A Narrative Inquiry into Self-Discovery, Social, And Emotional Development among Young Adults through Cosplay

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ABSTRACT	Published Online: January 20, 2025
Cosplay is a social activity where people dress up and act as characters from various forms of fiction. Current literature discusses how participating in cosplay influences one's identity construction, social and emotional development, and self-expression. However, there is little to no research that uses a qualitative and Developmental Psychology approach. This study explored the narratives of 8 cosplayers, aged 18-25 years old, focusing on investigating their self-identity, social, and emotional development in the cosplay community. Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) narrative inquiry was utilized. Findings revealed several central themes: (1) Self-Discovery through Cosplay; (2) Social and Emotional Growth in the Cosplay Community; (3) Skill Development through Cosplay; (4) Emotional Connections with Characters and (5) Integration of Cosplay in Future Plans. Overall, cosplay is more than an entertainment practice, it influences one's development. Through this study, development programs in the education system can be created to cater to the growth of these cosplayers.	**KEYWORDS:** Cosplay, Identity construction, Social and emotional, Qualitative Research, Philippines

1.0. INTRODUCTION

Originating from Japan, cosplay comes from the combination of the words costume and play where participants role-play personas from anime or Japanese cartoons, manga or Japanese comics, video games, and other popular culture media forms (Rahman et al., 2012). As a social activity, people engage in role-play, by behaving the same way their character does, and participate in an active community with others who share similar interests (Peirson-Smith, 2019). With its growing presence in youth lifestyle and entertainment activities, cosplay has now become a recognized major culture worldwide (Lamerichs, 2018a). It is observed in the Bangladesh fashion industry where it has influenced students' internal and external values (Minhus & Huie, 2022) and Philippine pop culture events festivals (e.g., Cosplay Mania and Ozine Fest) (Calinao et al., 2023).

Cosplay's participatory culture allows fans to hone different skills (Jenkins et al., 2015). Firstly, the analysis and research skills used when planning the close-replica representation of the character. Secondly, ethnocultural

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*Cite this Article: Jomar Saif P. Baudin, Maria Lourdes L. Chavez (2025). A Narrative Inquiry into Self-Discovery, Social, And Emotional Development among Young Adults through Cosplay. International Journal of Social Science and Education Research Studies, 5(1), 58-69

language is developed for cosplayers who interact with other cultures' content (Winge, 2019). Thirdly, they also learn physical skills, such as acting, controlling body movement, and interpreting characters needed for their performance (Yang, 2022). Finally, the aesthetic and technical abilities (e.g., colors, costume design, makeup jobs, stitching, painting, and carpentry among others, etc.) (Hale, 2014; Puspitasari et al., 2023; Winge, 2019). There are two significant aspects to developing skills and self-confidence: Making and the process of creating the character (Karen & Whittaker, 2023). These aesthetic elements boost creativity, social engagement, and confidence, which enhances teenage cosplayers' imagination and arts (Chao, 2017). This aspect of cosplay as learning is consistent with the educational theories that have supported the use of learner-centered and project-based education for adolescent learners.

Karen and Whittaker (2023) use the metaphor of 'crossing-over' between the cosplay and the everyday world to assert that the cosplay experience is related to identity formation through agency, reflexive self-consciousness, and social interaction. For the youth, cosplay is an essential tool for the construction of their identity (Rosenberg & Letamendi, 2018). Individuals spend much time and effort to mimic a definite character that they inevitably experience identification. Their participation enables them to try out

other identities and features and might promote identity transformation (Nichols, 2019).

Identity construction processes related to cosplay are also diverse and context-dependent, meaning, there are individual differences in attitude toward cosplay experiences. Dinatha and Dewi (2021) noted that cosplay helps some identify their interests and deepen their self-understanding. However, for others, there is still a distinction between cosplay characters and real-life personas. Selecting characters based on physical or personality resemblance imply that there is not a clear-cut relationship between existing self-concept and character selection. During performances, cosplayers constantly switch between a character's identity and their own, which sometimes results in initial identity confusion between the self and the character (Poerwito-Setijadi, 2012). Yet this is vital in developing a deep understanding of the self and one's identity.

Cosplay can also be used to represent race (Ramirez 2017; Yang, 2022), reverse elements of power relations, and provide a different meaning for stigmatized populations. Cosplayers, who are seen as a minority, employ subversion approaches to make their presence felt in conventions that are mostly White and heteronormative (Ramirez, 2017). Gotfredsen and Linander (2023) say that creative spaces (e.g., cosplay) enable trans youth to express their gender identity in ways they cannot do in other settings. Taylor (2020) also revealed that female cosplayers use their costumes to portray power, sexual orientation, benevolence, and affiliation. Altogether, choosing, designing, and embodying a character allows people to try out aspects of their personality that they would not typically engage with (Lamerichs, 2018b; Yang, 2022). It can be especially valuable for adolescents who are in the process of developing their identity and relationships with others. Adolescents from vulnerable groups can use this as a means of empowerment and affirmation. Thus, cosplay is understood as the construction of identity and belonging at the group level (Bonnichsen, 2011).

Aside from influencing their identity construction, cosplay also affects social development. It gives participants a feeling of belonging and togetherness (Poerwito-Setijadi, 2012; Abramova et al., 2020). Different cosplay communities are social affiliations that enable the persons to be themselves, make friends, and enhance their communication skills (Reysen et al., 2015). These communities can offer adolescents, most especially those who are rejected in other spheres of their lives, the need to belong and be accepted, important social needs during a developmental stage. Moreover, Yang (2022) defined cosplay as a group effort wherein cosplayers and makeup artists, photographers, and other supporting cast are involved. Cosplay costumes are also group projects and entail cooperative learning which develop social communication (Ito & Crutcher, 2014). Overall, the teamwork aspect inherent in cosplay allows adolescents to work in teams, communicate effectively and build social networks.

The age of digitization or social media has contributed to the growth of this community by maintaining relationships, improving their skills, and bringing attention to the cosplay culture (Lee, 2023). As such, the cosplay culture has been revolutionized through new platforms that promotes inclusivity and allows individuals to share skills and promote their work. Furthermore, the social and community feature of cosplay gives great benefits to psychological well-being (Reysen et al., 2018).

It is also a form of self-expression and emotion regulation. Lamerichs (2018a) described cosplay as an affective practice in which the creation and costume-wearing are seen as an active process that is involved in the experience of cosplay. This affective dimension of cosplay may help adolescents to have a healthy way of channeling their emotions and to deal with different emotions and feelings. Cosplayers had higher levels of disclosure of fan identity, satisfaction in life, and self-esteem and lower depression than non-cosplayers (Reysen et al., 2018). It also acts as a way of balancing stress in everyday lives and building up coping mechanisms (Ramirez, 2017). For those with psychological disorders, it helps them express themselves through their favorite characters, providing them with psychological therapy (Rosenberg & Letamendi, 2018). It also provides an opportunity for individuals with neurodevelopment disorders to participate from behind the curtains and engage in cons which may not be convenient when it comes to social events (Leyman, 2022). Hence, cosplay, as a social activity, can support the needs and abilities of every kind of person.

However, cosplay has negative effects as well. Firstly, there are problems with their body image. Lamp (2018) reported possible body image problems resulting from comparison with others in cyberspace. Backdahl (2024) discovered that beauty standards of the community, especially the ones promoted through social media can affect body image and force one to change and align to the laid standards. Gioia et al. (2020) found that while attending cosplay events, participants are drawn to enhance their appearance, experiencing body surveillance and body shame, thus worsening body image for some of them and leading to vulnerable narcissism and social appearance anxiety. Secondly, the expectations that people must perform and build an online personality can lead to stress and anxiety among cosplayers (Lamp, 2018). In addition, the appearance of such platforms as social networks might contribute to increased pressure and body image issues. Thirdly, cosplayers can experience various forms of roleplay harassment when they fulfill their character roles (Price, 2020). Fourth, the costs and time that are involved in cosplay can also be rather high. Hale (2014) pointed out the economic concerns of cosplay such as the cost of creating costumes and conventions. Such financial factors may lead to exclusion of

some adolescents and may result in stratification of cosplay groups. Due to the highly engaging nature of cosplay, there are concerns about possible negative effects of highly engaging activities, so Kincaid (2023) stresses that more work has to be done on understanding particular mental health conditions that may stem from engagement in cosplay activities. This concern raises other questions regarding the identification with the characters or with the fan communities that have also been discussed in fan studies literature.

Though cosplay has become increasingly popular, there is a scarcity of non-quantitative research focused on the life histories of cosplayers, using a Developmental Psychological approach. There is little to no qualitative research that studies the overall experiences of cosplayers across different levels of engagement. Furthermore, a more diverse sample selection is needed in the cosplay studies, especially concerning the experiences of discriminated and non-western populations.

Thus, this gap will be filled by using narrative inquiry to analyze cosplayers' experiences with a perspective on self-identification, social, and emotional growth among adolescents. This may add to the existing discussion on the relationship between participatory fan cultures and youth socialization and identity in the media. The research aims to answer the following questions:

1. What are cosplayers' narratives about dressing up, role-playing, and self-discovery?
2. How do these narratives of self-discovery through cosplay reveal insights about their everyday self and cosplay self?
3. How does participation in the cosplay community contribute to social and emotional development?
4. What are the programs that can be developed to benefit cosplayers, based on the findings of this study?

As cosplay moves forward, it is important to look at its multidimensionality and its use to promote individual and communal growth in a rapidly changing world. Knowing its role in adolescent development is starting to become more relevant for educators, mental health professionals, and youth workers.

2.0. METHODOLOGY

Research Design. A qualitative research approach was used to do a deep exploration of participants' lived experiences and allow the researchers to create a thorough understanding of the central phenomenon through the collection and analysis of rich, descriptive data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This research used Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) narrative inquiry. The use of narrative inquiry is relevant when studying cosplayers because it focuses on the subject's biography and personal narrative within their social, cultural and temporal context. This approach aligns with Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) three-dimensional narrative

inquiry space. This difference stems from the four modes of narrative practice, namely interaction, continuity, and situation (Clandinin, 2013).

Participants and sampling technique. The research employed eight (8) cosplayers, aged between 18-25 years old, living in Metro Manila, Philippines. This age range is consistent with Arnett's (2000) emerging adulthood (i.e., late teens through their twenties). It is a phase of identity morphing, role confusion, autonomy, not quite young adulthood, and options (Arnett, 2015). It enables the exclusion of people who may be coerced into participation while still including people who are important in the developmental essence of the identified age range which is the legal consent age and the ability to form identities and relationships. It also complies with the most often engaged age demographic of cosplay enthusiasts (Rosenberg & Letamendi, 2018). The study's inclusion criteria include: must have been cosplaying for more than one year and must have attended at least three cosplay events or conventions within Metro Manila.

Recruitment was done through purposive sampling with equal numbers of male and female participants. Participants were informed about the study's purpose, methods, possible hazards and advantages, and informed consent were agreed upon. They were advised of their right to withdraw from the study at any time and decline to answer any question or provide any artifact that makes them uncomfortable (Hammersley & Traianou, 2012). Participants were also given the option to learn about their data's storage and any possibility of sharing and were also permitted to view and agree with their individual narrative data before data analysis (Cox et al., 2014). Identifications were disguised with pseudonyms and other markers were masked or erased. The research respected cultural sensitivity of the participants and the cosplay community to eliminate biases (Liamputtong, 2010). The researchers ensured that the participant feels at ease to share his or her experiences (Einarsdóttir, 2007) and the absence of power relations between them. Proper care and assistance were also offered (Josselson, 2007). Finally, qualitative data was kept secure and would only be accessed by the researchers (Saunders et al., 2015).

Data Analysis Procedure. Data analysis was done in an ongoing cyclical manner as described by Clandinin & Connelly (2000), by moving between field texts and research texts. The analysis proceeded through the following stages: a) Preparation of field texts that encompass interviews, observation notes, and artefacts' descriptions. b) Analysis of field texts in terms of re-describing refocusing on the plots, the characters and the events developed in the participant's stories. c) Coding of narratives with reference to the three-dimensional inquiry space, finding out interaction, continuity, and situation themes. d) Building of the biography for each participant as well as focusing on the temporal and social parameters of the process. e) Comparative analysis of

the four narratives to discover similarities and differences within and between the participants. f) Formulation of more global analysis statements that answer the research questions and situate the results of the study in the context of other work done on cosplay and adolescent development.

During the analysis, the researchers themselves and the positions they hold were recognized and biases by the researchers were recognized as well. Member checking was used, whereby participants were invited to scrutinize and offer their opinions on the textual representations of their individual stories to ensure that they were credible (Clandinin, 2013).

Data collection and analysis. Data gathering was done through semi-structured qualitative interviews. Onsite interviews were done at the participant's preferred secluded venue while online interviews were conducted using Zoom due to the onslaught of typhoon Pepito in Luzon when participants cannot be accessed personally. The interviews lasted for 60-90 minutes. It was also recorded after receiving the participant's permission.

An interview guide was created based on Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) three-dimensional narrative inquiry space. Furthermore, participants were requested to provide items associated with cosplay experiences such as photos, sketches of costumes, or posts on relevant social networks if possible. These artifacts were to engage participants in further conversation and will help expand on the stories shared by participants (Clandinin & Huber, 2010).

To ensure its alignment with Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) three-dimensional narrative framework examining temporal continuity, personal-social interactions, and situational contexts, the researchers employed expert validation through a panel of qualified researchers with expertise in qualitative research methodology and psychology. The questions were also assessed for their clarity, cultural sensitivity, and appropriateness for the Filipino-speaking cosplay community, as evidenced by the inclusion of both English and Filipino translations. They also reviewed the progression of questions from general experiences to more specific aspects of personal development, ensuring that the probing questions effectively facilitated deep exploration of participants' narratives and experiences in cosplay. Additionally, the researchers conducted preliminary testing with three (3) cosplayers, who were not part of the main study, to ensure the questions were comprehensible, culturally relevant, and effectively captured the lived experiences within the community. This refined the questions and probing statements to better reflect the language and experiences familiar to the cosplay community.

Notes were made in the field, during and shortly after interviews to document non-verbal behaviors and other contextual features. This was done to seek further elaboration on themes that may have arisen during the first analysis of data.

The raw data was further divided into three categories. The interview recordings were transcribed in Microsoft Word with participants' pseudonyms and the date of the interview noted next to each. Field observations of cosplay activities were taken in the form of notes and written in chronological order, with special emphasis on participants' behaviors, activities and processes of creating costumes. Participants' cosplay artifacts were photographed and sketched and each object was documented with descriptive information regarding the material used, the manner in which it was constructed and the character it represented.

The narratives were read more than once and specific information related to the plot, characters and events were highlighted. For each participant, the researchers reconstructed the timeline of the participant's involvement in cosplay and marked the first costume-making, first convention and skill achievement. This also assisted in establishing their evolution process in cosplay.

The researchers who utilized Taguette software for the study constructed a coding framework following Clandinin and Connelly's three-dimensional space of inquiry. Interaction codes included personal (emotions, goals) and social (friends, organizations) domains. Continuity codes recorded past occurrences, current activities and future plans. With situation codes, environmental forces, cultural frames, and physical locales of cosplay activities were recognized. The work of Taguette with its numerous collaboration tools and the user interface made it possible to systematically sort and analyze the qualitative data from various sources.

The individual biographical accounts were constructed by analyzing coded data from all the sources available. These accounts followed the participants' cosplay process in a timeline and included their change, relationships, and surroundings. Both biographies were developed in a manner that would allow the temporal process of their participation to be emphasized regarding the main social relations and context.

The narratives were compared based on the matrix. This made it possible to determine general processes (for example, skill development trajectories, and identity searches) as well as individual experiences (personal difficulties, personal reasons). By carrying out within-case and between-case analysis it was possible to see similarities in the levels and types of cosplay engagement as well as differences in developmental processes of different participants.

The results were discussed and analyzed with reference to the literature on adolescents' development and the prior research on cosplay. This involved associating the patterns identified with theory on identity development, arts, and youth cultures. The results of the analysis were especially summarized concerning the impact of cosplay participation on the participants' individual and social changes.

3.0. RESULTS

As seen in Table 1, the results identified five (5) central ideas about cosplay's role as a form of transformation, training, and social networking. The narratives depicted relationships between identity development, social development, and creativity. These domains show how cosplay is not just a pastime, but a multifaceted process that has an impact on identity, social, and career aspects of life.

Table 1. Themes and Sub-Themes of the Narratives of Cosplayer Participants

Theme	Sub Themes	Framework Context
Self-Discovery through Cosplay	Journey into Cosplay	Temporal (past) – Participants reflect on the origins of their cosplay journeys.
	Building Confidence	Personal-social (interaction) – Cosplay enhances self-esteem through social engagement.
	Identity Merging	Temporal (present) – Participants discuss evolving self-perception.
Social and Emotional Growth in the Cosplay Community	Finding Community and Support	Personal-social (interaction) –Interactions within the cosplay community provide emotional support.
	Handling Criticism	Personal-social (interaction) – Facing and overcoming external criticism aids emotional resilience.
	Navigating Prejudices	Place (situation) – Challenges arise when cosplay overlaps with professional life.
Skill Development through Cosplay	Creative and Technical Skills	Temporal (past-present) – Participants detail skill acquisition over time.
	Project Management	Temporal (present-future) – Applying systematic approaches to cosplay projects.
	Professional Skills	Personal-social (interaction) – Transferring cosplay skills to professional settings.
Emotional Connections with Characters	Deep Connection to Cosplayed Characters	Personal-social (interaction) – Emotional bonds formed with fictional characters.
	Character Study	Place (situation) – Detailed preparation immerses participants in character.
Integration of Cosplay in Future Plans	Teaching and Mentoring	Temporal (future) – Plans to share knowledge with newer cosplayers.
	Professionalizing Cosplay	Place (situation)
	Broader Industry Impact	Temporal (future)

Self-Discovery Through Cosplay

As participants discussed their journey of self-discovery through cosplay, their transformative narratives talked about their initiation into the world of cosplay. Their experiences were characterized by a gradual involvement and deepening engagement with cosplay to discover themselves and foster personal growth. This process was significant and life-changing because it gave them new perspectives on their self-identity. Many expressed how cosplay served as a catalyst for self-exploration, enabling them to shed inhibition and overcome shyness. Such testimonies resonate with Rosenberg and Letamendi's (2018) notion of cosplay as a tool for identity formation, particularly impactful for young adults.

As they immersed deeper in cosplay, there was an identity merging or the blending of their cosplay persona with their authentic selves. While some previous studies, such as Dinantha and Dewi (2021), described a clear boundary between cosplay and reality, our participants described a gradual diminish of this separation. In other words, these characters are not separate beings, rather, they are an extension of oneself (and vice versa), thus creating a unified sense of self.

This journey, starting from initial exposure to profound immersion shows that cosplay is not merely a costume play, but it is also a medium for identity performance (Rahman et al., 2012). The move towards an integrated identity is a sign of a paradigm shift, showing how social identity

intertwines with the practice of cosplay. Thus a novel perspective on the transformative power of costume play in self-discovery and personal development.

"Actually mas naging fluid na siya ngayon. Like dati, feeling ko split personality ako...Pero I learned na they're really just different sides of who I am." ["Actually, it has become more fluid now. Like before, I feel like I have a split personality...But I learned that they're really just different sides of who I am."] (Participant Belle, Personal Communication, October 15, 2024)

"Cosplay helped me become a better engineer! Kasi sa cosplay, you learn to work with limited resources, tight deadlines, and you need creative solutions." ["Cosplay helped me become a better engineer! Because in cosplay, you learn to work with limited resources, tight deadlines, and you need creative solutions."] (Participant RJ, Personal Communication, October 22, 2024)

"Dati po kasi, super shy ako. Like, kahit sa choir, I always tried to blend in sa background. Pero through cosplay performances, I discovered na may confidence pala ako inside." ["Before, I was super shy. Like, even in the choir, I always tried to blend in with the background. But through cosplay performances, I discovered that I have confidence inside."] (Participant Tine, Online Communication, November 29, 2024)

"Dati kasi sobrang mahiyain ako. Like, kahit sa work, hindi ako masyado nakikipag-usap. Pero ngayon? Kaya ko nang mag-approach kahit kanino, especially pag may rare item sila na gusto ko!" ["I used to be very shy. Like, even at work, I don't talk much. But now? I can approach anyone, especially if they have a rare item that I want!"] (Participant JP, Online Communication, November 27, 2024)

Social and Emotional Growth in the Cosplay Community

The cosplay community plays an important part in the social and emotional development of young adults as a platform for interpersonal interactions to promote personal growth. Participants in our study highlighted the dual nature of the cosplay community as both empowering and limiting for individuals engaged in the practice.Inclusivity and camaraderie in the community were found through the support and acceptance given by the members.

Furthermore, participants demonstrated resilience by using cosplay as a coping strategy to respond to challenges and barriers (e.g., outside criticism) (Ramirez, 2017), which

enabled them to develop emotional resilience and handle criticisms successfuly. This ability improved their mental health, facilitated personal development, and the creation of creative cosplay solutions.

For several participants, navigating cosplay and work presented additional difficulties that show the need to manage biases and social norms. The balancing act and dynamic link between cosplay participation and personal identity has inspired people to determinedly overcome challenging social environments.

"Recently, one of our members lost their job. The whole group came together -- may nag-organize ng benefit concert, yung iba nag-share ng job opportunities, may nag-offer pa ng temporary place to stay [--somebody organized a benefit concert, others shared about job opportunities, and some offered a temporary place to stay]." (Participant Tine, Personal Communication, November 29, 2024)

"Very open source kami as a community! Like kung may nakadiscover ng more efficient way to wire LED systems or lighter material for armor, they share it agad." ["We are very open source as a community! Like if someone discovers a more efficient way to wire LED systems or lighter material for armor, they share it immediately."] (Participant RJ, Personal Communication, October 22, 2024)

"Most of us are actually from science backgrounds. May isang chemical engineer, isang architect, tapos ako, medtech. We approach cosplay like a research group!" ["Most of us are actually from science backgrounds. There is a chemical engineer, an architect, then me, medtech. We approach cosplay like a research group!"] (Participant Andi, Personal Communication, October 18, 2024)

"I remember when my dad got sick last year, grabe sila. Hindi lang emotional support - they even helped me sell some of my old costumes to help with hospital bills." ["I remember when my dad got sick last year, they were great. Not only emotional support - but they also even helped me sell some of my old costumes to help with hospital bills."] (Participant Belle, Personal Communication, October 15, 2024)

These accounts of a powerful feeling of identification and camaraderie support Reysen et al.'s (2015) findings about the community, as a positive social identification, and its function of meeting essential social wants. Participants viewed cosplay events and the community as more than just recreational spaces; they served as vital networks of professional support and emotional solidarity. The cosplay

community emerged as a cohesive system. One that offers assistance and encouragement beyond cosplay-related activities and support to individuals facing personal crises or professional challenges. Through this ethos of mutual aid and cooperation, the transformative impact of the cosplay community on the social and emotional well-being of its members can be easily seen.

Skill Development through Cosplay

A central aspect to the transformative narratives shared by participants was the impact of cosplay and cosplay engagement which was a platform for gaining new skills and development, ranging from creative and technical ones to adept project management and transferable professional competencies.

Participants recounted their journey of skill acquisition, talking about the changes in their creative and technical abilities over time. Through hands-on experimentation and continuous learning within the cosplay community, individuals honed their craftsmanship and artistic talents, showing great improvement in their ability to execute intricate designs and create detailed costumes.

Across the narratives, a significant theme was the development of project management skills (i.e., the systematic and organized approaches to accomplish detailed projects). Participants navigated the intricate details in planning, budgeting, and resource management, from conceptualization until execution, showing their ability to create multifaceted plans with precision and efficiency.

Interestingly, these cosplay-acquired skills can be used in a professional context. The insights gained through cosplay has enriched participants' personal lives and offered a pathway to professional development and advancement. The ability to use cosplay skills in professional settings shows the duality of cosplay, showing how it can be. a recreational pursuit and an informal training ground for developing professional skills.

Furthermore, the development of these skills aligns with Winge's (2019) framework, which shows how there are essential skills to be learned such as project planning, market acumen, and professionalism beyond the creative realm in cosplay. This multifaceted approach to skill development through cosplay shows its transformative potential by providing cosplayers with many opportunities for growth and self-improvement.

"Negotiation skills, marketing yourself as a brand, and maintaining boundaries -- these were all things I learned through gravure cosplay." (Participant Sam, Personal Communication, October 20, 2024)

"Pero I think yung pinaka-valuable skill na na-develop ko is yung business side. Like, how to price both artwork and cosplay appearances, paano mag-handle ng client expectations." ["But I think the most valuable skill I have developed is the business side. Like, how to price both artwork and cosplay appearances, how to handle client expectations."] (Participant Deni, Online Communication, November 26, 2024)

"I showed them how costume patterning improved my manual dexterity for delicate lab procedures. How project management skills from cosplay helped me organize laboratory workflows better." (Participant Andi, Personal Communication, October 18, 2024)

"Una, definitely video editing! Kasi iba yung editing style needed for cosplay content compared sa regular gaming content. Need mo i-highlight yung costume details while still showing yung gameplay." ["First, definitely video editing! Because the editing style needed for cosplay content is different compared to regular gaming content. You need to highlight the costume details while still showing the gameplay."] (Participant KJ, Personal Communication, October 24, 2024)

"Di ko alam na magaling pala ako makipag-negotiate! Kasi sa conventions, lalo na sa trading, kailangan talaga marunong ka makipag-usap." ["I didn't know that I was good at negotiating! Because in conventions, especially in trading, you really need to know how to talk."] (Participant JP, Online Communication, November 27, 2024)

Emotional Connections with Characters

Participants discussed their relationship with the characters in their shows, the impact of these relationships on the show and the participants' development. This aligns with Lamerichs' (2018b) analysis of cosplay as affective practice. Their emotional connection, characterized by profound affective attachment and significant character analysis, often led to intensive character study. This allows them to go through an identity shift which is continuously moving between their own persona and the persona of the character, (Poerwito-Setijadi, 2012).

"When I performed as Kaori, I immersed myself in her story to convey her emotional weight through the performance." (Participant Tine, Personal Communication, November 29, 2024)

"Minsan nga napapansin ng nanay ko na pag malapit na yung convention, I start unconsciously acting like my character! [sometimes my mother observes that when a convention is fast approaching, I unconsciously start acting like the character] *(*Participant Belle, Personal Communication, October 15, 2024)

"The sexy, confident persona - that's something I channel specifically for shoots and events. It's like...theater actress? When I'm in character, I embody that persona fully." (Participant Sam, Personal Communication, October 20, 2024)

"Sa regular streams ko, I'm just KJ - medyo makulit, sometimes toxic pag ranked games. Pero pag cosplay streams, I try to embody yung character while still keeping my personality. Parang 60% character, 40% KJ ganun." [in my regular streams, I'm just KJ – a bit stubborn, sometimes toxic with ranked games. But with cosplay streams, I try to embody the character… It's like 60% character, 40% KJ] (Participant KJ, Personal Communication, October 24, 2024)

"For me kasi, cosplaying is like creating a living art study. When I'm in costume, I'm not just performing as the character. I'm studying how the fabric falls, where the shadows naturally form, how certain poses actually work in real life." (Participant Deni, Online Communication, November 26, 2024)

"When I'm performing as Kaori from Your Lie in April, for example, kailangan ramdam mo yung emotional weight nung character […for example, you need to feel the emotional weight of the character]. *So I really immerse myself in their story."* (Participant Tine, Personal Communication, November 29, 2024)

Hence, devoting time and effort to studying these characters creates a strong emotional attachment to these characters. Participants discussed their relationship with the characters in their shows, the impact of these relationships on the show and the participants' development. This aligns with Lamerichs' (2018b) analysis of cosplay as affective practice. Their emotional connection, characterized by profound affective attachment and significant character analysis, often led to intensive character study. This allows them to go through an identity shift which is continuously moving between their own persona and the persona of the character, (Poerwito-Setijadi, 2012).

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Hence, devoting time and effort to studying these characters creates a strong emotional attachment to these characters. As an affective practice, the construction and performance of characters require emotional investment (Lamerichs, 2018b). The data revealed that this emotional bonding frequently caused unobvious shifts in behavior, especially as the participants were gearing up for conventions. This observation can be linked to Poerwito-Setijadi's (2012) identity shift theory where cosplayers are seen to constantly oscillate between their own identity and that of the character.

The research also showed that this emotional bond sometimes translated not only into performance comprehension but also into quantifiable concepts. It is also more personal than the conventional critical appreciation of a character in terms of performance skills and visual aesthetics. Furthermore, participants described how their performances had to be emotionally sincere as well. Thus, the type of character embodiment is in line with Rosenberg and Letamendi (2018) about the importance of character relationships as the source of identity formation through cosplay.

The emotional connections formed through cosplay appear to serve multiple functions: they enable real

performances, enable learning, and offer structures for talent and technique. This multiple-layered character relation enshrines Yang's (2022) argument on cosplay as the gender and identity performance that is more than imitation but a transformative act.

Overall, these findings build on previous literature by studying the affective aspect of cosplay. It shows how passion and identification with the characters can act as a mediator between the technical training that helps them develop their skills and the character development from the experience. Thereby, supporting the hypothesis that the affective dimension is fundamental to both the artistic and the psychological perspectives of cosplay.

Integration of Cosplay in Future Plans

There is very strong evidence of the desire of participants to contribute to the growth of the community as teachers or mentors. The emphasis placed on knowledge sharing and community raising awareness has great indications that cosplay communities act as knowledge silos whereby knowledge is created and disseminated, which also highlights its participatory culture (Jenkins et al., 2015).

For others, they are busy trying to professionalize some aspects of cosplay. There is an attempt to create professional rooms, business and educational programs to support the practice indicating the change in perception and practice of cosplay. The blending of cosplay with professional self-representation, especially seen in the technical occupations of the participants, contrasts the negative potential effects of cosplay on professional sphere.

"I'm investing in a studio for safe, professional shooting spaces specifically designed for gravure cosplayers." (Participant Sam, Personal Communication, October 20, 2024)

"Planning to start a small workshop series for beginners. Gusto ko i-share yung knowledge na natutunan ko over the years [I want to share knowledge that I have gained through the years]*."* (Participant Belle, Personal Communication, October 15, 2024)

"Long-term, I want to create a systematic approach to costume crafting. Imagine a workshop series combining scientific principles with creative techniques!" (Participant Andi, Personal Communication, October 18, 2024)

"I'm also planning to start a YouTube channel! Not just build tutorials, but deep dives into the engineering principles behind each costume." (Participant RJ, Personal Communication, October 22, 2024)

"Long-term dream ko po [my long-term dream] *is to establish a performing arts school specialized for*

cosplayers." (Participant Tine, Personal Communication, November 29, 2024)

"Yung ultimate dream ko talaga [my ultimate dream really] *is to have my own studio... a space specifically designed for both cosplay photography and digital art creation."* (Participant Deni, Online Communication, November 26, 2024)

"Long term, gusto ko mag-put up ng [I want to put up a] *proper gaming and cosplay studio... One-stop shop for gaming content creators who want to get into cosplay!"* (Participant KJ, Personal Communication, October 24, 2024)

"Gusto ko mag-open ng hobby shop na may cosplay section. Pero hindi yung typical na shop lang [I want to open a hobby shop with a cosplay section. But it will not just be a typical shop]. *I want it to be a complete experience!"* (Participant JP, Online Communication, November 27, 2024)

So, these narratives also show how participants are attempting to make broader industry changes in cosplay. Participants are using new-age technologies (e.g., 3D printing and electronics) with more conventional handcrafting. This implies a shift in the technical dimension of cosplay, which supports Hale's (2014) analysis of technical expertise in cosplay.

Participants are proactively constructing and formalizing the different elements of cosplay, an aspect that has not been given much attention. The progressive orientation of this approach can indicate that, at present, cosplay is gradually transforming from a strictly pastime-based craft into principally more organized and professionally driven careers.

Overall, these demonstrated how cosplay is a transformative practice. Where skill acquisition, self-esteem boost and interpersonal relations, as well as social networking and forward planning are concerns, the phenomenon of cosplay is revealed to be highly multifaceted. It is a creative, self-reflecting and growth-oriented process as well as a community that helps participants to construct their subjectivity and to develop their potential. It also enables negotiation of multiple selves.

It remains a continuously practicing field, and the participants are constantly trying to establish a more professional and systematic approach to it while keeping it as creative and oriented towards supporting communities as it started. Social media and digital platforms in current cosplay practice shows the significance of social networks in sustaining relationships and enhancing expertise in the cosplay subculture (Lee, 2023). Participants can also negotiate the blurring and combining of online and offline selves and create advanced business strategies for their online persona.

Thus, cosplay is evidenced to be much more than an interest or pastime but a practice that causes changes across

several dimensions of the cosplayers' lives, which enhances their learning and work, and provides a community that encourages evolution and creativity for the practice.

4.0. CONCLUSION

This paper explores the narratives of Filipino young adults in cosplay. While participants' narratives indicated how cosplay serves as a form of learning outside personal interest for performance and play, it also helps build emotional and practical skills not only because of the deep sense of support and camaraderie in the cosplay community but also with mentorship. The study revealed the participants' attempts at professionalizing cosplay can be applicable to other creative sectors. Overall, cosplay is not merely a hobby but a developmental process that helps individuals learn and grow and a way to build community.

5.0. LIMITATIONS OF THE FINDINGS

The following are the study's limitations. The small sample size of eight participants from Metro Manila might not fully represent the experiences of different areas in the Philippines or the cosplay community as a whole. Further, although it was designed to recruit equal numbers of male and female participants, this research did not deliberately seek the views of cosplayers with different socioeconomic statuses, education levels, or those who may experience financial difficulties in participation, since cosplay events identified in the literature review tend to be costly. The participants' age was a limitation since they were aged 18-25 years old and therefore the results cannot be generalized to younger adolescents or older cosplayers who may have different developmental experiences and motivations. Moreover, the data collection was done during the time of typhoon Pepito, which forced some of the interviews to be done virtually and not face-to-face as would have been ideal for the narrative researchers because this would have limited their ability to capture nonverbal behavior and the environment that would have supported the narrative inquiry.

6.0. PRACTICAL VALUE OF THE PAPER

The results can be used to improve educators, mental health workers, and youth workers' understanding of the role of cosplay in adolescence. Given the developmental and psychological benefits of cosplay, it is highly recommended to develop a program that can benefit the cosplayers. Educational institutions can also include cosplay development programs to combine identity-formation activities and skills improvement programs that are beneficial for the career formation of individuals.

7.0. DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This research should be followed by a similar study on the cosplay experiences of individuals from other age groups, in different geographical areas and from different SES

background in the Philippines. More longitudinal could examine changes in the participants' identity, skill, and social relations that could not be captured in short-term, cross-sectional investigations of the effects of cosplay participation. Furthermore, a cross-sectional comparison of Filipino cosplayers and other Southeast Asian cosplayers can show how culture shapes cosplay and identity. Also, research on cosplay's use as an intervention in schools and mental health facilities can be done. Exploring how skills developed through cosplay can be applied in the workplace is an important area of research, given the creativity and performance elements of cosplay. Finally, future research should investigate the role of digital platforms and social media on cosplay communities, given the integration of off- and online cosplay practices, and possible implications on body image, self-presentation, and community.

8.0. DECLARATION OF CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declared no potential conflict of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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