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**INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS, SEXUAL LIFE, BODILY  
EXPERIENCE AND ON-LINE ACTIVITY:**

**a comparative study between adolescent and young adult cosplayers  
and non-cosplayers.**

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**Abstract**

We have conducted a comparative study between a population of Italian young adults who practise the *Cosplay* and a group of 'non-cosplayers', exploring several topics such as interpersonal relationships, on-line activity, sexual life and bodily experience in order to contribute to the nationwide understanding of this phenomenon which is still at its beginning.

The cosplayers of the studied sample are aged between 15 and 23, with an average of 19.8 years. They are mainly female and are composed of "average" subjects whose principal activity is, as observed, to tailor their own costumes as well as to share their practice within the group.

Comparing the two examined groups, the cosplayers reveal a more considerable complexity with regard to their sexual life and their

interpersonal relationships experienced, the latter, mainly through virtual platforms. Moreover there's a significant difference between these two groups on how they protect their body. This aspect has been investigated by the test *Body Investment Scale* (Orbach, Mikulincer, 1998).

**Keywords:** Cosplay, bodily experience, interpersonal relationships, on-line life.

## INTRODUCTION

“Cosplay”, a contraction of the English words “costume” and “play”, relates to the practice of reproducing one's favourite animation's character devoting a great amount of time and money to recreate their costumes or imitate their poses and attitudes.

Norris and Bainbridge (2009) highlight that, far more than just *wearing a costume*, the coplayers aim to live the same *habitus* of the character they choose, playing their role physically and emotionally, where, anyway, the playing aspect stands as crucial. The spread of this practice is also attracting part of the sociological and anthropological literature.

Early studies on the population of cosplayers helped to describe the phenomenon's development from its original peculiarities to those of the countries where it gradually advanced.

Considering the reasons for practising the Cosplay, a keen desire of amusement, socialisation and being part of a community prevails within the cosplayers (Lotecki, 2012), but some of them also underline the importance of having the chance to be watched, photographed or known, denying that the practice can be considered just a simple hobby. Referring to this, Rahman (2012) connotes that through the practice the youth can achieve something missing in their life. The Cosplay is also associated with violent acting out or drugs abuse, as in Japan where it reflects a sense of unease and consequent misbehaviour (Kinsella, 2000).

More specific identity-making aspects can be found in the works of different authors. In his study on a population of Australian cosplayers, Lotecki (2012) describes the unique process of "identities negotiation" which the cosplayers seem to realise between their identity and those of the characters they choose to emulate. Interviews done by Hieu Truong (2013) with Japanese cosplayers pointed out that the Cosplay gives its followers the chance to test intellectual, relational and physical abilities felt as impossible

to perform in their daily life, and, above all, it seems to awaken hidden aspects of their sexual identity. Very few are the studies on the Italian cosplayers (Vanzella, 2005, Cantone *et al.* 2013a, 2013b).

As testified by the latest works of Cantone *et al.* the Cosplay, through the identification of the practitioners with a fictional character, can be seen as a way of managing individual unease as well as a possible path to compensate a *self* perceived as fragile. The involvement in the practice, of adolescents in particular, invites us to concentrate mainly on the body contents and on the sexual sphere, crucial matter in such important moment of their life: adolescence is in fact the moment when "...everything falls onto the body...as the place where psychic unmanageable contents gather [...], either because of puberty's new experience [...] either because of lack of psychic reference points or the redefinition of them" (Carau, Fusacchia, 2010 p.12). Our specific attention to the cosplayers' relationships is due to the high commitment they have towards their peers. At this stage, in the adolescents' life, there is a fluctuation between the use of many identifications, typical of the age and signal of curiosity and interest towards new things, and the steadfast refusal to identify themselves with adults.

The latter seems to be more appropriate to the adolescent ways of discard, related to the wish of walking out on their "old" love objects (Novelletto, 2009). The parents' idealisation leads, in the initial growing phase, to the creation of the ideal Self which can diminish during the Oedipal phase or the latency period, but, instead, it can dramatically fall apart during adolescence. Therefore a new ideal of the Self is needed and it can be found within the peers. Friends represent the opportunity to know and explore themselves thus allowing them to leave behind their primary emotional niche, through a process of breakaway-individuation which guides the adolescent to the adult life. (Lancini, Turuani, 2009).

The community of cosplayers is very active on the virtual platforms: the Internet is the favourite means to share information about fairs, to learn and improve their sewing skills, to show their passion for or devotion to a specific character (choosing them as avatar or imitating them on the chat rooms (Lamerichs, 2011). This practice seems to emphasise the importance of the group met through the Internet before the encounter face-to-face; in particular, the virtual gathering helps to create a sense of belonging to the community anticipating what will become real during their live conventions (Lotecki, 2012; Almazán, Barlés, 2011; Vanzella, 2005).

The work we are going to present here will show a deeper layout of Italian cosplayers, on a psychological/clinical level, already started by the

Department of Psychology of the Seconda Università di Napoli. Our aim is to describe a population of Italian adolescents and young adults practising the Cosplay through a comparative study with a group of non-practising young adults. Our expectation is, in particular, to detect the differences between the two samples with the regard to their interpersonal relationships, sexual life, bodily experience, self-confidence and use of social networks.

## **Materials and methods**

### **The sample**

The studied group has been selected between November 2012 and April 2013 within three events: the *Lucca Comics & Games*, the *Salerno Comicon* and the *Napoli Comicon*. These are some of the most popular events in Italy where many *anime* and *manga* enthusiasts go and where Cosplay's performances take place.

All those people who declared to be cosplayers and chose to voluntarily submit to the survey have been included in this research.

The control group, homogeneous to the first one by age and sex, has been selected between April and June 2013, in the Campania region (Italy), within university students and those of one chosen high school.

All of them agreed to participate voluntarily after being informed about the methodology and the purpose of the mentioned research. Every participant was guaranteed anonymity by means of a numerical code for each questionnaire.

The participants have been given the appropriate tools and told to simply answer to the questions, using all the time needed to do so.

### **Tools**

All participants were given a questionnaire consisting of three tools with closed-ended questions:

a socio-demographical Form was created *ad hoc* to obtain information about a wide range of daily life's aspects: age, sex, education, sexual orientation and related practices, relationships, use of alcohol or drugs, possible illegal behaviour, use and frequency of use of Social Networks;

the *Body Investment Scale* (Orbach e Mikulincer, 1998) Italian version, realised by the Chair of Clinical Psychology, Department of Psychology of the Seconda Università di Napoli, which is a self-report instrument used to

examine the emotional investment in the subject's body. The tool organises the construct on four dimensions: ideas, body image feelings and attitudes (investigated by the scale BIS-F, *Body feelings and attitudes*), the body care and body protection (investigated by the scale BIS-C, *Body care* and BIS-P, *Body protection*), comfort or discomfort in body touch (investigated by the scale BIS-T, *Body touch*). The instrument consists of 24 items (6 items per scale), which are affirmative responses expressing a range of agreement. They go from a grade of total disagreement (point 1: "I totally disagree") to a total agreement (point 5: I totally agree). The survey is introduced by a brief guideline which presents the items' nature, the answering methods and the instrument's purpose which doesn't aim to evaluate the individual's ability but it just invites the subjects to concentrate and to be sincere;

three scales of the *Multidimensional Self-concept Scale* (Bracken, 1993). This is a self-report instrument which investigates the self-concept construct, in its Italian version (Bergamini e Pedrabissi, 2005). The scales used for this research are: the *Interpersonal Relationships* scale which has the purpose to investigate how individuals evaluate their relations with others, the emotions related to them and the idea of the feedback's nature they seem to receive; the *Emotivity* scale which investigates the kind of the subjects' emotional experiences and their ability to be aware of, evaluate, describe and control them; the *Bodily experience* scale which investigates the idea the subjects have on their own external appearance, health state and physical potential. The three scales have in total 75 items, 25 items per scale, for which each subject gives an affirmative answer depending on their personal viewpoint of "truth", using a score range between 1 (Absolutely true) and 4 (Absolutely not true). The instrument is introduced by a brief guideline which is, per contents, similar to the one used for the BSI.

A supplementary part of the sociodemographic Form has been administered only to cosplayers in order to gather information about the Cosplay practice and in particular: time of practising, frequency of participation in the events or the fashion shows and related contests, awards, peculiarity of the chosen characters, methods of making costumes, frequency of visiting Cosplay-like websites or blogs and possible management of them, opinions about the practice.

## Outcome

### Sociodemographic data

The cosplayers group consists of 98 women (68%) and 48 men (32%) (Tab.1) with an age average of 19.8 years. No one has only a primary school qualification: 57 subjects (38.5%) have a secondary school qualification, 75 subjects (50.7%) have a college qualification and 16 subjects (10.8%) have a degree.

Table 1						
Sociodemographic data						
	Sex (N=298)		Educational qualification (N=298)			
	Male	Female	Primary	Secondary	College	Degree
<b>Cosplayers</b>	48 (32, 9 %)	98 (67, 1 %)	0 (0, 0%)	57 (38, 5%)	75 (50, 7%)	16 (10, 8%)
<b>Non Cosplayers</b>	51 (34, 2%)	98 (65, 8%)	1 (0, 7%)	71 (47, 3%)	77 (51, 3%)	1 (0, 7%)
$\chi^2$	,806		,001			

The non-cosplayer sample group, instead, consists of 98 women (65.8%) and 51 men (34.2%) (Tab.1). One subject (0.7%) has a primary school qualification, 71 subjects (47.3%) have a secondary school qualification, 77 subjects (51.3%) have a college qualification and 1 subject (0.7%) has a degree. The two mentioned groups are equally arranged by gender ( $p=.806$ ) and the number of women is higher than that of men (Tab.1).

### Variables related to the Cosplay practice

The interviews we carried out highlighted the times and methods our sample group uses to live this practice. The results showed that the 40.9% of the population has been practising the Cosplay between one and three years; the majority of them (45.3%) participates in the events at least once a year and

the 35.8% do so up to five times per year. With regard to the events only the 7.7% always take part in the fashion show/contest, while the 35% does it just sometimes. Those who participate in the fashion show usually are gathered in groups (27.5%); within them the 19.6% states to have won the contest. The choice of the character is mainly inspired by the Japanese animation: comic books (68.9%) cartoons (67.6%) and videogames (44.6%), quite significantly neglecting the Western tradition's proposals.

The character's gender choice is always made towards a same-sex character for the 51.7% of the cosplayers while just the 2.1% declares to always choose characters of the opposite sex. The 61.9% of the subjects declares, at last, to never choose a character with undefined gender.

The 40.3% of cosplayers always makes their own costumes whereas the 45% declares to do it only few times. The 54.2% of the cosplayers spends less than one hour visiting websites or blogs; only the 15.8% declares to dedicate more than three hours per day to them. The majority of the population (73.8%) sees the Cosplay as a moment of recreation as well as a way to meet friends (69.8%). For the 41% of the population the Cosplay is a way to play and for the 38% it is an artistic performance.

### Comparative analysis

#### Sexual life results

The subjects of both groups declare mainly to be heterosexual (98.6% of the control group and 85.9% of the cosplayers), but the cosplayers choose "homosexual" and "bisexual" more frequently than the non-cosplayers group (Tab.2).

<b>Table 2</b>			
<b>Sexual orientation (N=297)</b>			
	Cosplayers	Non cosplayers	$\chi^2$
Heterosexual	128(85,9%)	146(98,6%)	
Homosexual	9(6,0%)	0(0,0%)	.000
Bisexual	12(8,1%)	2(1,4%)	.000

Contrarily, no significant differences on the sexual sphere were remarked about the choice of not having sex ( $p=.873$ ) and the sexual life self-

evaluation ( $p=.255$ )

### Interpersonal relationships

Table 4

Comparing the results it has emerged that the 56.7% of the non-cosplayers has a stable partnership against the 38.9% of the cosplayers (Tab.3). To confirm this trend, the cosplayers group (8.8%) declares, more often than the non-cosplayers group (2.7%), to change sexual partner frequently. Furthermore the survey tells us that a higher number of cosplayers (86.3%), compared to non-cosplayers (71.1%), declares to have many friends (Tab.3). With regard to the ways of meeting their peers, cosplayers, compared to the control group, declare more frequently to meet their friends on the Internet (Tab.3).

Table 3

Relationship								
	I have a stable relations (N=299)		I frequently change sexual partner (N=297)		I have many friends (N=295)		I meet my friend especially	
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	In person	On the Internet
Cosplayers	58 (38,9%)	91 (61,1%)	13 (8,8%)	135 (91,2%)	126 (42,7%)	20 (6,8%)	131 (87,9%)	22 (14,8%)
Non cosplayers	85 (56,7)	65 (43,3%)	4 (2,7%)	145 (97,3%)	106 (35,9%)	43 (14,6%)	140 (94,0%)	9 (6,0%)
$\chi^2$	.002		.024		.001		.013	

Use of Social Networks												
	I usually connect to the Internet with			Social Networks				I use Social Networks to				
	Home PC	Laptop	Smart phone	Face book	Netlog	Twitt er	Insta gram	Com muni cate	Share opinions	Play online	Buy goods	Pornographic material
Cosplayers	86 (57,7%)	75 (50,3%)	43 (28,9%)	143 (96,6%)	20 (13,5%)	49 (33,1%)	24 (16,2%)	135 (91,2%)	60 (40,5%)	39 (26,4%)	34 (23,0%)	10 (6,8%)
Non cosplayers	61 (40,7%)	41 (27,3%)	82 (54,7%)	136 (90,7%)	5 (3,3%)	32 (21,3%)	38 (25,3%)	109 (72,7%)	32 (21,3%)	17 (11,3%)	8 (5,3%)	3 (2,0%)
$\chi^2$	.003	.000	.000	.035	.002	.022	.053	.000	.000	.001	.000	.044

### Use of Social Networks

Considering methods and time dedicated to the social networks, these seem to be far more preferred by the cosplayers population.

Facebook, Netlog e Twitter are used more often by the cosplayers than by the non-cosplayers. Instagram is the only social network where the opposite tendency can be seen. Referring to the use of Badoo, Myspace, Google+ e Linkedinnon there are significant differences between the two groups (Tab.4). There is no difference about the frequency of surfing on the Internet: data show that the main answer, for both groups, is "Every day" (cosplayers 84.6%; non-cosplayers 78%). Cosplayers usually connect to the Internet from home with their own pc (cosplayers 57.7%; non-cosplayers 40.7%) or their laptop (cosplayers 50.3%; non-cosplayers 27.3%). The control group, instead, declares to connect to the Internet more assiduously with their smartphone (non-cosplayers 54.7%; cosplayers 28.9%) (Tab.4).

Both groups declare to use social networks mainly to communicate (cosplayers 91.2%; non-cosplayers 72.7%). Statistics show relevant differences with regards to the purpose of using social networks: cosplayers declare to use them to share opinions (40.5%), to play on-line (26.4%), to buy goods (23%), or to watch pornographic material (6.8%). Non-

cosplayers declare to use social networks mainly to look for information (53.3%) (Tab.4).

### **Use of drugs or alcohol and illegal behaviour**

None of the groups seems to lean towards the use of drugs or alcohol, with no significant statistical differences.

The only difference identified refers to the affirmation "I had illegal behaviour". Although the percentage is minimum, the answer "Yes" is more frequent in the non-cosplayers group.

### **Outcome of the *Multidimensional Self-concept Scale and Body Investment Scale***

Statistically the two studied groups don't show relevant differences on the scales: "Interpersonal relationships", "Emotivity" and bodily Experience" of the *Multidimensional Self-concept Test (M.S.C.T.)* as well as on the areas of the BIS-f (*Body feelings and attitudes*), BIS-t (*Body touch*) and BIS-c (*Body care*) Between the two groups, a difference has arisen only with regards to the BIS-p (*Body protection*): the cosplayers reported a score lower than the one of the control group (Tab.5).

	Cosplayers average	Non cosplayers average	t	df	$\chi^2$
BIS-f	21,13	22,23	- 1.728	296	.085
BIS-t	19,15	18,99	.368	296	.713
BIS-c	22,57	22,83	-.540	296	.590
BIS-p	21,53	22,48	- 2.105	295	.036
MSCT <i>Interpersonal Relationship</i>	70,51	72,53	- 1.780	296	.076
MSCT <i>Emotivity</i>	68,52	68,04	.362	295	.717

MSCT <i>Bodily experience</i>	65,71	66,98	.973	293	.332
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## Discussion

Our research portrays a population of cosplayers mainly made by females, confirming the outcome revealed by the works done on the Cosplay in Italy (Cantone *et al.*, 2013a) and in some other countries. In his study on a North American population of cosplayers Lotecky already reports this tendency, discussing how specific activities, such as sewing, are historically connected to female household duties (Lotecki, 2012). More recently, also at the *Comiket* held in Japan, more women than men have been reported as participants (Lamerichs, 2013). The Comic Market, also known as “Comiket” or “Komiketto” (from the Japanese word “Komikku Māketto”) is considered the most important worldwide show dedicated to comic nooks. It is held twice a year in Tokyo, Japan.

The cosplayers of the studied sample are aged between 15 and 23, with an average of 19.8 years. Most of them have a secondary school qualification. The majority of them has been practising the Cosplay more or less three years and participates in the Cosplay events up to five times per year; very few participate assiduously in the fashion shows/contests and even fewer declare to have won none of them. The results about how frequently they participate in the Cosplay events suggest that the subjects who decided to take part in the survey are normal followers, away from the *top cosplayers* who represent the highest level of the community's hierarchy. They are cosplayers particularly good in choosing characters looking like them but who also have the ability to sew very high quality dresses. They perfectly imitate their character and are very popular, taken as example within the community. They start by taking part in the events assiduously, winning the contests or the fashion shows and then becoming more popular through personal websites or participating in the events as anchormen, coordinators or back judges.

Lotecki has lately described a similar situation in North America: the majority of the cosplayers he interviewed doesn't take part in the fashion shows and goes to Cosplay conventions or events one to four times per year (Lotecki, 2012). As in most of the Western countries (Lotecki, 2012; Lamerichs, 2013), the main element of the Cosplay practice has appeared to be, in our research as well, the making of their own costumes which often requires big amounts of money (Cantone et al. 2013a, b; Vanzella, 2005; Peirson Smith, 2013; Lamerichs, 2011).

Considering this aspect, the tendency of the Eastern population is, instead, the opposite: they prefer to buy manufactured costumes, maybe because they are more interested to perfectly reproduce their character than to create a personal handcrafted work (Bruno, 2002; Lamerichs, 2013).

To choose their favourite character the cosplayers of our sample are inspired exclusively by the Japanese animation: first by the comic books (*manga*) followed by the cartoons (*anime*) and the videogames; this tendency confirms once again the results of the first study on the Italian cosplayers (Cantone *et al.*, 2013a). Another of the main aspects we focused on was what the practice represents for a cosplayer. The answers "leisure time" and "a way to stay between friends" were the ones expressing best what the practice means for them but, overall, within our sample, the Cosplay seems to fulfil many needs at once, including those of *playing* and *performing*.

Same nature have the studies carried out by Lotecki whose results show that most of the cosplayers like the practice because it's a way "to have good time and socialise" as well as "to belong to a community" (Lotecki 2012). A very small percentage of cosplayers within our sample chose the answer "Other" giving motivations which suggest more the chance for them "to appear" or "to call for attention".

The results about the use of drugs or alcohol don't show any difference between the two groups: the cosplayers state to be away from these habits. Therefore the outcome on our sample seems not to connect the practice with violent acting out or drugs's abuse as recorded instead, by Kinsella (2000), within their Japanese peers for whom the Cosplay represents a way to express their sense of unease and rebellion against the government's control and oppression (Adami, 2009). The community of our research is very active on the virtual platform: cosplayers declare, more than the non-cosplayers, to meet their friends on the Internet and to use social networks much more assiduously than the non-cosplayers. The outcome about the use of social networks, to communicate or to share information and opinions, confirms a trend previously mentioned by Nicolle Lamerichs (2011). The

author describes the importance copleys give to the use of the virtual community to improve their sewing skills as well as to show admiration for and devotion to their favourite characters.

The gathering on social networks though seems to anticipate the interactions the youth will have during their real encounter (Vanzella, 2005; Lotecki, 2012): cosplayers actually declare to have many more friends than the control group. But, at the same time, results show that they tend not to have long-lasting and stable friendships. Furthermore, referring to the sexual sphere, the number of subjects who declare to be homosexual or bisexual is higher, within the cosplayers, than the one related to the non-cosplayers. Although both groups state to have had sexual experiences, the cosplayers differ from the non-cosplayers by affirming that they are not keen to have a stable relationship and inclined to change sexual partner often. In a previous study Cantone and her co-authors (2013) had noticed, within the cosplayers, results significantly higher than the non-cosplayers (university students and professional actors) with regards to the scales Avoidant, Schizotypal, Narcissistic and Histrionic of the ADP-IV. The assessment DSM-IV - Personality Disorders Questionnaire (ADP-IV) - (Schotte et al., 1998), Italian version (Pedone et al., 2005) is a self-report test to estimate the diagnostic parameters of personality disorders reported on the Axis II of the DSM. The study revealed a population with a strong tendency to social inhibition, struggling with their interpersonal relationships, especially those intimate, and a way to handle social relations with emotional detachment, or with a strong need to be admired but at the same time experiencing feelings of inappropriateness.

Following this path, cosplayers' disguise and imitation of fictional characters may have the role of *social facilitators* giving them the chance to live something that in real life, fearing people's opinion, they wouldn't be able to experience; these expressions also compensate a non-defined sexuality, helping the cosplayers to elaborate their own sexual identity through the defeat of the narcissistic and all-powerful aspects inheritance of the childhood sexuality. This is in fact why the Cosplay is peculiar within other practices (referring to the aspect of the *Play*): it makes "possible", through a *performance*, experiences impossible to live in the daily life, as stated by the cosplayers interviewed by Lotecki (2012), Alexis Hieu Truong (2013) and Emerald King (2013). They deeply expressed how helpful in defining their sexual identity, previously repressed by difficulty and embarrassment, was the chance to "live" bodily and sexual aspects different from their own nature or to be able to use unearthly *powers*. With regards to

the sphere of the sexual and identity-making "experimentation", Emerald King has conducted in Australia a study on the Cosplay practice focusing on the Boys Love narrative's characters. The Boys Love Narrative is a genre which has at its core the love between very beautiful boys or young men, known, especially within the youth through the *manga* and *anime*. In particular these stories are commonly named *Shōnen'ai* (from the Japanese *Shōnen*, boy, and *ai*, love) based on romantic and sentimental themes. The other side of it is what they call *Yaoi* (acronym for *Yamanashi*, *Ochinashi*, *Iminashi* "no climax, no implication, no meaning) based exclusively on sexual relationships between the characters, with no limits and no reserve.

The peculiarity of the Boys Love stories is the obsession for the characters' beauty so perfectly emphasised that they end up resembling women, with an ephobic and angelic appearance. For this reason they are called *Bishōnen* (very beautiful, gorgeous boy)

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Her attention on this phenomenon is due to the high number of female followers which gives a more interesting perspective especially when it comes to the *cross-dressing*. English word (clothes exchange) which refers to the act of wearing clothes and accessories conventionally considered as belonging to the opposite genre. The expression is commonly used within the community to indicate either a personal habit either a public practice, no matter the environment neither the intention.

The interviews revealed that these practices allow the Australian cosplayers "[...] to try sexual experiences avoiding to face the real aspect of them" (p.8). A similar observation has been carried out by Lotecki (2012) on the stereotypical idea people might have about the cosplayers' obsession and desire to become just like their idols. The author can affirm that his research, against the public opinion which wants the *fans* choosing this

practice to "escape" from themselves or from an unpleasant reality, reveals instead that cosplayers look for a conscious "identity negotiation" between their identity and that of their chosen character more than "replacing" it with one fictional. Although our study has assessed the preference for the same sex characters and a low interest in the *crossplay* practice, we believe that the Cosplay represents a search of the self and a way to define their own identity, including the sexual one, throughout the body. The term merges the words cross-dressing e cosplay. It is very often used within the practitioners when they choose, for the cosplay, characters of the opposite sex.

The different age of our studied sample made us to examine in depth the Cosplay when it merges with the adolescence and postadolescence dynamics. During adolescence the psyche is involved in a process which will end where the childhood's sexual development inheritance and the genital sexuality's insertion converge, urging to redefine the self and the object (Carau, Fusacchia, 2010).

This "reshuffle" can have pathological results or, instead, be creative. The shape the adolescent's body takes will mirror exactly what the psyche's complex process struggles with during those years (Blos, 1962). Throughout this phase the body substitutes the word while the psyche is working to give a name to those feelings which are yet undefined. The body alterations the cosplayers put into effect to perfectly look like the fictional character, made the authors of another study (Cantone, Laudanno 2013) think to associate the Cosplay to the *body modification* category where the body is deliberately altered. Considering this similarity the Cosplay could be seen as a *symptom* anticipating the modifications which, beginning by the disguise of the body *forced* into expressions, poses and attitudes of the chosen character, will ultimately end with the actual alterations of the body itself, final effect of the inability to symbolise it further. With no doubts the Cosplay, compared to other practices, is a transient modification not involved in distressed and painful paths which usually these kinds of practices are related to but, as disclosed by a particular element in our study too, the common tendency seems to be confirmed.

We refer in particular to the minor protection cosplayers have towards their body compared to that of the non-cosplayers as revealed by the *Body Investment Scale*. The test's authors themselves (Orbach, Mikulincer, 1998) had focused particularly on the *Body Protection* factor: in one of his works Orbach (1998) had proven the tight bond between the *Body Protection* indicators and the *Attraction to death*, which he thinks to be highly important to investigate suicidal tendencies within adolescents: in particular

the index of the BSI-P (*Body Protection*) test was inversely proportional to the *Attraction to death* one, within the *Multi-Attitude Suicidal Tendencies Scale* (MAST; Orbach *et al.*, 1991). Several authors highlight that the behaviour expressed through the *body modifications* can represent an attempt to appear (Coco Pavone *et al.*, 2010; Nicolò, Romagnoli, 2010) as well as a refusal and hate towards their own body, signals of a possible suicidal design. Therefore both the Cosplay and the *body modifications* might be considered, on increasing levels of escalation, a failure in the development and the acceptance of a 'new' body, thus of a sexed body, in puberty. The present study is nevertheless only an assumption which deserves to be investigated more deeply considering, also, that the conflicts and the discomfort experienced during adolescence can still have, in postadolescence, a place to develop through what Novelletto indicates as the "typical condition" of the postadolescent experimentation (2009).

### **Limits**

The number of people involved in our studied sample has been limited by the difficulty we had finding the participants but, anyway, we were able to guarantee a conspicuous quantity. It will be very interesting to observe if, on a bigger sample, the results will be the same. The Cosplay events' venues, where we enlisted the cosplayer volunteers, didn't give us the chance to use specific places suitable for the survey; we had to arrange on our own the right conditions to let them fill in the questionnaire. But neither the external conditions nor the questions on personal matters have stopped the cosplayers we have met from participating; in addition, they have been very happy to cooperate and visibly interested in our study. If we had a more comfortable space for the participants, with more privacy, probably a higher number of cosplayers would have taken part in the survey. We would also like to stress the fact that it has been difficult to reach and engage the professional cosplayers who have been impossible to approach because of their participation in the fashion shows and the inaccessibility of the areas where these were taking place. But again the main reason that stopped us from involving the top cosplayers was the lack of a private space within the fair where they could fill in the questionnaire. The tools we used to collect data are all self-report tests whose results are often determined by social appeal or by the environment. The different ways the tests have been administered to the two groups might have influenced the outcome and the comparison between them. Therefore the results can't be generalised and furthermore, for not giving closed solutions, they offer new areas to be

explored in depth through different tools such as focus group or talks. One of the areas to develop, for example, could be the study of the Cosplay as a significant precondition of the *body modifications* process.

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