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Article

Slashing Swords: Identity and Culture of the Live Action Role Playing (LARP) Community in Jakarta

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Abstracts: The Jakarta LARP community, established in March 2020 and primarily active in Gelora Bung Karno, fosters inclusivity, diversity, and physical role-playing activities. It adheres to a policy of excluding ultra-nationalist ideologies and integrates new members despite language barriers. Bruhn (2011) defines this kind of community sharing the same goals, values, and lifestyles, while McMillan & Chavis (1986) outline four aspects of the sense of community. The research discovered that communities endure by utilizing solidarity built on the basis of their peculiarities. This study employed ethnographic methods alongside grounded research to identify the community's culture and their efforts to sustain and utilize it as community solidarity.

Keywords: community; identity; culture; solidarity; *Live Action Role Playing*

1. Introduction

The Jakarta LARP Community was founded around March 2020. This community is a role-playing community based in Jakarta. It was established around March 2020, but due to the pandemic, the community went dormant until a year later. After that, the community started gathering at Gelora Bung Karno until now. Along the way, they also established branches (chapters) in Semarang and Bandung.

The founders of this community are Radit and Crystal. Radit is a game developer. While studying abroad, he became acquainted with role-playing games like Dungeons and Dragons. Upon returning to Indonesia, he invited Crystal to join the community he established. Crystal had LARP experience before while studying in England, and equipped with her experience as a LARPer she helped in forming the rules and game mechanisms locally. Another member is Martin. Martin works at a Production House, and he also makes a lot of equipment for the activities, like weapons models for LARPing. Lastly, there is Michael. He works in the forestry sector in Semarang and travels to Jakarta every 2-3 weeks to participate in LARP events.

The primary activity of this community revolves around physical role-playing, known as Live-Action Roleplay (LARP). In the realm of role-playing, the community utilizes various tools to enhance its experiences. Among these tools is a *codex*, a book containing rules and a brief narrative detailing the fantasy world where battles unfold. Moreover, participants wield weapons crafted from foam and other materials, while donning costumes fashioned from a diverse range of materials, including paper, aluminum, and foam. Some of these items are handcrafted, while others are sourced externally.

Typically, members gather around 10 a.m. at Gelora Bung Karno. While LARP Jakarta previously convened at Pintu Kuning, they have recently relocated to a grass field in Taman Kota. Upon gathering, there's usually a period of waiting until sufficient members assemble. During this interval, community members engage in casual conversation and minor skirmishes prior to the main session's commencement. These sessions take on various forms, spanning from *tag-of-war* games with weapons to group battles. Sessions generally conclude around 12:30-13:00, after which members organize their equipment and belongings before dispersing.

Individuals interested in joining need only visit the community's gathering place and express their desire to participate. Some may bring their own equipment, while others arrive empty-handed.

Nonetheless, all are welcome to join by borrowing additional equipment provided for all members. The community prides itself on inclusivity, embracing individuals from diverse ethnic, political, and sexual backgrounds.

2. Concepts and Theories

2.1. Community

In Bruhn (2011), the concept of community is explained in general terms, indicating that there exists a relationship among a group of people, whether in a specific geographical location or in the virtual world, that transcends ordinary recognition (relationships). This relationship is closer than ordinary connections because the group shares common goals, values, and lifestyles that strengthen each other, create positive feelings, and generate levels of commitment and shared responsibility. Communities have variations, just like the individuals who comprise them, but they also reflect a level of firmness in fellowship and a sense of ownership among members.

2.1.1. Sense of Community

Sarason (1974) in Bruhn (2011) states that the sense of community is a "feeling", "awareness", or "level of comfort" that everyone is working together towards common goals, or participating in activities or events that depend on the cooperation of each individual (Bruhn, 2011). In communities, there is a basic need for belonging, which includes the need for frequent personal contact and bonds with others that provide stability and emotional attention (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Meanwhile, according to McMillan & Chavis (1986), there are four aspects of the sense of community. The first aspect is the sense of membership, which is being part of a team. The second aspect is influence, meaning, believing as a team member that one has a certain level of strength and can make a difference in outcomes. Third, there is integration and fulfillment of needs, meaning that one can fulfill the team's needs through their individual skills and abilities. Finally, there is the aspect of shared emotional relationships, meaning that one feels joy in participating in collective efforts and enjoys the acceptance of other team members.

2.1.2. Multiple Community

Multiple communities explain that one individual can be a member of several communities. Most people are connected to numerous networks in various types of personal communities. Some individuals strive to explore which networks or communities are most beneficial or useful to them. There are good reasons to consider a person's decision to join various networks or communities. It must be considered that not all social networks or communities provide the same accessibility, accountability, availability, intimacy, privacy, or rewards. The advantage of being tied to several networks (communities) is that one can gain access to broader resources through network relationships. Some networks provide a lot of flexibility, strength, availability, accessibility, and benefits (Craven & Wellman, 1973; Bruhn, 2011).

2.1.3. Excluded Community

Social exclusion is the process of ostracism, either wholly or partially, from a system within a society (Barata, 2000; in Bruhn, 2011). Social exclusion typically arises from a combination of low income, unemployment, poor health, lack of skills, inadequate housing, lifestyle-related stigma, stereotypes and prejudices, and enforced geographic isolation. An Excluded Community is a community of those who are marginalized due to differences in behavior, attitudes, appearance, opinions, perspectives, or residing in a different location from the majority group in society. Social exclusion results in economic, social, political, and cultural losses. Socially marginalized groups cannot fully participate as citizens in the society where they reside.

2.1.4. Social Inclusion

Anver Saloojee (2003) in Bruhn (2011) explains that the value of social inclusion is meeting the challenges posed by diversity, namely building a tradition of equality and incorporating equality as a national value. Saloojee elaborates on five points about social inclusion:

1. Social inclusion is a political response to exclusion. Social inclusion is more than just removing barriers; it is about a comprehensive vision that encompasses all.
2. Social inclusion is proactive, involving active interventions to promote rights and responsibilities.
3. Social inclusion is both a process and an outcome, which can hold social institutions accountable for policies and serve as a measure for good governance.
4. Social inclusion is about advocacy and transformation. The vision of social inclusion is a positive one that binds individuals, groups, and social institutions to action.
5. Social inclusion embraces. It places the idea of democratic citizenship against formal citizenship.

2.1.5. Self Help and Support Group

Self-help groups and support groups are groups consisting of individuals with common bonds who voluntarily come together to share, reach out, and learn from each other in a trustworthy, supportive, and open environment (Knight, 2007). The appeal of self-help and support groups lies in their availability and accessibility; they are available on the internet in the form of websites, chat rooms, discussion groups, forums, and message boards. The benefits of self-help and support groups include providing a space for individuals to share their stories, discuss their reactions and frustrations, discover new coping skills, camaraderie, and support from others, learn skills they may have forgotten, share information and resources, learn problem-solving techniques, and gain new friends and connections.

3. Research Methods

3.1. Primary and Secondary Data

The researchers plan to collect data both through primary and secondary methods. Primary data collection will involve conducting in-depth interviews with the leaders and members of the LARP Jakarta community. The researchers aim to use in-depth interviews to understand the history, objectives, and interactions among members. Secondary data collection will involve gathering information from posts uploaded on the Instagram account @larp.jkt and from online media articles. The research team members will begin observation through Fris as a Gatekeeper within the community and engage in the activities conducted. The process of collecting observational data will be conducted gradually by team members with consideration given to the closeness between the community and the researchers.

Researchers will gradually ask research questions using oral methods for questions that are private and general, and written for questions that are specific. Researchers will gradually build rapport with the community, considering the backgrounds of the members being studied. The number of researchers conducting field observations will be adjusted based on the number of community members participating in activities during the designated research period. Questions with specific nature and goals will be delivered by research members who have better communication skills and closer personal relationships within the community being studied.

3.1.1. Ethnography

The data collection method for this research uses ethnographic methods, with observation and in-depth interviews being more dominant in gathering evidence for analysis. Ethnographic method emphasizes detailed descriptions of a culture within a group, using perspectives from different cultural actors to understand the meanings and purposes of culture from the viewpoint of the actors to enhance understanding (Neuman, 2014). Moreover, when conducting field research with

ethnographic methods, important events in the community are documented in the form of photos, field notes, and interview recordings.

Observation in this research is conducted using the *Overt Ethnography* system because the community being studied is aware that they are being observed and have agreed to be researched and observed. *Overt Ethnography* is a type of ethnographic research method where the researcher's status as a researcher who will study a community is known by the members of the community to be studied, and the community accepts the presence of the researcher in the community (Bryman, 2008). In the method of observation and collecting sufficient data, the team considers including one of the research team members who has also become a gatekeeper of the community to participate in the activities conducted by the community to better understand the sensations, emotions, and perspectives of community members when engaging in communal activities of the community. This method is chosen because to build trust and good rapport with the community being studied, researchers are also involved or "pretend" to be involved in the activities conducted by the community (Babbie, 2013).

3.1.1. Steps to Gathering Data

The application of the outlined method in researching the LARP Jakarta community begins with firstly seeking permission from the community's leaders and members and establishing personal rapport with its members through Fris Valentino Lie, serving as the community's Gatekeeper and as a bridge between the research team and the subject under investigation. Subsequently, the research team prepares a list of questions to be posed to the relevant community. Field research and observation take place when the community engages in their activities in their habitual environment, which serves as their regular activity location. Field research involves researchers observing every activity conducted by the community and attempting to communicate with community members without displaying research notes and question lists. In addition to concealing the question list, research questions posed to informants are "hidden" within dialogues that do not directly express the research questions in a more informal and comprehensible language. The dialogue format created by the researcher addresses personal matters with informants without diminishing the essence of the research questions. The questions asked are also formulated so that the statements made by informants in their answers address other related research questions previously formulated, thereby reducing the number of questions posed.

4. Findings and Analysis

4.1. Community's Overview

Based on the research conducted, our research team successfully obtained sufficient data to address the research questions. Following the observation strategy outlined in the previous section, we commenced field research on the LARP Jakarta community on Sunday morning, December 12, 2021, and concluded field observations at the last meeting on December 19, 2021.

Field research began with observing the activities of community members in the Gelora Bung Karno area in the city park across from the Al Bina GBK mosque. This location was recently used as a gathering place because previously, activities were held in the *Pintu Kuning* area within the inner circle of the Gelora Bung Karno Stadium complex. Considering the increasing number of community members and the need for a larger arena, the community needed to find another location for community activities within the Gelora Bung Karno Stadium area. The research team members present in this observation were Yoga Susatyo, Michael Douglas, and Fris Valentino Lie, who also serves as the community's gatekeeper. Nandi Karuniko will be responsible for transcribing the recording results and proofreading the paper and research findings.

Upon the initial field observation, researchers found that the community is inclusive in its recruitment of new members but maintains a distance from newcomers who enter the community area but do not intend to participate in the hobby activities held within the community. Additionally, there was an impression that the attending research team, who had previously informed other

community members and disclosed the origin of the research institution and the research goals, was present to conduct research on the community. The research team made personal approaches to several community members and the community leader to establish rapport with the researched community. From the observations, the number of community members present at the meeting on December 12 was 16, comprising 15 men and one woman. Of the sixteen members present, the researchers successfully identified several names and backgrounds of potential informants for the research.

The first member interviewed by the researchers was Radit, whose position in the community is both de facto and de jure as the leader of the LARP Jakarta community. During the researcher's encounter with him, Radit was acting as the referee of a tournament organized by the community. Radit holds a background in Visual Communication Design (DKV) from a leading private university in Indonesia and continued his studies in Singapore. Currently, he works in the animation department of a gaming company and serves as a history researcher for the company. The second member interviewed was Crystal, a co-founder of LARP, specifically in Jakarta. Previously involved in LARP communities in the United Kingdom, Crystal established LARP in Jakarta as a community to "cure longing" and a gathering place for individuals sharing her hobby interests.

4.2. Community's Background

The researcher approached Radit through the gatekeeper in a professional and formal manner (notified about the interview), but in the field practice, data extraction took place informally. Radit used two languages in communication: English and Indonesian. Radit responded to the questions given in detail, initially using somewhat stiff language structure, but gradually becoming informal over time. Radit also seemed open to new members who joined in the middle of the month. Mike could be communicated with little by little through conversations related to his action figures. The language used in communication was primarily English, with Indonesian for elaboration. According to Radit's testimony, LARP as an organization was formed in February 2020. Initially, LARP consisted of 10 people and conducted activities within the GBK ring. Promotion and recruitment were initially done via Facebook and word of mouth. LARP has 3 chapters: Bandung with 7 members, Jakarta with 25 members, and Semarang with 34 members. The most active chapter is in Jakarta, while the Semarang chapter has not yet conducted regular activities. The establishment of LARP was aided by a co-founder who also participated in LARP communities in the United Kingdom (UK) and brought it to Indonesia. Her name is Crystal, a woman of Chinese ethnic background.



LARP emphasizes norms and rules called the "Codex". The Codex contains rules about the roles of each member and how they play their roles. Within the Codex, there is lore, which is the storyline of the entire LARP universe. There are races in the Lore, or also called storylines, where these races. Members of this community are diverse; however, the majority share similar hobbies, namely an interest in history, outdoor sports, and a fondness for certain popular cultures (especially Star Wars and Dungeon and Dragons).

Additionally, members of this LARP community also belong to other communities with varying hobbies. Radit, along with some other members, is also part of the Airsoft Gun community. The dual membership of LARP community members also indicates that each community an individual belongs to does not provide the same level of fulfillment and equivalence for each member of its group (Bruhn, 2011). Furthermore, based on the researcher's observation, it's unique that the majority of senior members in the community are of Chinese ethnicity. On a different note, during an interview conducted on December 19, 2021, Radit also mentioned that the LARP community formed because of the common hobbies they shared, and the openness within the community itself to accept new members.

Based on this explanation, using the theory proposed by Ferdinand Tonnies in his theory of *gemeinschaft* and *gesellschaft*, we can identify the background aspects of the groups that make them a community or classified as *gemeinschaft*. Tonnies stated that *gemeinschaft*, or also called community, is a form of social organization based on similarity of blood ties, region, or similarity of thought (Macionis, 2018). In the phenomenon of the LARP community, especially the Jakarta Chapter, we can see that the group is informally formed by activities that are relatively favored by all community members, united by common hobbies and interests of each member, which in practice may influence other members as well. When researchers engage in conversations with group members, it is revealed that most of them have good knowledge of European history and culture, while the rest tend to have a better understanding of Japanese culture with anime as a reference source.

4.3. Community's Interactions and Cohesivity

The interactions that occur within the community are informal. The use of words and language is not in formal form. There are two language uses in the community: English and Indonesian. When engaging in role-playing, the use of English is more intensive in the context of the dialogue. However, for communication and judging, Indonesian is still more intensive. The use of language indicates segregation among groups; those who are more proficient in English prefer to use English among themselves, and when using English, it also indicates their educational class.

Then, there is a pattern of grouping behavior among community members when they are taking a break. Grouping behavior seems to be based on several factors: proficiency in English, length of time in the community, and technical ability during the game. Those who are less fluent in English will gather closer to the bags and LARP equipment in the back of the arena. They tend to cluster together.



Conversely, groups that are more technically skilled, proficient in English, and have been members longer tend to gather in smaller groups of 1-4 individuals at most in a low slope near the tournament arena, which is slightly closer to the arena and located in front of the merchandise areas.

Their relationships appear to be closer and more private (such as hugging and embracing, which do not occur in the newly joined or less proficient English-speaking group)



Newly joined members or conscripts of the community share identical similarities: ineffective communication skills, awkwardness, and unclear information delivery. However, researchers were able to understand the purpose of the ongoing conversations and build trust with them. Their acceptance into the group is equal to senior members, but even so, their willingness to integrate with more members is still limited by language, and their interactions seem stiff. Senior members do not see this as a "boundary" separating the two groups in the community, and senior community members will make every effort to involve newly joined members in conversations and communal activities within the community.

Meanwhile, regarding the cohesion of the LARP Jakarta group, during the interview held on December 19, 2021, Crystal, as the co-founder of LARP and the individual who introduced this community in Indonesia, expressed her reasons regarding the cohesion of members in her community. According to her, the members of this community persist in remaining a cohesive entity because of the acceptance and warmth provided by the community to its members. Furthermore, she also added that the more someone is liked within the group, the closer their relationship is with other group members. Additionally, Crystal mentioned several factors that keep LARP Jakarta united in a solid community; one of them being its policy instructing all LARP members to set aside personal political views and ideologies when engaging in communal activities, as manifested in the motto "*Leave your Politics out the Door*". Moreover, even though there are no restrictions on who can join this community, there are implicit prohibitions regarding who cannot join the LARP community. Based on the statement from one senior member in the LARP community who refused to be named, the LARP community prohibits any prospective members with ultra-nationalist ideologies (commonly referred to in the community as "NAZI") from joining the LARP community. All elements with Ultra-Nationalist-Authoritarian or Ultra-Conservative political ideologies are rejected from joining or expressing themselves within this community.

In particular, this prohibition applies strictly within the community with the aim of maintaining community integrity and strengthening cohesion among community members. Nevertheless, based on the researcher's observations, each individual community member is free to express their views, including political views, as long as they are not participating in communal community activities, even though some of the topics of conversation may provoke impulsive reactions leading to ultraconservative ideas.

Based on this description, using Loewy's theory (in Bruhn, 2011) of competent communities as communities that share certain elements (such as values, perspectives, ideologies) and unify the group, to explain interactions among community members, we can see informal interaction patterns within the community, with acceptance of each member's identity allowing them to freely communicate with anyone, but limited by the English language proficiency practiced by the community. One of the research members also admitted difficulty when interacting with senior members due to language differences and shifting from one language to another. However, even so,

senior members in the community are nurturing towards new members who have just joined the community. In addition to teaching techniques, senior members also encourage new members to engage in conversations and interactions during community activities.

4.4. Community's Identity and Culture

According to Radit's explanation and acknowledgment, members of this community do not overly emphasize their identity as members of the LARP community. However, each LARP member has their own pride and sense of belonging as a member of LARP Jakarta. The most visible identity in the LARP Jakarta community is the identity as "fans of European culture and Western gaming activities" and "intellectual historical enthusiasts." Intellectual prowess is manifested through language proficiency and the core arguments in debates during community activities. The core arguments often discussed include online gaming, medieval European history and culture, contemporary world history, and global conspiracies. Based on field observations, there are two language uses in this community: English and Indonesian. During role-playing, the use of English appears more intensive in the context of dialogue. However, for communication and judging, Indonesian is still more intensively used. The language usage indicates segregation among groups; those proficient in English tend to use English among themselves, and when using English, it also reflects their educational background and level of intellectualism.

This group also displays strong self-confidence (confirmed by its leader as well), as evidenced by their lack of concern for anyone watching them (even though their members may appear childish despite being adults). For instance, even during a tournament, when the community's activities were unexpectedly watched by local picnickers who were curious, and surprisingly, by a group of British expatriates (who even approached to watch because they were intrigued by the English language used in their skirmishes).



This group also possesses material and immaterial culture. Based on the observations conducted by the research team, the material culture present within the community includes the use of props shaped like replicas of sharp weapons, which come in various forms aiming to represent the original weapons' shapes according to their history and function. These tools are often referred to as props. The properties are generally made from hard rubber, rigid plastic fiber, or carbon foam. These properties are specifically constructed to withstand fairly harsh and rough treatment, especially for striking and slashing. The downside is that the more expensive a property is, the better the quality of the material and its durability. Therefore, some cheaper properties are not strong enough to perform certain movements and maneuvers in LARP theatrical performances. In addition to weapons, they also produce other props that function as shields to block blows from the props used for striking. At least, there are four to five types of swords, three types of axes, and two forms of shields used in this community activity. As for other equipment, some members use hand, elbow, knee, and shin guards that are often used in Airsoft Gun community activities.



Meanwhile, another form of material culture is the Codex, which serves as written rules about the game and drama performed. It should be noted that the Codex does not contain rules regarding who and the criteria for individuals who may or may not join the community, and exclusively discusses the technical implementation of LARP activities in the context of drama and game rules. The Codex, although technical in nature, is informally applied within the community given the young age of the community and the changing nature of its members. The Codex is utilized as an outline of game rules and existing storylines created within the LARP group.

Next, there is also an aspect of immaterial culture within the LARP Jakarta community. The immaterial culture present in this community consists of background music used during dramas or games, player formations during gameplay, slogans issued during specific events in the storyline, and strategies created by team members when faced with certain game situations that help them coordinate better. The first aspect of immaterial culture is background music. The background music used in LARP games and dramas features a Medieval-Fantasy genre that accompanies every ongoing game. The term "game" is used by the researcher to represent the condition of the team performing ritual reenactments or engaging in sparring and tournaments by attempting to strike specific body parts of opponents from the opposing team to score points and reduce their opponent's points. To prevent the opposing team from winning the ongoing game, a group of individuals in the team must cooperate to create formations and devise strategies to defend or attack with the aim of minimizing point loss and keeping team members alive. The point system is based on hits that occur and has corresponding consequences when hitting specific body parts. For example, when one opposing member is struck in the leg, they must move slower and take one step at a time using only one leg while mimicking the expression of pain as if directly struck by a sharp weapon in real life. In the researcher's findings, each sparring member has 3 points, and when all points are depleted, the individual is declared dead in battle. Points can decrease if an individual receives a blow to their body parts, and it is also calculated according to the applicable rationality (for example, if hit in the stomach and head, points can decrease more than if hit in the arms or legs).

In addition to background music and sparring or tournament rituals, there are also slogans performed during sparring activities in this community. For example, when a team member, in the context of the storyline, is engaged in a one-on-one or one-on-two match, if a condition arises that causes one of the opposing parties to suffer a reduction in points to a critical condition and nearly dead (losing all points) but there are some movements that prevent them from dying immediately, then after deciding which player is more dominant to win the battle to "finish off" their helpless

opponent with an "execution right" implemented by shouting "execute!" or "executing!" while striking, slamming, or stabbing the opponent with a weapon where the contact location ensures that the loser will lose points until declared dead. The individual "executed" also wholeheartedly portrays the expression and reaction of someone who - literally - is being executed to death. There are also formations and strategies as the immaterial culture of this community. The formations and strategies applied in communal activities are abstract and adaptive; when many members of the opposing team are large-bodied, the strategy used tends to be defensive rather than offensive, and the formation taken is in the shape of a semi-circle. On the attacking side, even though they may not have as large a body as the defending group, they adapt their strategy by attacking from the sides and rear, thus reducing the defensive team's points more quickly and the attacking team gaining an advantage.



4.5. Community's Sense of Belonging

According to Radit, based on an interview conducted on December 12, 2021, people join LARP because of the characteristics and shared hobbies of its members who enjoy playing with foam swords, the sense of camaraderie due to liking certain cultures (considered unpopular and odd in society) and being accepted within it, the need for a group to formally identify and legitimize their hobby (imagining fights using weapons), and having a place to express attachment and the need for friendship and affection (as most seem to console one another). A prominent characteristic of almost all members of this community is having communication issues (especially in speaking). For instance;

lacking the ability to use and organize effective language variety, expressing opinions, using language flexibly but unstructuredly, and self-confidence.

Childish behavior, and the result of exposure and socialization to external cultures such as Japanese and Western cultures (which sometimes depict fighting scenes but cannot be replicated by members within the community in their native society). The desire to replicate these scenes drives them to join, including realizing their fantasies of fighting as seen in their shows. According to Crystal, the LARP community provides a safe space for its members to freely express themselves in the context of communal games. As long as members comply with the community's rules and values, and embody their roles in the existing Lore, they are accepted into the group. Subsequently, Crystal and Radit made personal statements regarding what motivates individuals to join the LARP community. Radit stated that the LARP community is dominated by those with similar interests, whether in history, culture, or just for fun. Meanwhile, according to Crystal, what unites them is the feeling of "*we are freaks, but we're free*". Their shared eccentricity makes them feel safe and comfortable in a group that behaves strangely together. Their peculiarity does not extend to the level of nonconformity seen in public (such as wearing mismatched and flamboyant clothing).

Meanwhile, according to Radit and Crystal, the factor that keeps them within this community is "*koibito*," which can be interpreted from a Japanese phrase as the affection from community members who have become like "significant others" in a close-knit, informal, and supportive community. The community's attitude of "acceptance" and "support" is crucial in maintaining the integrity and interpersonal relationships within the LARP Jakarta community to sustain the integrity and security of social relationships among its members. Furthermore, unexpected factors that have kept this group united are that nearly all group members have autism or ADHD. This claim is based on Crystal's acknowledgment of being autistic, and Radit admitting to having ADHD as he falls within the spectrum. Upon closer examination, the validity of this claim may be reinforced by observing the behavioral difficulties experienced by community members, such as communication challenges, impulsive behavior, and obsession with an object (in this case, several LARP members are obsessed).

Other abnormal behaviors, such as making specific gestures while communicating, are also observed in some LARP members. However, from the researcher's personal perspective, this community provides an excellent communication "laboratory" for members who lack communication skills and feel ostracized from their original community/society or even do not have a community previously. By training the confidence of community members to communicate, it will trigger self-assurance in members who experience communication difficulties or feel afraid to communicate. Because of the feeling of acceptance – as in the slogan "*We are cringe but we're free*" – it indicates the existence of a self-help community as a place of refuge ready to be a protector and a "home" that provides warmth for those who are marginalized.

Based on the presentation, the researcher found similarities in the characteristics of the community with the concept of Excluded Community discussed by Bruhn (2011). Bruhn mentions that an excluded community is a group of individuals who are marginalized due to differences in behavior, attitude, appearance, opinions, or residence compared to the majority group in society. Bruhn, in his table (2011), mentions several relevant characteristics in this case, namely:

- Community members are individuals excluded from their original community,
- the relationships within the excluded group community have medium to strong cohesion, with informal social control,
- There is stigma against members of the community group, and
- There are efforts to make the community inclusive.

4.6. Community's Social Cohesion

From the phenomenon of the LARP community, we can observe the close social cohesion among its members, as demonstrated by the support system provided by senior members to newcomers. Furthermore, the strong community cohesion is due to the "*koibito*" system and the application of a not overly strong social control system; for instance, even though there are prohibitions on certain

political behaviors within the community, expressing political views in non-provocative behavior is still tolerated. Additionally, in line with Crystal's motto about community members being "We are freak/cringe but we're free", it also indicates the stigma against these community members receiving negative impressions from society. While this stigma may have some truth to it, not fully representing the entire community, it indirectly labels every involved member as "strange and non-conforming to society at large". However, members of the community group still use common sense when behaving in places other than their activity arenas. Radit stated that no LARP member showcases LARP identity by traveling in crowded places wearing armor and carrying replica swords just to display their membership. The stigma experienced by LARP community members makes them more inclusive towards newcomers who wish to join the community. Despite experiencing imperfect acceptance from society, this community still upholds the community values as behavioral guidelines, maintains group cohesion, and provides a "safe space" for those marginalized due to behavioral and thought differences by eliminating prejudice in group interactions.

Moreover, the behavior of community members who feel accepted in a community that appreciates their "oddness" brings about a "sense of belonging" or also known as "feeling part of a group" within those community members. Besides the sense of belonging, there is also a sense of community that emerges among community members. Sense of Community according to McMillan & Chavis (1986) consists of memberships; situations where community members feel they are part of the community, Influence; the influence of group members on their group and the influence of group members on the group itself, Integration and Fulfillment of need; when the group can fulfill the needs of its members by being a part of the group, and Shared emotional connections; commitments, views, and/or beliefs held by all members of the community.

Based on the case we discussed, the implementation of McMillan & Chavis' theory is as follows: From the first aspect, there is a characteristic of membership in the LARP Jakarta community in the form of the conscious attitude of community members that they are part of the LARP community and consciously follow the customs and traditions within the community, even though they may belong to other communities outside of LARP activities with different values. Additionally, the influence aspect is evident from the ability of new members who have just joined LARP to communicate or participate in communal community activities without rigid or intentional limitations. New members can protest to the community leader if something unfavorable happens to them while competing. This right also makes the position of both new and old members equal and equally strong in the community.

Furthermore, the integration and fulfillment of needs are reflected in the "koibito" philosophy within the community, where acceptance and affection are factors that make members remain in the community while feeling accepted despite all the quirks of behavior and peculiarities. Lastly, shared emotional connections manifest in the values of affection and inclusivity in the Koibito motto and the motto "*we are freaks/cringe but we're free*," which demonstrate the values of acceptance and affection held collectively, thus maintaining the integrity and cohesion of the group. The prohibition of expressing politics within the community is also a form of shared emotional connections because even if there are members who disagree with someone else's political views, they cannot freely express them in the ongoing forum, and all members' activities are focused on ongoing gaming and sparring or tournaments.

5. Conclusions

The Live-Action Roleplay (LARP) community is a group engaged in physical role-playing activities, using various props to support the roles they play. These props include a codex or rule book containing game rules and brief stories about the fantasy world where they engage in battles, as well as weapons and costumes made from materials such as paper, foam, aluminum, and others. The community was established in March 2020 in Jakarta, but they already have branches in Semarang and Bandung. The LARP Jakarta community typically gathers in the Gelora Bung Karno area around the grass field in Taman Kota. Their activities vary, primarily involving tag-of-war

battles with weapons and group warfare. The community is inclusive, accepting members from diverse ethnic, political, and sexual backgrounds.

The formation of the LARP Jakarta community stems from shared hobbies and interests among its members, which in practice influence each other, with most having good knowledge of European history and culture, while others tend to understand Japanese culture as a reference. This aligns with Ferdinand Tönnies' theory known as *gemeinschaft*, which describes a social organization based on similarities in blood relations, regions, or thoughts (Macionis, 2018). Interactions within this community are informal, using both English and Indonesian languages. The use of two languages indicates a segregation among them and reflects differences in education levels among members. Those fluent in English tend to use it among themselves, but this language difference does not hinder the warmth or acceptance within the LARP community. In line with Loewy's description in his theory of competent communities, a competent community shares certain values, ideologies, perspectives, and unifies the group (Bruhn, 2011).

Members of the LARP community do not necessarily outwardly display their identity as LARP participants, but they take pride in being part of this community. Their most visible identity is as enthusiasts of European culture and Western and historical gaming, manifested through their language proficiency and argumentation during community activities. This group exhibits both material and immaterial cultures. The material culture is evident in their use of specific attributes like replica sharp weapons representing their original forms according to history and function. Another form is the use of a codex containing written rules for the games and performances. The immaterial culture in this community includes background music during performances or games with a Medieval-Fantasy genre accompanying every game played.

As briefly mentioned, members of this community share a common hobby of swordplay and a sense of camaraderie due to their appreciation for a specific culture considered unusual and unpopular by society. Therefore, this community exists as a safe space for them to express their interests and hobbies. Furthermore, another factor that unites this group is that almost all members have autism or ADHD. This is reinforced by observing the behavioral conditions of community members who experience communication difficulties, behave impulsively, and become obsessed with a particular object. From this exposition, the similarity in the situation within this LARP community with the concept of an Excluded Community described in Bruhn (2011) can be seen—a community of individuals marginalized due to differences in behavior, attitudes, appearance, opinions, perspectives, or residence compared to the majority group in society. The behavior of members in this community can also be explained by the concepts of "sense of belonging" and "sense of community." According to McMillan & Chavis (1986), Sense of Community consists of membership, where community members feel they are part of a community; Influence, the impact of group members on the group and the influence of group members on themselves; Integration and Fulfillment of need, when the group is able to meet the needs of its members by being a part of that group; and Shared emotional connections, commitment, views, and/or beliefs held collectively by all community members.

The LARP Jakarta community is a highly positive and supportive group for its members, serving as a support system. Informal relationships among members are crucial to maintaining close interactions and reflecting a sense of family within the community. It would be beneficial for the LARP Jakarta community to recruit more new members while enforcing the established criteria and boundaries to maintain group cohesion, separate from practical political influences unrelated to the community's goals and close informal relationships guided by the "Koibito" philosophy that serves as a guiding principle in interacting with fellow LARP community members.

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