

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Study

Cosplay, a shortened form of *kosupure*, that is the abbreviation from the English “costume play” (Winge, 2006, p. 67), is a common practice of fans of modern popular culture, involving a detailed reproduction of the image of a character: their appearance, costume, demeanor. In the 1970s, in the wake of the popularity of the series Star Trek and the Star Wars franchise, there were a lot of conventions in the USA - events where fans of science fiction gathered. Many visitors came there, dressed as their favorite characters. However, the term cosplay (*kosupure*) itself came into being later, in 1984. It was first used by Japanese designer Takahashi Nobuyuki. After his visit to the United States, he created the phrase “costume play”, which was eventually shortened to *kosupure*, or cosplay (Bruno, 2002). He described his experiences about American pop culture and its fans of fantasy and science fiction that he saw in Los Angeles where he attended World Con, a science fiction convention, that year (Winge, 2006, p. 66). Being greatly impressed by the costumed science fiction and fantasy fans that he had seen, especially those competing in the masquerade (Bruno, 2002), he encouraged his followers to apply costumes in the same way (Cozens, 2009). As a result, Takahashi enriched the English language, subculture and pop culture lexicon with two new words: cosplay and cosplayer.

Since the 1980s cosplay as a youth subculture has been popular in Japan, gradually winning fans all over the world (Napier 2007, p. 125). Manga magazines are sold at a great number of places today, and the arrival of the “Pokémon” obsession at the end of the 1990's made animé globally recognized. The culmination of success came in 2003 when Hayao Miyazaki's film *Spirited Away* won an Academy award for best animated feature.

The geographical spread of cosplay at fandom-based events and the number of its fans are the two most outstanding indicators of its vast popularity. However, most cosplay research (Taylor, 2005; Chen, 2007; Napier, 2007; Chen, 2011) deals mostly with anime and manga cosplay, which constitute only two genres within the larger scope of cosplay. Likewise, research on the demographics and movements surrounding cosplay is quite limited and actually reflects its current lack of importance and legitimacy in the academic world. Therefore, there are wide-spread misconceptions about cosplay and the culture surrounding it (Lewis, 1992, p. 1) caused by the shortage of scholarly literature on the subject.

Consequently, individuals within such groups are likely to regard absence of representation as signs of their weakness, lack of significance or authority in society (Williams et al., 2009, p. 820). Not being recognized, the cosplayer worldwide community, their fans, and their artistic produce are not properly represented and possibly stigmatized.

People who cosplay are known as "cosplayers" or "cosers". Susan J. Napier (2005 and 2007), who examined the subject of cosplay, interviewed the so-called cosplayers about their occupation. Napier regards cosplaying as a means of temporarily accepting the identities of pop culture characters, considering cosplay a vent for a desire to become an other.

The cosplay phenomenon is currently popular among many Indonesian young people as well and has become a distinctive feature in major Indonesian cities. Many young people are experimenting with various means to explore and discover their identity, one of which is by using cosplay. Cosplay is an activity term used by young people who are fans of Japanese fashion, style costumes, ala characters in manga (Japanese comics) and anime characters (Japanese cartoons). People take up cosplay activities as a way of determining their identity and a means of cultural interaction.

The Indonesian cosplay community has rapidly emerged over the past twenty years. It develops, is in great demand among teenagers and University students in Indonesia, attracting increasing public attention. For young people interested in cosplay, it is a form of cultural communication that provides the participants with a unique chance of interacting, living and creating a new self-identity through playing, a way of expressing their inner self and, finally, channelling personal hobbies and pleasures into a demonstration of their abilities and a show of queer costumes, while looking for their identity in the cosplayed characters. Through cosplay, cosplayers can display how they want to be known and accepted.

In her article, published in the communication journal and entitled “Media and Identity: Japanese Cultural Imperialism Through Cosplay”, Ranny Rastati states that "Cosplay is a vehicle for realizing all their wild imaginations and for a few hours a cosplayer can become a different person from his everyday self" (Rastati,2012). Applying the expressed ideas, the researcher describes the act of cosplay as an act of forming self-identity.

The social reality that is constructed by this phenomenon, shows that almost all cosplayers present a dual identity, the identity as a cosplayer and the identity they display in their daily lives. On the other hand, cosplay is a vehicle for developing creativity because many youngsters use this occupation and cosplay activities to benefit from it. It can be partly a means of promoting their costumes or clothes for sale, starting a career as a model, expanding friendships, building communication bridges and many more.

From the background of the research above, the researcher was interested in examining the cosplay phenomenon as a means of cultural interaction and communication that forms the participants' self-identity through playing while interacting and living a life of a fictional character. This research, therefore, intended to explore the transfer of individuals into a youth

community, called cosplay fandom, and their transition from oneself to another identity, changing their lifestyle via the instrumentality of activism.

As stated above, cosplay was a novel event about two decades ago. Quite unexpectedly it became popular with cosplay fans all over the world and well-known among Indonesian youngsters, too.

It seems to be a paradox but Indonesia was colonized by Japan in the past. Nowadays Japanese pop-culture has occupied Indonesian young people's minds. I wonder why the world's cultural preferences have changed and why cosplay has gained tremendous popularity in Indonesia, making youngsters forget and, possibly, ignore their history. I would like to understand the effects of Japan's ideology on Indonesian economy and cultural developments to make a final conclusion on whether this cultural phenomenon should be adopted and followed or avoided. Further studies into cosplay and Japanese influences should be continued.

Culture is aimed at building positive images about a nation which can help to forget about its dark history. Pop culture identity, which is being spread in Indonesia, is an identity that is based on foreign cultural identity, borrowed mainly from Japanese culture. I might make a conclusion that the country's modern younger generation neglect local cultural values and identities. Though there are some attempts made to start cosplaying Indonesian characters, unfortunately, character design and costume and all the entourage are greatly influenced by Japanese manga and Anime characters.

Here arises the necessity for the older generation of Indonesia to contribute to the survival and development of local creative industries by educating young people not to blindly accept foreign influences and promote their own creative initiatives.

In this respect there is a separate issue I would like to examine and focus on. It concerns the way cosplayers communicate making the transition from oneself to another identity, creating a community by means of participatory culture presented by cosplay.

Exploring the abovementioned issues enabled me to examine the act of cosplay as a form of cultural interaction and communication aimed at constructing self-identity. To that end, the research focus is centered on the self- identity of cosplayers, how the individual identity and group identity are interdependent and interrelated and in what way the cosplay venue operates, giving its fans a chance to display a different identity and why they are so much attached to Japanese culture.

The notion of an other represents a central focus for this thesis too, as cosplaying plays a great role in changing one's identity and discovering one's place in the world. This issue is one of the chief topics of this study. Oyserman (2003, p. 8) claims, that social and situational structuring impacts the self-concept of an individual. Cosplay is mainly a group activity. To prove it, I analysed the participation in a group and the activities around the group and how they transform the identity.

In order to study these issues, it was significant to know how cosplayers' personal identities and their group identities are affected by the cosplay venue. It is a well-known fact that human beings are social creatures, so the group/ community occupies a very important part in the life of the individual.

1.2 Research Focus and Inquiries

The study was guided by the following research questions:

- I. How does the cosplay phenomenon contribute to cultural interaction and communication in shaping the participants' self-identity through playing while interacting and living a life of a fictional character?
- II. How do cosplayers communicate making the transition from oneself to a different identity, creating a community by means of participatory culture presented by cosplay?

1.3 Purpose of Study

This research is aimed at explaining what factors make it a communicative phenomenon that is used by a group of people to construct their identity, a sense of belonging in the world and why constructing a cosplay image is a creative process.

The present study explores the issue of a creative community development and intends to realize the following goals:

1. To create a clear picture of the act of cosplay in society as the formation of self-identity through interacting and communicating while playing and expressing one's inner self.
2. To describe the motives of cosplayers in constructing their cosplay image and identity as a form of social engagement or, possibly, escapism.
3. To identify the role of the media employed to promote activism through cosplaying.
4. To explore how this development supports the process of community change towards a more creative society.
5. To examine the changes in cosplay practice caused by the pandemic of COVID-19 and its revival.

The research covers a period of one year, from January to December, 2022.

1.4 Significance of the Study and its Benefits

This research is likely to be a new insight in the study of communication science to provide benefits, especially:

1. Academic benefits, as a learning resource and a source of experience, especially in the study of analyzing this communication trend which affects young people today.
2. This research can be helpful for the Communication Studies Programmes to be used as one of the sources of new knowledge about the problem under study, especially for further researchers who are interested in conducting research on the same theme.
3. Social benefits, as the general public will get to know the cosplay phenomenon, where cosplayers communicate their identity, ideas and messages to the society.

This study has both practical and theoretical application. Its significance lies in the fact that it is different from previous research on cosplaying. It takes a new attitude to the subject being presented as an integral part of creative communities and creativity for their inclusion in the study of culture and creative industries. All the related governmental organizations, media representatives, leaders and employers would also be motivated by the study's findings.