

HUMANISTIC PSYCHOANALYSIS OF COSPLAYERS WITH ERICH FROMM'S THEORY

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ABSTRACT

Cosplayers, costume players, are people who dress up similar to animated characters from Japan and they are known to be very unique in Indonesia due to the new culture of Cosplay; Costume Play. The community has grown rapidly over the years with increasing number of cosplay events held annually or even monthly. It leads to a psychological perspective why people cosplay and what are the supporting factors that shape them as cosplayers. Reader response method through Google Form will be used to conduct the research. Erich Fromm's Humanistic Psychoanalysis theory will be applied to analyze reader responses through psychoanalysis aspects such as relatedness, transcendence, rootedness, sense of identity, and frame of orientation.

Key words: cosplay, cosplayer, psychoanalysis, Erich Fromm, culture

ABSTRAK

Cosplayer, pemain kostum, adalah orang-orang yang berpakaian seperti karakter animasi dari Jepang dan mereka terkenal unik di Indonesia karena pengaruh budaya baru Cosplay; Costume Play. Komunitas cosplay juga bertumbuh dan berkembang cepat setiap tahun dengan peningkatan jumlah acara setiap tahun mau pun setiap bulan. Hal ini membawa kita ke perspektif psikologis yang mempertanyakan mengapa orang-orang berpartisipasi dalam kegiatan cosplay dan apa saja faktor pendukung yang membentuk identitas mereka sebagai cosplayer. Penelitian ini dilaksanakan dengan menganalisa tanggapan pembaca dari Google Form dengan mengaplikasikan teori Humanistic Psychoanalysis Erich Fromm yang terdiri dari beberapa aspek seperti relatedness, transcendence, rootedness, sense of identity, dan frame of orientation.

Kata kunci: cosplay, cosplayer, psychoanalysis, Erich Fromm, budaya

INTRODUCTION

Cosplay is derived from ‘costume’ and ‘play’ which literally means the utility of a garment. It was first popularized in Japan when people feel strongly attached to Japanese Animated Characters and they want to be like the fictional characters that they love.

With increasing numbers of fans and people conducting cosplay, it grows as a community. Eventually, it becomes a culture newly known to the society and world. Starting from Japan to USA, cosplay is a unique culture that attracts eyes even to people who do not know anything about animation and cosplay culture.

Through cosplaying, cosplayers (people who cosplay), feel happy and feel as if they belong to a certain community. Many also claim that they have learned many things from cosplaying. Starting from hair-styling, makeup, sewing, modeling, photography and even acting. They feel the benefits from doing cosplay seriously.

However, as a new culture, cosplay receives constant scrutiny from people around. Cosplayers are often stereotyped as weird, unemployed, and even thought as a part of LGBTQ community. Contrary to many beliefs that cosplay as a hobby cannot produce financial support, in current advanced era, cosplayers can strive and earn financial support through the sale of their photobook, posters, and postcards if they gain enough followers or fans such as the renowned cosplayer from Japan called Reika. Even in Indonesia, famous cosplayers earn as both cosplayers and influencers such as Frea Mai, Ryan Cyd, and Yukitora Keiji. Due to annual or monthly cosplay related events, famous cosplayers are invited as judges for cosplay competition. Such popular culture enables anyone to be able to rise up in the community by attending events and winning cosplay competitions particularly World Cosplay Submit (WCS).

Regardless of race and sexuality, cosplayers have deeper constitution than just being creative and different. There is psychological impact to cosplayers. Through Erich Fromm’s humanistic psychoanalysis, cosplayers will be observed and analysed in order to find the reason why they love doing this particular new culture coming from the obsession of fictional character.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Culture is one of the most difficult word to explain. Culture can be regarded as the product of civilization. It can mean traditions and religious celebrations. It can also mean lifestyles. At the same time it could mean procession of academic, artistic and religious development (Williams, 1983). According to Merriam-Webster dictionary, the definition of culture includes ‘the customary beliefs, social forms and material traits of a racial, religious, or social group’ and ‘the set of shared attitudes, values, goals, and practices that characterizes an institution or organization’.

Culture can never be separated from society because people go through culture as a routine in certain time and place (Storey, 2009). Whether it has a negative impact or positive impact, culture is the result of how humans interact within particular community. What makes a culture good, however, is the ability to connect people who practice a certain culture and people who are swept away by the advancement of industrialization.

Cosplay is a term contributed by Takahashi Nobuyuki, a game designer, when he visited America and saw how fans dressed up especially for the occasion (Lamerichs, 2011). Cosplay itself is very closely associated with Japanese comics also known as *manga*, Japanese animations, as well as games (Rahman, Wing-sun & Cheung, 2012). However Cosplay is not limited simply around Japanese culture but also to western culture and other Asian countries.

People who participate in the act of cosplay, cosplayers, usually make characters' costumes and props by themselves although the commercial industry has taken huge role in selling complete costume online and cosplayers can purchase instead of trying to figure out how to create a specific costume with certain patterns or details. Commonly, cosplayers are stereotyped as creative people due to the capability to learn a set of skills such as sewing, hair-styling, makeup, modelling, photography, acting and props making.

Cosplayers also imitate the characters' personalities which is commonly called as role-playing. Wherever they go, they identify themselves as the characters and do what the characters would do. Cosplay is not just any dressing up activity.

Erich Fromm's theory in psychoanalysis takes a more cultural and anthropological perspective. Other than basic needs such as hunger, thirst and sexual necessity, Fromm believes that there is another thing that human nature must accomplish and it is solving problem. Fromm's theory consists of relatedness, transcendence, rootedness, sense of identity, and frame of orientation under what he calls Human Needs.

Relatedness.

Relatedness in this theory consists of submission, power and love. According to Fromm, love can be regarded as the ability of maintaining individuality while bonding with someone. Love is also thought as the key to solving dilemma in human.

Transcendence

Humans are born into this world without knowing their purpose (Burston, 1991). It is within their natural instinct to survive. Fromm depicts human's survival through two methods; destroying or creating. Through destroying, humans can survive but through creating humans can learn to appreciate and care.

Rootedness.

Rootedness means finding comfort or what people call home (Thompson, 2009). Productively, it means the growth of sense of security outside family ties and forge new bonds

with new people in new environment. On the unproductive side, it means the degrading of sense of security and fear of unknown.

Sense of Identity.

Human needs sense of identity as a way to differ themselves with other people. It is unproductive if one expresses himself through a group and it is productive if one expresses himself as an individual.

Frame of Orientation

Frame of Orientation is a goal human needs in every action he takes. It is a need because human needs a philosophical support, a motto, to strive through their live.

DISCUSSION

The Author uses questionnaires to receive samples from cosplayers in order to analyze their answers based on their experience and background regarding their activity of cosplaying. Most of them agree to participate in this session by their real names or stage name.

There are five open questions and given to them as seen in the figure below excluding two other questions for name and age.

Why do you love cosplay? (please answer as detailed as possible with your background)

Long answer text

Were there any obstacles when you wanted to cosplay?

Long answer text

What do you feel specifically when you cosplay?

Long answer text

How do you differ or identify yourself from others through cosplay?

Long answer text

Do you have any goals and motto in cosplaying?

Long answer text

Figure 1. Open Questions

From their answers, most of them are above 17 years old. 60% comes from correspondents aging from 21 and older. 40% of correspondents are around 17-20 years old. It is as depicted in the figure below.

How old are you?

5 responses

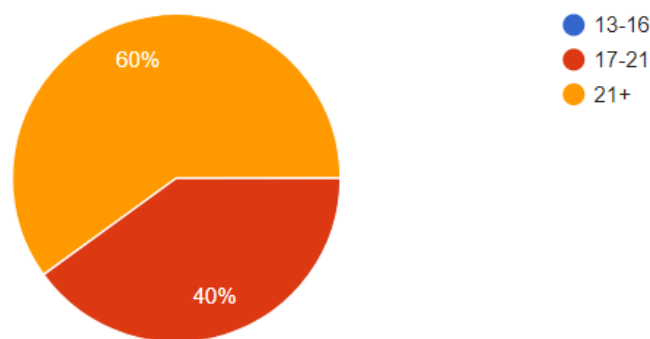


Figure 2. Age

Based on the aspects of Erich Fromm's Humanistic Psychoanalysis, responses will be analyzed per aspect starting with Relatedness. First response comes from Edward Yang Putra who answers the first question, "Why do you love cosplay? (please answer as detailed as possible with your background)" with a statement that he does love cosplay because he comes from a rather pressuring household with parents setting expectations on him because he was the first-born and cosplay plays a huge role for him to express himself.

Why do you love cosplay? (please answer as detailed as possible with your background)

Yes, I do love cosplay. I came from a typical asian family so probably some people can relate to the pressure especially when you are the first born, cosplay really takes my mind off things that don't really matter. I guess you can say it's like an expressive art as well.

Figure 3. Edward Yang's Answer

Second response comes from Lidya Astriani. She answers the question by sharing that she has a rather closed-up personality also known as introvert and that she comes from a family that does not really give any specific answer whether she is allowed to cosplay or not. When she cosplays, sometimes her family would mock her. Cosplay for her is freedom because she can be an extrovert for the whole day.

Why do you love cosplay? (please answer as detailed as possible with your background)

Biar bebas hahaha

Pribadiku terkenal tsrtutup maximal introvert juga. Cosplay let me be an extrovert for a full day.

Keluarga....

Mereka ga ngelarang aku, tp jg ga ngebolehin. Tp if i do ya kadang suka diungkit diejek gt.....
.w. gapaham deh sm kekuargaku.

Figure 4. Lidya Astriani's Answer

Third response comes from Putri Nony Lovyta who answers the question similar to the previous correspondents. She loves cosplay because she can freely express herself by associating herself to a character she loves.

Why do you love cosplay? (please answer as detailed as possible with your background)

I love cosplay because, it's like kind a express myself, also because cosplay it's the way to show my love to my favorite character and make it real

Figure 5. Putri Nony's Answer

Fourth response comes from Vinca Valentina who answers more specifically due to her love in creating things. She describes herself as an artistic person who uses more of her right brain which is often related with creativity. By cosplaying, she can utilize her creativity by creating costumes and designs from a characters in reasonable price yet quality result. Ultimately, she also mentions the same thing with other correspondents and it is to express herself because usually she is shy. She socializes in community and finds new friends.

Why do you love cosplay? (please answer as detailed as possible with your background)

First of all, because i love to creating things. As a designer and illustrator, I'm a person who mainly use my right side of the brain. and through cosplay, i can channeling my creativity. in cosplay, i learnt how to make something as similar as possible with the original design but still on budget and looks good, and you can also give some touch of your own style in the costume.

Also, since i was little, i'm a shy person. so cosplay also help me to build me confidence and give me a community and friends.

Figure 6. Vinca Valentina's Answer

From her answer to second question, it is revealed that her parents did not support her hobby. Still, she continues cosplaying and her parents eventually yielded as long as she could be responsible for herself and her hobby.

Were there any obstacles when you wanted to cosplay?

For me, it's time and money. Because i want to keep doing cosplay as just a hobby, i don't want to turn it into my job or something i make money from. So, since I also need to make money from my main job, i have to manage my time carefully to do cosplay. and making costume for cosplay takes a lot of money (for buying the materials, make up, etc), so i usually limit myself to make only 1 costume per 3-6 months.

My parents also didn't support this hobby. they said it's wasting money and don't have any benefit for my life. but since i'm an adult already and i keep doing it regardless for the last 12 years, they eventually go like 'well you can do it as long as you can responsible with your hobby and yourself'.

Figure 7. Vinca Valentina's Answer 2

Fifth and final response comes from Yusuf Bima Putra Adi Sajjana who elaborates on how cosplay changes his life because through cosplay, he learns many skills and earns many experiences. He, however, mentions that he did not know how to deal with people which can be regarded as he did not know how to express himself well. When he started cosplaying, he learned not just how to create costumes and take up a role, but also how to meet with people from his statement ‘meet many friends from my hobby’ and ‘make new friends’.

Why do you love cosplay? (please answer as detailed as possible with your background)

i love cosplay because cosplay change my life, before i just normal person who dont know to make costume, and how to dealing with many people , when i was in kid i love playing video game and sink on my imagination i was love make my own character and make the paper doll for my own character, after i goaing to junior and senior haight school i start make my own character into a character and meet many friends from my hobby, after i enter the collage i start my cosplay live in jogjakarta and start join the competition, and i start have lot of champion title in many competition and make a new friends also i meet my fiance in cosplay, after long time i learn making costume i start for taking comission and now become my main job until now, the best memories i have is when i join to world cosplay summit 2015 at nagoya japan, as indonesia representative i start to leran how to become and how is the world clash championship like, but the result is not going well, i lost and become my country big shame, every people bully me and bashing me on social media, and i just learn world clash is not easy to reach and i can see where is my real people who suport you and not, and now i just have become judge in several country and join competition and become guest start in some country like taiwan, now i have learn many thing from cosplay from i nobody become cosplayer. thats why i love cosplay

Figure 8. Yusuf Bima’s Answer

From the responses given, it can be concluded that Relatedness aspect among cosplayers comes from the capability and ability to express one’s love and self through the action of cosplaying. One of the correspondents also answered that he met his fiancé through cosplay activity. They find love towards the characters and towards the act of cosplay itself.

Transcendence aspect relates to whether people destroy or create to survive. The question used is “What do you feel specifically when you cosplay?” and the first correspondent, Edward Yang, replied with “I feel like I can try to be somebody else, it sort of feels like a break from the real world”. Second correspondent, Lidya Astriani, also answered similarly by typing “Bebas jadi orang lain sehari” which translates to “I can freely be someone else for a day”. Third correspondent, Putri Nony, replied differently quoting, “Of couse feel happy and free, also fun because meet up new people and friends! Gain some experience from outside the house”. Fourth

correspondent, Vinca Valentina, responded with “I feel happy. I'm happy that I can wear pretty costume that I poured my efforts into. I'm happy that I can be pretty/cool characters that I like, especially when people recognize your costume and praise it. I'm also happy because I can meet my friend who share the same hobby with me in the event. Though it's tiring and sometimes it makes my body ache because some parts of the costume are uncomfortable, but I guess it's all worth the fun”. Finally, the fifth correspondent, Yusuf Bima replied similar to the first two correspondents, quoting, “I feel like a character I cosplay when I wear my costume I just feel like I become one and always want to doing role play as my character and I have more courage to face people specially on stage”.

Compiling responses and analyzing it, cosplayers create to survive within the community. They create new identity through the characters they are cosplaying to create new bonds and new experience.

Based on the answers on the same question, “What do you feel specifically when you cosplay?”, cosplayers find their Rootedness positively outside of their homes. They are able to find comfort with new people in new environment. From the correspondents, it is found that they all used to have trouble in expressing themselves which also means they have negative Rootedness or fear of the unknown outside their homes. They were shy and did not know how to interact with strangers. Through cosplay they manage to change negative Rootedness to positive Rootedness. They no longer fear new environment and new acquaintances.

Cosplayers usually introduce themselves as the characters they cosplay. However, it is important for them to be able to identify themselves as an individual instead of belonging to a community. "How do you differ or identify yourself from others through cosplay?" is asked to find out what they think about themselves as cosplayers.

Edward Yang replied “usually each person have their own way of doing things, usually some groups are quite distinct from one another as well, so from time to time it's easy to spot the differences” which does not really answer the question. His answer shows an uncertainty towards himself. He seems to lean in the middle between community and individual. He identifies his individuality through community although he does not specify how he would identify himself individually. Lidya Astriani answered, “Aku biasa cosuin chara yg emang specifically aku suka/temen chara yg aku gilai bgt. More like event goer dibanding photosession maniac alias lbh doyan ngevent. Progress cosu lambat banget tapi selalu jadi plan yg udah kubicarain jaug hari” which translate to “I usually cosplay character that I specifically like or obsess with. I am more of an event-goer instead of photosession maniac, in another way, I fancy participating in event. My progress in cosplay is very slow but it is always in my list of plan that I always talk about since a while before”. Lidya identifies herself as an event-goer cosplayer compared to cosplayers who prefer to take photo sessions both outdoor and indoor. Putri Nony seems to identify herself

differently, quoting, “I show my costume different from other and I choose not mainstream character, for me if I have a plan a character and then so many people cosplay it, I mostly cancel it, or I search the other version that can show my skill on the costume, since I can make my own costume”. From her answer, she identifies herself as anti-mainstream because she will choose only characters that are not too popular to cosplay. She also identifies herself from her skills in making the costume. Vinca Valentina said, “I don't know tho. I guess I'm the same as most of cosplayers in Indonesia. But I do my cosplay with love. I only do cosplay from the series I like. Even when I can't play the game, I always make sure I know the story and character I cosplay”. Although she claims to not know how to identify herself, she provided enough points to her identity as an individual cosplayer. She identifies herself as well researched considering she always makes sure she knows the character well to cosplay as the character because she loves the character. Yusuf Bima wrote, “People say to me, I have good skill for making costume and I have my signature style of costume armor finishing and I have signature style for my cosplay performance, and when people say that to me that means they are admiring my skill and my signature style of cosplay and it makes me different with other cosplayer”. He identifies himself from how people identify him and it is a skillful cosplay performer and distinctive cosplayer.

Analyzing responses to how these five cosplayers identify themselves, it is discovered that most cosplayers find their own style and individuality in cosplaying. Although some of them have ambiguity in describing themselves, they go with how people around them describe them.

The last but not least analysis is the Frame of Orientation of these five cosplayers. “Do you have any goals and motto in cosplaying?” is asked to find out their goals or motto in cosplay activity. First correspondent, Edward said, “Supporting one another is never a bad thing, a community is a community because everyone is involved”. It is a motto rather than a goal. His purpose or goal, however, is answered in the first question regarding the reason he loves cosplay and it is to express himself. Second correspondent, Lidya Astriani, answered, “Do it because of love not fame” in which also means her goal is to express her love to the characters she cosplays. At the same time, it can also be regarded as her motto to keep cosplaying. Putri Nony seems to have a clear goal and motto, quoting, “My goal mainly to 'show off' my family that I'm not just waste money, cosplay it's a hobby that I can be proud of, I can have new Experience and also achievement, I have a dream to get chance joining up on international competition but for now still focused on other things”. Her goal in cosplaying seems to lie within her desire to be acknowledged by her family that through cosplay, she can succeed and be proud of it. She also wanted to participate in international cosplay competition. Vinca Valentina, the fourth correspondent, answered similarly to that of Lidya's answer and it is, “I just do cosplay that I like and I want. I don't want to make costume that popular and mainstream in the community,

just for the sake of fame. Well, I do it for my hobby, and if I do it for the sake of other's, I think I'll lose my point of doing cosplay". Her motto is to cosplay because of love not for fame or popularity. Both Lidya and Vinca think that if people cosplay for fame, the essence of cosplay is lost. Last correspondent, Yusuf Bima, has similar goal as Putri Nony, quoting, "my goal is become world champion, and make more friends from cosplay". Yusuf aspires to become world champion cosplayer and meet more people through cosplaying.

Generally, the goal of cosplayers is to express themselves, have fun, and meet new people in same community. Several, however, do cosplay on a different level and seriously aim for the top like Yusuf Bima and Putri Nony. Both reasons are cosplayers' Frame of Orientation whether it is an actual goal or simply a motto, they have philosophical or realistic view to keep cosplaying.

The writer also conducted an additional research with Likert Scale to improve this research. The target is around twenty cosplayers which has been reached. The statements are as shown on the images below.

You love cosplaying *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly Agree

You love creating through cosplay. It can be creating new bonds/meeting new friends or creating costumes and props. *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly agree

Are you comfortable in public cosplay event? Are you comfortable with new people? *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly agree

You can still differ yourself among cosplayers whether you cosplay anti-mainstream character, cosplay to join championship, or your choice in materials for costumes and props. *

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

You have a motto or goal in cosplaying. *

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly disagree Strongly agree

Figure 9. Likert Scale

The questions are made in correlation with Erich Fromm’s Five Human needs. The purpose is to see if cosplayers agree with previous five samples. The scale ranges from 1-5; 1 = Strongly disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, and 5 = Strongly agree.

You love cosplaying

22 responses

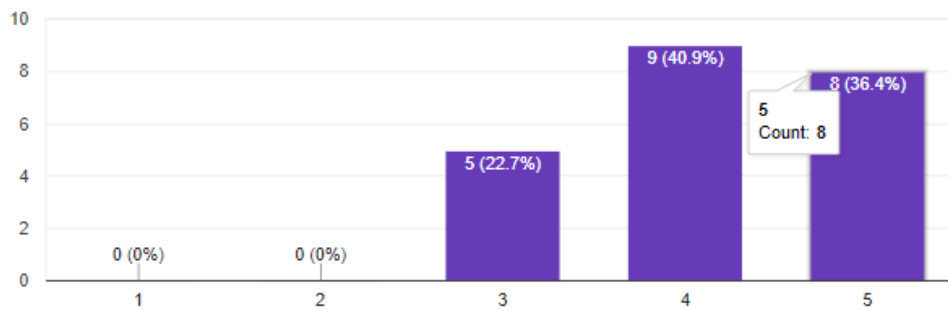


Figure 10. Responses

From the responses given, majority of the respondents agree that they love cosplaying. It proves that Erich Fromm’s Relatedness aspect plays a role through cosplay in their lives. With

five respondents answering neutral, it proves that they lean to ‘likeliness’ than to ‘dislike’. They relate and they find love in and through cosplay.

You love creating through cosplay. It can be creating new bonds/meeting new friends or creating costumes and props.

22 responses

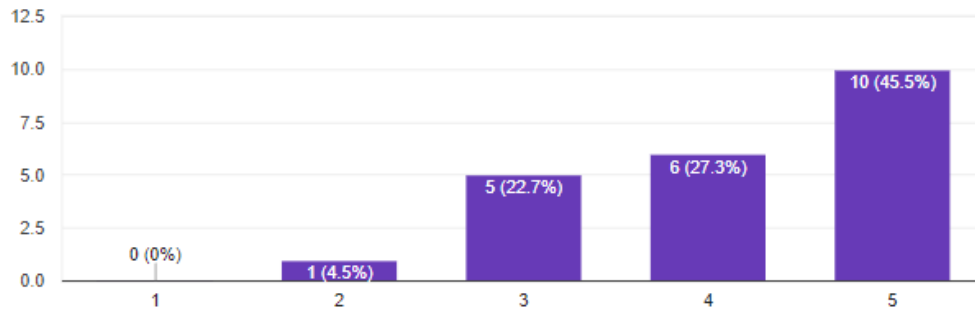


Figure 11. Reponses

Based on the aspect of Transcendence, humans survive by creating or destroying. By letting them measure the statement, “You love creating through cosplay. It can be creating new bonds/meeting new friends or creating costumes and props”, it is shown that majority of them agree to the statement with one respondent disagreeing. Majority feels they have created something through cosplay and it could be either of the mentioned attributes. It could also be something else.

Are you comfortable in public cosplay event? Are you comfortable with new people?

22 responses

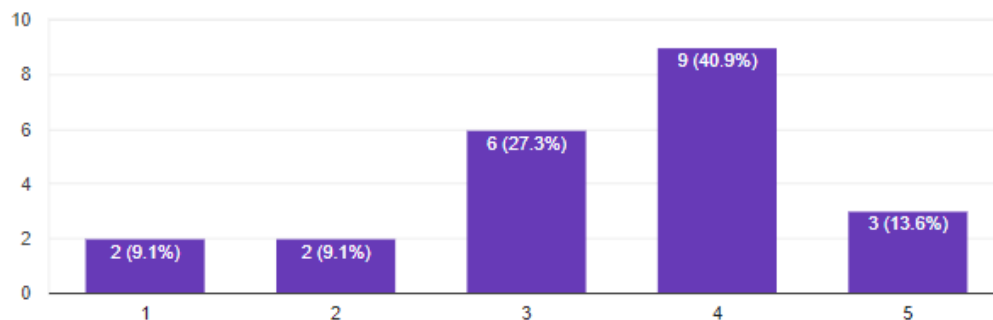


Figure 12. Responses

To this statement, the responses given vary. Two people strongly disagree and two people disagree while the other eighteen respondents agree to the statement. This result shows that there are people who prefer to have private cosplay event or photo session and there are people who prefer to mingle in public cosplay event. Based on Rootedness, majority shows positivity in finding comfort in public or different environment.

You can still differ yourself among cosplayers whether you cosplay anti-mainstream character, cosplay to join championship, or your choice in materials for costumes and props.

22 responses

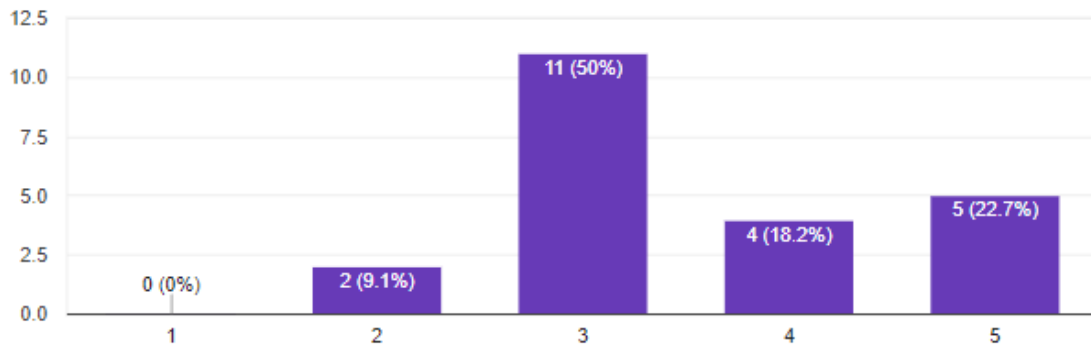


Figure 13. Responses

To this statement, answers vary as well with majority choosing Neutral, two respondents chose disagree and the other nine respondents agree. Based on Erich Fromm's Sense of Identity aspect, majority can differ themselves through cosplaying with two of them indicating their incapability to differ themselves. It shows that they prefer to be referred as part of the cosplay community which falls into the unproductive category; simply 'cosplayers' instead of individually creative cosplayer. Eleven respondents, majority of the participants, answered Neutral which proves that they can identify themselves but they are not certain how. Majority is identified as productive.

You have a motto or goal in cosplaying.

22 responses

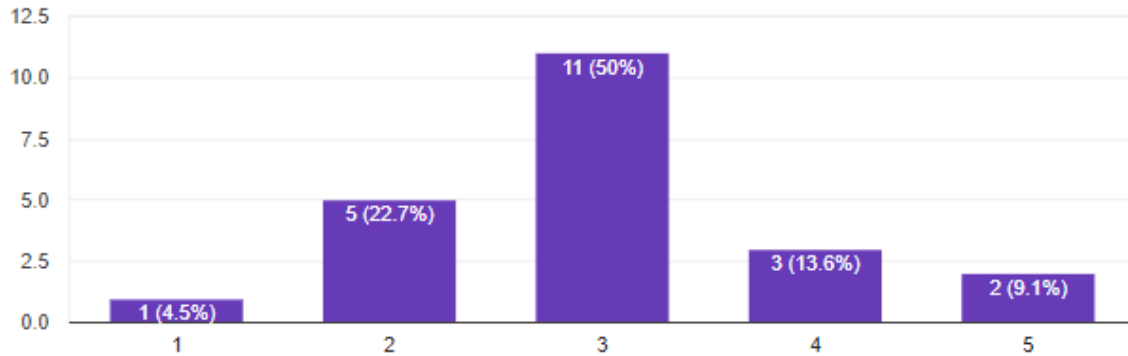


Figure 14. Responses

The statement used for the last scale is to find out whether they have Frame of Orientation in accordance to Erich Fromm's Human Needs. Six respondents show that they do not have particular motto or goal; they simply cosplay without any consideration in the action. It could also mean they do not need any moral support in cosplaying which also means that they do not have any difficulties in it. On another side, majority shows they have goal or motto in cosplaying; two of which strongly agree. It means they strive for something by cosplaying.

CONCLUSION

Cosplay, certainly is a new cultural activity to the world. Its uniqueness and distinctive characteristics appeal to people. However, it is discovered with Erich Fromm's humanistic psychoanalysis that there are more compositions to a cosplayer than people think. Cosplay, after this research, proves to be not simply a hobby but a cultural activity based on psychological needs based on Fromm's aspect of relatedness, transcendence, rootedness, sense of identity, and frame of orientation.

Based on the aspect of Relatedness, cosplayers are all related through their love to the fictional characters they cosplay and to the activity of cosplay itself because it gives them a sense of liberation from other matters. Cosplay is a freedom of expression for cosplayer.

Based on the aspect of Transcendence, it is discovered that cosplayers survive or keep cosplaying by creating. Through cosplay, they create identities associated to the characters of their choice to create new bonds and new memories.

Based on the aspect of Rootedness, from five correspondents, they all show how they manage to turn their unproductive Rootedness, their fear of the unknown, into productive

Rootedness. Through cosplaying, they find comfort and 'home' in cosplay community. They do not fear meeting new people in new environment. From shy to confident and from social anxiety to socially capable. Some people, however, still cannot find their comfort zone in public event.

Based on the aspect of Sense of Identity, cosplayers can identify themselves most of the time based on their skills, style, and motivation. Some identify themselves from how they cosplay because of their love to the character and activity. Some identify themselves from their skills in making their costumes. Some also do not identify themselves as individual creative cosplayers but simply as 'cosplayers' in the community.

Based on the aspect of Frame of Orientation, some cosplayers make it their goal to enjoy, express and have fun, and some others make it their goal to be able to be recognized internationally. Some of them also have same motto and it is to cosplay because of love not because of popularity. However, there are also small number of people that do not have such moral support while cosplaying. It could mean they do not have obstacles in cosplaying that they do not need any moral support to keep cosplaying.

Cosplayers, in the eyes of public, seem to stand out with their colorful wigs and costumes, however, psychologically, they are trying to survive by finding some external support. It is through cosplay that they found the support other than satisfying hunger, thirst and sexual necessity. They met problem, in this case social anxiety, and by cosplaying, they solved it.

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