

Cosplay – Creating, or playing identities?

– An analysis of the role of cosplay in the minds of its fans

Author: Henrik Bonnichsen 19830912-3373

Advisor: Karin Becker

JMK – Department of Journalism, Media and Communication

Masters programme in media and communication studies

Abstract

This thesis analyses the concept of *cosplay* by critically engaging earlier theories that have claimed cosplay to be a form of escapism for fans of Japanese manga and anim . Theories have so far been concerned mainly with identifying cosplay as a type of theatre. By interviewing active cosplayers in focus groups, this thesis instead focuses on the ways in which cosplay functions as an arena for identity-creation. By looking at theories of identity, the thesis has analysed how identity is created, not by an individual, but in a reciprocal relationship with social groups. Cosplay is an element around which social groupings are built and through complex social structuring identity is created by attaching one self to the group. The group is structured by the amount of symbolic capital each member possesses, which is to say that knowledge about the stories within the group, and social relationships are determining the structure of the group. By looking at the structure of the group, we are able to gain insight into the question of cosplay as an object for identity-creation, and by looking at the interactions in the focus groups we are furthermore able to actively analyse the distribution of capital. This thesis thus asserts that cosplay does not function as a simple form of escapism that allows for cosplayer to escape their mundane lives, but that it is instead an important field for the creation of identity for the fans of manga and cosplay.

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1 Introduction

Since the late 1980's and during the 1990's, Japanese animation known as manga and animé has become increasingly popular in our part of the world (Napier 2007, p. 125). Manga magazines can be bought at a great many places, and animé which was made highly popular by the “*Pokémon*” craze in the late 1990's has also been critically acclaimed, culminating with Hayao Miyazaki's film *Spirited away* being awarded an academy award for best animated feature in 2003. This thesis will look at manga and animé as a popular culture phenomenon and will engage the consumer's of it in interviews, in order to look closer at how it is used by its consumers in order to create identity and a sense of place in the world. Specifically, I will look at the concept of *cosplay* in that regard. Cosplaying is a term applied to fans of manga dressing up as their favourite characters and attending conventions where competitions for best costume are held. The word itself is derived from a combination of the words “costume” and “play”. Susan J. Napier (2005 and 2007) has earlier delved into this subject by, among other things, interviewing so-called *cosplayers* about their interest. Napier looks at cosplaying as a way of assuming the identities of the manga-characters and thus looks at cosplay as an outlet for a desire to become an *other*. This notion is an important aspect for this thesis, as after conducting my research, I would contest, that the activity of cosplaying plays a larger and much more permanent role in the everyday lives of the fans. This thesis will analyse how cosplay plays a larger role in the creation of identity and how it is not mainly used to change one's identity but to create a sense of belonging in the world. The use of an object of popular culture in order to create identity is thus one of the main topics of this thesis. However, as Oyserman (2003, p. 8) points out, the self-concept of an individual is also influenced by social and situational structuring. An important aspect of cosplay is the fact that it is mainly a group activity. In that regard, I will look into, not only the creation of identity, but also look at how the participation in a group and activities around the group are a part of the puzzle as well. An important aspect of “group identity” is of course the overall construction of the group. We shall thus look into, how the group is constructed in terms of power structure, and how this structuring is an important part of the construction of identity.

Thus, the following research questions are going to be analysed and answered:

- 1) *How does cosplay function as an arena in which the fans of manga are given a chance to act, and interact?*
- 2) *How is cosplay used as an object around which individual identity is constructed?*
- 3) *What is the relationship between individual and group identity and how is access to the*

group gained?

4) *How is the structure of the group created?*

Analysing these questions will help us analyse the final research question which will thus be: *Is cosplay a form of escapism which acts as an outlet for escaping one's own identity for a while?*

In order to study this, I will make use of focus groups and engage the fans of manga in an discussion among themselves, in order to gain access to knowledge about the impact of cosplay on their personal identities as well as their *group* identities. As human beings are social creatures it is my conviction that the group plays a very large role for the individual. In order to study the dynamics of the focus groups, I will use analyse how the structure of the group is created and will in that regard base my analysis Erving Goffman's theories on role-playing in everyday life. This study of interaction will be combined with Bourdieu's concept of capital, which will give us access to knowledge about the dynamics within the group, i.e. power structures, as well as the boundaries of the groups, i.e. who can claim to be a legitimate member of the group and how is access to the group granted. The study of interaction within the group will thus provide us with a stepping stone for finding answers to questions of structure. In order to explain why these structures are important to understand, I will use the concept of *trust* as it is explained by Anthony Giddens. Trust is a concept that is used in order to explain how individuals place their trust in e.g. the social structures of a group and according to Giddens is a central concept to human beings. Without trust, be it in a system or in another person, a person loses faith in the meaningfulness of life. Focus groups are in this regard perfectly suited to study the trust of the participants. In order to do so, the analysis of interaction will be very important as it will allow us to see how the participants of the group are placing trust in each other and thereby asserting their position within the group, and in the world.

I will start the thesis by presenting the theory which will be used to analyse the research questions and will afterwards describe the method for data collection and the choices I made in order to do this collection. We shall then move over to an analysis of the data in connection with the theories and will finally answer the research questions in the conclusion.

2 Theory

Before presenting the theory which will be used for the analysis, there is a need to explain the concepts of manga and animé as this will ease the understanding of the terms used throughout the thesis, some of which are self-evident for the respondents I have interviewed, but which cannot be understood by the uninitiated reader.

In short, manga are Japanese comics, or graphic novels as they have also been called (Napier 2005, p. 6), and animé are animated series. As Susan J. Napier mentions (2005, p. 6 – 7) however, describing manga and animé simply as Japanese cartoons does not do justice to the variety and depth of the culture, as manga and animé in Japan is not associated only with children but is used by adults as well. The themes covered by manga range from simple stories much akin to western cartoons for children, to grander narratives describing apocalyptic scenarios targeted at adults (Napier 1996, p. 237). Cosplay is a trend that has been derived from the manga and animé culture and as explained above, involves fans dressing up as characters and attending conventions with like-minded fans. At these conventions, the cosplayers are performing in the role of their characters and try to mimic the characters as best possible.

This is of course only a very small presentation of the central concepts, but they should be enough in order to understand the terminology used in the thesis. Let us now turn our attention to the presentation of theory, and first of all look at the identity-concepts we will be using to answer the research questions.

2.1 Identity

Talking about identity as a single concept is not possible of course. In the context of this thesis only a small portion of the total discussion on identity-creation will be used, as the field is quite simply very large. I will only make use of three central concepts within identity, namely the self-concept, theories on group identity and identity through interaction. As mentioned in the introduction these concepts will later be connected to Bourdieu's concept of social and cultural capital, and in the interaction analysis we will see how the group distinguishes itself from other groups by using Goffman's theories on stigma. In this section however, I will describe the three identity-concepts I will use in the thesis and explain how they will be used.

2.1.1 Self-concept

“*Self-concept* and *identity* provide answers to the basic questions “Who am I?”, “Where do I

belong?”, and “How do I fit (or fit in)?” Oyserman (2004, p. 5)

As the above quotation shows, the self-concept within identity theory is a concept that relates to a person's own sense of belonging in the world. By having a sense of belonging, our lives become meaningful, which in its turn means that we get a sense of purpose in our lives. But what exactly is meant by self-concept? Oyserman (2003, p. 8) describes it thus: “[...] *the self-concept has been described as a “theory” about oneself that represents and organizes current self-knowledge and guides how new self-knowledge is perceived (Epstein, 1973). As a theory, the self-concept is made of the current state of knowledge about the self and is assumed to be veridical enough to help organize experience, focus motivation, regulate emotion, and guide social interaction.*”. An interesting theory on the function of the self-concept is Swann's self-verification theory, also mentioned by Oysermann (2003, p. 9): “*According to Swann's self-verification theory, individuals are motivated to preserve self-definitions and will do so by creating a social reality that conforms to their self-view.*”. In other words, the self-concept is thus shaping our *social* reality, as we are actively seeking a social reality which will mirror our own self-view. In the context of this thesis, this is of course a very important notion as it allows us to gain insight into why fans of manga see themselves as a distinct group, and why fans have a need to be a part of a group. It could thus be said that a group of fans conducting activities around an object of popular culture such as manga, are doing this specifically in order to verify their self-concepts.

2.1.2 Group identity

This leads us over to the next concept that will be used in this thesis namely group identity. As I just mentioned, the self-concept is verified by each person, by shaping a social reality that conforms to our self-view. This means that we do not surround ourselves in this social reality with people who do not conform to our self-views. This does not mean that every person in our social life is a “copy” of ourselves, and that we do not associate with people who we disagree on e.g. politics with. What it means is, that if a person does not have *some* abilities that we can recognise and understand even though we might disagree with them, we will leave that person out of our social realities. What is important about this is that the self is not only shaping our social realities, but that there is a dialectic relationship between these concepts. As we shape our social realities, we are equally shaped by our social reality. As Oyserman (2003, p. 8) argues: “[...] *the self-concept, though vital in guiding motivation, behaviour, and understanding, is highly susceptible to social and situational structuring.*” When using focus groups in this thesis, we are able to see how the participants are

actively affirming their relationship with the group, as well as using the group to re-affirm their selves. We shall see this in the analysis by looking at the interaction and conversation of the focus groups. In that regard, we will look into the power structure of the group by including Bourdieu's *capital*-concept, and look at the ways in which the conversation serves to gain status within the group. Bourdieu's concept of capital will be introduced later in this theory-section, and will only be touched upon briefly now. The concept of *capital* has to do with our ways of gaining status in the world. Specifically Bourdieu developed the theory of *symbolic capital*, which serves to explain positions in society through a combination of the cultural capital of a person and the economic capital of a person. Järvinen (1996, p. 266) describes it thus: “*Symbolic capital is another word for distinction, i.e. resources of all kinds that can be used by a group in order to gain an advantage in relation to another group.*”. Looking at how the group of manga-fans distinguishes itself by laying claim to a certain type of cultural capital, we will thus be able to see Bourdieu's theories in practice. As mentioned, Bourdieu's theories will be described in-depth later in this thesis, but without revealing too much, we can already see now that they are closely related to another concept which is important to group identity, namely the concept of *the other*. In order to distinguish a group as such, there is a need to create boundaries of the group. In other words, the group cannot become all-encompassing but needs a border to mark who is a legitimate member of the group, and who is not. This is what Kirkpatrick and Ellis are calling competition between groups. (2003, p. 58) The boundary of the group is of course changing all the time, but what can be said of it, is that when a person is not a part of the group, either through social nor cultural capital, that person is a part of *the other*. Kirkpatrick and Ellis mention (ibid.) that: “*A principal adaptive function of inclusion within one's local population concerns defence against outgroups*”. However, in my opinion this *other* does not need to be a threat to the group, but merely a person who does not have legitimate access to the group, which will be illustrated in the analysis of the focus groups.

Furthermore, *the other* is not only present as a group phenomenon, but is very much an important for the individual as well. In connection with this, Aron, Aron and Norman (2003, p. 105) write: “[...] *cognitively, the self is expanded through including the other in the self, a process which in a close relationship becomes mutual, so that each person is including the other in his or her self. [...] That is, people seek relationships in order to gain what they anticipate as self-expansion. When faced with a potential relationship, one compares one's self as it is prior to the relationship – lacking the other's perspectives, resources, and identities – to the self as prospectively imagined after it has entered the relationship, a self now with access both to the self's own perspectives and*

so forth plus the other's perspectives and so forth.”. In the context of this thesis, this is a very important notion. In the analysis of the focus groups, we will thus look closer at how the respondents chose to emerge themselves in manga, as well as the reasons for keeping the association with the group. An important factor in all activities is the relationship with others in the group, and this will give us the opportunity to analyse how the self is being created in a dialectic relationship with the group.

2.1.3 Identity through interaction

This dialectic relationship is a form of interaction with the group. The aspect of interaction is thus one of great interest to this thesis, as a study on interaction will give us valuable insights into the creation and maintenance of identity. Interacting with another person or a group of persons is a daily ritual for almost all people. This interaction does not need to be a face-to-face interaction, but can also be a mediated interaction. Abrams and Hogg (2003, p.147 – 148) mention this when they state that :”*Greater access to communication technologies and transportation mean that cultural, ethnic, and geographic groups are less able to constrain their members or restrict access to alternative social perspectives. The “Group”, or more particularly the ingroup, is no longer restricted to specific social networks of known others.*”. Our interaction with others has thus been changed by external factors such as means of communication. In this thesis, I have chosen to analyse only the face-to-face interactions that are present in the focus groups, but it is an important notion to keep in mind as the respondents are of course used to communicating with the group through different media. We shall see it represented somewhat in the focus groups, when looking into the respondents means of communications with the group and the ways in which this helps affirm the affiliation, but I will not analyse this form of interaction separately. Therefore, I will analyse the face-to-face interaction in the focus groups, which will enable us to see how the identities of the participants are constructed while engaging in conversations with other members of the group.

2.2 Bourdieu and capital

Pierre Bourdieu's concept of capital is as mentioned earlier, one of the major concepts used in this thesis. Bourdieu is perhaps best known for his work on the concept of habitus which has been used and discussed by many scholars since he engaged the concept in 1977. However, in the context of this thesis I have taken up another of his well-known concept; capital. In everyday life, capital is usually used to refer to money and thus signifies a type of power. In “The distinction: A social critique of judgement” from 1979, Bourdieu however uses capital to describe a *symbolic* capital-concept as described briefly above. According to Järvinen (2005, p. 268) Bourdieu distinguishes between 3 different types of capital, only one of which refers to economic capital. The other 2 types of capital described by Bourdieu are called cultural capital and social capital. Bourdieu (1984) uses symbolic capital to describe social positions with society. Symbolic capital are all types of resources used by a social grouping which are used to gain an advantage in relation to another group. In Bourdieu's sense, this is in a larger scale then employed to distinguish between social classes in society. (Bourdieu 1984, p. 6). When describing how Bourdieu does not see art as a cultural product with an inherent artistic beauty, Järvinen (2005, p. 266 - 268) makes it clear how capital can be most easily understood as a concept: *“The art experience is instead founded on a long-term acquisition of knowledge, which the actors from the dominating classes are guaranteed through their upbringing in middle class families and through a school system which benefit these classes. The aesthetic disposition is a learned skill which some have and others lack [...] Taste is in Bourdieu's interpretation, above all a distaste for other people's tastes. The privileged groups tastes are always formed in opposition to the underprivileged groups tastes”*.

This quote of course reflects Bourdieu's capital-concept on a macro level, where oppression of social classes is achieved by assigning these classes a low level of symbolic capital. One of the major criticisms that can be said against Bourdieu's theories on symbolic capital, is exactly this notion that it is used consciously by people in order to gain status in society. This presupposes a notion of an active power struggle, a class struggle so to speak. The question is however, whether this active power struggle is a conscious or a subconscious activity; i.e. how aware are people actually of their own capital, and is taste then only something which is learned in order to actively gain status? In my opinion, capital is an important aspect in order for a structure in society to be established. However, I do not agree wholeheartedly that status is automatically achieved through a high degree of symbolic capital as this eliminates the need for other basic human qualities in a

person such as moral or ethics. I do not think that status is automatically gained by signifying a high degree of capital. In the context of this paper however the concept of capital is still very useful as I am much more interested in capital at a micro-level. I will thus look at a group that is not engaged in any ideological struggle for symbolic capital. In other words, my analysis will not focus on cosplay and manga as instruments for social status in society as a whole. Instead, what I am interested in, is the use of capital within the group to gain a position of “power” within the social group of manga and cosplay enthusiasts. I will analyse this by looking at how different degrees of capital are signalled to the members of the focus group, and how capital is thus invoked actively in order to create roles for everyone involved in the interview. As Bourdieu (1984, p. 241) states: “*Taste is what brings together things and people that go together*”. Bourdieu specifically mentions this in connection with a discussion on couples and their affinities for each other. As mentioned, we will analyse how taste and capital are used in the social groups as well. In other words, we will analyse how identities are created for all the actors, or respondents, by using capital as a signpost. As also mentioned earlier I will combine the capital-concept with Goffman's theories of role-plays, and we will thus see how roles are played out all the time, and how capital is an essential part of the role-play. As we have seen earlier, social identities are very important to the self-concept. By using the capital-concept and analysing the degree of capital of each member of the focus group, we are able to see how the self-concept is validated by members of the group. We are also however, able to see how capital is given to another member by acknowledgement from the other members. The cultural capital in this instance refers to the specific texts a member, or a “prospect-member” has read. By being able to invoke special knowledge of a given text, cultural capital is gained and the power structure of the group is first established. We shall return to this notion in the analysis, so let us for now look at the other ways in which capital will be used in this thesis.

There is one more analysis that capital will be applied to, namely the concept that capital is not only important for the structure within the group, but also important for establishing the boundaries of the group, and thus for the creation of *the other* we presented earlier. One of the reasons for this, is that it is not at all possible to gain access to the group without some sort of capital, either social or cultural. In order to gain access to the group from the beginning, social capital can be necessary, as introduction to the group is often not based on cultural capital, but rather one is introduced through a friend. In some sense, you could say that the cultural capital of the member introducing a new member to the group will help establish the new member's position within the group. However, cultural capital can also qualify a person for access to the group. If we look at the “cosplay-scene”

as a whole, the group cannot be said to be homogeneous. Instead, several groups exist within the group, and there seems to be a certain type of rivalry between these groups. We shall see this in the analysis section, but let us touch quickly upon it now for ease of understanding. A group of cosplayers typically consists of an informal gathering of friends where costumes are made, and conventions are attended together. These groups can range anywhere from a small number of members, to larger groups. To gain access to such a group typically then requires social capital as described above. However, it is also possible to gain access to it by invoking cultural capital. If a member wants to join a group, the barriers of access will in this case require to be circumvented by proving one's cultural capital. Once this is done however, the place within the group is secured, and one is now a legitimate member. We shall also return to this notion in the analysis, and I will therefore not elaborate further on it now.

As has been made clear, I analyse the social and cultural capital by looking at the interaction within the focus groups. This interaction will be analysed by using Erving Goffman's theories on role-playing in everyday life.

2.3 Goffman and interaction

In our daily lives we are used to engaging in interactions with other people almost all the time. We have different relationships with different people, and the interactions are therefore ranging from affective interactions like giving your partner a kiss, to very passive interactions where we are simply sitting next to a total stranger on the bus. These interactions are based on our previously experienced interactions, as we will have learned how to interact in a given moment. Erving Goffman has contributed to the field of interaction analysis with his theories on symbolic interaction. Goffman originally published his theories in 1959 in “The presentation of self in everyday life”. Since these theories are quite old by now, they have been used by numerous scholars but have also been criticised since they were published as they do not take into account mediated interactions. Since Goffman published his text, the rise of mediated communication has therefore meant that there has been a need to somewhat refine his thoughts. This was done by Joshua Meyrowitz in 1985, who combines Goffman's theories on face-to-face interaction with the study of mediated interactions in his book “No sense of place”. Whereas I agree with the criticism that Goffman does not think of the mediated interaction in his theories, I have chosen to use his theories anyway as I am only studying face-to-face interactions. Had I studied the interactions that the respondents have with other cosplayers over the Internet, I would on the other hand have preferred

to work from Meyrowitz's theories. In this section I will thus only describe Goffman's theories, and how they are used to analyse the face-to-face interaction.

2.3.1 Face-to-face interactions

Let us first take a look at face-to-face interaction and how an analysis of this interaction will be fruitful for our understanding of fans of manga and cosplay. As I have explained when describing Bourdieu's capital-concept, the focus groups provide us with an opportunity to look at how capital is operationalised in order to gain a position within the group. The study of the interaction within the group will thus provide us with valuable insights into capital *in action*. Goffman works with several concepts when describing face-to-face interaction. However, only 1 of the major concepts will be used in this thesis; namely face. In order to understand this concept properly, it is useful to first present his theories on front.

Goffman (1959, p. 1) describes how we seek to acquire information, or to bring into play information we already possess, about a person who enters our presence. We do this in order to help us define the situation we are in, and what type of behaviour is expected of us. According to Goffman we regularly take on a “front” in connection with role-playing. This front is made up of settings and a personal front. A setting provides the scenery for interaction. In other words a setting can be e.g. a furnished room. Goffman (1959, p. 22) describes that “*A setting tends to stay put, geographically speaking, so that those who would use a particular setting as part of their performance cannot begin their act until they have brought themselves to the appropriate place and must terminate their performance when they leave it*”. This can be illustrated by using a restaurant as an example. A waiter can e.g. not take his role as a waiter before he is in the appropriate setting, which will be the restaurant. Once he has installed himself in this restaurant however, his performance can begin. Accordingly the guest in the restaurant will know how to interact with the waiter only when the waiter appears to have taken up the role. A setting is thus important for our understanding of the situation we are in. The personal front of a person are items “*that we most intimately identify with the performer himself and that we naturally expect will follow the performer wherever he goes*” (Goffman, 1959, p 24). The personal front is thus made up of items like “[...] *clothing; sex, age, and racial characteristics; size and looks; posture; speech patterns; facial expressions; bodily gestures; and the like.*” (Goffman, *ibid.*).

The front is thus made up of both the setting and the personal front. What is important to understand about the information that the front conveys to us is that these signs are *general* and *abstract*

(Goffman, 1959 p. 26) which means that several roles can be played behind a smaller number of fronts. As Goffman (ibid.) explains: “*However specialized and unique a routine is, its social front, with certain exceptions, will tend to claim facts that can be equally claimed and asserted of other, somewhat different routines*”. We thus do not need to make up hundreds of fronts for each unique situation, as the general and abstract signs help the “audience” to identify the situation.

2.3.2 Face

This leads us to the concept of face, which is closely related to the front-concept as well as the self-concept described earlier. According to Goffman (2004, p. 39), “*the term face can be defined as the positive social value a person in practice lays claim to, because of the line others assume he has applied in a certain interaction*”¹.

In other words, *face* can be said to be an individual's subjectively and socially created self-image (Drotner, Jensen, Poulsen and Schrøder, 2004, p. 132), and is thus something we apply in any kind of interaction. We apply a face appropriate for the situation, which means that the concept of face does not assume that there is a fixed self-concept behind the face. You are the role you play in a given situation, which means that it is essential that you play along with the roles of others, and that these others also play along with your role (ibid.). If a certain role is not maintained properly or if others do not help sustain the role, there is a risk that the person behind behind it might lose face (Goffman, 2004, p. 42). This might happen in a situation where the self-image that a person has applied is openly questioned, and this self-image therefore can no longer be maintained. In the analysis, we shall see how face is maintained and how members of the focus group are helping each other save face in order to maintain the dynamics of the group. We shall furthermore see how capital and the maintenance of other respondents' capital are essential concepts in connection with face and face-saving.

¹ My own translation. Original quote found in the edited collection of Goffman texts called *Social samhandling og mikrosociologi* by Michael Hvid Jacobsen and Søren Kristensen (eds). Original text: ”Begrebet ansigt kan defineres som den positive sociale værdi et menneske i praksis gør krav på i kraft af den linje andre antager han har anlagt ved en bestemt kontakt”.

2.4 Trust

Let us for now turn to the subject of trust, in the way it is described by Anthony Giddens. Trust is an essential factor in modernity according to Giddens (1990, p. 29), and in the context of this paper it has an essential role to play in the creation and maintenance of the face of the manga/animé fans, while it is also an essential part of the creation of inter- and intra-group relations. Giddens explains to us, the definition of trust as seen from Luhmann's earlier definition. Luhmann believes that the "normal" state of human experience is confidence; this confidence is seen in the way that we as humans are confident in the order and causality of experiences. Luhmann himself describes this confidence by explaining that humans have an innate need for being confident that cars will e.g. not hit them on Sunday afternoon walks, and explains that the alternative to this confidence is to live in a state of permanent uncertainty (Giddens 1990, p. 31). This confidence in the state of things, is closely associated with terms like risk and trust. As mentioned, Giddens follows in the footsteps of Luhmann, and acknowledges that Luhmann's concepts of confidence, risk and trust are helpful in understanding modernity's impact on humans. However, as Giddens (1990, p. 32) explains, trust is not something that can be distinct from confidence as a concept, nor is risk something that can only be associated with an active action. Instead, Giddens suggests that trust is a certain kind of confidence, and lists 10 observations that are important for fully understanding the concept (Giddens 1990, p. 33 - 36). In the context of this thesis not all of these elements are important, and I will therefore only present the notions that are most relevant for my analysis. Before doing so however, Giddens' notion of risk needs to be explained for ease of understanding. As mentioned, Giddens does not agree with Luhmann that risk is a concept only related to actions. Luhmann assumes that risk is only "calculated" by individuals who are about to carry out an action, i.e. if faced with the choice of two different actions, a person will ask him-/herself: "what kinds of risks are associated with this action, as opposed to my other option?". In Giddens' opinion however, risk is also closely related to the abstention from action, and this marks the divide between his and Luhmann's concepts. Giddens thus explains that inaction often carries certain risks with it, and that we as humans always calculate risks in a subconscious way in order to determine the right course of action in a given situation. (Giddens 1990, p. 32).

As mentioned Giddens uses 10 different points in order to explain his definition of trust. In one of these observations (1990, p. 34) he reaches his definition of trust: "*Trust may be defined as confidence in the reliability of a person or system, regarding a given set of outcomes or events, where that confidence expresses a faith in the probity or love of another, or in the correctness of*

abstract principles (technical knowledge)". In short, if I were to have a conversation with my partner, I trust this person to engage with me in a way that will carry on our relationship. This trust means that I will not have to reflect upon all the risks of daily social life, which means that paranoia is "kept at bay". In the context of this paper, trust can be said to be the confidence that a given participant of a focus group places in another participant, that this person will not act in a way that will endanger the face of the given participant. In short, participants are helping each other with their facework. Trust in this regard is thus an essential part of the self-concept, as it serves to explain to us how interaction shapes us. Within the group the power status of each individual is also trusted, and so it is assumed that the person who asserts the most power within the group will not be "challenged" to this authority from within the group from an unqualified person. For inter-group relations, this can mean that a certain grouping of fans are protective of their group and that the barriers of access to the group might be too great for another group to gain access into it. Trust is thus also very much associated with Bourdieu's capital-concept. As described earlier, capital is invoked in order to create the power structure within the group. By looking at trust in this connection, we are able to see why the power structure is maintained. Finally, we are also able to look at the concept of face as described earlier, and understand why the participants are helping each other maintain face. As trust is an essential part of the creation of identity, Giddens' concept will allow us to analyse the importance of the group for the creation of the self-concept.

3 Methodology

In this section I will present the overall methodology for this thesis. Overall, the section will be divided in to four different sections. First I will describe the epistemological background for the data-collection. This is an important aspect of understanding the findings of the thesis. Next I will describe a model by Kim Schröder which I have used for this thesis, although I have changed his model a bit. Afterwards I will describe how focus groups have been used as the main source for data-collection, and explain different methodological choices I made in the process. Finally, I will round of this section by describing the overall validity, reliability and generalisability of the results, which will help us criticise the methods used constructively.

3.1 Epistemology

For a thesis of this type, where the discussion and interpretation of the findings are of a central nature to the results and conclusions, it is of course necessary to first identify the ways in which the writer of the thesis thinks about the creation of knowledge and the theoretical background from which the writer perceives science as a source of knowledge. For that reason I will in this section describe the epistemology from which this thesis has been written. This thesis is not based on one single definition of "what is science". Instead, it has been written through a lens of different epistemologies, each contributing to a different part of understanding how knowledge is created and obtained. Thus, I will in this section describe 3 different perspectives all serving to explain how knowledge and the creation on empiric data is being perceived in this thesis.

3.1.1 Social constructionism

Writing from a viewpoint of social constructionism is writing from the point of departure that all phenomena are inherently created by our perception of the given phenomenon. Social constructionism thus claims that there is no objective truth about a given subject, but that knowledge of a subject is created by humans discursively constructing the "truth" of the knowledge at hand. Collin and Køppe (2005, p. 248) explains it thus: "*A social constructionist standpoint on a given phenomena claims, as a minimum, that the given phenomenon which is normally seen as "natural" and independently existing, in reality is created from human activity and carries an imprint of its human origin: It is formed and shaped by human interests*".

For this thesis, the social constructionist standpoint is important to keep in mind, as I have chosen to

work with focus groups. The knowledge created from a focus group, will e.g. be directly influenced by the way I have chosen to structure it. This implies that the empiric data, I have created is not existing independently of me as a researcher. By knowing this beforehand however, I have been able to distance myself from the research, and have used other epistemological standpoints in order to *triangulate* my research, thus creating an approach that will hopefully not has been as biased as a focus group could otherwise be. I will elaborate on focus groups as empirical research method later on, and will also describe how the notion of social constructionism influenced the methodological choices made. For now however, I would like to turn the attention to the two other epistemological standpoints used in this thesis.

3.1.2 Discursive realism

As we have seen, social constructionism claims that knowledge is not independently existing, but created by human interaction. While I agree with the sentiment that human interaction will in a great deal shape and influence the knowledge created by empiric research, I do not agree with the claim that knowledge cannot exist entirely independently. For this reason, it is important to include another epistemological theory; namely discursive realism. According to Schröder, et al., (2003, p. 45): "The essence of discursive realism consists in the belief that there is a social reality that exists independently of language, but our only access to knowledge about this reality goes through language and other sign systems". Discursive realism is thus in a somewhat oppositional position to social constructionism. In the context of this thesis, discursive realism is important to keep in mind, as it allows us to see that the empiric data created in the focus groups, is not entirely constructed as one could claim if working strictly from a social constructionist approach. The knowledge created in the focus group, should not be dismissed as simply created by the discursive needs of the researcher, but should also not be regarded as an absolute truth. Discursive realism, thus gives us the opportunity to think of knowledge in a more nuanced way. As Schröder, et al. (2003, p. 45) mention, working from a discursive realist point of view, results are not interpreted as neither an absolute truth, nor would dismiss the results as entirely situationally created. "A discursive realist will take 'the third way' between these two (Pavitt 1999), agreeing with the interpretivist that the findings - quantitative or qualitative or both - represent no more than interpreted 'versions of reality', but agreeing also with the empiricist that some form of generalization may be desirable and necessary, and that some versions of reality are better - *more* truthful - than others".

For this thesis the notion that language and other sign systems are our only way of gaining access to

a social reality. This has e.g. directly influenced the ways in which the interview guide for the focus groups has been structured, and the choice of words in the interview guide. Furthermore, discursive realism as an epistemological theory has helped in the reflection of the interaction between the participants of the focus group. Discursive realism has thus functioned not only as a counterweight to a purely social constructionist view, but also helped in shaping the overall creation of the methods to 'create' knowledge. As was the case with social constructionism, we shall go deeper into the importance of discursive realism when I will describe the methodological choices I made in the focus groups. Before doing so however, it is important to describe the third and final of the epistemological foundations of this thesis.

3.1.3 Grounded theory

The last of the overall epistemological foundations is one that has influenced the structure of the interview guide as well; grounded theory. Grounded theory is a theory of thought in which the researcher moves back and forth between analysis and data. As Schröder, et al. (2003, p. 81) write "[...] grounded theorists stress that concepts are formed from empirical data in an interlaced process of observation and analysis.". This means that when working from a grounded theory approach, the analysis and the creation of data are not two separate processes, but rather part of an interactive process. It allows for a inductive as well as deductive approach to the data, and helps the researcher ground the theory and the process of data-creation in the data itself. In connection with this thesis, grounded theory has specifically been applied to the focus groups. I will explain this in more depth in the method section later, and will thus only give a short account of it in this section. When the first focus group was conducted, the questions that were asked, were mainly based on broad categories that were created out of the curiosity of myself, as well as the theories of Susan J. Napier who has extensively researched manga fandom. The point of the first focus group was thus to create a fairly broad set of categories, in order to later be able to let the discussion of the first focus group shape the interview guide of the following focus groups. Once the first focus group had been analysed through transcription, new categories were made based on the most interesting interactions between the participants of the first focus group. In this way the new categories were based on experiences gained from practical field work. Throughout the focus groups, grounded theory has been applied actively as well, as elaborative questions on interesting topics of conversation were created from the conversation itself. In other words, whenever the focus group was discussing an interesting subject, I as a researcher was asking questions that were meant to open new lines of

thought.

Furthermore, the grounded theory approach not only shaped the practical data-collection, but also the theoretical setting of the thesis itself. While carrying out the categorisation of the focus group, new questions arose and influenced e.g. the choice of including interactional analysis in order to analyse how group identity was being articulated in the focus group. In this way, grounded theory is related to the so-called hermeneutic circle (Jensen 2002 and Pahuus 2005) which has also been applied to the thesis, although in a somewhat more abstract fashion than in its original incarnation. In short, the hermeneutic circle is a model that allows us to understand that a given text is more than just the sum of its parts. As Pahuus (2005, p. 145) writes: "You move back and forth between an understanding of the separate parts (sentences and paragraphs) and an understanding of the text in its entirety". Jensen (2002, p. 21) elaborates it thus: "Hermeneutics suggests that the very process of both reading and analysing a text is incremental and creative - readers gradually work out their categories of understanding in order to arrive at a coherent interpretation. This dialectic at the level of the individual text, however, is only the first step in working out its meanings and implications. Next, the textual whole must itself be interpreted as part of larger totalities". In the context of this thesis the hermeneutic circle has thus been used in connection with gaining understanding of the grounded theory applied, and has helped connect the data with theories of identity, interaction and globalisation. These theories have in their turn influenced the creation of questions for the second and third focus groups. In short, the conversation of the first focus group changed my perspective on the thesis, which then led to a study focused on identity, interaction and globalisation. This in turn helped me create the questions for the next focus groups. As a whole the thesis in itself can also be seen as a part of a hermeneutic circle, as my previous understanding of the field of manga has been changed due to my work on the thesis. My understanding is of course based on my personal interpretation of the results which reflects my anchoring in social constructionism. I will elaborate on this notion later when discussing generalisability, validity and reliability of the thesis.

3.2 Schröder's multi-dimensional model

With regards to the overall structure of the thesis, I have chosen to use a framework described by Kim Schröder in "General aspects of mediareception?" (1990). In this text, Schröder hypothesises that there are certain aspects that are necessary to include in a reception-analysis, and creates a model which helps researchers focus their work. Whereas my study is not a reception analysis, as such, the model is still useful for the context of my thesis. As Schröder says: "The multi-

dimensional model is thus to be seen as an analytical tool, a checklist that sharpens the eyesight for the fundamental aspects of mediated production of meaning (motivation, understanding, construction, attitude and action).”. Schröder has developed the model as a refinement of Stuart Hall's classic ”Encoding/Decoding” from 1980. Criticism for Hall's model often focuses on the way in which it is sequential in its description of the reception-process; it goes from sender to receiver and is processed there. Schröder's on the other hand is a model which is based only on looking at the reception-side of media consumption. At the same time, Schröder (1990, p. 67) mentions that ”The model instead tries to catch the meaning-dimensions which occur at the same time, or almost at the same time, in connection with media use and which can only be separated analytically.”. Schröder's model of media reception is thus a model based on multiple dimensions which occur all at the same time, and which are not distinguished as separate instances by the receiver of the message, but only by the researcher. The dimensions that Schröder mentions himself are: Motivation, Understanding, construction, attitude and action. All these dimensions are specifically connected to the text, and as Schröder mentions (1990, p. 69) some of the dimensions might be changed by the researcher depending on the type of study conducted, and some might be left out entirely. In my analysis of the focus group, I will e.g. leave out the construction dimension as well as the understanding dimension as these are most relevant in studies related to a specific text. The construction dimension relates to the respondents' awareness of the text as a construction, which is useful to look at when e.g. working from an effects-research point-of-view and looking at a specific commercial's effect on its audience. The understanding dimension in the same way relates to a study of how the respondents understand the text and its denotations and connotations. As I am interested in a more abstract part of manga as a part of media these two dimensions do not make sense to include. Instead, I will add a dimension which will focus on the interaction between the participants of the focus group. My analysis of the focus group will thus focus on 4 dimensions of the reception: Motivation, attitude, interaction and action. By using this model, I was able to gain a greater overview of the thesis, and structure it properly. As explained earlier, it was used as a checklist, that was intended to focus the thesis.

In this regard, the model has been a very helpful tool for me in order to not only structure my analysis, but also to choose the most suitable approach to data-collection for this thesis. As I knew that action, motivation and attitude were all essential parts of my thesis, the model helped me to quickly decide that the best approach would be to work from a qualitative point of view. As mentioned, I furthermore included a new category; interaction. Interaction was included as focus

groups allow for a study of interaction among people interested in the same part of popular culture. The model was included in my work after I had conducted my pilot study which consisted of a focus group, and helped me in the process of devising a revised interview guide as it made it possible to keep an eye on the most important parts of the discussion. In appendix A, I have included the original interview guide, and in appendix B, I have included the revised edition. As is obvious, all four dimensions thus became essential parts of the interview guide. As mentioned however, the dimensions also helped me in structuring the thesis. As can be seen, the analysis section is focused entirely on these dimensions, whereas the discussion also incorporates them. I have included the other dimensions in my suggestion for further research, as they could all provide with some very insightful information.

For now, let us leave this model, and instead turn the attention to the method of data-collection. In this section, the dimensions are all present as well which will further underline the usefulness of the model.

3.3 Method for data-collection: Focus groups

As a means for creating empiric data, focus groups have of course strengths and drawbacks as all other methods will also have. In this section I will go through some of the most important strengths and drawbacks, and explain why the method has been used for this thesis. As mentioned in the introduction, my main focus for this thesis has been to look at identity. In this regard I have chosen to look at fans of manga, and as a part of this especially focus on the phenomenon called cosplay. My main task for this thesis, was thus to find a method of empiric research that would allow me to not only to find answers to my questions, but also to look at the interaction in the focus group first hand. As described by Halkier (2002, p. 12) focus groups allows the researcher to gain direct access to “action”. To explain the reasons for choosing this method, let me begin by describing how it differentiates itself from other types of interview.

3.3.1 Group interview or focus group?

A focus group is essentially of course a group of people being interviewed by a researcher. In this regard, focus group can be compared to a group interview. As Stewart and Shamdasani (1990, p. 10) mention in one of the classic texts within focus group theory, what fundamentally makes a focus group different from a “classic” group interview, is that the discussion of the participants is essential to the results. Halkier (2002, p. 12) further mentions, that the data is produced during a discussion

of a subject determined by the researcher. That means that focus groups, when conducted properly, will lead to creation of data that is more independent from the pre-conceived notions of the researcher, as the questions do not necessarily need to be answered with a “straight” answer. But while a focus group will always be a type of group interview, a group interview is not by all accounts a type of focus group. As the word *focus* suggests, a focus group constitutes a *focused* discussion of a particular subject. As Merton, Fiske and Kendall (1990, p. 3) mention in one of the classic texts within focus groups, all the persons interviewed share the experience of a particular situation. In this thesis, the situation is constituted by being part of a particular community.

Interestingly, Kvale (1997, p. 108) does not differentiate between group interviews and focus groups. I do not agree with his notion that a focus group is essentially the same as a group interview, as structured and semi-structured group interviews call for a more static “call-and-response” technique for answering questions. In my opinion, this is a technique more closely associated with the nominal group technique as described by Stewart and Shamdasani (1990, p. 22 – 23), where the participants of a group are not encouraged to interact with one another. Kvale's view that a focus group and a group interview constitutes the same situation, does not seem to be widely supported, as e.g. the aforementioned Stewart and Shamdasani (1990), Puchta and Potter (2004), Halkier (2002), Flick (2006), Schröder, Drotner, Kline and Murray (2003) and Frey and Fontana (1993), all treat focus groups as a particular type of group interview. Thus we can conclude that a focus group generally is regarded as a type of group interview that has some overarching differences to other types of group interview.

In context with this thesis, the notion that the data is created during a discussion was of particular importance, as the discussion was the stage for interaction between the participants, while at the same time it constituted a useful way of producing knowledge of the culture of the fans of manga and cosplay. I chose to look at interaction in order to see how capital was invoked actively in a group in order to gain a position of power, while also see how the group is constituted actively as opposed to the idea of a group of fans as a static and homogenic grouping. Using focus groups thus gave me an access to the fans of cosplay and manga, and their own accounts of their interest.

3.3.2 Advantages and disadvantages

What then, are the specific advantages of the focus group as a method, and equally as important, what are the disadvantages? Let us look at some of the most important advantages and disadvantages of using focus groups in connection with this thesis. For the most part the advantages

of using a method is connected with a disadvantage as well, which we will see in this section. Later I will describe what specific methodological efforts were taken in order to best use focus groups as a method, and how these methodological choices have influenced the creation of data.

One of the major advantages of using focus groups as a means of producing empirical data in the context of this thesis, is that the method allows access to what I referred to as *action* earlier. In this context *action* is not only understood to be all the different articulations brought forth by the participants of their experiences with manga and cosplay, but also a direct access to a interactive situation where roles are being played out. The disadvantage of this aspect, is that if the interview guide is not properly structured, or the interviewer does not succeed in directing the discussion, the focus group will run the risk of being simply a group interview. By directing the discussion, I do not mean that the researcher should strictly work from the interview guide. What is meant is that it is necessary for the researcher to encourage discussion at the right time, being able to let the discussion bring forth new perspectives, while at the same time being able to steer the discussion back on track when a particular discussion is not fruitful for the research work being done. This is what Puchta and Potter refer to as moderation (2004) of the discussion. In connection with this thesis, I performed the role of the moderator myself, which meant that one of the biggest challenges was knowing when to steer a conversation back to the topic at hand. As my aim was to use grounded theory in my approach, I had to find a balance between a free discussion, and a focus on the topics I considered interesting. This balancing was simply done by using my previous experience with conducting focus groups. We shall later see how the interview guide was also created in order to allow a free discussion, and which questions were used in order to encourage the discussion. Let us for now continue to identify some of the most important advantages and disadvantages of using focus groups in this thesis.

One of the major advantages of using focus groups, is related to the role of the moderator. Focus groups as a method is very helpful in gaining access to knowledge about the “*creation of meaning in groups*” (Halkier, 2002, p. 12). The view that focus groups are especially helpful in this regard, seems to be based on the fact that the discussion collects people of similar interests and it is thus assumed that the participants are more interested in conveying their knowledge to the researcher (Halkier 2002, Stewart and Shamdasani 1990, Morgan and Krueger 1993, Puchta and Potter 2004). As Halkier (2002, pp. 15 – 16) states: “*First and foremost, focus groups are good at producing data about the interpretations, interactions and norms of social grouping, whereas they are less suited for producing data on individuals' lifeworlds*”. As mentioned above, the discussion is very much

dependent on the ability of the moderator to properly maintain the discussion, which means that the moderator plays a central part in the actual access to the lifeworlds of individuals. This can be said to be somewhat of a disadvantage, but in my view this disadvantage is no greater than the disadvantage of personal interviews relying on good questions. What can be a major disadvantage though, is the fact that there can occur a type of group pressure during the discussion. This group pressure is mentioned both by Halkier (2002, p. 17) and Schröder, Drotner, Kline and Murray (2003, p. 154), and will always be more present when conducting interviews with groups of people as opposed to individual interviews. In groups, humans are simply more prone to conform to opinions carried by the majority of the group. As mentioned by Morgan and Krueger (1993, pp. 7 – 8), this group pressure effect can be balanced by a good moderator by creating an open and permissive atmosphere. In connection with the overall description of the methodological choices I made below, we shall see how I tried to create such an atmosphere in my focus groups, and I will also describe how the first focus group influenced the second focus group with regards to these questions.

3.3.3 Methodological choices and consequences

As mentioned in the description of the epistemological foundations for this thesis, I have chosen to work from a grounded theory approach. For the collection of data, grounded theory, has been a very influential approach, as I chose to conduct 2 focus groups. The first of these focus groups, was treated as a pilot study in this regard, and thus served as a foundation for the identification of the research questions to be studied.

As I wanted to make the research topics present themselves through the data, I structured the first focus group as quite a free forum, where I did not control the discussion as rigidly as in the later focus group. This was done to avoid having to conduct more focus groups, which could lead to what Steinar Kvale describes as the 1000-page question (1990, p. 176 – 185). The 1000-page question in short is the question that a researcher asks him/herself after data has been collected, and a method of analysis of this data has to be found. In practice, the amount of data created by a focus group is very large, and thus a good interview guide and good moderation are essential to getting to the core of the most relevant topics.

3.3.4 Recruiting respondents

The first hurdle in connection with a focus group is of course the identification of respondents that

are relevant to the study at hand. There are several different approaches to recruiting participants, but one important aspect is usually emphasised by theorists; the respondents should be people outside of the social sphere of the researcher. I agree completely with this notion, as any kind of knowledge about the respondents, or any knowledge the respondents might have about the researcher could influence the data created through the discussion. Therefore, I tried to recruit respondents for the first focus group in a manner that would ensure that the respondents would not possibly be able to know me. As I knew that the science fiction-bookstore in Gamla Stan in Stockholm had a large section of manga, I decided that I would go there and try to recruit respondents. I succeeded in only recruiting one person, but asked if she could ask more people to join. The respondent I first contacted will be called A1 throughout the thesis, and the person she brought along will be called A2. A1 successfully recruited A2 for me, and this meant that I also did not have a previous social knowledge of her. Before meeting with the respondent's for the interview, I had explained in person and by e-mail² briefly to A1 what a focus group was and what we would talk about generally. As A1 confirmed her intention to participate by e-mail, I decided to construct the interview guide and locate a suitable locale for the interview. As can be seen, I furthermore emphasised that the conversation would be relaxed and informal in this e-mail. This helped in creating a relaxed and open atmosphere for the participants before we were scheduled to meet. As I had only succeeded in recruiting one person from the SF-bookstore and asked her to recruit further participants, I sent all e-mail communication to her, and then asked if she would forward it to the other participant she eventually succeeded in recruiting. As discussed by Schrøder, Drotner, Kline and Murray (2003, p. 149), it is of vital importance for any interview to define the situation as a *speech event*, as the aim of the interview is to “get people to speak from the depths of their hearts about their experience of the media product you are exploring”. The mails sent to the participants before the interview, was thus not only briefing them on how a focus group is conducted, but was also “setting the stage” for the speech event by briefing the participants.

3.3.5 Constructing the interview guide

As mentioned earlier it was my intention to create as broad an interview guide as possible in order to let the data influence my research. As can be seen in appendix A, the first interview guide put an emphasis on first setting the stage for the interview, before going on to the actual questions. Setting the stage for the interview, by explaining the social situation is an approach described by Puchta and Potter (2004, pp. 31 – 39). My aim was to create an informal, friendly atmosphere in which the

² See Appendix XX

respondents would feel that they could say what they wanted. I therefore emphasised that there were no right or wrong answers, that the discussion amongst the participants was the most important thing and that the recording of the interview would only be listened to by myself. These short remarks which did not take long to state, thus set the stage in an informal way, and helped me detach my own notions of the study from the questions. This was thus an important aspect of the epistemological foundations of the data-collection.

After setting the stage of the situation for the respondent's, I decided to use general questions in order for myself to gain knowledge of the respondents interest in manga, and start the interaction between the respondents by letting them discuss their original interest in the medium. Overall, the questions used for the focus groups were designed as open-ended questions in order to ensure a basis for discussion.

What can not be seen from the original interview guide is of course the freedom I allowed for the discussions to continue even though they did not directly answer any of the questions I had prepared. An important aspect of the interview guide was to be able to ask follow-up questions to interesting discussions, and thus let the respondents “control” the research. When to ask follow-up questions is of course again a balance the researcher has to find. They cannot be prepared, and the researcher must decide in a short period of time whether or not it is necessary to ask a follow-up question in order for the discussion to be more giving. What is also important in that context is to keep in mind the overall group psychology that may exist whenever interviewing a group of people. It is necessary to understand that a person in a group might be inclined to not voice his or her opinion on a matter, because of the pressure from the group to conform with the overall opinion of the group. I therefore tried to alleviate the risk of group pressure, by asking these follow-up questions whenever a statement was made that seemed to be repressed by the discussion. In this way, I thus tried to create a feeling of openness in the group, and avoid the conformity as described by Morgan and Krueger (1993, p. 7).

3.3.6 Location of the focus group

The interview guide is of course not the only important aspect to consider before conducting a focus group. A very important aspect is the physical setting in which the focus group is conducted. As Morgan (1993, p. 68) mentions, the greatest challenge when deciding on the location for the interview is to ensure that the environment is comfortable and relaxed. For the first focus group, I thus decided to meet with the respondents at the science fiction book store in Gamla Stan, and then

go to a nearby café for the interview. I had previously contacted the café and asked if it would be possible to conduct the interview there, and was allowed to do so. The reason for choosing a café for the interview, was that I wanted to ensure a relaxed atmosphere which could support the informal nature of the interview, and thus support the free discussion within the focus group. As I was recording the interview, I was however worried that the ambient noise would hamper the quality of the recording, but I decided that the relaxed atmosphere was the most important thing, and decided to use the café anyway. The quality of the recording was not seriously harmed by this choice, and the atmosphere of the café fortunately seemed to have a good effect on the outcome, as the focus group indeed had a relaxed atmosphere as well. However, for the second focus group, I chose to change the location. This was partly done as the second focus group was conducted in spring, while the first was conducted during the winter. The café would thus have had more guests, and I therefore chose a quieter location to be completely certain that the ambient noise would not impact my recording. Before describing too much about the change of location, I would like to first add some concluding remarks to the section focused on the first focus group.

The first focus group was originally intended to consist of more respondents than 2. However, in hindsight it might have been an advantage to keep it as small as it turned out to be, as I ended up with 2 hours and 45 minutes of recorded interview. Had there been more participants we can of course only guess at what would have happened, but the main thing to keep in mind is that it certainly did not hinder the discussion that there were only 2 participants. In that regard, the open-ended questions, the location, and the introduction to the focus group all were helpful tools for ensuring that the atmosphere of the focus group supported the epistemological foundations of the thesis.

3.3.7 Second focus group

We have now seen how the first focus group was arranged, and how the creation of the interview guide was done in order to support the use of grounded theory in the thesis. Let us for now turn our attention to the second focus group instead and look at where this was conducted, how the first focus group was used in order to conduct it, and above all how the second focus group was then conducted.

3.3.8 Creating a new interview guide

As mentioned earlier, the overall aim of the grounded theory approach was to let my respondents

influence the research. I therefore used the first focus group and the results I gathered in order to identify the overall questions of the thesis, and conducted a second focus group in order to look further into these questions, and whether or not they were actually valid or simply important for the specific respondents of the first focus group. I decided that the discussion should not be restricted by the interview guide, and as described above I therefore let the discussion follow more freely and only steered it back to my questions when I felt that it was necessary. The structure of the interview guide for the first focus group can be related to a funnel, in which the goal was to start with general probing questions, and then gradually becoming more specific. As mentioned, this approach resulted in a total of 2 hours and 45 minutes of recorded interview. From a transcription of the questions in the first focus group as they were actually carried out, and a timing of the amount of time spent on each question, I could see where the most relevant topics were, and could then construct a new interview guide for the next focus groups, based on the results of the first focus group. To make sure that not only the total time spent on my questions would be the decisive factor in constructing the new interview guide however, I also created categories based on the topics discussed. These categories and a count of how many times each category was brought up can be seen in appendix D.

The results of the analysis of the most important topics led me to construct the second interview guide as seen in appendix B. As can be seen, this interview guide is focused more on the topics of cosplay, identity, group feeling, etc.

I chose to use the same approach as in the first interview guide and introduce the project and set the stage for the social situation again, thereby creating a more relaxed atmosphere. This approach had worked very well in the first focus group, and I concluded that it could have been one of the important reasons for the atmosphere of the first focus group being non-intimidating.

3.3.9 Recruiting participants

Once I had constructed the second interview guide, I started the recruiting process. I tried contacting the respondents from the first focus group and ask them about recruiting others, as they had mentioned this during the first focus group. However, I never got a response from A1, and was eventually forced to use a different approach. Instead I was helped by my supervisor who referred me to the daughter of a friend who was interested in manga and cosplay. I contacted the mother of the respondent first and asked if the daughter might be interested and quickly got a response back where I was informed of the daughter's own e-mail address. I contacted the respondent and she

agreed to participate and recruited a friend of hers who also wanted to participate³. As I had done before, I used the e-mail contact to brief the respondents on the focus group beforehand in order to set the stage for the interview.⁴ This recruiting process went well, and the focus group was scheduled. However, this time I decided to conduct the focus group in a different setting than the first focus group.

3.3.10 Location of the second focus group

After the pilot study was carried out, the quality of the recording was acceptable although the ambient noise of the café meant that some of the conversation was harder to decipher. As a consequence of this, I chose to relocate my next focus group to a quieter place that would still allow for a relaxed atmosphere. For this reason I booked a group room at the library on Medborgarplatsen. As is mentioned by Halkier (2002, p. 41 – 43) choosing the locale can be a vital influence on the outcome of the focus group. Halkier mentions that choosing an institution as a locale can hamper the interaction, as it conveys a more formal message to the participants. Therefore, I specifically chose the library at Medborgarplatsen as this library has quite a wide selection of mangas. The intention was thus to choose a location which would probably be known to the participants. As a library can still have a somewhat institutional look, I decided that in order to create a relaxed atmosphere I would buy some grapes and some sodas to place on the table. During the course of the second focus group, these choices seem to have been quite helpful as the atmosphere was again relaxed and allowed for a free discussion to be carried out.

3.3.11 Evaluation

The discussion in the second focus group was more *focused* than it had been in the first focus group. This was an intentional effect of the new interview guide as I had of course already identified the research field I wanted to look further into. In the end, the second focus group was 1 and a half hours long, but was unfortunately cut short by the library as it closed. However, at the time it was cut short, all questions had been asked and I felt that it was only some concluding remarks that could still be gathered. I therefore chose not to carry on at a different location. The discussions of the second focus group further helped me identify the important aspects, and helped me decide which aspects could be analysed in depth, and which aspects would need further research. The topics in the analysis section of this thesis, are thus based on these findings, whereas the suggestions

³ The respondent I contacted will in this paper be referred to as B1, while her friend will be referred to as B2.

⁴ See appendix E

for further research are based on topics discussed, but were not deemed conclusive enough to use for an extensive analysis.

3.4 Validity and reliability

We have now had a look at the way the focus groups were conducted and what choices were made in order for the focus groups to be as useful as possible for the collection of data. However, in order to evaluate properly on the method used, I will describe and discuss the important aspects of validity, reliability and generalisability of the methods. This will serve as a critical analysis of the methods used.

The validity of a method is an overview of how valid the results are that were brought about by the method chosen. In other words, how true are the findings that have been reported. The choice of focus groups as a source of grounded theory, can in this regard be seen as a strengthening of the validity as the topics discussed were general. However, it needs to be said that I of course had some pre-conceived notions of the topics to be discussed as I would otherwise not be able to create an interview guide. To increase validity I have tried to be as open as possible in the discussions and have also tried to ensure that the respondents were aware of the fact that there were no right or wrong answers. Furthermore, I have tried to be as transparent about the method as possible by e.g. including transcripts of the interview guides as they actually turned out, and by including in the appendices, the first e-mail I sent to respondents A1 and B1. I have chosen not to transcribe the complete interviews, but only 1 minute before a quote is used and 1 minute after the quote ends. This was done in order to increase readability, but for the greatest validity, it would of course have been better to include full transcripts of the interviews.

Validity is thus related to the truthfulness, but what then of the reliability of the results? The notion of the reliability of the results is to quite a large degree influenced by the social constructionism and discursive realism foundations of the thesis. These foundations were, as mentioned earlier, very important in the overall data-collection. The notion that social constructions are important for our understanding of a truth, and the notion that language is our only access to knowledge is important for understanding how focus groups can be a source of data. The reliability of the results in a focus group will of course be greatly influenced by the researcher and the questions asked. In theory, for the results to be reliable a different researcher should be able to take the methods used, apply them to different focus groups and be able to reproduce the results. However, the results in this thesis are based on subjective analysis of data collected qualitatively. The notion of reliability in this regard

becomes somewhat of a drawback of using this method.

3.5 Generalisability

This leads us to the notion of generalisability of the results. I have interviewed 4 people in two focus groups and thus it needs to be said that the results are of course not applicable to cosplay as one single grouping. However, in my analytical approach I have not aimed at generalising the findings to cosplayers as a homogenic group. Instead I have used focus groups in order to gain access to a small part of the group, and have then applied applied theories on identity, interaction and capital to the data that was collected. This means that we have gained access to the validated thoughts of the respondents and have thus been able to analyse how these individuals are creating identities through group belonging and interaction.

4 Analysis

We have now seen what methods were used for collecting the data. Let us now go in to the analysis and look closer at the theoretical concepts and their presence in the focus groups. That will enable us to answer the research questions, and discuss some of the aspects of the findings.

4.1 Cosplay as an arena

First, let us have a look at how the respondents are looking at cosplay as an arena in which they can act out a specific role. As Napier states, this is definitely one of the functions of cosplay for the manga fans. As A1 stated when describing what cosplay is to the researcher:

”It's called cosplay. It is kind of like a theatre you could say. It is just that, you dress up as a manga-character, or a game-character. [...] You run around and almost play. That is kind of what happens”⁵

As can be seen from the transcription, this explanation of cosplay to an uninitiated person, was supported by A2. The respondents of the second focus group also mentioned how acting as the characters they are cosplaying gives them a feeling of becoming the character:

B1: *”I think that it is fun to be able to become the character you are cosplaying a while. [...]”*

B2 elaborates on this and states that:

”That is probably the thing about cosplay. [...] It might not be about that you don't like your own personality [...] The character I am cosplaying right now is generally depressed all the time. But I am not”⁶

The notion of cosplay as an arena in which to act as a character is thus touched upon by all respondents. As the respondents in the second focus group are quick to point out, this does not mean that they consider their own personalities inferior. The respondents do not seem to totally agree with Napier's notion of cosplay being a form of escapism. We shall return to this discussion later in the analysis. First however, it would be fruitful to look into cosplay as a group activity through which the respondents are, among other things, engaged in a form of identity construction. As we have seen in the analysis section, identity can be explained through the presence of a self-concept. This self-concept is however not only created by the individual, but also by the group in which the individual has invested him-/herself. We will therefore analyse the importance of the group in

⁵ This quote has been cleaned for ease of reading see appendix E, section 3 for full quotation.

⁶ These quotes have been cleaned for ease of reading see Appendix E, sections 19 - 20 for full quotations.

connection with the creation of identity as well.

4.2 The self-concept

Let us therefore now take a closer look at how the self-concept can be seen in the focus groups, and furthermore, look closer at how the self-concept is an integral part of understanding why group belonging is such an important part of identity-creation. In the theory-section we looked at Swann's self-verification theory in which the main point is that we tend to create social realities that conform to our self-view. The respondents of the focus groups are associating cosplay with something positive, something which gives them a feeling of belonging. In this regard, A1 made a very interesting point when she was discussing how her cosplay-group has changed:

“[...] they have gotten very changed personalities kind of. They have a new. A very new outlook on cosplay.”⁷

This part shows that the self-concept of A1 has been shaken by the actions within her cosplay-group, which she does not agree with herself. Her sense of belonging so to speak is no longer supported by the group. A2 picks up this notion and states:

“Even if I see a person cosplaying better [...] I should still never never substitute a friend, and that it probably the biggest drama's at conventions [...] The worst thing about cosplay is that you can be substituted”⁸

The notion that a person can be substituted by someone else is of course something which most people will know from their daily lives. As the self-concept is based on questions like “Who am I?” and “Where do I belong”, this can be a very dangerous notion as the self is suddenly not supported by the group any more. This brings into play Giddens' notion of trust in connection with the self-concept. As we saw in the theory-section, trust is an essential part of modernity according to Anthony Giddens. The notion of trust is often analysed in quite abstract ways, but in this focus group we are now able to see trust as an essential part of the self-concept. If we were to put the above quotation into Giddens' definition of trust presented earlier, it is clear that the confidence in the reliability of the group A1 is a part of has been disturbed by the actions of the group. A1 states that she is cosplaying a certain character, and mentions that:

“People have become, like, inspired, like, they come up to me when I am cosplaying my “Chopper”, like “Oh god, you are so cool really. I was inspired when I saw you” (...) That is really cool, but

⁷ This quote has been cleaned for ease of reading see appendix H, section 4 for full quotation.

⁸ This quote has been abbreviated and cleaned for ease of reading. For the full quote see appendix H, section 5.

still there is this gnawing feeling in the back of my head: “They, they are coming” (...) That he did like that against someone else, one of my friends. That makes me think: “Is he going to do the same thing to me?” (at this point A1's voice cracks and she dries away a tear from her eye), Are they going to do the same to me? (...) And yeah. That is really hard”⁹

The trust that A1 had in the group before seems to have been affected a great deal by her experience of how one of her friends has been treated within the group. For the future of her involvement in the group, this could be an important factor as she might not be as willing to invest her self-concept in the group because of a lack of trust in the reliability of the group membership. The importance of this lack of trust is quite significant, especially considering the fact that just before she describes this situation, A1 describes her relationship with the group as such:

“I have associated with convention people for more than 5 years. I have been “raised” as a convention-goer. I look at the people I associate with like a family. They are kind of my other family, and [...] we have joked that I am their child. I am the convention-child they have “raised” since I was a little little girl”¹⁰

As the trust that she has put in the group at an earlier time has been disturbed, that calls forward quite an emotional response from her. In other words, because her trust has been betrayed, she will not invest the same amount of trust in the group. This also means that her identity which is associated with this group will have been affected as she considers her social ties with the group much akin to the ties she has with her own family. How this “betrayal” of trust could have some consequences for her future involvement in the group can not be analysed through the statements she made, and instead I will therefore follow up on this notion in the discussion later on. For now, I would like to return to the notion of identity construction through group belonging.

4.3 Constructing identity through group belonging

As mentioned above, the self-concept of an individual relies to a great extent on social and situational structuring. As we saw in the theory section one of the reasons for the self-concept being influenced by situational structuring, is that we include the notion of *the other* in the construction of the self-concept. The other is an important aspect for not only the inclusion of the other in the construction of the self-concept, but also for establishing the boundaries of the group. The notion of *the other* is thus interesting as it is both inclusive and exclusive at the same time. If we look at the

⁹ This quote has been abbreviated and cleaned for ease of reading. For the full quote see appendix H, section 8.

¹⁰ This quote has been abbreviated and cleaned for ease of reading. For the full quote see appendix I, section 4.

respondent's ways of including the other in the self as described by Aron, Aron and Norman, we can explain how symbolic capital is an important aspect for the respondents. As mentioned in the theory section we are comparing our social capital before and after entering a potential relationship, and thus decide whether to create a relationship based on the perceived rewards. In the first focus group, this was best exemplified through an interaction between the respondents.

The best example of how capital is distributed in the first focus group arose in a discussion of the competition that exists within the cosplay-scene and the respondents' discussion of their mutual jealousy and respect for each other. Respondent A1 thus mentions:

“I can admit that I have been very jealous of A2 [...] you are super beautiful, your cosplays are. I have never seen you do anything that I could feel anything but “Wow” about [...] I look forward to seeing what you are going to do, like, next, and at the same time kind of “No, but”. (...) The thing is. I have been depressed about your shadow. But I will fight. I want to be on the same level as you some day”¹¹

With this quote we clearly see that A1 is interacting with A2. She grants that A2's cultural capital when it comes to cosplaying is greater than her own, and that she has actually been depressed about this. A2 reacts to this with quite an amount of disbelief to the fact that A1 has been jealous of her. She responds in a positive manner however and in turn states:

“On the other hand, I feel that it was kind of a status-thing for me, to become friends with you. It is awful but you automatically become a little bit status-thinking [...]”¹²

Here we see how A2 asserts A1's position within the group by mentioning the positive social capital associated with being friends with A1. The status of A2 within the group is thus partially due to the social capital of A1. In other words, A2 compared her amount of symbolic capital before entering into a relationship with A1, with the potential symbolic capital gained by entering into the relationship. The inclusion of *the other* in the self thus becomes an important part of the construction of the group, which in turn then influences the self-concepts of the respondents. At the same time we also see how A1 expresses a feeling of jealousy towards A2 and her cultural capital. A2's reaction is a good example of how the power structure of the group needs to be re-established. The interaction has called for a positive response from A2 after A1 mentioned that her cultural capital was not as great as A2's. The positive response is an illustration of the reciprocal bond mentioned by Goffman (1959, p. 82). Goffman's point is that this reciprocal bond is shared by

¹¹ This quote has been abbreviated and cleaned for ease of reading. For the full quote see appendix J, sections 9 – 12.

¹² This quote has been abbreviated and cleaned for ease of reading. For the full quote see appendix J, section 13.

people who are team-mates, and that it helps overcome any social and structural cleavages there might be. Whereas the respondent's in this focus group are not trying to overcome such cleavages, it is clear that the interaction is establishing a power structure within the group, where A2 has to re-assert A1's place in the group by positively mentioning her social capital. Both respondent's then go on to assert their position within the cosplay-scene as seen when A2 states:

*“I am associating with all people [...] From all ranks like that [...] I am really also trying not to become a person who only thinks of fame [...] I have made a name for myself, but I am a long way away from one of those famous people like that”*¹³.

A1 follows up on this by acknowledging the position that A1 has gained within the scene, and says:

*“Yeah. I also have a name [...] I am A1-kan [...]”*¹⁴

This is then confirmed by A2 who nods in agreement, and the power structure within the group is thus established again. A2 acknowledges the position of A1, and capital has in this connection been used actively by the respondents. What is furthermore important in regard with *the other*, is that by associating with each other, both respondent's become more protective of each other as well and will therefore protect their relationship. As we saw in the interaction, this showed itself in the way that capital was distributed by both respondent's. Even though capital is thus used for establishing a power structure, it is nevertheless in the interest of both respondent's to assert the capital of the other as that serves to protect one's own capital as well. By protecting the capital of the other, the respondents are protecting *the other* that has been included in the self-concept, and are thus protecting their own identity by proxy.

If we look at the interviews again, it quickly becomes clear that all of the respondent's put into play the notion of social capital in this way. In the second focus group, this is further illustrated by B1 who states that her interest in cosplay was started by her relationship with B2:

*“That was probably some while ago I guess because I was looking a bit at B2 and she can sew really well [...] And then I was allowed to borrow one of her outfits then a day and walked around in that, and then my parents thought that “Yeah. You seem to find this cool” so they bought this one for me (points to her own outfit) and yeah, I think it is really cool [...]”*¹⁵

B1's interest in cosplay was thus in the first place started by her association with B2 who had also

¹³ This quote has been abbreviated and cleaned for ease of reading. For the full quote see appendix J, section 13.

¹⁴ This quote has been abbreviated and cleaned for ease of reading. For the full quote see appendix J, section 14.

¹⁵ This quote has been abbreviated and cleaned for ease of reading. For the full quote see appendix G, section 9.

given her recommendations on which manga's to read at an earlier point. The relationship with the group, and thus the creation of the self-concept is in this case reliant on the social realities of B1's as well as B2's relationships. As we saw earlier, *the other* is an essential part of the self, and in this case B1's interest in cosplay and manga, and access to the group was achieved through her acquaintance of B2. In other words, the cultural capital of B2, meant that B1 could join the group. The social capital gained by B1 by joining the group means that she can be a legitimate member of the group, and that she can now invest her self-concept in this group. B2 exemplifies to a great extent, how social capital is instrumental in the choice of investment.

“I met a girl [...] She was really into cosplay, [...] I was very inspired by that [...] Then I became friends with her friends, and the friends of her friends, so now [...] I have a great deal of friends on Facebook who are really interested in cosplay. [...] It wasn't that I thought: “Now I want to know people who really like cosplay”. It just turned out that way”¹⁶

B2's social capital is greater than B1's as she has more friends within the group who are a part of cosplay. She started cosplaying earlier than B1 and has thus a greater amount of cultural capital as well, but what is interesting here is the amount of social capital B2 has gained by befriending the friends of one of her own friends. B2 makes a very valid point in that context, namely that she did not seek out these friends for the benefit of this social and cultural capital. In her own words “it just turned out that way”. This is an important point to keep in mind, as it reminds us that even though B2 will probably have compared her self-concept before she entered into the relationships with the friends of her friend, with the potential self-concept gained by entering the relationship, this process is largely not a conscious one. However, maintaining the relationships is a very conscious process, and had B2 not gained cultural or social capital by entering into these relationships it is not certain that she would have invested trust into these to maintain them.

As mentioned earlier, *the other* is however, not only an inclusive term were it is used for the creation of the self by including *the other* in the self. It is also an exclusive term, insofar that it helps establish the boundaries of the group. We discussed this phenomenon in the theory-section and in that regard came to look at Kirkpatrick and Ellis's notion of *between-group competition* (2003, p. 58) as well as Aron. Aron and Norman's notion of the inclusion of the other in the self (2003, p. 105). These are important notions to keep in mind, as it explains how the community is established and why investments are made in keeping associated with that community. As Kirkpatrick and Ellis write (2003, p. 58): *“Many of the most important benefits of social inclusion relate to actual or*

¹⁶ This quote has been abbreviated and cleaned for ease of reading. For the full quote see appendix G, section 10.

potential competition between groups” What is interesting in this regard, is furthermore the fact that both sets of respondent's specifically mention how their community differs from other communities, which can be seen as a way of strengthening their own sense of belonging. B2 in that regard states that she finds people interested in manga and anim  more easy to talk to:

*“The most people who are interested in manga and anim  and cosplay, and things like that [...] They are so incredibly hyperactive and glad. It is really easy to talk with them. As opposed to, what can I say, “normal” teenagers [...]”*¹⁷

This quotation is thus a direct example of this competition between groups. The respondent's mention “normal” teenagers as hard to talk to, and are associating their own community with positive feelings. This is further exemplified by a discussion started by B1 mentioning how her family teases her a bit about her association with cosplay:

B1: *“[...] They thought I was crazy about “Twilight”¹⁸ (laughs)”*

B2: *“Yeah, “Twilight” isn't so popular right now”*

B1: *“No, now you hate “Twilight” [...]”*

B2: *“Not even the “Twilight” lovers like “Twilight” any more (laughs)”*

B1: *“(Laughs) [...] No, now everyone is a Belieber¹⁹, or something like that.”*

B2: *“Oh! Don't even talk about that”²⁰*

The competition between the groups in this instance leads to a type of stigmatisation of the fans of “Twilight” and Justin Bieber. The stigmatisation is not performed in a directly hostile way, but is instead achieved by ridiculing these fans. This then exemplifies how the capital of the respondent's is not only achieved by including positive capital of their own group, but also how the capital of another group is perceived negatively. *The other* in this regard then plays a significant part in the creation of the group. As an inclusive term *the other* can be seen as an important factor in constructing a group. Investing one's self-concept in a group is influenced greatly by the ways in which potential investments can lead to a higher degree of capital. As an exclusive term, *the other* is important for establishing boundaries of the group, and strengthening the ties within the group. Stigmatisation of unaccepted *the other* reaffirms one's own ties.

¹⁷ This quote has been abbreviated and cleaned for ease of reading. For the full quote see appendix K, section 14.

¹⁸ “Twilight” is a series of youth-novels involving vampires by American author Stephenie Meyer.

¹⁹ A “Belieber” is a reference to the fans of pop singer Justin Bieber.

²⁰ These quotes have been abbreviated and cleaned for ease of reading. For the full quotes see appendix L, sections 14 – 19.

4.4 Access to the group

Now that we have had a look at how *the other* is an important aspect for investing oneself in a group, it is fruitful to look at the ways in which access to the group is granted in the first place and how the structure of the group is furthermore created through the use of capital. Interestingly enough, in both focus groups, the respondent's state that their first interest in manga was purely coincidental and that they did not know of manga before they started immersing themselves in the culture. This seems to indicate that initial access to the group is not limited by barriers of access. A1 and A2 thus respectively state:

A1: *"It was a series, [...] "This seems cool", I turned the pages and then I was totally hooked"*²¹

A2: *"I saw the style, and I just thought (...) It was something new, it was something cool. It wasn't that typical American you always see on TV. It was really something new, and when I got to see again [...] Then I was totally sold, totally sold, and that was when I began to really understand what kind of a thing it was [...]"*²²

The experiences of B1 and B2 in this regard are very similar:

B2: *"I think I was with my grandmother and then I saw a cartoon book that looked interesting and then it turned out to be manga and then I continued reading and became more immersed in, well, more manga-series then [...]"*²³

B1: *"I saw the magazine called "Shoeio stars"[...] and I just thought "Well that looks good" because I had nothing to read and then I was allowed to buy it. Was hooked by the series I am cosplaying right now called "Gakuen Alice" and then I thought "Hmm, I like this" and then when I started in 7th grade I met B2 and another girl called Nelly and they explained a bit more to me what you can read, and where you can find. And then it just became so, that I began reading more and more and started looking at animé and now I read manga every day (...)"*²⁴

All of the respondent's are thus immersed in the culture because they simply started reading manga's out of coincidence. This is an interesting aspect when considering how much time and effort these respondent's are now putting in to their interest. The first access to the group is thus simply achieved by reading a manga. All these respondent's however, are very much involved with their interest every day, as can be deduced from the above quotations. There thus seems to be a need for all respondent's to affirm their interest by immersing themselves with the tales of manga. This is

²¹ This quote has been abbreviated and cleaned for ease of reading. For the full quote see appendix M, section 3.

²² This quote has been abbreviated and cleaned for ease of reading. For the full quote see appendix M, section 4.

²³ This quote has been abbreviated and cleaned for ease of reading. For the full quote see appendix N, section 4.

²⁴ This quote has been abbreviated and cleaned for ease of reading. For the full quote see appendix N, section 5.

e.g. seen when, in both focus groups, by all respondent's different manga's are mentioned. Every time a character or a specific manga is mentioned, the other respondent in the group knows what is being talked about. This seems to suggest, that there is a certain amount of manga you have to read in order to be a proper member of the culture.

B2: *“Naruto” is almost a must-have read [...] Everybody knows what “Naruto” is. It doesn't matter if you are new, or [...] a veteran within the manga world. (...) You have to have at least looked in a book in order to be acceptable*²⁵

B1 and B2 are discussing “Naruto” for quite a while, and they are positive that everyone knows what the series is. Even though a person is not interested in manga and animé, “Naruto” is something everyone knows, which seems to suggest that the series is not only popular among the dedicated fans of manga. More importantly though, is the notion that you have to know what “Naruto” is on order to be acceptable. This seems to support the fact that there is a certain amount of manga's you have to know in order to be a part of the community. Immersing yourself in the tales of the community is thus an important part of the cultural capital which asserts your position within the group. This could thus be said to act as a signpost to alert other members of the group to the symbolic capital one is in possession of. The structure within the group can be said to be constructed through the use of these signposts.

4.5 Status markers

To look closer at how this social structuring takes place, let us take a look at how the respondent's are affirming their relationship with the group through the use of cultural capital. The cultural capital in this section will refer to the ways in which the respondent's are affirming their relationship with the group through the mentioning of texts as well as through their cosplaying-abilities. As was discussed earlier, all the respondent's reference manga's and characters from the manga's they have read continuously. This is one example of how cultural capital is invoked in order to affirm the relationship with the group. One of the most interesting displays of cultural capital however, was the fact that all respondent's mentioned that they spoke some Japanese. This is stated by B1 who explains:

“I will apply for a Japanese group next term as well, but otherwise I am more or less self-taught in what I know [...] When you start looking at manga and animé you are learning simple words, and then it became a habit for me to using them a little sometimes without me noticing, like, when I am

²⁵ This quote has been abbreviated and cleaned for ease of reading. For the full quote see appendix O, sections 7 – 11.

*finished with food I always say “(says a sentence in Japanese)”, like, “Thanks for the food” when I am going away from there, and in the beginning my parents were like “What? What are you saying?”, but then they have become used to that [...]*²⁶

B2 goes even further than this and thus states that she even begins to think in Japanese:

*“[...] Sometimes I catch myself even thinking in Japanese”*²⁷

Similar notions were brought up in the first focus group as well, and this suggests that studying Japanese and Japan is an activity associated with a greater cultural capital. This is illustrated well in the first focus group when A1 and A2 are discussing an experience A2 had while attending a convention in the US. A2's photo was photographed for the world's largest cosplay magazine because of a special outfit she made. A1 in that regard reveals in the interview:

“And with that particular cosplay. Just because I want to brag on her behalf. They were published in a Japanese cosplay-magazine”

A2: *““Cosmode”. [...] It was really cool actually. In America, there are so many people. You can't experience that in Sweden. It was like a wall of photographers quite simply. And one of the people who came and asked “Can we publish you on maybe a page where. Or here is my card then”. And then there was one guy. A Japanese. I didn't really get that. And he asked if we wanted to be published in “Cosmode” [...]*²⁸

Being associated with a Japanese cosplay magazine that is also the biggest in the world, is thus a facilitator of higher cultural capital in this instance. By associating with, and studying the country of origin of manga, the fans are affirming their relationship with the group and are at the same time asserting their position within that group. Studying Japanese could thus be seen as an investment that is meant to strengthen the bond with the group, and thus heighten the sense of trust the respondent's places in the group. In turn that then means that the investment of trust carries a greater amount of capital. For the respondent's this is positive as the self-concept is influenced by the social structure of the group. The best example of just how much membership of the group can mean to the creation of identity is seen in the first focus group when A1 explains about gay manga (known as Yaoi and Yuri)²⁹:

²⁶ This quote has been abbreviated and cleaned for ease of reading. For the full quote see appendix K, sections 29 – 31.

²⁷ This quote has been abbreviated and cleaned for ease of reading. For the full quote see appendix K, section 32.

²⁸ These quotes have been abbreviated and cleaned for ease of reading. For the full quotes see appendix P, sections 7 – 8.

²⁹ Yaoi are mangas with gay themes, while Yuri are mangas with lesbian themes

“[...] I love Yaoi. I love this guy-guy. Then (...) Well I don't mind saying it. I am a lesbian myself and I think that I feel a connection with it. I understood, like, these taboo-feelings that were in there. [...] It gave me support to be able to explore my own homosexuality and dared giving me a bit of self-esteem, but now. Well I have also grown up a bit [...].”³⁰

A1 thus directly links her own sexuality and her own identity to what she has read in manga's. The manga style known as Yaoi has acted as a facilitator of the creation of self-esteem for her. This is of course a very interesting notion as that is a direct example of a very positive “effect” of reading manga and being immersed in the cosplay world. As B2 explains:

“[...] It is almost like animé are testing its limits in one way, and I also think that [...] maybe a lot of people start thinking about “Maybe I am gay myself” or whatever. I also thought about it a bit, but I concluded that “No, I have never been in love with a girl, or anything, so I am probably straight”³¹

Being able to connect one's own identity with the stories that are circulating within the group seems to be a very helpful way in establishing a tighter relationship with the group.

As we saw earlier though, A1 is quite disturbed by the thought that she could be replaced by another person in the group, and we will later discuss how this lack of trust could have a negative impact on her willingness to invest in the same way in the group in the future. However A1 also states that she had an earlier group of cosplayers she associated with and in that regard mentions how that group was the first in Sweden to cosplay a certain manga:

“ [...] My first cosplay group was called Ace of Sweden (...) We were the first “De-gramer” cosplayers in all of the Nordic countries, as far as I know. We were the first group. And they have become really big now. At every convention now there are “De-gramer” cosplayers, and it is still kind of cool that we were the one's who started that. [...] I came into it quite late, but still to have been part of bringing forward a very good series, that makes me really glad.”³²

Here we see then, how the social capital of A1 is brought into play as a status marker. Her involvement with this group of cosplayers has led to a higher degree of cultural capital, as she can now bring this social capital into play whenever talking of this “De-gramer” manga. Another interesting point in that regard is made by A1 about how she would like to cosplay from a manga which is not very well-known:

³⁰ This quote has been abbreviated and cleaned for ease of reading. For the full quote see appendix Q, section 6.

³¹ This quote has been abbreviated and cleaned for ease of reading. For the full quote see appendix Q, section 7.

³² This quote has been abbreviated and cleaned for ease of reading. For the full quote see appendix R, section 8.

“There is one series that I am thinking about cosplaying from which is called “Alitino”. [...] And it is really unknown. The people who introduced me to the manga-world, those who introduced me to the convention-world. Like, my idols. They almost don't have a clue about what kind of thing it is and that [...] It feels like it could be very fun to do just because, actually getting people thinking about it”³³

Especially the notion of A1 idolising some of the people who originally led her into the world of conventions is very interesting. Impressing on these members of the group seems to be a big part of the experience if she would choose to cosplay this manga. Impressing her idols by proving her cultural capital could be seen as a connection between social and cultural capital. What is important to keep in mind, is that social and cultural capital are both a part of the symbolic capital. A1 could thus raise her total symbolic capital by doing this cosplay. This could in turn mean that her identity-investment in the community will be bigger, which can influence her self-concept.

This was also seen in the interaction in the second focus group, where the interaction formed a significant part of the distribution of capital and the power structure of the focus group. This was exemplified when B2 mentioned her collection of manga books at home:

“[...] I think I have more than 200 manga books at home”

This is an early establishment of the cultural capital of B2, which is supported by B1 who states that:

“That's right. You have so many “Inuyasha” books that take up room (laughs). (...) I have seen the whole animé on the other hand.”

B1 thus establishes her own cultural capital and asserts her position in the group. Interestingly, B2 then supports this by stating that the animé is of around 200 episodes. B1 however, corrects her and states:

“No, 167 episodes in the first season, 6 additional plus 4 films”

As we saw in connection with the social and cultural capital distributed in the first focus group, B1 and B2 are also supporting each other's capital and are thus affirming their mutual belonging and are at the same time establishing the power structure within this focus group. B2 moves on with another example of her capital by mentioning another animé she has watched:

“Yeah I am watching an animé which is. Or it is called “Bleach”. It is over 300 episodes long, and

³³ This quote has been abbreviated and cleaned for ease of reading. For the full quote see appendix R, section 2.

*I have seen them all. I can't understand how I have had the strength to do so actually*³⁴

B2 thus asserts her own capital once again and can thereby show that her position within the group as the “strongest” is based on her capital, while she at the same time helped B1 assert her position. This could be said to be a distribution of capital that was granted by the leader of the group.

The status markers within the group are thus used actively by the respondents in order to signal their symbolic capital to other members. Further research into these status markers could help us understand, how an object of popular culture becomes an important part of the creation of identity. We shall discuss this notion a bit later. For now, let us analyse the ways in which cosplay becomes an important part of the creation of identity for the respondents.

4.6 Cosplay as escapism?

As we have seen, the respondents I interviewed are both big fans of manga and of cosplay. They invest a lot of time in creating their own costumes, and being able to cosplay a character well is connected to a higher degree of symbolic capital. The fans of cosplay are attending conventions, are engaging in group activities and are actively asserting their status within the group by using status-markers as signposts for symbolic capital. But is cosplay then a form of escapism as Napier mentions? She also mentions that the fans invest a lot of time and money in their interest, but should cosplay then really be counted as a mere “theatre” in which the fans can for a short period of time become the characters they like, before they once again have to revert to their everyday life? As I have made clear, I am of the opinion that this is certainly not the case. The investments of capital seem to suggest instead that this activity is a complement to their interest in manga which serves to reaffirm their relationship with other people interested in the same part of popular culture. Cosplaying thus becomes, not only a form of theatre as it also is according to the respondents, but a more important activity that helps the fans attach themselves to a social group. In this social group, they are distributing capital in complex ways in order to gain a position of status within it. As we saw earlier, engaging in social groups is an important factor for the creation of the self-concept of an individual. We saw how the self-concept of an individual is not created solely by the individual, but is to a large degree created through a reciprocal relationship with a social grouping. In other words, the group of cosplayers is made up of individual people where each person has his or her own self-concept. The members of the group are shaping each others' self-concepts, while they are

³⁴ These quotes have been abbreviated and cleaned for ease of reading. For the full quotes see appendix N, sections 9 – 15.

at the same time constituting a social grouping. The self-concept of each member thus also influences the construction of the group. This explains to some degree why the concept of *the other* is central to our understanding of the individual. By engaging in cosplay the fans are showing their attachment to the group, and have thus attached their self-concepts to the social interactions within the group. For the members of the group, cosplay becomes an important way of engaging in a meaningful construction of the self-concept. As we also saw, an important aspect of the relationship each individual has with the group is Giddens' notion of trust. We saw how the trust in the first focus group had been betrayed by the group, and will shortly discuss what this could mean for her future investment in the group. What can be said however, is that the trust which is placed in the social group was great enough for her to become shocked at the behaviour of other group members. Emotional reactions such as A1's further underlines that cosplay is an activity which fills a function far beyond escapism. The notion that cosplay serves a function of escapism could be linked to the fact that it is an activity surrounding an object of popular culture. Popular culture is of course often used to reference to activities that are not regarded fulfilling in other ways than for entertainment purposes. Within academics, this has of course long been debated, and most scholars would probably agree that popular culture can indeed provide meaningful use. However, there is still a sentiment popular culture is a type of inferior culture. We shall take this notion over to the discussion section where we will also look into one of the ways in which popular culture has helped A1.

5 Discussion

We will begin the discussion by picking up the sentiment that popular culture is often claimed to be of less value to its fans than other cultural products. As mentioned, this was seen in the first focus group when A1 describes how manga has actually helped her. The respondents were discussing conventions when A2 explains that it is seldom that you meet girls at a convention who are completely straight, but also explains how some of these girls are supposedly faking their homosexuality:

A2: “ [...] And I think that it is actually kind of rare that you find a girl at a convention who is totally straight (laughs). But I think the most of them are faking it just because they think that it is so cool. That's not so cool”

A1: “[...] They are what I call “fakers” or maybe “låtsas”. They are kind of insecure. They are probably never going to have a girlfriend, but they still call themselves lesbians and...”

A2: “The most of them are calling themselves bi-sexual, because that is like “in””

A1: “I become almost. What should I say? (A2: Annoyed?) annoyed, yeah. [...] Because it gives us a certain reputation. Before it was more like, “Oh, lesbian relationships is not something that you hear about, it doesn't exist”. Now it is more like “Oh, they have sex with them, and them, and them, and them and “uuuhhh””³⁵

What is interesting about this notion, is that it seems that the manga and cosplay community has embraced bisexuality and homosexuality as a more accepted part of their social realities. For A1 this has meant that she has been given a certain amount of freedom to explore her own sexuality, which means that her investment in the group is even bigger than before. For A1 the negative side of this, is that it has become a trend to claim to be bi- or homosexual without being it, as was confirmed by A2. In other words, the social reality within the group has been shaped by its members in a way that is accepting towards bi- and homosexual members of the group. As we saw in the theory-section the self-concept both shapes, and is shaped by, the surrounding social reality. In return, this means that the self-concept of the members has equally been shaped by this social reality and has resulted in members claiming to be a part of the bi- or homosexual part of the group. The reason for members choosing to claim to be a part of this part of the group, could well be explained by what A2 said

³⁵ These quotes have been abbreviated and cleaned for ease of reading. For the full quotes see appendix Q, sections 7 – 12.

when she mentioned it had become cool to be bi-sexual. It could be asserted that the members claiming to be bi-sexual are doing so in order to gain a higher amount of capital within the group. In order to establish a certain amount of theory on this however, it is necessary to conduct further research into the function of manga in this regard. What it does tell us at this point is that manga is probably not only a popular cultural object that is not helping its users in their lives. Popular culture can often be associated with negative side-effects such as having a dumbing-down effect on culture. However, if we see popular culture in the light of post-modernity we might get a different outlook on the subject. One of the major claims of post-modernity is of course the diminished role of organised religion in the daily lives of people. I am not claiming of course that religion does not still play a significant part in the lives of a majority of people, but we could theorise about the function of popular culture in shaping the identities of fans. The respondents in my interviews are participating in group functions and are investing so much time and effort in this group, that it is helping them shaping their identities. The social functions of a religion could be said to function in similar ways, as that could also be used to create a self-concept based on moral and ethical truths put forward in religious gospel. The role of popular culture serving a function of identity-creation could thus be seen as a consequence of post-modernity. An increased focus on the positive sides of popular culture could help us understand why it is so widely consumed. This is a discussion that of course warrants more research that focuses on aspects like identity-creation in connection with popular culture.

Let us for now continue a discussion on another major topic which is relevant to this thesis, namely the importance of capital in connection with identity. Before we discuss this subject it is important to decide the structure of the discussion. After the discussion of capital and identity, I will take up the notion mentioned in the analysis section that the trust of respondent A1 in the group was shaken by the actions of certain group members, and discuss what consequences this might have for her future involvement in the group. Last but not least, the discussion will be rounded off, by a discussion of some of the positive and negative consequences of engaging in cosplay with regards to the creation of identity. That discussion will be anchored in a point brought forward by the first focus group that there was a negative identity-side to cosplaying as well.

5.1 Capital as an essential part of identity?

As we saw in the end of the analysis section, capital is an important factor in connection with the group. The respondent's are very aware that certain members of the group have a higher degree of

capital and through their interactions with these individuals, the respondent's can achieve a higher degree of capital themselves. The question is however, how conscious the respondent's are of this fact before entering a relationship with a member of the group. As we saw with regards to the concept of *the other*, a person takes into consideration the possible effects of going into a relationship with another person, before deciding to do so. This was what was called the expansion of the self by Aron, Aron and Norman (2003, p. 105). When considering this expansion of the self, the question is whether the process is actually dependent on a concept like capital. It certainly seems as though the major consideration of going into a relationship with the community of manga-fans does not have anything to do with the possible capital gained. Instead, the respondent's were all fascinated by the community through co-incidence when they were exposed to the media. This seems to suggest that the first contact with the group is based on a value of taste, and not a degree of the perceived high or low symbolic capital associated with the group.

However, staying with the group and affirming one's position within it, requires a higher degree of investment in the group. This investment is both seen in the investment of symbolic capital, as well as the degree of trust a person puts in the group. As respondent's B1 and B2 put it:

B2: *“If you don't know anything about the culture and what cosplay is then...”*

B1: *“It becomes somewhat more of a masquerade”*³⁶

As both respondent's themselves are cosplayers, they do not have to affirm their affiliation with the group. The notion of cosplaying as a masquerade however, is very interesting in this regard. The respondent's themselves are certainly not a part of a masquerade, as they have in fact invested a high degree of trust in the group, as well as a high degree of capital in cosplaying. The trust that these respondent's put in each other means that the self-concept of each of the girls is verified by the interactions with the group. Activities such as cosplay can thus be seen somewhat as a type of “played-out” capital. The people participating in cosplay are affirming their “contract” with the group, while at the same time proving their belonging, by referencing the stories important to the group. The stories are in this instance e.g. a manga like “Naruto” which we saw in the analysis was regarded by B1 and B2 as a must-have read.

5.2 Trust

This, then, leads us to the notion of trust. As we saw in the analysis, the trust of respondent A1 was

³⁶ These quotes have been abbreviated and cleaned for ease of reading. For the full quotes see appendix S, sections 7 – 8.

betrayed by the group she had chosen to invest her self-concept in. This provoked a strong emotional response from the respondent during the focus group when she recalled the feelings she had when a friend in the group was replaced by a person who was perceived as having a higher degree of symbolic capital. As I mentioned in the theory-section, trust is an essential part of Giddens' theories on the consequences of modernity. Trust can of course be seen at many different layers, but what is striking in connection with this thesis, is that the trust of these young people who are creating their identities through interactions with a group is focused on an object of popular culture. For many people it might seem odd that such an object can become somewhat of a facilitator of identity. The focus group respondents are mentioning this in connection with reactions from their parents as well which we saw in the analysis earlier. When placing trust in a group that is centred around an object in popular culture, questions of course arise about the true “deepness” of this relationship. However, in my opinion, it is quite reductive to regard this group as any less significant for the creation of identity than a group which is centred around, say religion. What is important is not what object the group is centred around; what is important is instead the ways in which the group can help the individual in his or her quest to create identity. We saw an example of this importance in focus group 1, when respondent A1 recalled how reading manga and participating in conventions has helped her explore her own sexuality.

5.3 Effects of cosplaying?

We have already discussed how cosplay can serve a positive function for the fans in the beginning of this section. As I have mentioned in the introduction one of the main contributors to the field of research on manga has been Susan J. Napier. I have mentioned her by stating that I do not wholly agree with her statement (2007, p. 161) that attending conventions allows the fans to escape their mundane lives. While Napier also mentions that this is only one of the functions, she mentions cosplay as an activity which let's the fans escape their own identities as well (Napier, 2007, *ibid*). Napier thus suggests that there is a desire among cosplayers to become *other*, i.e. to change the personality of one self in connection with the convention, but reverting back to a more steady identity afterwards. As I have already mentioned, I do not completely agree with this, as the respondent's I interviewed revealed another aspect of this. B1 e.g. mentioned that she liked to take on the personality of her character; a notion that was also mentioned by A1. However, the notion that cosplaying functions as a temporary disguise was not supported by the discussions in the focus groups. Instead, both A1 and A2 mentioned how cosplaying had helped them evolve their identities.

What is most significant about the effects of cosplaying however, was the notion that A1 and A2 brought forward in the interview that they had friends who had “gotten lost” in the realities of their cosplaying-characters, even going so far as to change their names to the names of the characters they were cosplaying, and feelings of jealousy if another cosplayer dressed up in the same costume.³⁷ This was by both respondent's perceived as a very negative and dangerous effect of cosplaying. Staying within the concepts of identity, we could say that in those instances, the social realities of the groups seemed to have too much of an impact on the self-concept, which meant that cosplaying for those people did not longer serve the purpose of reaffirming a relationship with the group, but was instead as stated by A1, an imprisonment of their personal identity:

*“[...] If I feel that it becomes too much I will let it go. I don't want to be imprisoned in a nightmare. And that is what it would become”.*³⁸

³⁷ See appendix T, sections 1 – 3 for a transcript of this.

³⁸ This quote has been abbreviated and cleaned for ease of reading. For the full quote see appendix T, section 4.

6 Conclusion

Cosplay as an activity is an outlet for fans of manga in which they can dress up as their favourite characters, meet with other enthusiasts at conventions and simply have a good time. It is a social activity surrounding an object of popular culture, and as we have seen is used by the fans of manga and animé in order to construct their individual identities through social interaction. Cosplay thus provides an arena where the fans can perform roles of characters from their favourite mangas. As Napier has theorised, cosplay does indeed perform a function of escapism although that particular word is probably quite value-laden. The use of cosplay as escapism is not a symptom of how the respondents are not happy with their own personalities. Instead my research has shown that it is an arena in which the fans of manga and animé can socialise with each other, and through their common interest affirm their belonging to the group by dressing up as their favourite characters. This affirmation of belonging is an important part of the notion of cosplay as an activity around which identity is created. As we have seen, the so-called self-concept is an important aspect of individual identity. It helps us locate ourselves in the world, and guides us in the decisions we make in life. The self-concept of the respondents is, as we have seen greatly affected by social structuring, and through the use of focus groups we have thus been able to analyse how the respondents are creating their identities and self-concepts through social interaction. Interactions with the group are important for affirming the connection with the group and can be used by a member in order to show that that person indeed does belong with the group.

An important aspect in connection with this affirmation of belonging is Bourdieu's capital-concept. As we have seen, capital is actively invoked by the respondents in order to gain status in the group. Capital is thus an important part of the structure of the group, and as we have seen is actively used in order to signal one's own status. Status is signalled to other members by stating e.g. the amount of mangas one has read, by being able to create a good costume, and, not the least, by being able to associate with a “Japaneseness”. Especially the notion of Japaneseness is an interesting one, since it tells us that even though we have a global phenomenon with regards to manga, it is still very much anchored in its Japanese roots. What this could mean for the respondents' sense of “national”, transnational, and globalised identities is an aspect that requires further research.

However, not only cultural capital is an important factor in the creation of the group. Equally important is the concept of social capital. Social capital is important for gaining first access to the group as well as for marking one's own status within the group. We saw this by A1 stating how she

is idolising the members of her group who introduced her to the world of manga. Social capital is however somewhat of a double-edged sword as we saw in the analysis with regards to the betrayal of A1's trust, where members of her group were contemplating substituting one of the members as they had the chance to include a member of higher status instead. This notion led respondent A1 to a quite emotional response which again shows us cosplay can not be described only as a simple form of escapism but is much rather an arena in which complex social structuring is played out. This structuring is important for the notion of group identity and fundamentally influence the self-concept of the respondents. Previous research done by Napier has focused on the aspect of cosplay as a play with identities. The research done in this thesis however suggests that cosplay is not a question of playing with identities but instead provides a ground on which social interaction can influence the overall creation of the personal identities of the fans. Engaging in social interactions with groups of people with similar interests as oneself is something which most people do on a daily basis. Cosplay however, is unique in the way that the dressing up as a character has previously blinded us somewhat to the fact that creation of identity is a much more significant consequence of engaging in this activity.

Whereas this seems to suggest that the respondents are doing this structuring actively it is important to keep in mind that in a lot of ways it is a somewhat unconscious activity. The thought that cosplay functions as far more than a simple way of escaping a trivial life is important for our overall outlook on popular culture. Through the analysis of the place that cosplay has in the lives of the fans of manga and animé we have been able to gain valuable insights into the importance of popular culture. As mentioned in the discussion, this importance could be linked to post-modernism. The importance of popular culture was of course best exemplified by A1's talk of gay and lesbian manga in connection with her own identity. An analysis of sexuality in connection with manga could be a very interesting starting point for further research.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Original interview guide.

Introduction:

First of all, I would like to thank you very much for taking your time, for participating in this focus group. Have any of you taken part in a focus group before?

(Pause for answers)

A focus group is an interview form, but it is somewhat different from e.g. a group interview, or a personal interview, insofar that I have some questions I would like to pose, but I would like you as a group to discuss the questions with each other.

So it is your discussion as a group that will be at the centre of the focus group. If you think that the discussion that is going on is interesting, and want to state your opinion too, please feel free to talk as much and as long as you want to.

I am going to record our discussion on this digital recorder, but I will be the only one who will listen to it. In connection with my current assignment, I will transcribe some of the discussion for ease of understanding.

First of all, I think that it would be a good idea to tell you very briefly about my project, so that you know what you have signed up for. My project is about manga, animé, and Japanese culture and look into the reasons why it has become so popular in our part of the world.

Beginning of the interview:

I thought that we could start the interview by you stating some information about yourselves, like name, age and what you do in your daily lives.

Question 1:

The first question I would like to ask is quite generally: How and when did you get interested in manga?

Question 2:

Do you think that there are differences between manga and other styles of animation?

Question 3:

What is it, that makes manga so interesting?

Question 4:

Is manga a lifestyle for you, in the same way as it is for people who are interested in cosplay?

Question 5:

Why do *you* think that manga has become so popular in our part of the world?

Question 6:

Do you think of manga as giving you a particular community? (Possible additional sentence in connection with this question: I am thinking about this because it is of course still regarded as a sub-culture).

Question 7:

Do you attend conventions like for example Uppcon?

Question 8:

Is manga capable of giving you something in terms of storytelling, settings, reading experience, and so on, that other media can not give you?

Question 9:

Obviously manga is from Japan. I remember that you (Adressed to person 1A) said that you were going to Japan to study later. Has manga made you interested in Japan in general?

Question 10:

Do you think of manga as something particularly Japanese, or is it still a manga if it is from another country like this one? (Bring out 'Skim' and put it on the table)

Question 11:

Do you talk to your friends about manga?

Question 12:

What do you think of the number of mangas that it is possible to get here in Sweden? Will it increase in the future do you think?

Question 13:

In Japan manga is read largely by everybody, regardless of age and social status. There are many

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different genres of manga as well. Do you think that we will ever have a similar situation here in Sweden?

Question 14:

Do you speak or read Japanese yourselves?

Question 15:

Do you feel that you are part of a sub-culture, or is that not something that you think of generally?

Final comments:

I think that this was all the questions I had. Thank you all very much.

Appendix B: Revised interview guide

Introduction:

First of all, I would like to thank you very much for taking your time, for participating in this focus group. Have any of you taken part in a focus group before?

(Pause for answers)

A focus group is an interview form, but it is somewhat different from e.g. a group interview, or a personal interview, insofar that I have some questions I would like to pose, but I would like you as a group to discuss the questions with each other.

So it is your discussion as a group that will be at the centre of the focus group. If you think that the discussion that is going on is interesting, and want to state your opinion too, please feel free to talk as much and as long as you want to.

I am going to record our discussion on this digital recorder, but I will be the only one who will listen to it. In connection with my current assignment, I will transcribe some of the discussion for ease of understanding.

First of all, I think that it would be a good idea to tell you very briefly about my project, so that you know what you have signed up for. My project is about manga, animé, and Japanese culture and look into the reasons why it has become so popular in our part of the world.

Beginning of the interview:

I thought that we could start the interview by you stating some information about yourselves, like name, age and what you do in your daily lives.

Question 1:

The first question I would like to ask is quite generally: How and when did you get interested in manga?

Question 2:

How did you originally become interested by this culture? If you can call it a culture?

Question 3:

Do you attend conventions? Can you describe what makes conventions interesting for you? How

did you get to attend a convention for the first time?

Question 4:

How do you choose who you want to cosplay as? Why do you choose a specific character? Do you identify with the character you choose?

Question 5:

Do any of you know any Japanese? Manga and cosplay are of course originally Japanese phenomena. Do you connect it to something especially Japanese still?

Question 6:

Do you feel as though you are a part of a group since you are interested in cosplay? How does it feel to be a part of an activity as cosplay with other fans?

Question 7:

Is it necessary to like a character in order to cosplay it?

Question 8:

Is there anything in particular that makes cosplay interesting?

Question 9:

Is it necessary to know manga in order to cosplay? Or is it possible to cosplay without any knowledge whatsoever about manga?

Question 10:

Do you feel as though you are a part of a specific culture, or subculture?

Question 11:

Is there a competitive element in cosplay? Is there a competition to have the prettiest dress?

Question 12:

Is it possible to make new friendships through cosplay and manga?

That was all the questions I had. Thank you all very much.

Appendix C: E-mail to recruited member in first focus group

Hello!

We met today at the Science Fiction bookstore, where we talked about that I would like to conduct a focus group with people who are interested in manga, and in Japanese culture generally. As I said when we met, I am studying my fifth year at the university and as my exam work I have chosen to write about how it is that Japanese culture has gained such a foothold in our Western culture.

You mentioned that you would like to participate and that you might even be able to help me find some other people for the focus group on Thursday? Maybe you have some friends who are also interested in manga who would like to discuss Japanese culture? The best would be with a group of about 4 people.

A focus group is just another form of group interview were we will sit and discuss things related to manga, animé and Japanese culture. The only special thing about focus groups is that it is the discussion of the questions I am going to ask that is the most important part.

I am still planning to conduct the focus group Thursday night. Is that possible for you? And which time would then be best for you? It should last about 40 minutes.

I will of course buy coffee and cake for anyone who wants to come, and I can promise an interesting conversation for anybody who is interested in manga.

Best regards

Henrik Bonnichsen

Appendix D: Categories and count

Category	Count
Cosplay	24
Identity and upbringing	24
Convention	13
Group	10
Sexuality	9
Identification	8
Manga as Japanese	8
Fan fiction	7
Internationalisation	6
The loss of a group member	5
Japan and Japanese culture	5
Differences between manga and American animation	5
Negative reactions	5
Fame and attention	5
Newcomers to conventions	4
Romance	3
Japanese language	3
Realism in manga	2
Age of manga-readers	1
Classics	1

Appendix E: E-mail to recruited member in second focus group

Hello.

I have received your e-mail address from your mom, and I think that she might have talked to you about my project with you. I am currently writing my final project for the university and I have chosen to write about cosplay and manga.

Through my supervisor I was put in contact with your mom who then sent your e-mail-address to me and wrote that you would be interested in participating in a focus group where we will discuss cosplay and manga.

I don't know if you have been in a focus group before but anyway, it is a form of interview where I will pose some questions which the participants of the focus group are then discussing with each other. In other words, it is not only my questions that are important, but also the discussions the questions can start. It is a very informal type of interview and it is usually very nice, where you get to discuss something you are interested in with other people who also find it interesting.

What I am interested in, is in short, how a Japanese phenomenon as cosplay and manga has become so well-known in our part of the world and why it has become like that, but the discussion will be about all kinds of things on this topic.

Would you be interested in participating in a focus group with this topic?

Your mom wrote me that you also had a friend who would like to join, and I would really appreciate that. If you know more friends who would like to participate and discuss you are more than welcome to write me as well. The more, the merrier.

Best regards

Henrik Bonnichsen

Appendix F

Section	Person	Comment
1	A1	I actually don't think that there is a big divide between the generations. Sure there are maybe a little less, erm, older people (A2: Mmh) (Interviewer: Mmh) if you say it like that but erm, still there are a lot of them as well
2	A2	I think. Well I think that it is more what you see at conventions for example (A1: Yeah) At conventions you most often see people who are like 15 to 18 like that. (A1: Yeah) But that is in Sweden. When I was in America for example and was at a convention there, there were really, I saw a lady who was. She was really older, she already had grey hair and she walked around with "Naruto" headbands like that (A1 laughs) That just was so cool. And there were also families walking around with their little children (A1: Oh yeah) and cosplayed "Gara" for example. Then they went and stood next to each other and posed and looked cool when you were taking pictures, and then there were really all ages, but I think that you see mostly people at conventions who are the same age as us
3	A1	Yeah. (...) And, we should maybe explain. Convention is like a gathering (A2: Mmh) where Japan-interested, manga-interested, like, meet and (...) sometimes dress up. It's called cosplay. (A2 laughs) It is kind of like a theatre you could say. It is just that, you dress up as a manga-character, or a game-character.
4	A2	Of yourself and take pictures
5	A1	Yeah. You run around and almost play. That is kind of what happens
6	Interviewer	Mmh. Is that something which you have done? Cosplaying?
7	A1	Yes! (laughs)
8	A2	Yeah (laughs) Absolutely (Interviewer: Mmh) (A1: Absolutely) I have planned . I have a lot of cosplays I am planning and I have done a lot where, now that I look back on it, erm it then feels like I have done so much. But it isn't that much actually. (A1: No) I have done first and foremost from "Naruto" since I nerded that series. It was just, oh, (A1 laughs) it is still one of my absolute favourites, even if have become a bit tired of it, but I am still
9	Interviewer	Which one did you say?
10	A2	"Naruto"
11	Interviewer	Aha, oh yeah

12	A2	It still has a place in my heart as well even if I have become a bit tired of it because it is becoming a bit protracted. Yeah, there were a lot of characters from that one that I cosplayed, and my first one was also "Gara" (A1: Yeah) but then I ran around with orange hair instead of red (A1 laughs) (Interviewer laughs). That was maybe not so good, but now I have become much much better through the years (A1: Yeah) (Interviewer laughs) so it is (undecipherable). But that is cool, because you can also participate in competitions if you want, sketches and things.
13	A1	Yeah you get to kind of play outside of a frame. I kind of, I have never cosplayed from "Naruto" because I have always had something a little bit against it (A2 laughs) I don't know why. I think it is too protracted and (...) the jokes are so bad. Sorry. People are going to hate me because of it.

Appendix G

Section	Person	Comment
1	Interviewer	(Laughs) How did you first get in to cosplay then?
2	B1	Erm...
3	B2	Well I had, I had. Okay now it feels like it is only me who is doing the talking (Interviewer laughs)
4	B1	...well I think that I got in to it is your fault. I know that (Interviewer laughs: Your <i>fault</i> ?)
5	B2	Well it is my fault. Well I think I started by (...) I don't know, I think it was in some manga book where there was some little note on cosplay and what it was, and I (...) thought that it would be fun but I didn't take it so seriously, but then after a while when I had gotten to know B2 then (...) That was kind of at that time when I. Then I met some more who were doing cosplay actively and, like, then it was more of an interest, like. Well I also want to cosplay so then I fixed, or put an outfit together and yeah (...)
6	Interviewer	(Laughs) How did you get in to cosplay?
7	B1	Erm, that was probably (...)
8		At this point the interview was interrupted by a woman who had forgotten something in the room. After about 10 seconds the interview continued
9	B1	Erm, that was probably some while ago I guess because I was looking a bit at B2 and she can sew really well (Interviewer: Mmh) I think it was B2. She can sew really well and puts together outfits like that. And then I was, erm, allowed to borrow one of her outfits then a day (Interviewer: Mmh) and walked around in that, and then my parents thought that "Yeah. You, you seem to find this cool" so they bought this one for me (points to her own outfit) and yeah I think it is really cool, like, because you get to play somebody else than yourself and that is a bit nice sometimes and also that, erm, that you get to meet other people who have the same interest as oneself while you are doing it. (Interviewer: Mmh) (B2: Mmh)
10	B2	Mmh, because, it isn't a lot of in your class, or in your school who really are initiated in manga and animé so kind of. It was a total coincidence that I met all of the friends that I have who are really in to cosplay. It was (...) I used to go to martial arts. I haven't gone this term. I stopped last term and then I met a girl who is called Stephanie who is the girl who is maybe coming here now (Interviewer laughs: Mmh) erm, and she was really into cosplay and that, even if she is, she is maybe 3 years younger but still, I was very inspired by that. And then I was, I don't know. We chatted mostly on Facebook and that. Then I became friends with her friends, and the friends of her friends, so now I, I know, I have a great deal of friends on Facebook who I talk with and who are really interested in cosplay. It was. Yeah it was a total coincidence. It wasn't that I thought: "Now I want to know people who really like cosplay" (Interviewer: Yes). It just turned out that way

11	B1	But also when I, erm, was. When I was in the 6th grade. Or when I was beginning in the sixth grade. Then we went to Japan, because my mom was going to a conference which was in Osaka (Interviewer: Mmh). Then we were there for 10 days (...) And during those days I had time to look at the Japanese society. Then we walked at "Harishuku", erm the famous, erm, cosplay-place (Interviewer: Mmh-hmm) and then I saw Japanese people who walked around in lolita-outfits (Interviewer: Mmh), I saw Darth Vader (laughs) (Interviewer laughs) That was like, it was really fun to look at. You just became: "Hmm. I would like to test that". Even if I didn't want those pink cutey-cute outfits that they were wearing
12	B2	I would actually like to walk around in one of those (B1: Yuk) Like a little princess (laughs) (Interviewer laughs)
13	B1	I saw some really nice goth-lolitas as well who had like. But they were a little scary because they were so incredibly thin and then they had really really tight outfits.
14	B2	Arh. Japanese (Interviewer laughs)
15	Interviewer	Exactly. Erm, you were talking about how it was quite nice to be able to put on another costume than normally before. (B2: Mmh) Erm, Is, is that a part of cosplay? That you (...) do that or is it more that you dress up to, erm, how do you say it. Like...
16	B1	Masquerade, or?
17	Interviewer	No, not masquerade as such, but more if it is something that you just do, like that? (laughs)
18	B2	Hmm
19	B1	I think that it is fun to be able to become the character you are cosplaying a while. That is a part of putting on a costume. I am, I am maybe my usual self right now, but, but otherwise when I put on this one (points to her outfit) I play a little, like for example I put on this one when we were going to meet (...) my relatives then. And then I played this character which I am cosplaying. They. That was quite fun (Interviewer laughs) because it was so obvious that my relatives became very annoyed at me (Interviewer laughs) (B2: Mmh) because this character is quite annoying, mmh-hmm
20	B2	That is probably the thing about cosplay. Just that you (...) It might not be about that you don't like your own personality, instead it is more that you. I mean, I, the most people who are cosplaying are really dedicated to behave like this character (Interviewer: Mmh) and it is just like that, that many many manga and animé characters are very very annoying, so (B1 laughs) (Interviewer laughs) No, but the character I am cosplaying right now is generally depressed all the time. (Interviewer laughs) So that, yeah, But I am not of course (Interviewer laughs: No)
21	Interviewer	Let's hope that you won't become that by cosplaying it (B1 laughs)
22	B2	Mmh, well actually this is actually not a character I am cosplaying. Not from a manga, but from, erm it's a "Vocaloid". I don't know if you have

		heard that expression?
23	Interviewer	No?
24	B2	Okay. No it's (...) It is, I think it is Japanese anyway, but...
25	B1	Yes it is
26	B2	... it is a voice-synchronizing software that you, I mean there are different, like artists with erm, there are female and male and, (...) there are Japanese. Well Japanese singing and English singing but it is the Japanese-singing that are, like, big (Interviewer: Mmh). Like for example "Hatsune Miku". She is very big in, in like everywhere. She is probably the first vocaloid that you are starting to listen to and , like (...) learn about (Interviewer: Mmh)
27	B1	She is known for walking around with an onion in her hand (Interviewer laughs)
28	B2	Yeah it maybe. She has blue hair, like light blue (Interviewer: Oh yeah!) and then an onion as well
29	Interviewer	That I have seen actually
30	B2	Yeah. That's a vocaloid (Interviewer: Aha!) and she is doing songs with that programme and that is, like, the different artist (Interviewer: Mmh) with the different kinds of voices (Interviewer: Aha)

Appendix H

Section	Person	Comment
1	A2	I was photographed very little at that convention, also because I had just fun-cosplay on (mys-cosplay) me (A1: Yes) and she said "you are a little bit of a celebrity here huh?" and I started feeling like, "Uh". That is something I am a little worried about for the next convention that then I am really going to go out, I mean, like, take all that I can get like, (A1: Yeah) (Interviewer: Mmh) that I want to have a really good cosplay and then I am a little worried that she, maybe she will feel bad if she is a little bit more in the shadow (A1: I...) and that is something I am a little bit afraid of. That maybe also be the same
2	A1	That was the feeling I had (A2: Exactly) (Interviewer: Mmh). Like, I was often in the shadow of my group members. (A2: Mmh) (Interviewer: Mmh) I am still never going to be, it feels like. I have cosplayed with a lot of very good cosplayers. I have like. (Interviewer: Mmh), I have received praise from many foreigners, like, like that. But I am, kind of, I still feel very much in the shadow of, erm, them (Interviewer: Mmh), because they, its, its, a very hard thing because like. I look up to them. Absolutely (A2: Mmh). They are kind of. They are my idols (Interviewer: Mmh) And they are probably always going to be that but (...) they have (...) Now they are beginning to change a lot and (...) That is, like, it upsets me because kind of. I have fought so extremely hard to achieve it, kind of, get up to their level and now they are changing (Interviewer: Mmh) That just feels like, what I have fought for has been totally in vain. Kind of: "What was it I was doing this for?" "Why did I do this?" Like.
3	A2	In what way have they changed?
4	A1	Mathias and Robin. (A2: Mmh) They are going through a very big change. It was. Mathias is now. Used to be "Akira". He. Now a he. He is going through a sex change (Interviewer: Mmh) together with his boyfriend who (...) is going through the same thing (Interviewer: Mmh) And I, like, they have gotten very changed personalities kind of. They have a new. A very new outlook on cosplay. They have become much more superficial which I was very hurt by. One of my group members, one of my very close friends, they (...) especially Mathias "Akira", want to substitute her because another girl who is much more well known (A2: Mmh) wants to do the same cosplay as her, and just because she is well known he wants this new girl because it will give him status. And kind of. Us other, like. I don't care about status. It was really cool. I still love getting this praise. I. I love to (A2: Exactly) have my friends like (Interviewer: Mmh) I don't care about fame. That is. That is not important to me (Interviewer: No) Like, as long as I feel that I have friends. And that. That was like a stab in the heart. (A2: Mmh) That he could betray one of the friends. (Interviewer: Mmh) (A2: Yeah) That like. That is amongst the hardest things that exist. People who betray friends.

5	A2	<p>Mmh. I feel like for me, fame is a little little important. It is almost like a goal for me. I like to that, and that is also because I have always felt that I like for example in the videos I do, that I can get in contact with people abroad. For example, I even got the opportunity to go to America through youtube. A girl started talking to me and my fans like that and that is why I felt like. I feel like. I am beginning to think a bit that without youtube or, erm, I feel. It is. I want to be able to reach out into the world. That is why it feels so important for me personally (A1: Mmh), but on the other hand I have never. I have said almost that it is important to have friendship. For me it is always, even if I maybe see a person who is cosplaying better, with some characters. But still. I should never never substitute a friend, and that is probably (A1: No) the biggest dramas at conventions (Interviewer: Mmh) (A1: Yeah) I have to. Of course it is cool to get a little status like that. It, but it. You are cosplaying for different reasons and I (A1: Yeah) I am doing it first of all because I think it is fun. I mean. Why I started with it was not to become a celebrity (A1: No) Instead it is just something that came with it and then I started thinking that it was fun to begin to get attention like that. And I think. I just think that it is great to really get contacts like that (Interviewer: Mmh), but erm, I, but it is really important that you don't substitute people I think (A1: That is, yeah?) Yeah and the worst thing about conventions. The worst about cosplay is that you are substitutable (A1: Yeah!) (Interviewer: Mmh)</p>
6	A1	<p>Yeah. There are always new people coming. Like. Since I. I cosplayed "Chopper" after another girl had done it (Interviewer: Mmh). I was pretty often compared (...) Not to brag, but I think I did it better because I was more character-like (A2: Mmh) She is "Chim" in another (Undecipherable). She even came from another. She is from "Norrländsk Cosplay Front" like (A2: Aha!) everybody in Sweden know her...</p>
7	A2	<p>I didn't know. Not me (laughs) (A1: No) I remember. I knew the group (A1: Yeah), but I didn't know the names of them</p>
8	A1	<p>...No, okay. But that's. They are really incredibly well-known. (Interviewer) They have like. They win as good as all the competitions they are participating in. (A2: Mmh) And that doesn't have to be because they are good. It is because they are who they are (Interviewer: Mmh) Like, so I (...) then, I had competed with that and then I was really proud of "Chopper", like. That is my identity-cosplay if I put it like that. That is the cosplay I am identifying myself with now (Interviewer: Mmh) (A2: Mmh) so that is like (...) I have received. After me there have been a lot of new people doing that. I am really glad. People have become, like, inspired, like, they come up to me when I am cosplaying my "Chopper", like "Oh god, you are so cool really. I was inspired when I saw you" I talked to you about that, but we can take that afterwards. That is really cool, but still there is this gnawing feeling in the back of my head (Interviewer: Mmh) (A2: Yeah like...): "They, they are coming" (...) That he did like that against someone else, one of my friends. That makes me think: "Is he going to do the same thing to me?" (at this point A1's voice cracks and she dries away a tear from her eye), Are they going to do the same to me? (A2: Mmh) (...) And yeah.</p>

		That is really hard
9	A2	It is like that probably and then you probably thought
10	A1	That is really hard
11	A2	That is hard. I think also that we. We are also doing a lot with videos, like that, my sister and my friends. And we have been doing a different thing now. I mean (...) With a series that is very popular. And one of the members. She has begun to distance herself from this world. She has, like, I don't know, we have begun fighting a bit with her because she never seems to have the time for this. She doesn't seem as interested in it any more, or immersed and now, erm, we have halfway fought with her and now we are thinking about. Now we are probably going to substitute her, but not because the other one is better or anything like that, but quite simply because she, this girl, isn't as dedicated (Interviewer: Mmh) and she, everybody must do as she says and things like that. (A1: Yeah) And I fought with her during the summer because then we had planned a thing during several months and she said that she couldn't because she needed to take care of her sisters dog and that's why she wouldn't be able to come and then I became really angry with her

Appendix I

Section	Person	Comment
1	A2	That also depends on what you like. (A1: Yeah) A lot of people say that they like little conventions because they think they are cosy (A1: Yeah) where you can actually be a little more social, while I am actually one of the few, it feels like, and my sister, who prefer big conventions. We were also, as I said, in America it is so incredibly big. (A1: Yeah) And I think, that is why. Generally actually, I think that big conventions feel more like real conventions (A1: Yeah) while small conventions are almost like you are meeting friends like that (A1: Absolutely) I stood. That is more like my challenge. There I take my really good cosplay. There I really bet on everything. Meet friends, take pictures, and that is like more experience like that for my part (A1: Mmh) That is what it feels like for me, conventions, while other are a little more talkative (A1: Yeah) (Interviewer: Mmh)
2	A1	I have my. I will absolutely go to big conventions abroad (A2: Mmh) but exactly "Uppcon". It has gone too fast for them (A2: Mmh) They haven't kept up with the progress which is. I think that it is really too bad because they, they were very good from the beginning
3	A2	I don't know. I still think that they are good. But it is just more, I don't know. When did you start attending conventions?
4	A1	I mean. Not so long. I am. I am very much a newcomer. But I, like (...) I have associated with convention people for more than 5 years. I have been "raised" as a convention-goer. (Interviewer: Mmh) Like, I look at the people I associate with like a family. They are kind of my other family, and they like, we have joked that I am their child. I am like, I am the convention-child they have "raised" since I was a little little girl (Interviewer laughs) (A2 laughs) Like: "Oh, we are going to take care of you. You are going to be big" and lalala (...) So like, I am very much on the old ways still (Interviewer: Mmh) I am an old newcomer (Interviewer laughs) because I was raised in the old way (Interviewer: Mmh) While new convention-goers. It is really cool that they think that it is cool (A2: Mmh) (...) But I, I still want to have it a little bit cosier (A2: Mmh) Of course I want to have, like exceptional, like large, the new stuff, like, that is why I am going to go abroad because it, it is going to be a whole different feeling (Interviewer: Mmh) (A2: Mmh)
5	A2	Yeah, I think that it is just different from person to person (A1: Yeah) what you prefer. It is like. But I think in the end, everybody goes to conventions, big or small (A1: Yeah) The small conventions I think. You probably rather would go to those that are a little closer to you or something (A1: Yeah) Or why people are cosplaying there. Yeah exactly
6	A1	Or maybe yeah, erm, it is because you know that, "Oh there are going to be people there that I know and I haven't seen them" There are people who are coming from the farthest away in Norrland and there are people coming from Denmark or Norway (Interviewer: Mmh) or Germany (A2: Mmh)
7	A2	At Uppcon I met some Japanese there.

8	A1	Yeah I know! At my first convention like, I was photographed by numerous Japanese at my first convention (A2: Aha) I was really shocked (Interviewer laughs)
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Appendix J

Section	Person	Comment
1	A1	You have to let people get forward
2	A2	And you should be cosplaying, because it is fun (A1: Yes) That is what it should be above all
3	A1	It should never feel like something you are forced to (A2: Yes)
4	A2	Then maybe it will become that. It automatically is like that. (A1: Yeah) You might not want to feel jealous, but it is like that sometimes, but in that case you look forward to the next time (A1: Yes) where you can really do everything to make sure that your cosplay will be good
5	A1	And then you are actually motivated for doing it better (Interviewer: Mmh) (A2: Mmh), like. If you are a little jealous then you always get a new miss. "I will fight even more (A2: Precisely). I will do it even better" (A2: Yes) So. In that way I have also thought, but it mustn't be too much...
6	A2	No it must absolutely not become too much. That would be awful
7	A1	...Yes, but still it is really great to have that change
8	A2	It is hard not to become jealous (A1: Yeah) sometimes. But that's just the way it is. That's a part of cosplay. (A1: Yes) That's that negative side, and you. You just have to handle it in the best way possible (A1: Yes. Right) and I think that the best way is to accept it: "I am jealous. I am not. There's nothing wrong with that person. It is myself who is the jealous one. That's the feeling I have to (A1 laughs). It's not their problem. I shouldn't take it out on them. It is myself who must handle it (A1: Yes), and then I must make the best of it"
9	A1	Like, I can admit that I have been really jealous of like A2 (A2: Me?) Yes!
10	A2	I am really learning something new here (Laughs) (Interviewer laughs)
11	Interviewer	Everybody is learning something here (A1: Yeah right? (Laughs)) (A2: Yeah (laughs))
12	A1	Like. You are super beautiful, like (A2: Blushes and looks down) (Interviewer: Oh you (laughs)) Yeah (laughs), and like (A2: Thanks (laughs nervously)). And like, your cosplays are. I have always kind of. I have never seen you do anything that I have even been able to feel anything other than "Wow" about (A2: Mmh). Like, that is always I look forward to seeing what you are going to do, like, next. And at the same time it is like: "No, but" (...) The thing is. I have been depressed about your shadow. But I will fight. I want to be on the same level as you some day
13	A2	On the other hand, I feel that it was kind of a status-thing for me, to become friends with you. (A1 laughs) It is awful but you automatically become a little bit status-thinking (A1: Yes) I would be friends with you even if you didn't have. It's not really. I associate with all people (A1: Absolutely). If they have. From all ranks like that. I am really not a person who, and I am

		really also trying not to become a person who only thinks of fame (A1: No) I am not one of those famous. I have made a name for myself . But I am a long way away from one of those famous people like that
14	A1	Yeah. I also have a name. I am. I am A1-kan. Like. (...) Unfortunately I have also become known as the convention-uke (A2 laughs). Uke is. Do you know what uke and sene is?
15	Interviewer	Erm. No, I don't think so
16	A1	Sene (A2 laughs) is the person who is topping in a, erm, sexual relationship. Uke is the person who is (puts up fingers to make citation-marks) "attacked" (Interviewer: Aha) I have played very (...) innocent and, kind of: "Uuuh" (Makes an imitation of an innocent girl) and like (A2: Mmh) a little bit convention-uke
17	A2	And she is cosplaying so fantastically sweet when she. (Interviewer: Mmh) This, at convention and mewcon when she was that one who fell a bit in the shadow of the others. I mean, erm, she was still so fantastic, and beautiful as that Sakura and then, like. And the others maybe had big accessories, like that and they were also really beautiful, but. And I mean in that way she was a bit more in the shadow of the others since she did not have any things that were as prominent as...
18	A1	I kept it really simple
19	A2	...she was adorable still (A1 laughs) (Interviewer laughs) and she is really good at cosplaying as well
20	A1	Nwaeh. Okay I kind of have to (She hugs A2) (A2 laughs). I become really touched when I am talking about something like this. I just "uuuhhh" wanna go home and cry
21	A2	I can feel that. Not that you want to cry as such (laughs) (Interviewer laughs)
22	A1	I am just sitting here and shaking
23	A2	There was something I wanted to say. I can't remember what I wanted to say (A1 laughs) It was something about the status thing

Appendix K

Section	Person	Comment
1	B2	If you don't have the interest then it is maybe a bit hard to understand the fun about it. Yeah, you dress up as a character from a manga or, erm, from a series every uninitiated person would think. Or a game, and then they think "Yeah. Are you dressing up as Donald Duck then or?", like, "No, not really" (B1 laughs)
2	B1	But it doesn't all the time has to be Japanese, since I have seen a lot who do Darth Vader (Interviewer: Mmh)
3	B2	Enzo?
4	B1	Yeah, Enzo
5	B2	That's a friend of ours
6	Interviewer	Aha
7	B2	He has, like, the whole outfit so...
8	B1	Yeah with that Darth Vader mask that he walks around with at times and just (Mimics Darth Vader's breath)
9	Interviewer	(laughs) Frightening
10	B1	But that is really fun to see (laughs)
11	Interviewer	Erm, so it is mostly when you are together with other cosplayers that you feel like a group, or (B1: Mmh) is there a feeling that you are a part of a subculture or something?
12	B2	Well yeah. I think
13	B1	Yeah you feel like. You don't think that "Oh I am the only one in the world who does this" because you know that there are others who do the same thing, and then you feel like you belong to, erm, something then (Interviewer: Mmh (...)) But is it
14	B2	It is just like we said before. Or no. The most people who are interested in manga and anim� and cosplay and things like that. I don't. I don't know what kind of a term I should use for it (...) Like, I can just call it manga quite simply. That. But the most of those people. They are so incredibly hyperactive and glad. It is really easy to talk with them. As opposed to, what can I say? "Normal teenagers" who...
15	B1	Everybody who is sitting and are trying to be so good and say "Yes I read Strindberg the other day". It just isn't possible. It just isn't, like, possible to talk with such people (Interviewer laughs)
16	B2	Or like, people who just think "Oh I need to be cool in front of the guys" and everything. But just. People who read manga, who are really in to it they have, like. It is as though they get a certain personality, a certain aura (B1: Mmh) so you just "This is one of them that it is possible to talk to.
17	B1	There is like, as soon as you get into a discussion about manga or anim�, it

		becomes, like, a form of hyperactivity and... (Interviewer laughs)
18	B2	You kind of have to assault each other with arguments
19	B1	...it looks so (...) incredibly weird for the surrounding world to look at us when we are standing there and "Arrrrrg"
20	B2	(Laughs) Like, standing and screaming in the cafeteria in school (B1 laughs). And everybody who walks by just "What? What are they screaming about?"
21	B1	And, erm, then we often quote from manga and anim�
22	B2	I can't understand how we can think of all of that
23	B1	No. And from songs as well. Japanese songs, erm
24	B2	Like vocaloid
25	B1	Yeah. And then it sounds so weird when we are standing there and are singing in Japanese and everybody is just "Erm, okay"
26	B2	But I also know Japanese. That is exactly what I thought, no
27	Interviewer	Do you know Japanese?
28	B2	Well I attended Japanese for two terms before but I didn't get into it this term unfortunately. But in 9 th grade. Next year. Next term I mean. Then I will apply (Interviewer: Mmh)
29	B1	I will apply for a Japanese group also in the 9 th grade but erm, otherwise I am more or less self-taught in what I know
30	B2	Mmh. I was also that before, but it feels good anyway to know (B1: Mmh) what you have learned. I mean, getting what you have learned confirmed in a way. It feels (...) safe
31	B1	When you start, like, looking at manga and anim� you learn simple words, like, and, erm, then it became a habit for me to start using them a little sometimes without me noticing it, like. No, when I am finished with food I always say "(says a sentence in Japanese)", like, "Thanks for the food" when I am going away from there, and in the beginning my parents were like "What? What are you saying?", but then they have become used to that so you learn a bit
32	B2	Yeah I remember. Sometimes, I, since I have also been attending Japanese lessons. Sometimes I catch myself even thinking in Japanese (Interviewer laughs)
33	B1	Me too
34	B2	When you think about that I actually don't know that much then (...) It feels a bit weird that I actually succeed in thinking in Japanese. It's the same thing with French and, I have French in school and I am really bad, but sometimes I catch myself thinking in French as well (Interviewer laughs) (B1 laughs) It's a bit of the same principle you don't know a lot but you think in the language still (Interviewer: Mmh) I am glad that I don't think out loud

		anyway (Interviewer laughs)
35	B1	Thinking out loud in French. Oh, how bad I would be (laughs) Usch
36	B2	Yeah our French teacher is not the best (Interviewer: Aha)
37	B1	So we haven't learned anything in, like, a year (laughs)
38	B2	3 years for me (B1: Oj då) I had it in the 6 th grade as well

Appendix L

Section	Person	Comment
1	B2	My mom never follows a recipe
2	B1	You haven't tasted my grandmothers "Gunbuns"
3	B2	No I haven't
4	B1	They are. They are a little hard. They are as hard as pistol bullets
5	B2	How do you know that? Have you tasted?
6	B1	Yeah
7	B2	A pistol bullet? (laughs)
8	B1	No. Not a pistol bullet but. They are buns but, erm, yeah
9	B2	(laughs) Buns
10	B1	Yeah but they are so incredibly hard, and just "Ow"
11	Interviewer	(Laughs) How do you think, by the way, sorry, what do your families think about that you are cosplaying? (B1 laughs) You were talking about your mom earlier, or your mom and dad, and that they
12	B1	They are teasing me, like. My dad and my, especially on my mom's side it is my uncle and my oldest cousin and then my grandmother they think it is so funny to tease me, like, because of stuff like that, and then it just becomes like "Eh, what the hell". But they have, they always think of something which his meant to peak me, like, little stuff, like, "B1 can you walk in the sunshine? You are a vampire" (B1 laughs) and you just "What?"
13	B2	(Laughs) What?
14	B1	Yeah. They thought I was. They thought I was crazy about "Twilight" (laughs) (Interviewer: Aha)
15	B2	(Laughs) Yeah "Twilight" isn't so popular right now
16	B1	(Laughs) No. Now you hate "Twilight" but yeah
17	B2	Not even the "Twilight"-lovers like "Twilight" any more (laughs)
18	B1	(Laughs) No. Now everyone. Now everyone is a "Belieber" and stuff
19	B2	Oh! Don't even talk about that
20	Interviewer	(Laughs) Erm, Justin Bieber fans, or?
21	B1	Exactly
22	B2	Yep
23	B1	Belieber, like. Yeah. (...) Don't watch "Never say never". Our friends
24	B2	It's like brainwashing
25	B1	It's like. They tie down your arms in a chair and then you are sitting there

		for 2 hours and just "Arrrg"
26	B2	But everybody I know who hate Justin Bieber but still have seen "Never say never" have been totally brainwashed. They just "Justin Bieber, Justin Bieber is so good. I understand him. He is so empathetic" and you just...
27	Interviewer	Is it that movie?
28	B1	Yeah, erm, my friend in the 9th grade Isabella, erm, had met some friends who went to see it. And she had been to it herself as well, and Isabella is quite rational, and she was like, in the middle just "Eh, I guess I don't hate him as an hate-object for real, but I don't like him either". Then she had seen it and she became, like, "No he was quite sweet" and I just "Ohhh." She wasn't as extreme as her friend who just "He likes bananas, I also like bananas, we have a link" and you just "No". (Interviewer laughs)
29	B2	Yeah it is. If you are a hater and become a lover then it becomes, like, very extreme, but when you are, like, more in the middle and then start liking it, then maybe it is more "normal" still.
30	B1	But. Soon Rebecca Black is gonna make one like "Never say never" (B2: Oh right) and then everybody is gonna lova Rebecca Black

Appendix M

Section	Person	Comment
1	Interviewer	Cool. Thanks (laughs) Now I at least have it on tape. (laughs) (A1: Yes) That you are real. (laughs) (A1: Yeah (laughs)). Erm. The first question I would like to ask is actually just quite general. How and did you first become interested in manga? Erm, Do you remember?
2	A2	Yeah. Well I remember (A1: Yeah) (laughs) The first series. "Sailor Moon" for me. I also thought actually, that people knew what kind of series it was and, erm, it wasn't just that I, just I looked at manga. It was probably something which everybody in my class also. (A1: Yeah) And then when everybody was watching "Pokémon", then.
3	A1	Yeah right? That is like. It is the same thing for me. I grew up with "Sailor Moon". I grew up with "Pokémon" (A2: Mmmh), then came "Digimon" (Interviewer: Mmmh) (A2: Mmmh), "Beyblade". There was also a lot of new stuff, erm, and I, erm, I has no idea what it was from the start (Interviewer: No) but that I loved it (Interviewer: Mmmh), and then like, I started reading manga, actually 9 years ago (Interviewer: Oj) I (...) Started when I was 7 and yeah. I don't know why. It was a series, and sure yeah "This seems cool", I turned the pages, and then I was totally hooked (Interviewer: Mmmh)
4	A2	Erm, I don't remember how I started looking at "Sailor Moon" and that kind of stuff. Instead I remember that people, well the guys in my class started trading "Pokémon" cards like that, a game, and then I just wondered what it was and then it started when I was at the movies while we were waiting for "Sailor Moon", then we saw that it was on TV. That was in Germany. The germans have a lot more of Animé and manga (Interviewer: Mmmh) and stuff and then (...) erm, I just asked "Can't we look at this one as well", and then (...) erm, I came into the "Pokémon" phase. After that I actually had a little more break if I am honest. I had a break from the manga and animé world because I didn't even know what it was. I think I thought that it was just a series, like that (A1: Yeah, right) And then when I saw one time in Germany there was a commercial on for "Inuyasha", and that is a little bit for the little older peopler, and I was also older then. Then, erm, I started becoming totally fascinated like "What is that?". I saw the style, and I just thought (...) It was something new, it was something cool. It wasn't that typical American you always see on TV. It was really something new, and when I got to see again. By then it had been a bit on TV. Then I was totally sold, totally sold, and that was when I began to really understand what kind of a thing it was, I started looking at "Ranma" and all kinds of stuff and my first manga-book was also "Ranma" (Interviewer laughs)
5	A1	That was also my first (A2 laughs). I loved "Ranma" (A2: Mmmh) You grew up with "Ranma"...
6	A2	Yeah. You really did
7	A1	It was one of the few books that were actually available here in Sweden when I started reading. Because I have read kind of a long time but then, erm, (...) I was kind of, I don't know if you have heard of it, but "DN Angel"? (A2: Mmmh (nods in agreement)). That was my second series

		(Interviewer: Mmh-hmm). That is like, a bit of a love-novel and (...) a bit like, then they change personalities and then they fly around just "uuuhhh" (A2 laughs)
8	A2	I came into that one quite late but I don't like it that much, because it is so. That is one thing I don't like about manga and animé sometimes, it is that many girls who are either so very bitchy, that that fight all the time, even if it is just for fun (A1: Yes) I just think it is annoying in the end or they are just too sweet, or it becomes that they just adore a guy and close off everything else (A1: Yeah) and that was something I didn't like about "DN Angel", like
9	A1	No. That is a bit annoying (A2: Mmmh), but, erm, I love the two main characters...
10	A2	Yeah. Those (laughs)
11	A1	...and this (...) Mmmh. Do you remember? The white-haired guy? With glasses?
12	A2	Yes. I don't know his name. I remember that his transformation was called "Krad" or something (A1: Yeah) (laughs).
13	A1	The opposite of "Dark" (laughs)

Appendix N

Section	Person	Comment
1	Interviewer	Well, I can begin by saying a little about why I am interested in this (B2: Yes). The thing is that I, kind of, erm, I am very interested in, erm, how something which is so Japanese as manga and cosplay. How that has become so big in our part of the world, erm. Why it is so popular and what it is that makes it so interesting for so many, because it had really, really become big now. Also because you can everywhere, at most libraries, you can loan mangas and things like that as well, so erm, so that is actually just what I am interested in (laughs)
2	B2	Stephanie says that she is 17 minutes late (Interviewer: Mmh-hmm) The third girl. I just need to (...) Oh. She is going to be really late, oh well
3	Interviewer	Okay. Well, well, we can just begin and then she can just come in and join us (laughs) if she makes it. Erm, before we begin, I thought that if you could maybe present yourselves just so that I have it on tape that you (laughs) actually are (...) you know. Real.
4	B2	Yeah okay. Yeah my name is B2 (...) And as I said I am 15 years old. I have. Well I started reading manga by coincidence in "lågstadiet". I was, erm. Wait how old are you at that point? (B1: Erm) Maybe I was 7 8 years old. First or second grade. (Interviewer: Mmh) It was. It was that. I remember that I was. I think I was with my grandmother and then I saw a cartoon book that looked interesting and then it turned out to be manga and then I continued reading and became more immersed in, well, more manga-series then. (Interviewer: Mmh) And yeah, that was when manga was still relatively new (Interviewer: Mmh)
5	B1	Mmh. My name is B1. And I am also 15 years old. And I began reading manga, erm, it was the summer vacation before 7 th grade. I saw the magazine called "Shoeio stars" which has now been cancelled. It was the next-to-last issue apparently as well (Interviewer: Mmh) and, erm, then I just thought "Well that looks good" because I had nothing to read and then I was allowed to buy it. Was hooked by the series I am cosplaying right now called "Gakuen Alice" and then I thought "Hmm, I like this" and then when I started in 7 th grade I met B2 and another girl called Nelly and they explained a bit more to me what you can read, and where you can find. And then it just became so, that I began reading more and more and started looking at animé and, erm, yeah now I read manga almost every day and have quite a lot of manga books at home. So it was also kind of by coincidence.
6	Interviewer	Mmh-hmm. Cool. How old was it you said you were (B2: 15, we...) when you started?
7	B2	Or when I started, yeah I maybe was. Well, I think that I went to the first or second grade and then you are around 7 or 8 years old

8	Interviewer	Oj, okay (laughs) (B2: Yeah) So it has been a long time then
9	B2	Yeah, now that I think about it. I think I have more than 200 manga books at home (Interviewer: Oj)
10	B1	That's right. You have so many "Inuyasha" books that take up room (laughs) (B2: Yeah) (Interviewer: Mmh)
11	Interviewer	I have heard a lot about that "Inuyasha". I have never read it
12	B1	I have seen the whole animé on the other hand
13	B2	Which is like 200 episodes (Interviewer: Wow!)
14	B1	No, 167 episodes in the first season, 6 additional plus 4 movies (Interviewer laughs)
15	B2	Yeah I am watching an animé which is. Or it is called "Bleach". It is over 300 episodes long, and I have seen them all. I can't understand how I have had the strength to do so actually
16	Interviewer	Wow! How long is an episode then?
17	B2	Oh, about 20 minutes (Interviewer laughs)
18	Interviewer	Oh, then you shouldn't calculate how many minutes you have used for that
19	B2	A lot of spare time (Interviewer laughs)
20	B1	Yeah you don't really dare to add the minutes because then, erm, then you say to yourself: "Oj då, I am sitting, sitting a bit too much in front of the computer"
21	B2	Maybe we should put some more time into homework instead (B1: Errrm)
22	Interviewer	(Laughs) Exactly. Erm, well. The first question I would like to discuss with you is actually very generally, erm, yeah. Well it actually was my first question how long you have had your interest, but we have discussed that now. But how come that you came into it, like, for real. I mean, I understood that you came into it by coincidence? (B2: Mmh) Or?
23	B2	Yeah I think it was. Well I had some books of just that series that I had started reading, and then. It was, like, a friend who, in "lågstadiet" as well who had started reading some other series by the same writer and then I thought, and that, it was "Inuyasha" that series and then I started reading and I was very much hooked by it so then I read. So now I have the first 18 books but there are more than 40 books now (Interviewer: Okay)

Appendix O

Section	Person	Comment
1	Interviewer	Oh yeah. It was, erm, when you started cosplaying, erm, I presume that you have some friends who are not cosplayers also, or? Do you. Do the most of your friends cosplay as well?
2	B1	Erm, I remember. I was. I borrowed her (points to B2) outfit and went to school in it (Interviewer: Mmh) (B2: Oh right) on the cosplay-day and then it was a bit like "What? What? B1, what are you wearing? Is there something special today?" And I just "Yeah, It is the cosplay-day" and they just "Aha! That is why you are wearing that"
3	B2	No there are just a lot of people in costumes and you just "That is exactly why. If you just search for them" (Interviewer laughs)
4	B1	Yeah but those in our class are like. Oh what do you say
5	B2	Pretentious. Pre-ten-tious. Yeah that's how you say it
6	B1	Yeah pretentious students who, erm, (B2 laughs) are a little bit stuck up. There have. Some. There are some guys guys who like manga and animé but we have Isak who walks around and has the "Naruto" style
7	B2	Yeah right. "Naruto" is like, almost a must-have read, because, like. (Interviewer: Mmh)
8	B1	I have actually seen the animé so he can't pick on me
9	B2	But everybody knows what "Naruto" is. (B2: Yeah) It doesn't matter if you are a new or (...) Yeah well a veteran within manga and animé
10	B1	You have to have heard about it
11	B2	You have to at least have looked in a book to be like acceptable (laughs) (Interviewer laughs) (B1 laughs)
12	B1	Yeah you have to at least have watched an episode. I remember. I watched the beginning of "Naruto". I thought it was quite fun, and next time it took them like 100 years to kill one damned ninja and I just "Kill him for heavens sake. I have seen multiple openings and you are failing, I hate you!" (Interviewer laughs) and then I couldn't watch any more
13	B2	Yeah but it is like that
14	B1	It is really annoying (B2: Yeah) when. Yeah but I watched it anyway so.
15	B2	But it is also like that, that the manga is better than the animé, even if the animé it is more like. There is more life in what you see but still it is so, so I mean it is so rigid in a way (Yeah and sometimes...) and in the animé it is not always so nicely drawn so that you just "Wow"
16	B1	There are some exceptions though like (B2: "Angel Beat") "Angel Beat" was so wonderful yeah
17	B2	Yeah that is a really nice story

18	B1	It is sad
19	B2	People also say that new animé and manga is a lot worse than old, older. "Angel Beat" is a little older but it is still really good
20	B1	But I thought that. Yeah it depends on what comes first. Me and Ejla we watched an animé that was called "Shuko-kara". Really long, and there we got used to it and then we should look at the manga and I just "My god, how is it they look?"

Appendix P

Section	Person	Comment
1	A2	"The first time I was at a convention was also "Uppcon", erm, it was also, I don't know if it was Scandinavia's biggest then, but it was the biggest in Sweden anyway, but it was just (...) such an incredible feeling when people came and asked if they could take a picture with me, or with me, not just of me, and, or hugged. And I was so glad when somebody said: "You are heavenly sweet" (laughs) (Interviewer laughs) That was really (A1: Yeah) the first time I heard a comment like that. I was so happy and it was just cool and all kinds of things. Later I then became better and better with time, so now when I think at (A1 laughs) my cosplays, I was in America recently and had my newest cosplay. It was "Kushi" from "Okami". From a game and pretty advanced from my point of view (A1: Yeah)
2	A1	It is really beautiful
3	Interviewer	Yeah I know it, it is a really beautiful game
4	A2	Yeah. Kushi (A1: Oh, it is magnificent) Do you know the character then? The saké-brewer (Interviewer: Yeah) Saké. I was her. And this time, erm (...) in America then, it is really big. Uppcon would probably fit in there 4 or 5 times (Interviewer: laughs) (A1 laughs) It is really big, and as I said people everywhere and there I, and my sister who also cosplayed. She cosplayed the human version of "Amaterasu" (Interviewer: Aha) and erm, we could really not walk from one side of the room to the other without being stopped after just 1 metre
5	A1	They were sooo beautiful (Interviewer laughs)
6	A2	That was really. And then I began thinking of how I at my first convention, that was really nothing if you compare it to this time (Interviewer: Mmh) But for me it was so incredible the first time because it was something new, I didn't know about it, so I just thought whatever you are cosplaying, however bad you are, you are still going to feel like you get a lot of acknowledgement as long as (Interviewer: Mmh)
7	A1	And with that particular cosplay. Just because I want to brag on her behalf. They were published in a Japanese cosplay-magazine (Interviewer: Wow)
8	A2	"Cosmode". I was a little (...) It was really cool actually. In America, there are so many people. You can't experience that in Sweden. It was like a wall of photographers quite simply. (A1: Yeah) And one of the people who came and asked "Can we publish you on maybe a page where. Or here is my card then". And then there was one guy. A Japanese. I didn't really get that. And he asked if we wanted to be published in "Cosmode" and I thought that it rang a bell after a while but I, erm, hadn't really gotten what it was then (A1 laughs) so I just "Sure, sure" and then I thought about it, just "Cosmode" when I was sitting there waiting for (...) my sister was getting something to drink and that took her half an hour in her cosplay to get drinks (Interviewer laughs) (A1 laughs) Erm, and then I was sitting "Oh yeah" and then I came

		to think "Isn't that a magazine?" So when, I began to become really excited and Stephanie didn't understand anything (A1 laughs) and I just "Stephanie, I think it is a Japanese cosplay magazine" and she just "No, I don't know anything" but when I got home and looked on the Internet then it was and it said that it was the biggest in the world as well, Japanese cosplay magazine (Interviewer: Oj) (A1: Yeah) so I just completely froze
9	A1	And they actually got a relatively big picture that was really nice (Interviewer: Cool)
10	A2	Among, I mean among a lot of others, but we were there at least (laughs) (Interviewer laughs)
11	A1	Yeah. It was the biggest picture
12	A2	It was? No it wasn't
13	A1	Yes it was. I think it was
14	A2	Weeell. I don't think so
15	A1	It was one of the biggest anyway
16	A2	Yeah, I don't know (A1 laughs: It was) (Interviewer laughs) but it was still really cool. Just feeling. I mean just being in there. That was just so awesome. I was really happy and proud. (A1 laughs) And really. That was probably my, yeah (...) The crowning jewel (A1 laughs) (Interviewer laughs: On the whole thing) Yeah. Exactly. I think that it is not going to be my best cosplay ever. I am also going to do The beauty from "The beauty and the beast" actually but it was really an incredible feeling then.

Appendix Q

Section	Person	Comment
1	A2	I will give it a chance I think (Interviewer laughs)
2	A1	You must see the movie with me. It is like, my favourite movie
3	A2	I think, if you, manga and animé world, especially the convention-world many girls are totally fanatic when it comes to Shonenai and Yaoi's, mostly that boy-stuff. Not so much when it comes to lesbian girls apparantly. Yuri is not as popular, but Yaoi. You can't. There are many people who are asking themselves "Why, actually?" because boys are sitting: "Oh, whatever, why actually?" like. But they are not one bit homophobic there actually, at a convention. I thought, I was before also "Oh, Yaoi, Yaoi, Yaoi", but I think why I liked it so much before was. It wasn't. Because many Shojos as I said are very much cuty-cute girls (A1: Yeah), whereas in many Shonenai the boys are. The boys are a bit tougher often. They are a bit more natural it feels like. (A1: Yes) I can identify a bit more with a boy who maybe, I don't know, but kind of...
4	A1	Actually stand up for themselves, and are not trying to be protected by everyone else
5	A2	...Yeah, and isn't crying as soon as, like (imitates a conversation): "Oh no, are you dating her? But I thought we were going on a date today?" "Yes, but her mother died." "I won't forgive you" (A1 laughs). That is so: "No, that isn't okay" (A1: No (laughs)) (interviewer laughs). So then you are a often attracted a bit more to them. And now when I have become a bit older, I feel that I don't care if it is girl/girl or guy/guy .(A1: No). It has to have a good story or good characters (A1: Yes) and then it works.
6	A1	Me too, like, I love Yaoi (A2: Mmmh (nods in agreement)). I love this, when there kind of is this guy/guy. Then (...) Well, I don't mind saying it. I am a lesbian myself, and kind of. I think that I feel a bit of a connection with it, like, I understood, like these taboo-feelings that were in there (A2: Mmh). And I was (...) It gave me support to be able to, like, explore my own sex..., or homosexuality (Interviewer: Mmh) and dared giving me, like, a bit of self-esteem (Interviewer: Mmh) But now, then (...) kind of. I have also grown up a bit. (A2: Mmh) Sure, I still think that it is totally fantastic (A2: Yes, of course (laughs)) because they have something special (A2: Mmh), but (...) I really appreciate normal relationships as well (A2: Mmh). They are. They can be very beautiful, as long as there are good characters and there is a good story
7	A2	I think also, it can often be attracting, especially when there are guys, in the sense that in the beginning it is so new. In American films you don't see gay guys (A1: Never). I mean, it is, like: "Wow, how unusual". It is almost like animé are testing it's limits in one way (Interviewer: Mmh), and I also think that it is like that, that many are starting to think: "Maybe I am gay myself" or whatever. I also thought about that a bit, but I concluded that "No, I have never been in love with a girl or anything, so I am probably straight". And I

		think it. It is actually kind of rare that you can find a girl at a convention who is totally straight (laughs) (A1: Yeah). But I think most people are faking it just because they think that it is so cool. (A1: Yeah, right?) That's not so cool.
8	A1	Kind of, I can probably say that I can never have a relationship with a boy. Too much has happened on that. Kind of, I see people as. They are what I call "fakers" or maybe "låtsas". They are kind of insecure. They are probably never going to have a girlfriend, but are still calling themselves lesbians (Interviewer: Mmh) and...
9	A2	The most of them are calling themselves bi-sexual, because (A1: Yes) that is, like "in" (Interviewer laughs)
10	A1	...Yes, but. I know that it is really weird, but I almost get, like, what should I call it? (A2: Annoyed?) annoyed, yeah...
11	A2	My sister also. She is also gay and she is really annoyed
12	A1	...Yes, because (...) it, it gives us a certain reputation. (Interviewer: Mmh) It kind of (...) Before, it was more like: "Oh, lesbian relationships is not something that you hear about, it doesn't exist". Now it is more like: "No, but oh. They have sex with them, and them, and them, and them and "uuuhhh"" (A2 laughs)
13	A2	Yeah. It becomes a bit. It can bec... It can easily become like that. On the other hand, I feel that in conventions and stuff, it makes it a lot more open (A1: Yes), for example that. Okay, I have never had anything against homosexuals or anything. But on the whole I think that people who are attending a convention. No person. Also if that person should actually think like that, would say anything homophobic, since they know they are going to be crushed (A1: Yeah (laughs)) by all the girls who are walking around with flags, those pride-flags (A1: And boys). And boys, because there are really a lot of guys as well.
14	A1	There are really a lot of gay guys
15	A2	But also. I think (...) I think that it is emb... I still think that it is embarrassing to say something like that to a straight person (A1: Yes, absolutely) but I think that it is. There is such a good. Such. It is almost like with culture (A1: Yeah). Not that it is from such different countries as such. It is more that it is really. All sexualities...
16	A1	A1: All different people, can just get together and have a common interest
17	A2	Yeah. And it doesn't matter if you maybe was the biggest geek in the world in maybe, or maybe were teased in your school and such. Here everybody who was popular, here a lot of people have experienced teasing, but here they might find friends immediately because everybody is so open. And that is what I love at conventions

Appendix R

Section	Person	Comment
1	A2	For me, the first time I went to a convention and saw them cosplaying, even if it is a bit bad, not I think that they probably weren't the best cosplays (Interviewer: Mmh) Just seeing someone from a series made me so happy. I think that it is a big experience. It is a big part of the experience, erm, so I think that (A1: Yeah, being able to recognise) (Interviewer: Mmh) Yeah. That is a really big part of the experience (A1: Be recognised) Yeah exactly. You don't have to. It is still fun if you don't know about it (Interviewer: Mmh) (A1: Yes, like) But it helps. It is part of the experience quite simply I think actually.
2	A1	There is one series that I am thinking about cosplaying from which is called "Alitino" (Interviewer: Mmh) It is unfortunately cancelled because (...) The creator broke the arm and then there was just a lot of trouble (Interviewer: Oj) so she couldn't continue, but it is totally awesome (Interviewer: Mmh) And it is really beautiful. I (...) I love the clothes (Interviewer: Mmh) Like, it really made me want to sew the clothes and the characters are totally fantastic (Interviewer: Mmh) (A2: Mmh) Unfortunately, like, we are never going to know what is going to happen because it will probably never be continued, but (...) (Interviewer: Unfortunately) Unfortunately. And it is really unknown. I have kind of (...) I have talked to people who (...) the people who introduced me to the manga-world, those who introduced me to the convention-world. Like, my idols. I have talked to people online. There is almost no-one who has a clue about what kind of thing it is and that [...] It feels like it could be very fun to do just because, actually getting people thinking about it (Interviewer: Mmh)
3	A2	Mmh. I am also thinking, if we are talking about if a person likes cosplay or not (A1: Yeah) because if you are there and you don't care about cosplay at all. Then it doesn't matter if you like the series or not (A1: No) Because then it is. You can still come there and learn about new series like that. You look at what kind of stuff they are selling (Interviewer: Mmh) but I think that it is just a really big part of conventions and in that case, it is just fun quite simply if you can recognise and if you yourself is cosplaying to be recognised (A1: Yeah) For example "Kushi" that was probably, I wanted to do that, and I thought "I just want to". I like the character a lot, and I thought it was a challenge and it was also a project for school actually (A1 laughs) (Interviewer: Aha!) Yeah. That's. I am not done with it yet (laughs) (A1 laughs) I have done the costume but I must write down everything, a big hassle but erm (A1: Nååh) Actually what I thought was a bit too bad was that people were taking photos like that but there were, like, not that many who recognised me. They might have recognised "Oh you are from that series" like that, or no, game by the way. But there were not that many who recognised me and I thought that was a bit too bad because (...) Sometimes it is like that that I have experienced that I maybe didn't have the best cosplay like that. But for example "Naruto" when it was so big. Then

		there were a lot of people who took pictures because it was new (A1: Yeah) and that was the thing that was "in" (Interviewer: Mmh) It was modern at that time.
4	A1	It was modern at that time. (A2 says something undecipherable) Now it has been done, like too much (Interviewer: Mmh)
5	A2	Yeah exactly now, now I still love "Naruto" but I have also become a bit tired so I am not going to cosplay "Naruto" characters so much any more One I am going to do, because Ann is also going to cosplay from it and exactly, then I feel I will also do it, but I think that if you come there and you really want to get everything out of it, of the convention-world and including cosplay, then you should probably know about the most popular series (A1: Yeah) (Interviewer: Mmh) Or at least somewhat popular so that you can (...) So that you can, first of all, recognise other characters (A1: Mmh) and erm, yeah, if you are cosplaying then it is maybe also fun to be recognised (A1: Yeah) Even if it isn't a requirement. You should of course do whoever you want and have fun (A1: Yeah) depending on...
6	A1	But like, even if you erm, do a totally unknown series. (A2: Mmh) That can like, if one person recognise you. That can also be a feeling.
7	A2	Mmh. That is a feeling and...
8	A1	That is, like, you hadn't expected anything (Interviewer: Mmh) You hadn't expected that anyone would recognise you. You had, like, you did it because you maybe hoped that someone. That you could get someone else to read it (A2: And, yeah...) Like, my first cosplay group was called Ace of Sweden That was, as I said the people who introduced me to it and (...) we cosplayed "De-gramer" it was called. We were the first "De-gramer" cosplayers in all of the Nordic countries as far as I know. We were the first group. And they have become really big now. At every convention now there are "De-gramer" cosplayers (A2: Mmh), and it is still kind of cool that we were the one's who started that (A2: Mmh). It went from totally unknown series to: "But look that is that one" (Interviewer: Mmh) (A2: Mmh) Everybody has actually heard of it. Everybody knows what it is. And (...) I came into it quite late, but still to have been part of bringing forward a very good series, that makes me really glad. (Interviewer: Mmh) (A2: Mmh)
9	A2	Exactly. And I also think that also if you are a character who is very unknown, or, no-one at the whole convention recognise it, as long as it is a really good cosplay that is like really cool and that has something extraordinary, like e.g. a really big sword (A1: Mmh) or something. Then you are still going to get attention. (Interviewer: Mmh) Then you are still going to have a lot who photograph you. They don't have a clue what kind of series it is, but they just think that it looks so good (A1: Yeah) and then it is also awesome like that because then it doesn't matter. You also think that it is not just to cosplay a character but also because I have done a good job (A1: Yeah) So...
10	A1	That is also a very big reward (Interviewer: Mmh) (A2: Mmh)

11	A2	And also if a series can become very overdone when it comes to cosplay, it is still cool if you have done a really good job, or you are doing a character that maybe hasn't been done by that many, then (...) it can also be fun. For example I did now for "Naruto" (laughs) I don't know if you have read "Naruto"?
12	Interviewer	No (A2: No), I have just seen a few episodes (A1: Yeah)
13	A2	That is a (...) "Naruto" is a bit special and erm, "Naruto" goes and erm, changes himself into a girl at one point (A1 laughs)
14	A1	It is like that, that "Naruto" is a little of a special girl (A2: Weeell) "Naruto" is a boy
15	A2	Yeah he is a boy but he goes and changes himself in the beginning into a naked girl sometimes (Interviewer laughs) (A1 laughs) because he wants to tease his teacher and stuff like that, and it is always painted with big clouds in front of those (...)

Appendix S

Section	Person	Comment
1	B1	Who else had survived did you say?
2	B2	Erm, "Aqua Times"
3	B1	Oh yeah that's right. Yeah when they just wrote from Japan "Oh they survived" I just "Yeah. That's good"
4	Interviewer	(Laughs) Hooray for that (laughs) (B2: Yeah) But that is good of course you could say (laughs)
5	B2	Yeah but still it was so big that you become worried
6	Interviewer	That's understandable (...) Erm, I, I asked before with this if you have to know manga in order to be able to cosplay. Is it. Erm, and, erm can? Would I be able to cosplay for example even if, well I know a bit about manga but if, we can say my girlfriend for example. She doesn't know, erm, a thing about manga. Would she be able to, like, go in and cosplay, erm (...) or do you think that you have to know a bit about the culture or
7	B2	Well, erm, I think that if you don't know anything about the culture and what cosplay is then...
8	B1	It becomes somewhat more of a masquerade
9	B2	Yeah masquerade yeah, like, "I dress up as this character because that seems cool" (...) Then maybe you don't think about that it is a really big hobby to cosplay. But then again. It's of course clear that you could do it, but not like. Not without some kind of assistance, someone who can help and, erm, fix it
10	B1	Yeah and maybe explain a bit who it actually is that you dress up as if you have never read a manga before (...)
11	B2	Yeah and then there are a lot (...) What was it I was going to say? No I forgot (laughs)
12	Interviewer	(Laughs) Erm, what was it I thought then? Yeah with cosplay as well, erm, is there, like, I know that at conventions there are competitions as well. But is it also a competition within the culture in itself without being at cosplay, that you want to look good or that you, as you for example do, do your own costumes and stuff
13	B2	Yeah, like, when you are cosplaying you are thinking that you want to do it as good as possible

Appendix T

Section	Person	Comment
1	A2	Yeah (laughs) But I think, like, if I look at my little cousin I think that this influence is very good for her in a way (A1: Yes) Then maybe she can skip Yaoi and Shonenai (Interviewer laughs) (A1 laughs) but, erm, that she. I felt that she. From her being insecure. She often seemed sad before a bit because. Well I felt that she had pressure on her from school (A1: Yes) and when she came there she became more open and she is really longing to go back and everything and she. And I also got, I don't know. She told me later also how (A1 laughs) she was doing in school. Before, she hadn't said anything to me. But after that convention-thing she started talking and "Oh, if my friends, if the people in the class could see this" or what, well I don't know exactly what she said, but. Oh yeah: "They are all the time: Oh like this and this and this" and she really told me exactly (Interviewer laughs) how she experience things, she told me things that I didn't. "Should you, should you really say something like that to me?" (Interviewer laughs) (A1 laughs) So I can feel that she is more open, and I think that it is. You get more self,erm, esteem through that stuff (Interviewer: Mmh) quite simply. But there are negative sides at conventions absolutely (A1: Yeah) I mean I know a girl, in fact I have known more people who suddenly go into the cosplay too much (A1: Yeah). One girl I know, she thought that she. She told me (A1: She...) that she thought that she was the character she was cosplaying all the time to a degree. (Interviewer: Oj)
2	A1	She has, like (...) I know people who (...) As good as have changed their name, have changed their identities (A2: Mmh). Become a character (Interviewer: Oj) and (...) that is not (A2: That is not good) good. It (...)
3	A2	This girl has on the other hand told me about that, erm, she was told by her mom: "But, but, I want my little daughter back" and stuff like that, and then she began feeling that "This isn't okay". She still has on her Facebook that she is called, like, her real name, but in the middle name or something the characters name then (Interviewer: Mmh) And, erm, her boyfriend is the same way, so she about, not necessarily (...) Necessarily like the character from the beginning but her boyfriend said it would suit her and then she also did that. Then she cosplayed her and since then she also loves the pair, like that then. Erm... But anyway. It just becomes too much competition if somebody see him/herself as a character, they see somebody cosplaying that character, then they become, like angry (A1: Yeah) Like: "I am that character. How can they think that they are?", like that (Interviewer: Aha) (A1: Yeah) and that is just. Then you go too far (A1: Yeah) It isn't healthy any more then either. (A1: No). You have to live
4	A1	You have to live to be able to be yourself, like (A2: Mmh) You can, erm (...) You can have like, feel a connection to the character (A2: Mmh) (Interviewer: Mmh) I think that is really good. I feel a connection to all my characters (A2: Mmh) because I don't want to cosplay a character that I really don't feel a connection with (A2: Mmh) It's (...) I wouldn't be able to do it properly then

		(A2: No) Like, but if I feel that it becomes too much, then I will let it go. I don't want to be imprisoned in a (...) a nightmare. (Interviewer: Mmh) And that is what it would become.
5	A2	No, I have never felt like a character like that, I have never had that problem but that is also because I have had so many different. I think "Naruto" is still the character I feel the most (...) That, erm, that is my cosplay thing in a way.