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Cosplay and creating youth identity in the narrations of teenage cosplayers

Adolescence is a period, which is connected with creating of adolescents' identity. This process is influenced by many factors, such as the environment, family, peer group, interests, difficulties encountered or activities undertaken by the individual. Globalization and development of the Internet has accelerated cultural exchange and has enabled adolescents to access a wide range of opportunities, giving them the opportunity to explore more. It caused also development of popular culture and many related activities. One of them is cosplay, which let individual impersonate in character which come from popular culture. During impersonate individual become both himself and someone else in the same time, while constantly maintaining the identity he has. The deep connection of the created character with the individual seems to be related to the process of identity formation in the individual who undertakes to be a cosplayer.

The purpose of PhD thesis is to examine how adolescents involved in cosplay perceive the role of cosplay in creating their own identity. Method used for this purpose is collective case study, technique was an open, semi-structured in-depth interview. In research took part fourteen adolescents in age between fifteen and nineteen years old. The respondents are actively engaged in cosplay cosplayers.

The qualitative analysis showed that from the point of view of cosplayers, popular culture is an opportunity for them to participate in trends, gain inspiration for creating costumes and a kind of escapism, which is understood in a positive, not pejorative way. In their narratives, the close connection with the characters they choose to impersonate and active participation in cosplay is related to the formation of the individual identity of each of them. Cosplay also seems to play a significant role in the formation of group identity, which the participants pointed out when citing activities performed with other people. In terms of gender roles, there is a visible relaxation of the rules, thanks to which cosplayers can freely experiment with them, and some indicate an increase in the sense of femininity as a result of interaction with selected characters. In the narratives of cosplayers, it appears that selected characters are real teachers for them, from whom they draw patterns of behavior and adapt them to everyday life. The respondents also speak clearly about the risks associated with cosplay, which makes them seem to be aware of the negative sides of participating in cosplay.

Keywords: adolescence, identity, cosplay, popular culture, adolescent, cosplayer