

Cosplay and Conventions: A Growing Phenomenon

The world of fantasy and lore reveals much of one's imagination as cosplay becomes mainstream in areas all over the world upon the release of major television and film titles.

“Costume Play” or “Cosplay” is the act of portraying a media character among others in a convention or gathering. In past years, upon the origins of comic book, film and television conventions, costumed attendance was mainly seen with paid models or actors hired to entertain the audience.

As years progressed, many attendees joined in on the costume building and portrayal of some of their favorite characters. What does this mean for the non-enthusiast or those unfamiliar with such acts?

Cosplay combines a lot of aspects of communication and interpersonal relationship factors many would not consider when seeing a man or woman dressed as a Disney character, masquerading among fellow convention goers. The reality of costume wearing is far more in depth than just donning a costume and attending a convention.

Many groups, such as Heroes Among Us, ran by Christopher Christoff of Raleigh North Carolina, utilize their amazing costumes to frequent hospitals and orphanages in an attempt to entertain the children there. Their most recent visit was to the cancer ward at Duke Medical Center where over thirty children eagerly awaited the arrival of characters such as Iron Man, Wolverine, Nova, Katniss Everdeen of *The Hunger Games* and many more.

“It is truly wonderful to be doing something we all enjoy and seeing the smiles the kids have.” Christoff exclaimed when asked about the involvement of the group and the reasoning behind forming the organization. According to other members of the costume troupe, a combination of personal experience with health issues and the need to volunteer founded the groups' efforts to aid children.

Cosplay conventions offer other wonderful aspects in social evolution. Many conventions are involved in supporting organizations preserving nature, cancer research and scholarship funds. An upcoming event titled “Animazement” in Raleigh, North Carolina, will be donated 50% of proceeds to the Duke Children Foundation and the Autism Awareness Foundation of North Carolina.

The event is also riddled with intercultural entertainment aimed at opening the minds of the younger generation toward other cultures and countries. This will be done through a variety of events like Japanese Tea Ceremonies, martial arts exhibitions and panels on cultures around the world.

Cosplay is a hobby that provides more than just personal gratification for the wearer but opens doors for many with social anxiety and lack of perception on other cultures or orientations. Cosplay conventions, since becoming more mainstream, have encouraged the acceptance of all colors, creeds and backgrounds. In the “world of the convention, anyone is accepted as simply a fellow enthusiast displaying their love for film, gaming and television.

As the evolution of cosplay proceeds, it's obvious that the influx in audience reception will be upward bound. More and more participants can be seen when attending any film opening, convention or “geek culture” gathering. Especially with major films from novel adaptations, Marvel and DC comic books and video game adaptations such as *World of Warcraft* release, it becomes more prevalent that cosplay and convention going are a positive hobby with massive potential.

Limited research on the subject has been done, possibly due to the hobby being relatively new in its capacity or the lack of relation between cosplay and social communication. As such, through an independent study within the University of North Carolina at Fayetteville State, it will be researched as to what major benefits cosplay and conventions give to personal communication growth.