color black is used as an accent of sorts for the door, doorframe, wall paneling seen behind Salander, and the frame on the right. Incidentally, both the doorframe and door itself make it appear as though Salander is surrounded by matching borders, and lends the feeling of being constrained. Perhaps most importantly, Salander's stance is stiff, her facial expression wary, neither of which support the notion of suppressed hostility conveyed by her clothing. In all, the filmic context in which Salander's clothing style appears does not sustain the argument that such style communicates, namely that she is an individual of power or autonomy.



Figure 2. Salander on the Train

In this early scene, Salander is on a train returning from the hospital where her former guardian, one of the few people she seems to respect, is recovering from a massive stroke that has left him largely incapacitated. Salander's overall attire covers her completely, leaving just her face bare. The paleness of her face provides the only significant contrast in the whole composite as her worn leather jacket, scarf, and messenger bag are black, and her semi-fitted cargo pants are a drab olive green. Neither the color of her clothing nor the clothing style itself really stand out from what the other passengers are wearing, with one exception: her boots, one of which has what looks to be several layers of duct tape around it. Normally, generally well-fitted clothes in dark, neutral colors are synonymous with power in the Western world, so it may seem reasonable to assume based on her clothes alone that this style reflects the influence of Punk subculture. However, because of how Salander is positioned in the scene this look communicates a general feeling of dishevelment, a characteristic sometimes associated with Punk clothing styles, but certainly not normally associated with those in power. Looking at the film elements within the frame, Salander stands out in part because of the color contrast between her clothing and the warmer yellows and browns of the walls and seats, but also because of her body language, which could be described as fetal. Compositionally, the florescent lights darken her eyes and the metal support bars of the train and the seat on which she is huddled seem to be enclosing her, a motif that is repeated throughout the film, effectively cutting her off from other people on the train who are either standing or sitting in the background. Importantly, despite being in the background of the scene, the other passengers appear above or on the same plane as Salander, resulting in her appearing disproportionately smaller in comparison, filmically diminishing her character. Overall, given the combination of both clothing and posture in this

screen shot, Salander projects an air of wounded animal: conceivably still dangerous with her dark, vaguely threatening outfit, but more so achingly vulnerable in her anguish and isolation.



Figure 3. Salander and Blomkvist's First Meeting

This scene is the first time that Salander and Blomkvist meet. Having coerced her employer to give him her address, Blomkvist abruptly shows up at Salander's apartment to ask for her help in solving Harriet Vanger's case. Despite not really being able to see much of her lower body in the screenshot itself, the viewer would know from the moments prior that Salander's overall attire again functions in so far as it covers most of her body. Her dull black T-shirt has several noticeable holes, and appears to be too large for her frame; aside from her piercings, she wears no other accessories. In an earlier moment from this scene, the viewer has seen that her T-shirt reads "FUCK YOU YOU FUCKING FUCK," cursing on T-shirts being something Hebdige mentions as a Punk standard, although this particular shirt did not make it into the H&M Dragon Tattoo collection. The viewer also knows that she has threatened to harm Blomkvist with her Taser if he touches her. Given all that, Salander's clothing here connotes an

air of outright hostility and aggression, or marks her as someone who is not to be tangled with. Thinking about how these clothes work in relation to her body language and the filmic components of the scene as a whole, however, provides insight into a different perception of her. Salander is bent forward so that her back is rounded, elbows on her knees. While she does have her head turned slightly towards Blomkvist, her eyes are facing down and the rest of her body is still and forward facing. Blomkvist, on the other hand, is angled toward her slightly and in motion, making him seem more dynamic and engaged in the conversation, and her less so. While Salander is physically smaller than Blomkvist, and therefore would normally take up less space within the frame, the result of her hunched posture is that she takes up an even smaller amount of space and appears more diminutive than she would typically. Additionally, there are a number of compositional elements in the frame that may shift the perception that Salander is a threat. For example, the couch she is sitting on is lower than the table on which Blomkvist is perched. Moreover, the combination of the couch at her back and the table in front of her, along with the vertical drapes and tall stack of boxes in the background, make it seem as though she is again bounded and trapped. Blomkvist, in contrast, is surrounded by open space and can conceivably move about and around her apartment with ease. In a move to perhaps filmically establish her as a heroine, there is a white lamp positioned above and behind her, cocked just enough to see that it is on, providing a sliver of yellow-white halo-like light that almost reaches her. An analysis of her clothing on its own, communicating blatant aggression as it does, may lead one to believe Salander is on the high end of the power scale. However, when combined with an analysis of the scene in which it appears, the overall result seems to indicate Salander's relative lack of power, especially in relation to Blomkvist.



Figure 4. Blomkvist and Salander Meet with Martin Vanger

This scene, which takes place in Martin Vanger's house after Blomkvist has been shot at, was included for analysis because it advances the arc of her character for the viewer despite the fact that the viewer sees very little of Salander. In fact, while the implication is that she is wearing her typical Punk clothing style, the only sense the viewer gets of Salander's clothing is that it is black, covers her to the neck, and that she is wearing what seems to be a silver necklace. Even though Blomkvist, and many other characters for that matter, wear dark colors in the film, their clothing lacks many of the distinct features of Salander's Punk clothing style, and therefore does not communicate the same stereotypical message to the viewer that hers does. Here, for example, the texture of Blomkvist's cable knit sweater, in a dark forest green hue with its turned-down lapel as well as his unshaven and weathered features, connotes an air of subtle, earthy masculinity. At this point in the film, Blomkvist and Salander's relationship has developed



considerably from their first meeting: they have worked well as a research team, she stitched up his head wound, and they have had sex. And yet as half of the research team and potential next shooting victim, she stands apart not only in appearance, dark clothing and hair contrasting sharply with Blomkvist's and all the white around her, but spatially as well. While recognizable as herself, Salander is a dark blur in the background, seemingly just barely inside the room proper, and once again ostensibly confined in her space, this time between the lines of two walls. In contrast, Blomkvist is positioned in the foreground, facing towards Martin Vanger and the viewer with the camera positioned slightly below him but seeming to point right at Salander's indistinct form. Compositionally, this scene in the film and screenshot adds to the narrative of powerlessness that is embedded in Salander's character.



Figure 5. Salander Approaches Killer

This screenshot is included because the scene from which it originates is perhaps one of the most powerful of the entire film: Salander, after having deduced the identity of the killer they

have been searching for, rescues Blomkvist from said killer by striking him across the face with a golf club. She then pursues the killer on her motorcycle and, after the killer crashes their vehicle, is seen here from the killer's perspective, striding towards him with a firearm in her hand. Though very few details of her clothing are visible, contextually the viewer would know from the previous scene that she was wearing her leather jacket, black pants, and broken boots. Given the events leading up to this moment, it could certainly be argued that this time the implied power of Salander's Punk clothing style aligns with the context of the scene at this moment, bearing down as she is on a known sinner like a wrathful avenging angel complete with another halo provided by the streetlight. Once again, though, that power is reduced both by the film compositionally and by the context of the larger film. In the frame of this screenshot, Salander continues to be confined by structural elements, this time by the window/door frame of the vehicle, as well as the trees on either side of her and the fence behind her. It could be argued that these filmic boundaries symbolically communicate that Salander has only one path she can take: now that they have been identified, this killer must accept her justice. But, the viewer knows that before Salander races after the killer on her motorcycle, she first asks Blomkvist for permission to kill the villain. This moment, therefore, cannot be read as a powerful one because she is still limited both symbolically within the film and spatially within the screenshot, and by her apparent need for permission to act, which withers her autonomy.



Figure 6. Salander's Final Frame

This screenshot is from very nearly the final scene of the film. Having fallen for Blomkvist, Salander has arrived at his workplace to declare her feelings only to see him and his former lover leaving together, presumably about rekindle their relationship. Salander's overall attire, from what the viewer can see as the camera zooms further and further out and reasonably surmise based on the fact that a moment previous showed her getting off her motorcycle with her helmet in her hands, while still dark and muted, consists of a black leather jacket, black pants, and black motorcycle boots. These items seem to be more properly fitted than previous ensembles and do not feature any of the glaring wear distinctive to Punk clothing styles, which would communicate a more put together and thus powerful look. The potential power in that look is thwarted yet again when the film's compositional elements are considered. Salander's frame is tiny in comparison with her surroundings, and half of her body blends in very nearly completely with the street behind her in spite of another haloing light from the building adjacent. While there do seem to be fewer boundaries enclosing her in this space, her movements are still very much limited by very firm borders provided by the building and the railing in the frame. Contextually, of course, viewers know that she has just had her heart broken, too. Taken into

account together, the composition of the frame and circumstances of the story seems to trump any power Salander's clothing may have communicated. By adapting the novel for film, the characterization of Salander Larsson began in the novel was perpetuated and expanded upon by virtue of the medium, which essentially brought the story to life for H&M consumers. While these six screenshots are only a small part of the overall film, they are representative of how Salander's clothing style appears in much of the film, and bring about a more robust understanding of how that clothing style is used to characterize her, particularly in relation to other characters and as a woman in what is presumed to be modern Western society.

Even though neither the novel nor film ever directly says that Salander's style is Punk, it is undoubtedly reminiscent of the clothing styles of the subculture. As such, it communicates to the viewer in a language that would be familiar to many because of the subculture's notoriety in our culture. The contextual analysis of that clothing style in the novel and film expands our understanding of her character as one with limited agency and power whose traumatic life events have compelled her to dress in Punk clothing styles that continually fail her. Since Salander is a woman, and the H&M Dragon Tattoo collection was made for and marketed towards women, it can be assumed that the majority of consumers purchasing the Dragon Tattoo collection are women. This becomes problematic in the context of the current cultural climate towards women in the West when considered in light of the fact that Punk clothing styles deviate drastically from what is considered acceptable for women's appearance. The discord or tension caused by this conflict takes shape in real world discourses through media coverage of the announcement of the collection and could potentially have negative implications for passive female consumers once items from the collection are taken out of any context except the streets.

## RHETORICAL ANALYSIS

H&M announced the Dragon Tattoo collection on October 26<sup>th</sup>, 2011, just two months shy of the U.S. film's release date. A number of publication outlets "picked up" and reported on H&M's press release in the intervening weeks. In order to examine the rhetoric surrounding the release of the collection and the media's depiction of the Punk stereotype implied first in the novel and expanded upon in the film, I analyze the original press release as well as five articles from various publication outlets. In deciding which articles to include, I chose ones from a diverse spectrum of primarily online publication outlets based in the U.S. that would provide distinct perspectives representative of a wide range of the American population: Katey Rich's "H&M To Sell Girl With The Dragon Tattoo Clothing Line," on [www.cinemablend.com](http://www.cinemablend.com); and a staff post from [theweek.com](http://theweek.com) entitled "H&M's 'slightly absurd' *Girl With the Dragon Tattoo* fashion line." The remaining three articles were published November 1<sup>st</sup>, December 1<sup>st</sup>, and December 13<sup>th</sup>, 2011, respectively: Sara Stewart's "Lady Thriller" from the [nypost.com](http://nypost.com); Haley Phelan's "See the Full Girl with the Dragon Tattoo for H&M Collection" posted on [fashionista.com](http://fashionista.com); and Molly Creeden's "Breaking Out: Trish Summerville On Her New Collection at H&M – and Dressing The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo" published on [vogue.com](http://vogue.com). Much of the rhetoric of the press release and articles aligns with cultural notions of Punk stereotypes through the use of archetypes characterized by resistance in some way of the status quo and violent imagery. Notably, however, several authors connect the announcement of the collection to reasons why women would want to wear them beyond the fact that they are in some way fashionable. The way in which those authors make these connections often reveals a level of hesitation, discomfort, or resistance for the collection being out in the real world that contrasts with their favorable views of Salander.

To start, the H&M press release evokes a series of violent imagery to convey information about how Salander's clothing characterizes her and how those characterizations transfer into the Dragon Tattoo collection. The mix of terms remains similar to the characterization Larsson uses in the novel; the press release uses words to describe the clothing that connote both protection and aggression and evokes Punk stereotypes. For example, a quote from Summerville appears in the second paragraph and she claims that Salander's jackets "act as her armour to shield her from the world." Additionally, to describe the collection, the press release uses words like "dark," "urban," and "grit," and includes a reference to "biker leathers." The details of some items from the collection continue in the same vein: leather racing jackets are "ready to protect," the denim of the trousers is "slashed," the hemline of the mini is "rough cut as if by hand," and the backpack is "battered." While the press release does not use the words Punk or goth, the biker reference brings to mind a somewhat similar outsider group also known for their similarly distinct clothing style and attitude. The underlying message these terms convey about the collection, much less what the clothing style itself conveys, stands in sharp relief from the explicit message that the collection is a "celebration" of the film the press release opens with.

The sample of articles included for analysis utilizes many of the same descriptive techniques as the press release, and work to further entrench the stereotypes associated with Punk clothing styles for the reader. For example, in her article from [cinemablend.com](http://cinemablend.com), Katey Rich claims that she herself prefers "a little more color and a few less spikes" in her clothing. The staff article from [theweek.com](http://theweek.com) dubs Salander's wardrobe to be "punk-goth" outright, and likens the collection to merchandise found in retail chain Hot Topic, known for its cheap, mass produced Punk-like apparel for teens and young adults. Sara Stewart cites author Leslie Simon in her [nypost.com](http://nypost.com) article as calling Salander an "outsider," a "misfit," and a "loner" who "kinda

makes it cool” to associate with “things that are antithetical to being feminine,” including clothing that looks “tough but comfortable.” In her fashionista.com article, Hayley Phelan references specific pieces from the collection before declaring it to be “classic and chic-looking” in spite of the “gothy-vibe” and “punk accessories.” She also uses the phrase “plan your attack” when suggesting tactics for checking out the collection, mimicking the H&M press release by evoking violent imagery when conveying information about the collection. Molly Creeden labels Salander a “course renegade,” another word like “biker” and “outsider” used in other articles that conjures up the idea of a person who would rebel against the status quo. She also quotes Summerville as stating, “we stayed away from fishnet, giant spiked collars, shiny leathers” when it came to designing the costumes for the film.

Each author implicitly or explicitly relates the collection to Punk clothing styles and, although these publication outlets represent a diverse range of reporting topics and styles, their articles serve to strengthen and perpetuate the stereotype associated with that distinct clothing style. Based on the reported audience demographics from each of the publication outlets, their audiences would likely consist of approximately the same number of college educated males and females aged 18-45 years, who are “plugged-in” to and consumers of popular culture, i.e. movies, television, fashion, books and the like, and who have at least some, if not a significant amount, of disposable income. An audience that brings an acute awareness of popular culture archetypes is therefore more likely to make the connection between the less explicit allusions to Punk stereotypes, and more easily able to catch the explicit references.

Beyond furthering the stereotype, the press release and most of the authors also try to make sense of the announcement for the reader. The press release relays the most straightforward and fashion specific message, claiming the collection is the style that will “define the streets this

winter” and quoting another H&M designer, Anna Norling, as stating the collection is “much more than a costume...it’s right for now.” In doing so, the press release provides a justification or a rationale for why the collection was produced and why people, most likely women, should purchase items from the collection. More than just regurgitating information from the press release, almost every author builds off of the information H&M provides and makes their own attempt to explain why the collection was created along with their own interpretation as to who would wear items from the collection and why. Obliquely or otherwise, these authors parallel the rationale for buying items from the collection with the belief that many women identify with Salander’s experiences with violence and being targeted by men and, understanding the anti-social and violent rhetoric inherent to Punk clothing styles, want to mimic Salander’s characterization through that rhetoric. The tone these authors use to make this argument, with one exception, falls somewhere between confusion and resistance in spite of the fact that every author seems to view Salander’s character favorably. The outcome creates a marked disconnect between apparent approval of Salander’s character and discomfort at the possibility of real women wearing versions of her wardrobe and perhaps emulating her behavior.

Rich is the first to convey this discomfort in her [cinemablend.com](http://cinemablend.com) article, which she opens by describing Salander as a “dour and violent girl,” a “misunderstood genius who has trouble communicating that to the world,” then posing the question, “So why wouldn’t you want to dress like her?” Her answer, “Believe it or not, H&M,” as well as her description of Salander and the rhetorical question, makes it clear she is suspicious of the whole concept. Still she acknowledges that the collaboration between Summerville and H&M “makes sense,” especially because H&M “appeals to the young women who may identify with [Salander].” And, although she’s “not sure [she] understand[s]” those who would want to dress like Salander, she “gets



where [the desire] comes from” given Salander’s favorable portrayal in the media as the “ideal modern heroine,” i.e. one who is both intelligent and physically capable of defending herself and others under her protection. Similarly, the staff post from [theweek.com](http://theweek.com) echoes the skepticism of Rich’s logic right from sub-title, which asks if the collection is “brilliant marketing – or just strange?” Even though the author/article agrees with Rich that the collaboration between Summerville and H&M “makes cross-promotional sense,” and that Salander is a “heroine,” “inspired” and “fierce,” they also consider the collection to be “slightly absurd” since Salander “isn’t exactly a ‘fashionista’.” Despite this seeming disparagement, the author/article still asserts that “girls everywhere will likely be inspired to ape Salander’s fierceness” by buying and wearing pieces from the collection once the film is released, implying perhaps that those “girls” were not already fierce in the way Salander is and would need or like to be. Likewise, towards the end of her very positive [vogue.com](http://vogue.com) article Creeden feels the need to clarify that the idea behind the collection “is not to have the women of America ditching their pleated silk-chiffon dresses to traipse around in clothing suitable for violent acts of vengeance.” Using a quote from Summerville, Creeden suggests instead that women will buy pieces from the collection that embody what she calls a “moral code” inherent to Salander’s character “that women all over identify with.” These quotes are particularly significant because Creeden is writing not just about fierceness or rebellious coolness like other authors; instead she is directly raising the issue of vengeance by way violence as a blanket response for all the women in America. Perhaps her words, and similar ones from the other authors, are a reflection of her discomfort with the methods Salander uses to apply her “moral code,” including hacking into people’s computers, stealing vast sums of money, and anally raping and forcibly tattooing those who wrong her or those under her protection. Either way, the fact that Creeden included these apparently

cautionary lines in her article suggests she believes women buying the collection may be tempted to emulate Salander's code and actions, a belief that the other authors seem to tacitly share. Moreover, this overall line of reasoning presupposes that women in America would have reason to commit acts of vengeance, reasons perhaps not unlike Salander's.

In contrast, Stewart's nypost.com article comes across loud, clear, and consistent right from the opening paragraphs. In essence, Stewart argues throughout that Salander has become such a sensation because many women can identify with her experience, particularly when she is victimized, and, because of "current societal anger," imagine exacting revenge in the same ways as Salander. She starts by claiming that the women of Brooklyn are in touch with their "inner Lisbeth Salander" because they have been "terrorized by more than 20 sex attacks...over the past eight months," then quotes an online commenter as saying that she "fantasiz[es] about being the girl who knifes him [an attacker]." Only after this contextualization does Stewart reveal the H&M Dragon Tattoo collection, stating once the collection is in stores "regular women can channel their outer Lisbeth, too," a statement even more direct than Creeden's. Stewart clearly favors this happening because she draws on opinions from two different like-minded sources, one of which is Melissa Silverstein, editor of the blog Women and Hollywood, who notes that Salander "comes from a book that resonated with people all over the world." Silverstein's interpretation of why the book is so popular underscores her belief that readers are able to connect to a female character who is physically assaulted once and sexually assaulted twice and, though she is ultimately victorious over her enemies, in the end she is still left broken hearted and alone. Although the New York Post is somewhat notorious for its propensity to sensationalize stories, Stewart's article is an anomaly within this group of articles only in its directness, not in its content. In order to understand why these authors, publishing in fairly

disparate kinds of publication outlets, all made comparable parallels between why women may want to purchase these items one needs to understand the cultural context from which the book, film, and collection has emerged.

The concept of space, especially public spaces, and women's experiences in those spaces is crucial to understanding why these authors may have arrived at roughly the same conclusions. In her landmark essay, "Street Harassment and the Informal Ghettoization of Women," Cynthia Grant Bowman defines street harassment as "the harassment of women in public places by men who are strangers to them," which includes both verbal and nonverbal behavior, and argues that street harassment "restricts physical and geographical mobility of women...depriving her of liberty and security in the public sphere" (519, 523, 539). Grant Bowman also contends that street harassment exacts a severe psychological toll on a woman and cites the work of other researchers who found that "rapists often harass women on the street and violate their personal space in order to determine which women are likely to be easy targets," a process called rape-testing (536). Even those authors who don't outright state that these clothes are in some way a reflection of the current climate of violence towards women, as Stewart does in her nypost.com article, they seem to be obliquely referencing the larger conversation about women's inequitable position in society, one which ultimately leads to a proliferation of violent behavior towards women.

What may be less clear is why most of the authors appear to be reluctant or averse to having the collection be available to women even though they view Salander's character favorably. An explanation may be found in Nilgin Yusuf's article, "On the Outside, Looking In: The Iconography of the Outsider in Contemporary Fashion," in which he argues "there are no more tempting targets for romantic fantasies than those misunderstood by others" (205). To

demonstrate his point Yusuf cites clothing items that have been monogrammed with characters like Travis Bickle from the film *Taxi Driver*, Jack Torrance from *The Shining*, as well as James Dean and Marlon Brando, all of whom exude an elusive aura culturally perceived as cool by virtue of being labeled an outsider (205). Moreover, he argues that “the outsider is the embodiment of personal freedom: unconditioned, free from social constraints and treading *his* own path,” (emphasis mine, 205). Arguably, Salander’s depiction as an outsider through Punk clothing styles is similar to those traits in Yusuf’s list: even as she breaks the law and behaves as a deviant in many ways, she also often does so on the side of ethical good. Her morally questionable acts work to reclaim her autonomy from her new guardian, to help Blomkvist, and to stop a killer who targets women not unlike Salander herself. Her prickly attitude is also analogous to the characters in Yusuf’s examples, and Larsson also describes her as having innate abilities like a photographic memory, renowned computer hacking skills, plus a rad motorcycle. The most apparent difference between Salander and Yusuf’s examples is her gender. It appears as though her gender is enough reason for authors to approach Salander’s clothing with unease as opposed to the celebration Yusuf’s analysis rouses. It’s possible that the seeming anxiety exhibited by most of these authors may have occurred when reflecting on what is considered culturally acceptable for women’s appearance and conduct, the extreme degree to which Salander’s character deviates from those expectations, and the realization that women would soon have access to embodying Salander’s ideology through her clothing style.

This tension between approving or applauding Salander’s character and being resistant to the idea of real women wearing replicas of her clothing style, in spite of acknowledging the desire or even factual need for clothing that communicates both defensive and offensive rhetoric, adds another layer of conflict, tension, and disconnect to those previously discussed in the

analysis of the novel and film. In addition to the tension Punk clothing styles communicate in general, the disconnect between how Salander is characterized as using that clothing style versus the brutality of her experiences in the novel, and how the film works in conjunction with her clothing style to further limit her agency and autonomy, now the rhetoric surrounding and used to promote the collection itself exhibits a distinct unease. An analysis of the data from the survey narrows further towards understanding the visual rhetoric that was used to promote the collection and provides some insight into the real world implications of the findings thus far.

## THE SURVEY DATA

A mixed methods survey was utilized to investigate and analyze the visual rhetoric used to promote the H&M Dragon Tattoo collection. The goal of the survey was to determine if Larsson's depiction of Salander through Punk clothing styles translated to participants through the visual rhetoric of the H&M Dragon Tattoo collection, and to unearth any broad patterns in cultural discourse that might be relevant to the present study. The research questions were "Does the clothing narrative Larsson constructed for Salander in the novel remain intact within the H&M Dragon Tattoo collection?" and "What can we learn about the approachability of the wearer based on the data?" It was believed that survey participants would align the Punk rhetoric inherent in the H&M Dragon Tattoo collection with ideology or ideas from Punk subculture regarding unapproachability that have been perpetuated through various media by way of public pedagogy.

The purpose of the quantitative aspect of the survey was to determine if Larsson's characterization of Salander through Punk clothing styles remained intact within the actual H&M Dragon Tattoo collection. Using methods from the field of social cognition, the survey consists of 11 pictures, five of which are official pictures of models wearing the H&M Dragon Tattoo collection that were released to the press by H&M specifically to promote the collection, and the remaining six pictures feature models wearing H&M clothing from unrelated collections that are generally representative of what the brand normally sells. In an effort to minimize overt bias, the pictures that do not feature the Dragon Tattoo collection were selected based on their overall similarity to the pictures that do feature the Dragon Tattoo collection with regard to similar lighting and background, similar poses, facial expressions, etc. Survey participants were asked, "Based on your first impression, how well do you think each descriptor word applies to the

character of the person in the picture?” and rated their agreement with each of the five descriptor words on a scale of 1 (Not at all) to 4 (Entirely/Totally). The five descriptor words on which the pictures were measured are character traits that were chosen informally, and based on their association to the concept of approachability. The descriptor words are divided generally into Positive/Neutral and Neutral/Negative categories, and more specifically into Approachable: Friendly, Approachable: Sexy, Unapproachable, and Negative subcategories (see Table 2). Each picture had one descriptor word from each sub-category and one additional word from a random subcategory. Two hundred of the 244 participants who began the survey completed each question. Using Chi-square statistical tests, there is conclusively more than a 95% chance these response values are not random or the result of chance. Based on the data, it would appear that the rhetoric of Punk clothing styles first used by Larsson to characterize Salander in the text has remained intact in the H&M collection by way of the film.

Table 2. Trait Descriptor Words by Category

<b>POSITIVE/NEUTRAL</b>		<b>NEUTRAL/NEGATIVE</b>	
<b>Approachable: Friendly</b>	<b>Approachable: Sexy</b>	<b>Unapproachable</b>	<b>Negative</b>
Friendly	Sexy	Aloof	Frightening
Kind	Attractive	Cold	Hostile
Cheerful	Alluring	Unfriendly	Aggressive
Approachable	Hot	Unsociable	Threatening
Outgoing	Good Looking	Withdrawn	Menacing

Survey participants were also asked, “What else would you say about the person in the photo?” after every picture. Since it is known that writing is a way of expressing cultural ideologies and that interpreting those artifacts often reveals patterns of human experience, this question was included in an effort to better understand not only how participants would further describe the person in the photo, but also to discover if any broad patterns emerged as being relevant to this study. To ensure a certain level of reliability, two individuals coded the

qualitative data from the pictures featuring models wearing the H&M Dragon Tattoo collection, 63 responses per picture on average, independently using an inductive approach to form discrete categories and subcategories. The two coders then negotiated and agreed upon the following categories: Gender, Research Terms, Body, and Desire. These categories emerged for both coders as being the most pervasive responses in the free writing. This data further confirmed the hypothesis, and also helped to illuminate the discourse of the roles of women and Punk clothing styles in society in ways that parallel the tension present in the review of the novel, analysis of the film, and rhetorical analysis of press release articles.

### Quantitative

Survey participants seemed to correlate the pictures featuring models wearing the H&M Dragon Tattoo collection, hereafter referred to as “DT pictures,” with the Neutral/Negative category character traits associated with unapproachability. Conversely, participants seemed to correlate pictures featuring models wearing H&M clothing from unrelated collections, hereafter referred to as “NonDT pictures,” with the Positive/Neutral category character traits associated with approachability. This seems to indicate that the impression given by the models in the DT pictures aligns with the stereotypical impression often projected by Punk clothing styles. The qualitative data seems to confirm the hypothesis.

A comparison of mean scores between DT and NonDT pictures for the Negative and Unapproachable character trait subcategories indicated that study participants tended to align DT pictures with Neutral/Negative character traits more so than NonDT pictures. Study participants rated DT pictures with descriptor words from the Negative subcategory at 2.35 on average, and NonDT pictures at 1.567 on average. For descriptor words in the Unapproachable subcategory, study participants rated DT pictures at 2.75 on average, and NonDT pictures at 1.787 on average.



Perhaps the clearest evidence of the divide in study participant responses can be found in the .963 difference in averages between DT and NonDT pictures in the Unapproachable subcategory, the largest such difference of the four subcategories. This deviation will be discussed further in the qualitative section. There is also a .4 variance in averages between DT pictures in the Negative and Unapproachable subcategories, which seems to suggest that study participants were slightly more likely to consider the person in the picture merely unfriendly or unsociable as opposed to outright threatening or hostile.

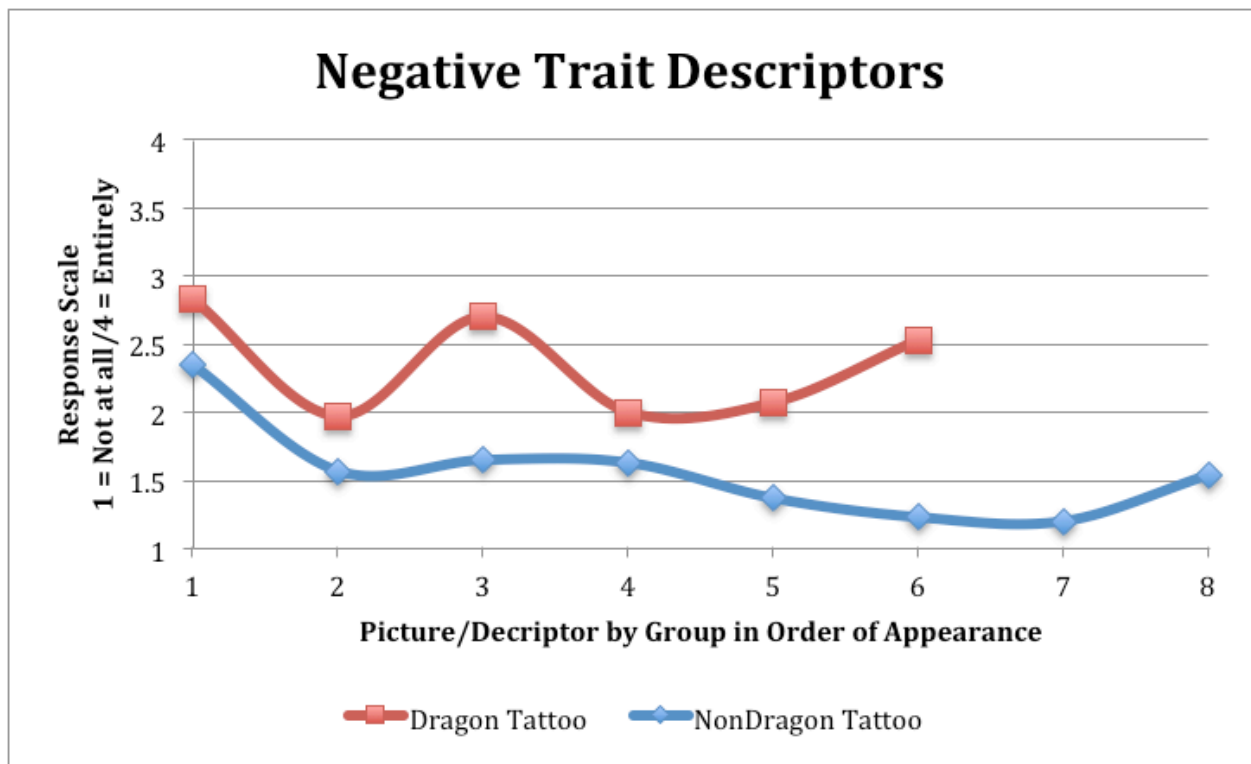


Figure 7. Average Negative Trait Descriptor Scores for DT and NonDT Pictures

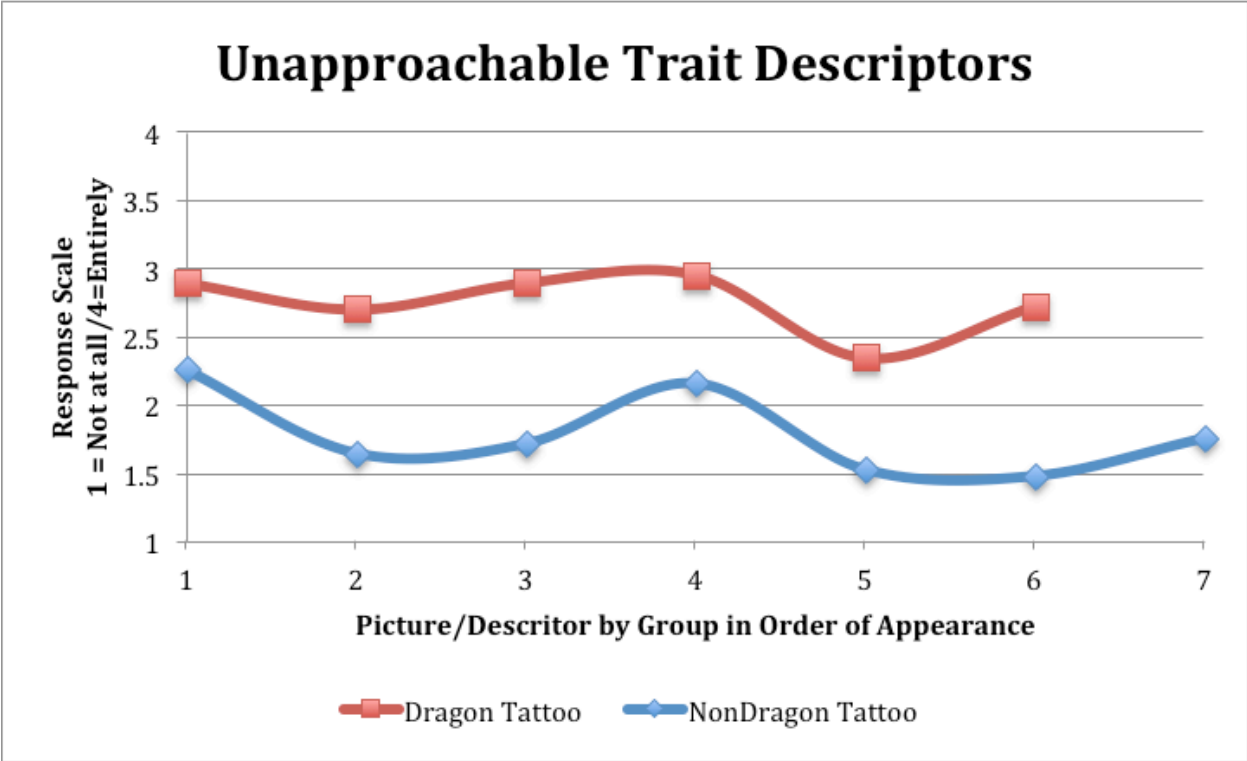


Figure 8. Average Unapproachable Trait Descriptor Scores for DT and NonDT Pictures

A similar comparison for the Approachable: Sexy and Approachable: Friendly character trait subcategories shows essentially the inverse. Study participants tended to affiliate NonDT pictures with Positive/Neutral character traits to a greater extent than DT pictures. On average, study participants rated DT pictures with descriptor words from the Approachable: Sexy subcategory at 1.723, and NonDT pictures at 2.597. For descriptor words in the Approachable: Friendly subcategory, study participants on average rated DT pictures at 1.63, and NonDT pictures at 2.471. The difference in mean scores between DT and NonDT pictures for both the Approachable: Sexy and Approachable: Friendly subcategories, .874 and .841, appears to indicate a level of consistency in the impression study participants got from the two groups of pictures.

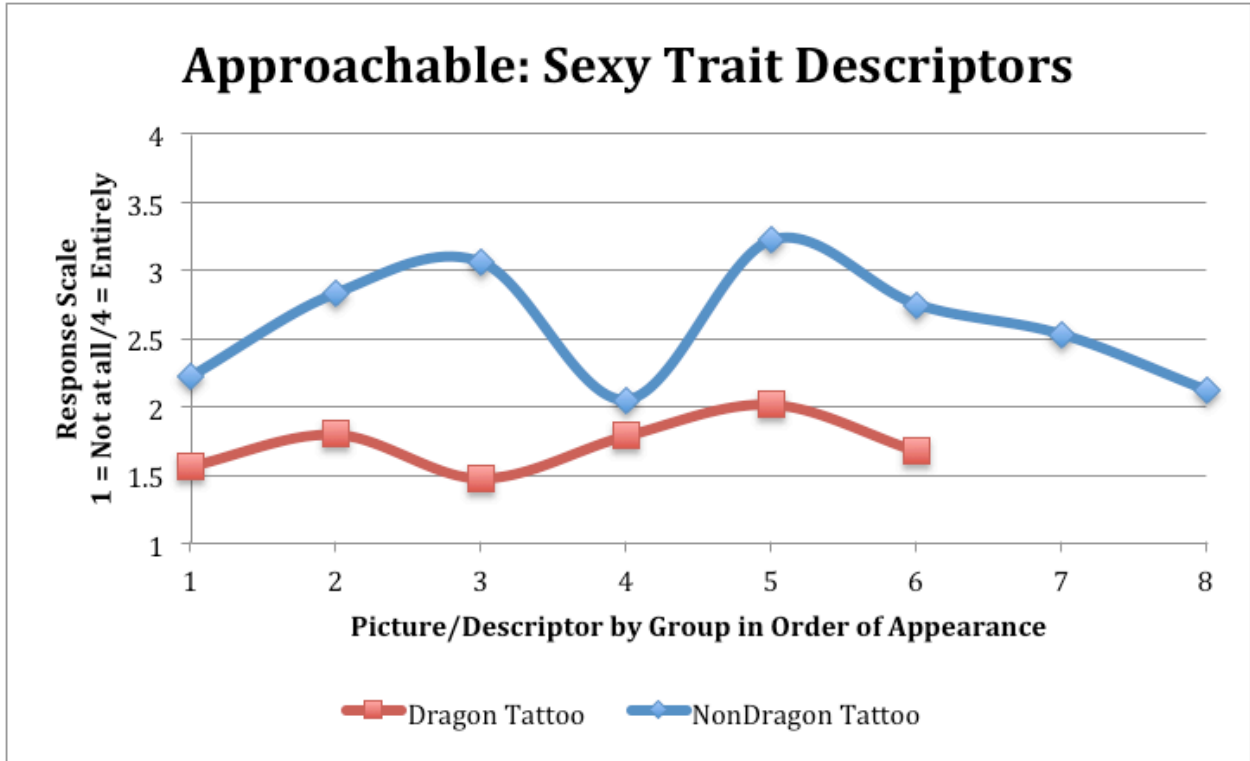


Figure 9. Average Approachable: Sexy Trait Descriptor Scores for DT and NonDT Pictures

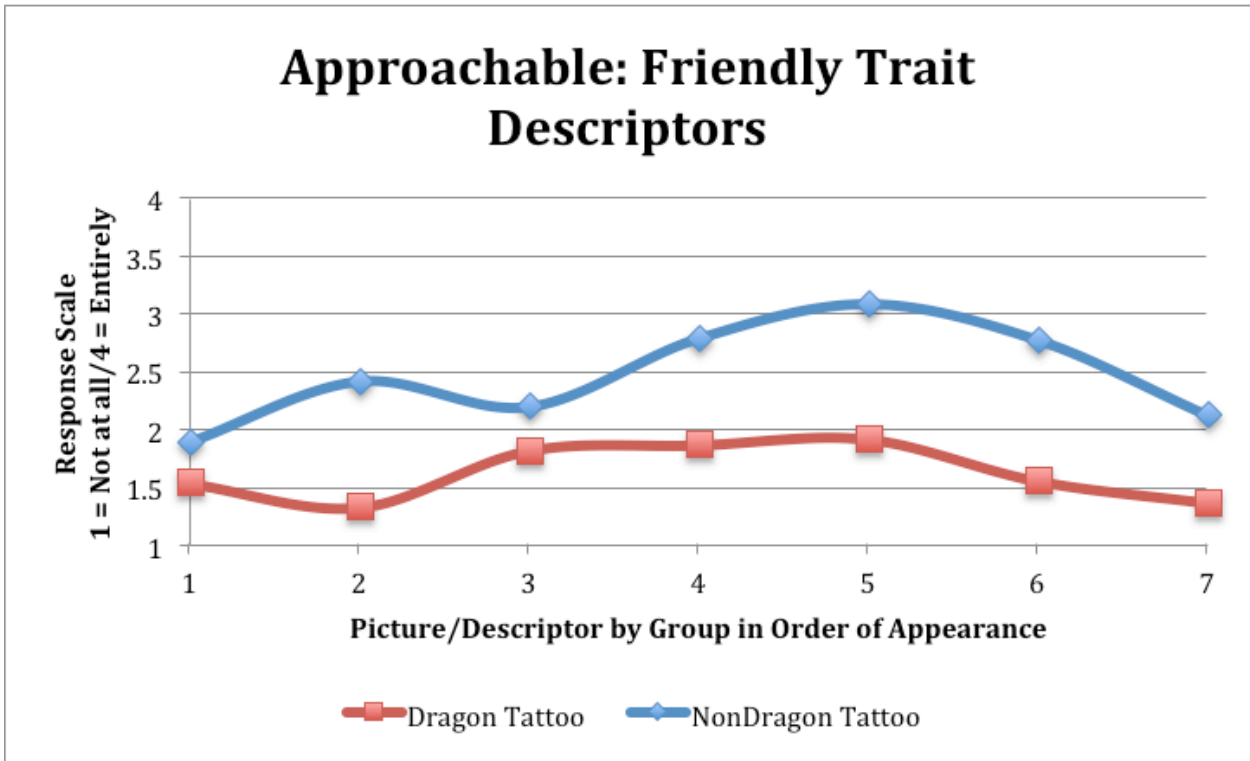


Figure 10. Average Approachable: Friendly Trait Descriptor Scores for DT and NonDT Pictures

## Qualitative

Since participants were limited by the descriptor words, it was hoped that the opportunity to freely respond would offer insight into the larger cultural conversation surrounding Punk clothing styles as they relate to women, clothing in general, and first impressions. Care was taken to present quotes in their original context and with exact spelling, grammar, and punctuation. The following categories encompass the most common themes that emerged from the coding, and they exhibit the same tension present in the analysis of the clothing style in the novel, film, and rhetorical analysis.

### Gender:

Survey participants used gender in many of their free responses through pronoun usage and terms that signify masculinity and androgyny. Participants used female pronouns to such an extent in their responses that it was unnecessary to categorize. Specific subcategories therefore emerged as Male/Masculinity and Neutral/Androgynous. There was a clear pattern of instances in which participants used conceptions of masculinity in their responses characterizing the person in the picture. A representative sampling of these responses includes, “creepy and more masculine,” “very masculine. the black lipstick is an odd choice,” and “Again, ugly shoes/outfit. Too manly of an outfit.” Based on these responses, it would seem that male or masculine traits had negative associations in this context, and seems to indicate participants with those views found the person in the picture to be undesirable.

In addition, participants also used notions of androgyny in their responses when referring to the person in the picture. These comments occurred more frequently than the Male/Masculine responses. Participants used terms indicating androgyny by using neutral characterizations, like “this person” or “this individual” for example, by using the word “androgynous,” or most often

with responses like “is that a boy or a girl?”; “can’t tell if it’s a boy or a girl”; and “gender of this person isn’t 100% clear.” It should be noted that prior to taking the survey, participants were told the survey was about “the impact clothing has on first impressions of women.” These responses, therefore, may simply be a reflection of the wording of the question or that participants did not make the connection between the study parameters and the pictures in front of them. If that is the case, these responses may suggest, at the very least, a level of anxiety about the model’s seemingly indeterminate gender. In light of the pre-survey disclosure though, these responses seem less innocuous than if participants had not been told as is evident in other responses like, “Gender undermined,” and “Wasn’t sure it was a girl until I looked twice.” Further, it may indicate that notions of femininity and masculinity are fairly rigid for some participants, and persons presenting outside of those ideals result in a tension similar to the one expressed by the authors of the articles in the earlier rhetorical analysis. Furthermore, this phenomenon may also suggest that ideals of femininity have been skewed to an extent that it rendered some participants incapable of discerning female from male even though participants had been advised of the study’s parameters and when it’s arguably evident that the person in each photo presents as female.

#### Research Terms:

Survey participants frequently used the specific research terms in their responses, or added to them in some way. Subcategories surfaced based on specific and implicit references to Punk/Goth/Emo, the Dragon Tattoo film, any of the Descriptor Words from the quantitative part of the survey, and finally Alternate Descriptor Words and phrases participants used to further characterize the person in the picture. An effort was made to code the responses from the Descriptor Word subcategory separate from those that make reference to clothing, styling, face,

or body of the person in the picture as a means to see what other words participants associated with the chosen descriptor words in the quantitative part of the survey.

In addition to outright use of the research terms “Punk” and “Goth,” participants used related terms like “badass” and “rebellious,” and other participants made associations like, “Goth. Disturbed. Rebellious.” and “Goth, punk, alternative.” At the same time, several participants made the association between Punk and music by writing things like, “punk rock,” “loves music,” or just “Music. Fashion.” Participants also made the connection to approachability stereotypes of Punk clothing styles in this context by writing, “She looks even less friendly than the last one, possibly because she is wearing all black.” Further, one participant mentions the film explicitly by stating, “...now this gal reminds me of the girl from The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo movie. Personally I probably wouldn’t approach her, but she seems to have found a niche and she’s working it.” The fact that there were multiple instances of participants using the specific research terms and referencing contiguous terms in the free responses for each DT picture seems to indicate that the spectacle of Punk subculture is still widely well known and the rhetoric communicated by the clothing is largely understood.

Since participants were given descriptor words to choose from, it was expected that they would repeat them to some degree in their responses. Interestingly, when participants repeated the descriptor word or words, they often used a series of words that included their own additions. An illustrative sample includes, “Dark. Muted. Distant. Unapproachable. Malnourished.”; “stuck up; introvert; unapproachable”; and “aloof, unwelcoming, threatening, untouchable.” Other participants were more descriptive, writing “This person is very attractive and confident but not very sociable.”; “standoffish, not easily approachable”; and “she looks more withdrawn, uninterested in others.” Many of the descriptor words the participants used were from the

Unapproachable subcategory, and the words participants volunteered would align with that same subcategory in that they are typically viewed as less extreme than “hostile” or “threatening.”

This would seem to indicate that participants were able to relate to the provided descriptor words from that category and perhaps are more likely to consider the person in the picture merely cold rather than menacing. A very few responses did deviate from this pattern, like “She looks cool, intimidating, street-smart,” however, which could indicate that there are some inconsistencies in the meanings of the words and the perception of this clothing style.

There were many, many instances when participants did not use one of the provided descriptor words and instead gave their own descriptor word, most of which suggest either a character trait or mood, or a title of sorts. Most of these alternate descriptor words correlate with those in the Unapproachable and Negative descriptor word subcategories, however some of them do not. A full list is provided in Appendix C. A representative sample of alternate words includes less approachable ones like “snobby,” “bitchy,” “reserved,” “unimpressed,” “drug addict/junky,” “sadistic,” “thief,” and “pessimist,” as well as a few like “cool,” “edgy,” “trendy,” “unique,” and “smart.” Additionally, participants used more descriptive techniques to convey their positive or negative impression, most of which consisted of a kind of projection with the participant telling a story of sorts. For example, participants frequently wrote things like “I wouldn’t want my son bringing her home!”; “I’d cross the street...”; “She looks like she could beat the crap out of me. She makes me nervous.”; and “She could probably blackmail me into doing something.” A few also wrote more optimistically: “Is probably friendly past the barrier of her outward appearance.”; “Someone who isn’t mean or friendly, but just keeps to themselves.”; and “I often find these types friendlier and kinder than conservative-looking people.” As in the case when participants used the provided descriptor word, most of these alternate descriptor words and

descriptive techniques would align with the Unapproachable and Negative subcategories. These are further indications of the largely consistent message of Punk clothing styles, as well as the presence of inconsistencies in the meanings of words and the perception of this clothing style.

#### Body:

Survey participants' responses repeatedly underscored the impact the face, body language, and styling of the person in picture had on the formation of their impressions. Facial Expression, Body/Posture, and Clothing/Styling materialized as the most salient subcategories. For the first subcategory, Facial Expression, participants' most common response amounted to either "Her facial expression speaks almost louder than her clothing" and "I tried not to take facial expression into consideration – it was difficult," or "There is no warmth or joy or life in this person's face. It gave me chills," and "Creepy facial expression." These two different kinds of responses indicate some participants' awareness that the person in the picture is likely a model of some kind, while also suggesting that other participants were willing to suspend disbelief and simply characterize the person in the picture. Notably, too, is that no participant had anything positive to say about the facial expression of the person in the picture, unlike the other categories and subcategories discussed thus far. This might suggest evidence of the stereotypical response to Punk clothing styles or, since females in Western society are often expected to smile and be attractive in pictures, this could reflect a similar tension found in the responses in the Gender category created by transgressed gender norms.

A similar tendency in responses was also apparent when participants chose to write about the body and posture of the person in the picture. For example, participants' responses swung between "This person's eyes appear to glare" and "She's obviously posing" on the meta side of the spectrum to "Her eyes freak me out and distract me" and "The way they are turned away



from me and looking back like that just says get away from me” on the suspension of disbelief side. This could suggest an understanding that the person in the picture is likely a model and would likely have been directed to pose. The same trend occurred in this subcategory as in the previous: no participant responded positively to the body or posture of the person in the picture. In fact, there were a number of responses like, “She needs to hit the buffet”; “She seems hungry”; and “This person may be malnourished,” as well as two direct uses of “anorexic.” These responses could be indicative of the rigid cultural ideals for female beauty and the larger societal trend of critiquing women’s bodies based on those standards.

Participants’ responses to the clothing and styling, i.e. makeup, hair, and accessories, of the person in the picture diverged a bit from the previous two subcategories. In general, participants tended to respond negatively to the styling, demonstrating Punk clothing styles’ deviation from Western notions of female beauty. However, participants’ responses seemed to suggest a finer distinction of how individual styling choices impact perceptions. For example, some participants wrote responses like, “Definitely an aggressive style, especially the zipper and the fabrics.”; “Her hair is off-putting.”; “The eye make-up makes it worse!”; and “That ring on her left hand looks a bit threatening.” Those kinds of responses indicate some participants have a keen eye for detail orientation, and suggest that even small styling or accessory choices can have an impact on first impressions. It should be noted, however, that the subcategories in the larger Body category overlap at times. Several responses amounted to, “It’s not just the clothes that make me think she is [negative description], it’s also her [makeup/hair/accessory] and [other makeup/hair/accessory].” One example of these more nuanced responses is from the participant who wrote, “Realistically the hostility comes from the make up and hair and not entirely dependent on the clothing choice.”

The responses in this category were not entirely unexpected. Given the research questions, and to avoid promulgating pictures of headless women, it was determined that the pictures would feature real people and that the face or body of the person in the picture would not be censored in any way. Participants were told that the survey had to do with the impact of clothing on approachability and first impressions, and they were not informed about the *Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* or the H&M Dragon Tattoo collection component of the research in any way. Lacking that information, it is understandable that participants would comment on the impact of things like facial expression, posture, and overall styling in their responses. The regularity of their responses further solidifies the tension present in the other avenues of analysis, as well as a fairly well honed awareness of how multi-faceted the first impression process is in that there is usually no singular thing about a person that leads to our initial impressions. The formation of first impressions, as Asch first determined, is varied and layered and often unconscious; these responses seem to reflect an understanding of that ill-defined and nebulous process.

#### Desire (Gendered):

There were several instances when survey participants indicated positive feelings for the clothing, as well as for the person in the picture. There are fewer responses in this category in relation to the others, however the pattern is clear and marked enough to warrant serious comment. This final category deviates slightly from the previous three in that the responses for one of the subcategories have been separated and analyzed based on the participant's gender. The responses in the first subcategory, Wanting Clothing, were like the responses in the previous subcategories in that they are universal across gender, and so were analyzed as a whole. The responses from the second subcategory, Relationship/Interaction, were similar enough in nature to be grouped together in a subcategory, but varied significantly in application when accounting

for the gender of the survey participant, and so were separated and analyzed by gender. First, for the Wanting Clothing subcategory, participants indicated either their desire for a specific item shown on the person in the picture or expressed a positive reaction to the clothing. For example, participants wrote things like, “Those boots are incredible. She looks like she’s gonna kick some ass in that outfit.”; “I love her edgy outfit.”; and “I actually like her outfit.” Three participants also noted “(But I kind of want those pants.)”; “I really, really want that coat.”; and “I WANT one of these hoodies!” Though there are only a few like them, these responses may be following the pattern in most other subcategories of participants providing some positive responses. It could also simply indicate differentiating taste levels, although in that case it is notable that there are relatively so few positive responses.

One of the most remarkable ways in which participants responded had to do with an apparent desire for some kind of interaction with the person in the picture either by way of a command ostensibly directed specifically to the person in the picture or a relationship with the person in the picture. Again the responses in this Relationship/Interaction subcategory are divided by gender. Female participants were far less likely to express a desire for either an interaction or a relationship. Only two wrote anything of the sort, one of which was very direct, “Get yourself together girl,” the other was decidedly indirect, “All she needs is a smile on her face, and she would look beautiful!” Additionally, there were just two female participants who indicated a desire for a relationship, one who responded, “She looks alternative, but cool, like someone you would want to get to know,” and the other who envisioned a negative relationship when she wrote, “I Wouldn’t even give her a hello in fear of getting punched in The face.” The dearth of this type of response, especially in comparison with the frequency of similar male responses discussed in the next paragraph, suggests that the females surveyed had no apparent

wish to interact in any way with the person in the picture, a claim that the quantitative data in the Figure 11 supports.

In contrast, a clear pattern emerged in the responses of male participants with regards to an expressed desire to interact or have a relationship with the person in the photo. As an example, several male participants wrote clear directives like, “Smile,” and “Stand up straight!” Many more, however, expressed an implicit or explicit desire to have some kind of relationship with the person in the picture. Some of the responses seem innocent enough on the surface, like “I could see myself approaching her out of interest rather than out of attractiveness. Is probably an interesting person.”; “Not the most approachable to most but definitely makes me curious on her story.”; and “Seems to be interesting, but probably unapproachable to most. Could carry on a long conversation with her.” Other male participants, though, took a different approach that seemed based on the attractiveness of the person in the picture: “Looks very interesting and alluring. She may seem threatening to others, but she is probably just putting on a façade.”; “Cute yet not closed off. Looks like wants to just have some fun.”; and “The fact that she is looking right at me makes her seem more approachable.” Lastly, some participants sexualized the person in the picture and chose to respond with an implied level of physical contact: “Wants sex but hates guys for wanting her. Dresses in a very deliberate put together look. easier to unzip her pants than her coat. I’d feel like i could get her to vent to me then make out with me.”; “kind of mysterious, which is also kind of sexy.”; and “bracelet and necklace make [*sic*] added to dark vampire look make me wonder which nipple is pierced.” These responses seem to indicate that for some male participants, the rhetoric of the Punk clothing style had no effect on gaging the unapproachability of the person in the picture. This gendered response was also reflected in the quantitative data for the Unapproachable descriptor words. When filtered by gender, the

percentage breakdown of female and male participants' ratings of the Approachable: Friendly, Approachable: Sexy, and Negative descriptor word subcategories were very similar. For descriptor words in the Unapproachable subcategory, however, males were significantly less likely than females to rate DT pictures as entirely unapproachable (see Appendix D for full breakdown).

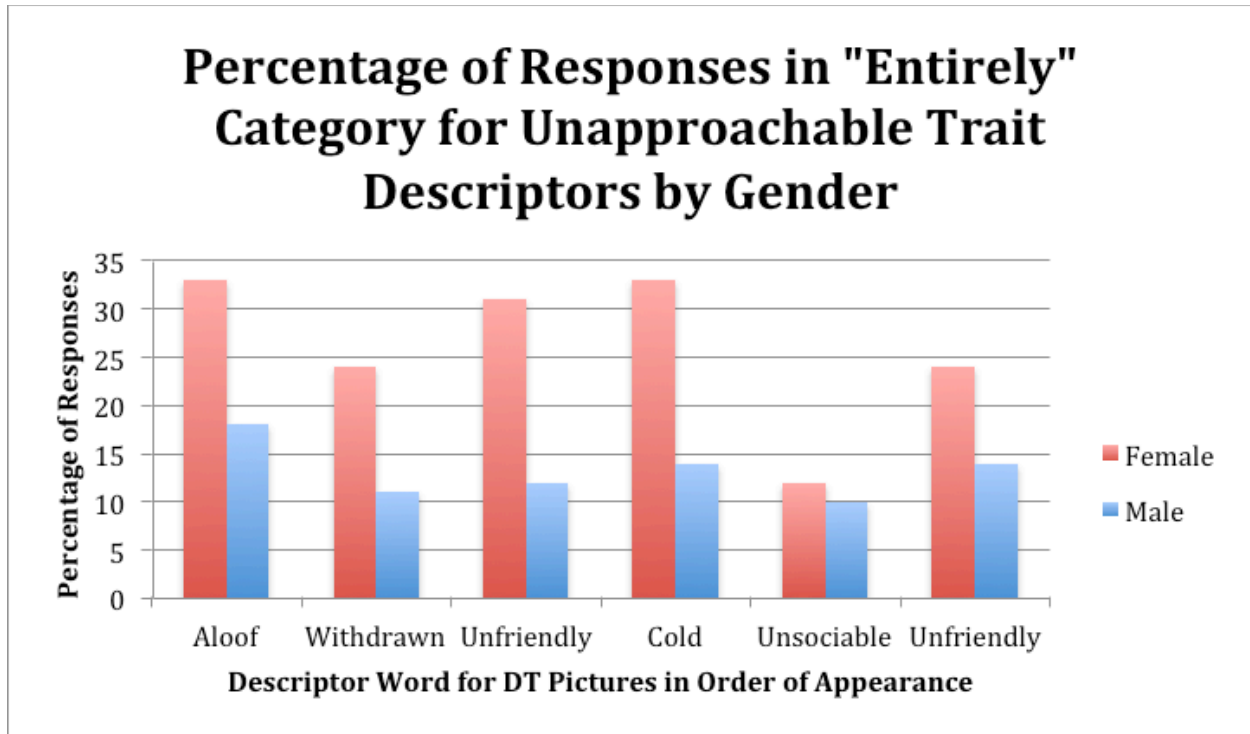


Figure 11. Unapproachable Trait Descriptors by Gender by Percent for "Entirely"

It is important to clarify that while texts like these responses do reflect broad societal beliefs, this analysis is primarily concerned with how these responses depict reality rather than with whether such responses contain true or false statements. In other words, these responses are not considered to be evidence of what male participants would actually do. And again, while there are notably fewer of these responses from participants compared to other subcategories, there are markedly more of these responses from male than female participants; for the researcher, that alone warrants inclusion.

It may seem reasonable to conclude that some male participants were simply less sensitive to the rhetoric communicated by the clothing style or perhaps not as adept at “reading” the language of the clothing style in comparison with the essentially all of the female participants. However, the pattern in these responses makes it seem unlikely that male participants were simply less proficient than female participants at interpreting the rhetoric of the clothing style. From the more innocent to the distinctly sexualized, most of these responses from male participants begin with the participant expressing an awareness of the negative or unapproachable impression the person in the picture is arguably trying to communicate and is immediately followed by the participant brushing off or otherwise ignoring the “go away” message inherent in Punk clothing styles that the qualitative data demonstrates. These responses are indicative of men’s behavior broadly in patriarchal society, where women are routinely objectified and sexualized. Moreover, these responses may be marshaled as evidence of rape culture at work.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

It is essentially impossible to know why consumers of the collection purchased items they did. Research from the field of fashion merchandising indicates that consumers' rational for purchasing clothing is layered and often unconscious. For example, Molly Eckman, Mary Lynn Damhorst, and Sara J. Kadolph report in their article "Toward a Model of the In-Store Purchase Decision Process: Consumer Use of Criteria for Evaluating Women's Apparel," that women decide to purchase clothing based on "underlying values and attitudes, stored information and experience, and various psychological, sociological, and economic influences" (13). At any rate the discovery of such information is not the purpose of this research. Indeed my goal throughout has been to investigate holistically how the Punk clothing style as depicted in *The Girl*, the film, and the H&M Dragon Tattoo collection appears and works rhetorically in its varied manifestations and, based on that research, consider whether women attempt to address larger societal issues of street harassment and rape culture through clothing choices.

When considering the rhetoric communicated by Punk clothing styles and how those clothing styles are used to characterize Salander in the novel and film, the argument that clothing constitutes and works as a language provides some insight. There must be a sender and a receiver in order for a language to truly function, someone conveying a message and someone perceiving and interpreting the message. When shared across large groups of people, the social meanings of the messages a language conveys are agreed upon through a process of negotiation between members of that society. In his discussion of how language, including the language of clothing, acquires social meaning, Hebdige argues that,

"Notions concerning the sanctity of language are intimately bound up with ideas of social order. The limits of acceptable linguistic expression are prescribed by a number of

apparently universal taboos...Predictably then, violations of the authorized codes through which the social world is organized and experienced have considerable power to provoke and disturb” (91).

The language of Punk clothing styles from the 1970s clearly disrupt the agreed upon “authorized codes” in ways that resonate all the way through to the modern H&M Dragon Tattoo iteration. Though the clothing style was quickly commercialized and mass-produced, it was never entirely incorporated into the mainstream, possibly due to its truly socially transgressive message. As a relative anomaly in the clothing world, Punk clothing styles stand out and make a statement about the wearer that seems to have remained the same since the subculture originated.

Another useful viewpoint on the issue comes from Muriel Schulz’s 1975 study and essay titled “The Semantic Derogation of Women.” In it, Schulz traces the “pattern whereby virtually every originally neutral word for women has at some point in its existence acquired debased connotations or obscene reference, or both” (83). Further, Wolfram and Schilling-Estes, whose argument that a language reveals clues about the culture was mentioned in the introduction, claim that one of the “low-status groups” who are often denied true power and autonomy through language in society are women (51). Since the ideology that exists within the language surrounding labels for women centers around denigrating women and since women are also systematically denied agency and access to affect that language, it follows that the rhetoric of women’s clothing would work similarly to construct and perpetuate patriarchal societal dominance.

Given that he writes about the brutality of her formative years being the reason she is declared mentally incompetent by the state, in some ways it makes sense for Larsson and the subsequent film to use Punk clothing styles to characterize Salander since being legally



autonomous is not her ordinary state. Clothing styles presented one of the most available, and arguably powerful, ways for those within Punk subculture to articulate discontentment with their relatively powerless status and consequent rejection of the status quo. Salander, simply by virtue of being written as a female, is already part of the subordinate social group and Larsson's portrayal of her life as a traumatic experience is what prompts her use of Punk clothing styles. The result is the text paints Salander as being essentially condemned by the ideologically powerful to a position of even greater marginality, although Larsson seems to imply that marginality is her goal. These theoretical perspectives reveal how the intersections of Punk clothing styles and Salander's gender add a complex layer to her characterization through this clothing style. That complexity becomes more problematic, however, when removed from its fictional context in the novel and film and made into a reality via the H&M Dragon Tattoo collection.

Clothing functions as a language to communicate information about the wearer to people in their line of sight both for fictional characters and for individuals in the real world. For women, as a less powerful group in society, the socially agreed upon messages clothing can communicate are sometimes not in alignment with the intent of the wearer. This disconnect has led to a cultural myth that what a woman wears serves as blanket implied consent, a myth especially harmful, for example, in criminal trials of rape. Decades of research have confirmed that this myth can sway judges and juries to favor the accused over the survivor. Evidence of this myth can be found outside of a courtroom, too, indicating this way of thinking is prevalent in society as a whole as Roger L. Terry and Suzanne Doerge found in their study, "Dress, Posture, and Setting as Additive Factors in Subjective Probabilities of Rape." Through different combinations of independent variables, they concluded that "a woman who ventures out-of-doors

in seductive clothing and who appears passive and defenseless is perceived as a likely target of a rape” (906).

As a society, the belief seems to be that one type of clothing style is enough for judge, jury, and the court of public opinion to pronounce that a woman invited any crime a man committed against her. One might ask then why cannot a different clothing style, like the Punk incarnation found in the H&M Dragon Tattoo collection, do the opposite and deflect attack? After all, decades of popular culture have cultivated the idea that individuals wearing Punk clothing styles are a symbol of dangerous youth through popular media like novels and films. Since the tension between Salander’s clothing styles and her characterization as a victim and perpetrator problematizes the hype of critical approbation for her character, it seems possible that similar tensions about the clothing style’s effects could also happen for women wearing items from the H&M Dragon Tattoo collection. As seen in the nuanced responses from participants in the Styling subcategory, women who purchased even one or two items from the collection could be at risk for reactions similar to ones Larsson writes and the film shows that Salander experiences all because clothing works as a language.

One of the most fascinating aspects of language is that it has the power to beget action. Language is not simply in the ether, unable to impact or influence; it is in fact performative, as Robin Tolmach Lakoff argues in *The Language War* (22). Research from the field of social cognition provides insight into how language creates rhetorical action. For example, John A. Bargh, Mark Chen, and Lara Burrows conducted experiments to test their hypothesis that social behavior can be triggered automatically, that is, unconsciously or passively, by the presence of situational features like relevant objects and events in their article titled “Automaticity of Social Behavior: Direct Effects of Trait Construct and Stereotype Activation on Action” (231, 230).

The results of their three-part study, which have since been reproduced, demonstrated that when a stereotype was activated through words or pictures, participants behaved in a manner consistent with the stereotype in a subsequent context (239). In other words, participants unconsciously acted out the behavior typified by the stereotype once it was activated. These results are especially relevant to the present study for two additional reasons: first, the researchers concluded that the content of the stereotype is what determines how participants will behave, and second, the same process also happens during impression formation (237, 239). Said another way, if the behavior associated with an activated stereotype is rudeness, participants do not behave politely in interactions after the stereotype is activated; they behave rudely. Moreover, the phenomenon occurs even during the first moments of seeing or meeting someone new.

In the context of the present study, these findings might help to explain why the survey data, especially the qualitative data, elicited the kind of responses it did. Negative stereotypes surrounding Punk and its clothing styles are already entrenched in our cultural consciousness through repeated depictions in popular culture, like films, which Giroux theorized carry more pedagogical weight than other mediums. These stereotypes communicate a message that can lead the person receiving it to take a certain action, which the novel and film indicate can manifest in degrees from attention to scorn to an inverse response to the message of unapproachability. The behaviors the clothing style provokes are largely negative in scope because aggression and hostility are embedded within the rhetoric of the subculture and clothing style. So it would follow, then, that the activation of Punk subculture stereotypes through arguably any item of the H&M Dragon Tattoo collection could provoke a response for women in reality that is similar to the ones Larsson writes and the film presents, including being approached by men of unknown intent who have disregarded the rhetoric of unapproachability.

All of the evidence from each section of the study finds a similarly conflicted nature in the way the clothing style functions. For the fictional texts it manifests in Salander's powerful look in contrast to her ultimate status as marginalized. For the press releases, the conflict occurs when writers cannot affirm real women taking on the power implied in the clothing style that characterizes Salander. Finally in the survey results, the conflict shows in male respondents willingness to approach the women in the pictures despite female respondents resounding response that the clothing styles make her unapproachable. Analysis of the survey data seems to suggest that women wearing any part of the collection could perhaps be subjected to a range of negative behaviors. Ultimately, it would seem that the critical esteem conveyed onto Salander's character through Punk clothing styles in the novel, film, and press release articles is disconnected from how the H&M Dragon Tattoo collection is interpreted in reality, to the possible detriment of the women wearing it.

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APPENDIX A. O'TOOLE'S FRAMEWORK

<b>Unit/Function</b>	<b>Representational</b>	<b>Modal</b>	<b>Compositional</b>
<b>Work</b>	Narrative themes Scenes Portrayals Interplay of episodes	Rhythm Modality Gaze Framing Light Perspective	Gestalt: -Frame -Horizontals -Verticals -Diagonals  Proportion: -Geometry -Line -Rhythm -Colour
<b>Episode</b>	Actions, events Agents-patients-goals Focal/side sequence Interplay of actions	Relative Prominence -Scale -Centrality  Interplay of Modalities	Relative position in work: -Alignment -Interplay -Coherence
<b>Figure</b>	Character Object Act/Stance/Gesture Clothing Components	Gaze Stance Characterization Contrast -Scale -Line -Light -Colour	Relative position in episode Parallelism/Opposition Subframing
<b>Member</b>	Part of body/Object Natural form	Stylization	Cohesion: -Parallel -Contrast -Rhythm  Reference

APPENDIX B. OWYONG'S FRAMEWORK

<b>Unit/Function</b>	<b>Representational</b>	<b>Modal</b>	<b>Compositional</b>
<b>Overall Attire</b>	Functionality Hierarchical stratification Role distinction Ideological affiliation Formality Event	Color Contrast Focal point Number of layers Coverage of body Material	Segmental proportion Complexity Symmetrical/Asymmetrical cut
<b>Apparel</b>	Upper-body articles Lower-body articles One-piece outfits	Color Cut Fit to body Print Material Texture Neckline Length Picture Words/Message Brand Logos/Slogan	Print Material Color combination
<b>Element</b>	Functional/Decorative Clothing details	Design Color Size	Shape Material Position on apparel Alignment to body Rhythmic relations
<b>Accessory</b>	Functional/Decorative Add-ons to garment Head pieces Facial adornments Arm pieces Body adornments Footwear	Design Size Shape Color Reflectiveness Membership Brand Logo/Slogan	Symmetry Left-right orientation Top-down orientation Rhythmic relations Material qualities Texture

APPENDIX C. PARTICIPANTS' DESCRIPTOR WORDS

Mood/Character Trait or Title	Projection
<p>Negative: Standoffish, bored, opinionated, sloppy, pissy, angry, grumpy, sad, upset, independent, tough, creepy, dark, empty, messy, depressed, possibly anorexic, unhappy, high/on drugs, "funny/weird", crabby, mean looking, morbid, insecure, unimpressed, controversial, pissed off, lost, dark, annoyed, don't care, inconsiderate of others, "chip on his/her shoulder. Full of attitude", broody, lonely, secretive, alternative, disgruntled, hungry, reserved, miserable, serious, "get it done type of attitude", risk taker, private, defiant, bitchy, hurt, ill, hard core, doesn't want to be bothered, very passive, drugged, trying too hard, high maintenance, "daunting, picky character", scary, contrived, dangerous, daring, "sensitive to injustices and discrimination", quiet, sadistic, pessimist, "possibly alienated", doesn't care what others think, snobby, sickly, "Grungy – 'F...you' attitude but still trendy",</p> <p>Positive: introspective, tolerant of others, intelligent, practical, interesting, loves music, cool, edgy, trendy, unique, busy, driven, fashionable, confident, artistic, clever, young and hip, passionate, comfortable with who she is, smart</p> <p>Title: Model, fashion model, "upper class model types", poser, drug addict/junky, "This is a poster child of a runaway", thief, student, loner, punk rocker, "Edward Cullen fan...possible anarchist", Douche bag, cartoon character, "pissed off skater on her period so she wears loose ugly pants.", hipster.</p>	<p>Negative: "I feel very sympathetic to this person and concern", "I wouldn't want my son bringing her home!", "I'd cross the street...", "I'm polarized by this girl/picture. She could beat me up!", "She looks like she could beat the crap out of me. She makes me nervous.", "I would be nervous to approach her.", "She looks like someone who Would take advantage of someone without thinking twice And not caring who she hurt.", "She intimidates me a little.", "She looks like she is about to say something nasty to you.", "People would Move out of the way if she was walking toward them.", "Looks like someone who wants people to stay away. Probably takes a long time to warm up to people," "this person would rather walk down an alleyway than a sidewalk just to avoid interaction with people.", "She could probably blackmail me into doing something," "she looks attractive but a little hostile"</p> <p>Positive: "not cheerful, exactly, but kind and well-equipped."; "I bet this person is interesting", "Is probably friendly past the barrier of her outward appearance.", "I used to dress like this and, though I was withdrawn, I was also kind. Fashion choices aren't everything!", "Perhaps she is cold and unfriendly, or perhaps she just likes the clothes!", "She looks like she wants to be scary, but she doesn't pull it off very well", "She's probably not unfriendly once you talk to her.", "Someone who isn't mean or friendly, but just keeps to themselves.", "I often find these types friendlier and kinder than conservative-looking people."</p>

APPENDIX D. UNAPPROACHABLE SUBCATEGORY DESCRIPTOR WORDS BY  
GENDER

<b>Unapproachable: Female Responses by Percent</b>				
	1	2	3	4
Aloof	7	22	37	33
Withdrawn	11	27	36	24
Unfriendly	7	19	41	31
Cold	5	17	44	33
Unsociable	16	42	28	12
Unfriendly	8	31	36	24
<b>Unapproachable: Male Responses by Percent</b>				
	1	2	3	4
Aloof	13	30	37	18
Withdrawn	11	27	49	11
Unfriendly	8	29	50	12
Cold	16	23	45	14
Unsociable	20	39	29	10
Unfriendly	12	29	43	14

## APPENDIX E. SURVEY INSTRUMENT

NDSU – North Dakota State University  
Department of English  
318 Minard Hall  
Fargo, ND 58105

### NDSU RESEARCH STUDY

#### The Impact of Clothing on First Impressions and Approachability

Dear Survey Participant:

My name is Gina Kruschek. I am a graduate student in the Department of English at North Dakota State University, and I am conducting a research project that investigates the impact clothing has on first impressions of women.

You are invited to participate in this research study. The only criteria for participating in the study is that you must be 18 years of age or older and have access to a reliable internet connection. Your participation is entirely voluntary, and you may change your mind at any time. It should take about 10 minutes to complete the questionnaire about your impressions of the people pictured. You will be asked general information about your gender, age and location, but this information will not be linked with your responses. You will not be identified in these written materials.

If you have any questions about this project, please contact me via email at [gina.kruschek@my.ndsu.edu](mailto:gina.kruschek@my.ndsu.edu) or contact my advisor, Dr. Miriam Mara, at 701-231-6506 or via email at [miriam.mara@ndsu.edu](mailto:miriam.mara@ndsu.edu). If you have questions about the rights of human participants in research, or to report a problem, please contact the NDSU Institutional Review Board (IRB) Office at (701) 231.8908, toll-free at (855)800-6717, or [ndsu.irb@ndsu.edu](mailto:ndsu.irb@ndsu.edu).

Thank you for your participation in this study. If you wish to receive a copy of the research results, please email me at [gina.kruschek@my.ndsu.edu](mailto:gina.kruschek@my.ndsu.edu).

What is your gender?

Male          Female          Other          Prefer Not To Answer

Where are you located?

East Coast          West Coast          Midwest          South

What is your age?

18-29          30-39          40-49          50-59          60+



Based on your first impression, how well do you think each descriptor word applies to the character of the person in the picture? Please provide a response for each descriptor word.

1 = Not at all

4 = Entirely/Totally

Kind	1	2	3	4
Withdrawn	1	2	3	4
Attractive	1	2	3	4
Hostile	2	3	4	
Hot	1	2	3	4

What else would you say about the person in the photo?





Based on your first impression, how well do you think each descriptor word applies to the character of the person in the picture? Please provide a response for each descriptor word.

1 = Not at all

4 = Entirely/Totally

Friendly	1	2	3	4
Hot	1	2	3	4
Aloof	1	2	3	4
Hostile	2	3	4	
Attractive	1	2	3	4

What else would you say about the person in the photo?



Based on your first impression, how well do you think each descriptor word applies to the character of the person in the picture? Please provide a response for each descriptor word.

1 = Not at all

4 = Entirely/Totally

Unfriendly	1	2	3	4
Outgoing	1	2	3	4
Good Looking	1	2	3	4
Aggressive	1	2	3	4
Cold	1	2	3	4

What else would you say about the person in the photo?



Based on your first impression, how well do you think each descriptor word applies to the character of the person in the picture? Please provide a response for each descriptor word.

1 = Not at all

4 = Entirely/Totally

Alluring	1	2	3	4
Threatening	1	2	3	4
Approachable	1	2	3	4
Menacing	1	2	3	4
Unsociable	1	2	3	4

What else would you say about the person in this photo?



Based on your first impression, how well do you think each descriptor word applies to the character of the person in the picture? Please provide a response for each descriptor word.

1 = Not at all

4 = Entirely/Totally

Sexy	1	2	3	4
Withdrawn	1	2	3	4
Cheerful	1	2	3	4
Frightening	1	2	3	4
Kind	1	2	3	4

What else would you say about the person in the photo?



Based on your first impression, how well do you think each descriptor word applies to the character of the person in the picture? Please provide a response for each descriptor word.

1 = Not at all

4 = Entirely/Totally

Kind	1	2	3	4
Withdrawn	1	2	3	4
Attractive	1	2	3	4
Hostile	2	3	4	
Hot	1	2	3	4

What else would you say about the person in the photo?



Based on your first impression, how well do you think each descriptor word applies to the character of the person in the picture? Please provide a response for each descriptor word.

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Aggressive	1	2	3	4
Cold	1	2	3	4

What else would you say about the person in the photo?



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Approachable	1	2	3	4
Menacing	1	2	3	4
Unsociable	1	2	3	4

What else would you say about the person in this photo?



Based on your first impression, how well do you think each descriptor word applies to the character of the person in the picture? Please provide a response for each descriptor word.

1 = Not at all

4 = Entirely/Totally

Approachable		1	2	3	4
Unfriendly		1	2	3	4
Cheerful		1	2	3	4
Hostile	1	2	3	4	
Sexy		1	2	3	4

What else would you say about the person in this photo?





Based on your first impression, how well do you think each descriptor word applies to the character of the person in the picture? Please provide a response for each descriptor word.

1 = Not at all

4 = Entirely/Totally

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What else would you say about the person in this photo?



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4 = Entirely/Totally

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Unfriendly	1	2	3	4
Cheerful	1	2	3	4
Hostile	1	2	3	4
Sexy	1	2	3	4

What else would you say about the person in this photo?