

# A BRIEF REPORT ON DIFFERENCES IN BIG FIVE PERSONALITY DIMENSIONS BETWEEN ANIME FAN COSPLAYERS AND NON-COSPLAYERS

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## Abstract

We tested whether there exist differences in the personality traits of anime fans who cosplay as compared to non-cosplaying anime fans. With regard to the Big Five personality traits, cosplayers scored higher than non-cosplayers on extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness. In contrast, non-cosplayers scored higher on emotional stability. The results are discussed with regard to existing research on the personality traits of actors, creativity, and parasocial relationships.

*Keywords:* anime, cosplay, cosplayers, big five, personality, extraversion, openness

## Introduction

Anime fans are people who have a passionate interest in Japanese animation and manga. Demographically, anime fans are comprised primarily of young males who self-identify as nerds and

tend to be obsessive about their favorite anime/manga (Reysen, Plante, Roberts, Gerbasi, & Shaw, 2016). While anime fans differ in the way their interest manifests itself – ranging from drawing anime to watching their favorite show to attending conventions – one of the most iconic and recognizable ways is through the practice of cosplaying, especially at fan conventions (Davis, 2017). Cosplay, a portmanteau of the words “costume” and “play,” involves fans dressing up – often with impressively elaborate or detailed costumes – as an anime, manga, or video game character (Winge, 2006). Although cosplay is hardly unique to the anime fandom community, occurring in science fiction, Disney, steampunk, and comic fandoms (Langsford, 2014; McCudden, 2011), cosplay does have a long history of association with the anime fandom in particular (Winge, 2006). Illustrating this point, anime fans attending Anime Expo cited cosplaying or watching cosplayers as one of the biggest reasons for attending the convention, second only to meeting other fans (Davis, 2017).

Even more striking than the prominence of cosplay in the global anime fandom is the similarity in underlying motivation among cosplayers worldwide. In one survey, for example, Benino (2014) asked young Filipino cosplayers to indicate the benefits they got through cosplaying. Beyond meeting new people and making friends, the cosplayers indicated that cosplaying boosted their self-confidence and self-esteem and allowed them to express their artistic and creative side through costume construction. In a series of interviews with Taiwanese cosplayers, Chen (2007) noted similar themes of boosted confidence and artistic expression. The same theme of confidence in interacting with strangers emerged in a series of interviews with American cosplayers (Ramirez, 2017), while a survey of mostly US cosplayers cited creative and artistic expression as the third most endorsed reason for cosplaying, behind only fun and appreciation of a character (Rosenberg & Letamendi, 2013). While motivations may illuminate specific reasons for participating in cosplay, there may also be personality differences between cosplayers and non-cosplayers. Therefore, in the present research we examine differences between cosplayers and non-cosplayers in the anime fandom on the big five dimensions of personality.

The most popular conceptual framework for understanding individual differences in personality is the big five (Gosling, Rentfrow, & Swann, 2003).

The big five consists of five distinct personality dimensions, each of which has a spectrum with opposite traits on the opposite ends of the range: Extraversion (e.g., active, energetic, outgoing) versus introversion (e.g., quiet, keeping to oneself), agreeableness (e.g., generous, kind, sympathetic) versus disagreeable (e.g., critical, quarrelsome), conscientiousness (e.g., organized, reliable, responsible) versus unconscientious (e.g., irresponsible, disorganized), neuroticism (e.g., tense, anxious, worrying) versus emotionally stable (calm, relaxed, not worried), and open to new experiences (e.g., artistic, curious, imaginative) versus closed to new experiences (e.g., prefers familiar to unfamiliar) (McCrae & John, 1992). Far from merely describing differences between people, the big five personality traits are associated with a wide variety of important real-world outcomes, including job satisfaction (Judge, Heller, & Mount, 2002), relationship satisfaction (Malouff, Thorsteinsson, Schutte, Bhullar, & Rooke, 2010), and subjective well-being (DeNeve & Cooper, 1998). In short, the big five represents a well-validated theoretical framework for understanding individual differences with demonstrably practical, real-world applications.

We are not the first to suggest applying the big five to the context of fan interests and behaviors. For example, Wilkinson and Hansen (2006) examined factor loadings of big five dimensions together and their association with different types of leisure activities in a

sample of undergraduate students. Openness was associated primarily with artistic or self-expressive activities such as cultural arts, arts and crafts, writing, gardening, dancing, and culinary interests. Extraversion, on the other hand, was associated with entirely different activities, primarily those with a social element, such as socializing, shopping, and travel. And while this research examined leisure interests in general, other work has focused specifically on the relationship between big five personality traits and facets of fandom.

In a study of sports fans, for example, Sun (2010) examined the association between the big five dimensions and having a parasocial relationship with one's favorite player. Traits like neuroticism, openness, and conscientiousness were positively associated with the strength of such parasocial relationships. Neuroticism, likewise, has also been shown to be positively associated with parasocial relationship with a favorite celebrity in other studies (Maltby et al., 2004).

Finally, research with sport fans has found that extraversion is associated with greater sport spectating (Appelbaum et al., 2012), extraversion and agreeableness are associated with a greater need for affiliation with others (Donavan, Carlson, & Zimmerman, 2005), and extraversion, openness, and conscientiousness are all related to greater identification with a team (Wann, Dunham, Byrd, & Keenan, 2004). In short, a fan's scores on the big five

dimensions can say a lot about the fan-related activities they engage in. To date, however, no one has looked specifically at the relationship between these dimensions and cosplay, a fan activity that, at least in fandoms like the anime fandom, is quite prominent.

As mentioned earlier, cosplay is a fan activity that, in addition to being social in nature, is also a product of self-expression and creativity. And in this regard, there is also reason to believe that a fan's personality traits may affect their willingness to cosplay. For example, research on the big five has shown that many of them are related, directly or tangentially, to creative activities and a fantastic mentality. Rain, Cilento, MacDonald, and Mar (2017), for example, found that the tendency to be transported into narratives was differently associated with the big five dimensions – with neuroticism in particular being positively associated with transportation. In a similar vein, Martinsen (2011) suggested that neuroticism, agreeableness and other traits (e.g., flexibility) form the profile of particularly creative people. Maslej, Oatley, and Mar (2017) found empirical evidence for this in a study of creativeness in writing and acting, where participants wrote a short character sketch based on a photo of a person. When rated for character complexity and likability, the writers' openness was found to be associated with more complex and interesting sketches, while less emotional stability was associated with more complexity of characters.

Finally, in a comparison between actors and the general population on big five dimensions, Nettle (2006) found that actors tend to score higher in extraversion, openness, and agreeableness than the average person, with a slight trend toward also scoring higher in neuroticism.

Taken together, the existing literature suggests that fans' personality traits may prove useful in predicting their proclivity towards cosplaying. This relationship is likely due, in no small part, to the fact that many cosplayers are motivated by self-expression and creativity – endeavors which, themselves, are differently associated with the big five traits. As such, it seems plausible that there are differences in the personality traits of cosplaying and non-cosplaying anime fans, despite both groups having a common interest in anime.

### **Present Study**

The purpose of the present study is to test the hypothesis that cosplaying and non-cosplaying anime fans differ with regard to their scores on measures of the big five dimensions. Given that cosplayers have been described as artistic and creative, we expect that, like actors (Nettle, 2006), those who experience parasocial relationships (e.g., Sun, 2010) and highly creative people (Martinsen, 2011), cosplayers will show higher levels of openness, extraversion, and agreeableness than non-cosplayers, and will score lower on emotional

stability (i.e., higher neuroticism) than non-cosplayers.

## **Method**

### **Participants and Procedures**

Self-identified anime fans ( $N = 3,122$ , 68.2% male, 1.4% other sex;  $M_{\text{age}} = 23.25$ ,  $SD = 6.64$ ) were recruited at A-Kon (an anime fan convention in Dallas, TX) and from online anime-related websites and forums. As part of a larger study of the anime fandom, participants responded to whether they participated in cosplay ( $n = 1074$ , 34.4%) and completed a measure of big five dimensions of personality.

### **Materials**

To assess the big five dimensions of personality we adopted Gosling et al.'s (2003) 10-item measure. The measure contains five subscales, each consisting of two items, which assessed participants' extraversion ( $r = .54$ ), agreeableness ( $r = .27$ ), conscientious ( $r = .36$ ), emotional stability ( $r = .49$ ), and openness to new experiences ( $r = .27$ ).

### **Results**

To examine differences in personality dimensions we conducted a MANOVA with cosplaying behavior as the independent variable and the big five personality dimensions as dependent variables. The omnibus test was significant, Wilks'  $\Lambda = .88$ ,  $F(5, 3116) =$

87.81,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .123$ . As shown in Table 1, cosplayers scored significantly higher than non-cosplaying anime fans on extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness. Non-cosplaying anime fans rated their degree of emotional stability higher than cosplayers. However, we should note that both conscientiousness and emotional stability had low effect sizes compared to the other differences observed.

## Discussion

The purpose of the present research was to test whether cosplaying and non-cosplaying anime fans differed with regard to their big five personality dimensions. As predicted, cosplayers scored higher than non-cosplayers on measures of extraversion, agreeableness, and openness, despite the fact that both were members of the same fan community. In a similar fashion, as predicted, non-cosplayers scored higher on emotional stability than cosplayers.

The present findings are largely in accordance with existing research on personality traits and fan behavior. Prior research, relying primarily on qualitative methods, suggests that cosplayers are creative, artistic, and benefit from cosplay by gaining confidence in interacting with strangers (Benino, 2014; Chen, 2007; Ramirez, 2017). The present findings largely support these conclusions, showing quantitatively that cosplayers score higher than non-cosplayers on personality traits

associated with these motivations, paralleling research on actors (vs. non-actors) (Nettle, 2006) and highly creative people (Martinsen, 2011; Maslej et al., 2017). The present findings are also in accordance with research on parasocial relationships (e.g., Maltby et al., 2004; Sun, 2010), in that cosplayers (vs. non-cosplayers) showed higher neuroticism, suggesting that cosplayers may be more attached or psychologically connected to characters than non-cosplayers. Finally, given prior research suggesting that, as a group, anime fans tend to be introverted (Reysen et al., 2016), it was not surprising to see that both cosplayers and non-cosplayers scored below the midpoint of the extroversion scale. With cosplayers scoring higher on extraversion than non-cosplayers, future research may examine whether their noted work to gain confidence in interacting with others is related to the higher extraversion observed in the present results.

While the present research accords with the existing literature in a large-sample, quantitative study, caution is warranted due to a number of considerable drawbacks in the study design. First, we only assessed personality at one point in time. Past research shows that rather than static or stable traits, personality can change depending on what identity is salient (Reysen, Plante, Roberts, & Gerbasi, 2015). Perhaps having cosplayers rate their personality thinking about their everyday (i.e., non-fan) identity and then their cosplaying identity is likely to shift

ratings on this personality measure. Alternatively, having cosplayers rate their personality in and out of their costume may lead to different results. Second, the present research was conducted in English and therefore excludes anime fans, cosplayers and non-cosplayers alike, who are not fluent in English. Third, we used a short measure of the big five that, while face-valid, has low subscale reliability and may not detect nuanced differences between cosplayers and non-cosplayers.

To conclude, we compared the big five personality dimensions of anime fans who cosplay and non-cosplaying anime fans. The results showed that cosplayers (vs. non-cosplayers) scored higher on extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, openness, and lower on emotional stability. The results suggest that cosplayers do show predictable differences on personality dimensions commonly associated with creativity, acting, and parasocial relationships and which suggest at some of the possible motivations driving cosplaying, including self-expression and facilitating social interaction. Further research should aim to expand these findings, both with regard to assessing the dynamic nature of personality across situations and to assess the stability of these motivations for cosplaying anime fans over time.

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Table 1

*Means (Standard Deviation) of Cosplayers versus Non-Cosplayers*

Variable	Cosplayer	Non-Cosplayer	<i>F</i> (1, 3120)	<i>p</i> -value	$\eta_p^2$
Extraversion	3.84 (1.60)	3.10 (1.45)	171.98	< .001	.052
Agreeableness	4.88 (1.29)	4.42 (1.26)	91.35	< .001	.028
Conscientiousness	4.79 (1.35)	4.46 (1.36)	41.91	< .001	.013
Emotional Stability	4.60 (1.49)	4.79 (1.41)	13.29	< .001	.004
Openness	5.54 (1.14)	4.87 (1.23)	221.57	< .001	.066

*Note.* Responses ranged from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*.