# Motivations of Cosplayers to Participate in the Anime Fandom

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## Abstract

We examined differences between cosplaying and non-cosplaying anime fans with regard to their motivation to participate in the anime fandom. Participants, all anime fans, completed scales assessing a myriad of possible motivations for anime fandom participation. Cosplayers rated all of the assessed motivations higher than non-cosplayers. The highest-rated motivations for cosplayers included entertainment, escape from everyday life, belongingness, eustress, and aesthetic beauty. Modest sex differences were also found, as women were more likely than men to cosplay and, even among cosplayers, women reported higher belongingness, family, self-esteem, and escape motivations. With the exception of sexual attraction, however, where men were considerably more motivated by sexual attraction than women, the effect sizes for sex differences were fairly small, suggesting little true difference between male and female cosplayers. The results are discussed in relation to past research examining anime cosplayers.

*Keywords*: anime, cosplay, cosplayer, motivation, fandom, escape, belongingness

## Introduction

Fans are people who ardently and loyally admire a particular interest, be it an athletic team, a genre of media, or a hobby (Reysen & Branscombe, 2010). Given the importance of fandom to peoples' lives (Chadborn, Edwards, & Reysen, in press) and the considerable resources people devote to their fan interests (Reysen & Branscombe, 2010), it is little wonder that researchers have sought to better understand underlying factors motivating fandom participation (Chadborn, Edwards, & Reysen, in press; Reysen & Branscombe, 2010). Early psychological research studied the question of fan motivation within the context of sport fans, with Wann (1995) identifying eight such motivations: (1) belongingness (affiliation, seeking to gain or maintain social contact), (2) family (maintain family contacts), (3) aesthetic (perceived beauty or appreciating as a form of art), (4) self-esteem (positive sense of self or accomplishment), (5) economic

(economic gain through participation), (6) eustress (positive stress or arousal), (7) escape (diversion from typical or everyday life), and (8) entertainment (amusement or enjoyment). Wann found that for sport fans, the top-rated motivations were entertainment, eustress, belongingness, self-esteem, and aesthetics, although all eight of the motivations were positively correlated with identification with one's favorite sport team. Subsequent research on sport fans has found a myriad of important moderator variables: sex of the fan, individual versus team sports, whether the sport is aggressive or nonaggressive (Wann, Schrader, & Wilson, 1999), stylistic (e.g., figure skating) versus nonstylistic sports (e.g., football; Wann, Grieve, Zapalac, & Pease, 2008), race of the fan (Armstrong, 2002), and fantasy sport versus traditional sport (Billings & Ruihley, 2013). Put simply, there exists a considerable body of research assessing the complex interplay of factors that drive sport fans.

Despite a broad range of different fan interests, the majority of psychological research on fan groups has focused on sport fans and has largely neglected less mainstream fan interests (Reysen & Shaw, 2016). There is little reason, both intuitively and empirically, to believe that fans of all interests are motivated by the same factors as sport fans. In recent years, there has been growing interest in studying the idiosyncrasies of individual fandoms and understanding important theoretical dimensions underpinning differences

between different fan groups (Schroy, Plante, Reysen, Roberts, & Gerbasi, 2016). For example, Schroy and colleagues (2016) re-examined Wann's eight motivations, adding two additional ones—attention (seeking feedback and regard from others) and sexual attraction (sexual arousal from fan interest)—and assessed the extent to which they predicted fan identification in three different fan groups: Anime fans, furries, and fantasy sport fans. Most presently relevant are the findings for anime fans—fans of Japanese animation and manga—that belongingness, family, self-esteem, economic factors (negatively), eustress, escapism, and entertainment all drive fandom identification, with belongingness and entertainment being the biggest motivators. Unlike fantasy sport fans, belongingness was the biggest predictor of fandom for anime fans, not entertainment, while factors such as aesthetics and eustress were only minimally associated with anime fandom participation. In short, findings such as these demonstrate the value of assessing the idiosyncratic motivations of different fan communities rather than treating all fans as a homogeneous category. In the present study, we take this notion one step further, assessing whether systematic differences in fan motivation exist within subgroups of the same fandom.

Closely tied to the anime fandom is the practice of cosplaying. Cosplay—a portmanteau of the terms "costume" and "play"—is the act of dressing up and

role-playing as a character from an anime series, manga, video game, or story (Winge, 2006). Although many studies have touched upon the question of cosplayer motivation within the anime community, few studies have quantitatively assessed these motivations or focused directly on the question of cosplayer motivation. In the present research, we expand upon the results of Schroy et al. (2016), which included ten motivations, but examine differences between cosplaying and non-cosplaying anime fans. It is also worth considering these motivations within the context of prior research assessing anime cosplayer motivation. For example, a review of the existing literature reveals that the motivation of belongingness almost always arises in such work (see Table 1), often taking the form of getting into cosplay to make friends, maintaining friendships through cosplaying, making cosplay costumes with friends, performing cosplay with teams of friends, online interactions, and a felt need to belong. A second frequently-mentioned motivation is entertainment, with cosplayers enjoying building costumes and performing for their own sake. Other less-commonly-mentioned motivations for cosplayers include escape from everyday life, seeking attention, self-esteem, and economic reasons. No explicit mention was made in prior research regarding family, aesthetic beauty, or eustress despite the mention of such motivations in prior research on sport fans.

It is also important to note the cross-national and cross-methodological similarities of cosplayer motivation, as shown in Table 1. Cosplayers from around the world mentioned being driven by many of the same motivations. Moreover, regardless of the size of the sample or the researcher's methodology, similar motivations emerged. That said, most of the existing research has been open-ended and qualitative in nature, allowing respondents to list any reason for why they cosplayed. The result is a variety of responses that, in some instances, represent idiosyncratic or personal reasons rather than general motivations shared by all cosplayers or anime fans. To address this in the present research, all respondents rated the same 10 possible motivations for participation in the anime fandom.

An additional methodological consideration in the present study is the examination of potential sex differences in cosplayer motivations. While the anime fandom consists of more men than women (Reysen, Plante, Roberts, Gerbasi, & Shaw, 2016), women are more likely to cosplay than men (Lotecki, 2012; Rosenberg & Letamendi, 2013), suggesting that there may exist sex differences in how fanship and fandom manifest. Although no research has directly examined sex differences within cosplayers with respect to motivations, Ray, Plante, Reysen, Roberts, and Gerbasi (2017) examined sex differences in psychological needs in a sample of anime fans. Across a variety of different psychological needs

commonly met by membership in groups, women only scored higher than men on self-esteem and social support compared to men. The results suggest that, at least within the general anime fandom, women and men are similar in the needs they fulfill through membership in the anime fandom. That study only assessed anime fans in general, however, and did not consider the subgroup of cosplayers, wherein the sex composition is reversed.

**Present Study**

The purposes of the present study are to examine differences between cosplayer and non-cosplayer motivations with regard to the anime fandom and to assess sex differences in the motivations of cosplayers. Participants, all self-identified anime fans, completed measures of the extent to which they were motivated to participate in the anime fandom on ten different factors. Based on the reviewed research, we predict that cosplayers, relative to non-cosplayers, will rate belongingness, entertainment, and escape as significantly stronger motivations driving their interest in anime. Additionally, we predict that female cosplayers will rate self-esteem motivation significantly higher than male cosplayers.

**Method**

**Participants and Procedures**

Self-identified anime fans ($N = 3077$, 69.2% male; $M_{age} = 23.23$, $SD = 6.61$) were recruited at A-Kon (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 indicated whether they participated in cosplay ($n = 1048$, 34.1% participate in cosplay) and completed items assessing their motivations for participating in the anime fandom. All items used a 7-point Likert-type response scale, from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*.

**Materials**

Participants completed 10 items assessing different motivations to participate in the anime fan community on a measure adapted from prior research (Reysen et al., 2016) and based on motivations identified by Wann (1995). Following a prompt ("I participate in the anime community because of…"), participants rated different motivations ("belonging (social reasons)," family," "aesthetic (beauty)," "self-esteem," "economic reasons," "eustress (positive stress)," "escape from everyday life," "entertainment," "attention," and "sexual attraction").

**Results**

**Cosplayers vs. Non-Cosplayers.** To examine differences in motivations, we

conducted a MANOVA with whether or not the fan cosplays as the independent variable and the 10 different motivations as dependent variables. The omnibus test was significant: Wilks' $\Lambda$ = .86, $F(10, 3066)$ = 50.15, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2$ = .141. As shown in Table 2, anime cosplayers rated all of the motivations higher than anime non-cosplayers. To examine which motivations were endorsed most strongly (above the midpoint of the measure), we also conducted a series of one-sample $t$-tests to examine whether the means, split by sample (cosplayer and non-cosplayer) differed from the midpoint of the scale (i.e., 4). All of the means for cosplayers and non-cosplayers differed significantly from the midpoint ($p$s < .05). Thus, for cosplayers, the motivations with which they agreed motivates them to participate in the anime fandom include (in order of rating): Entertainment, escape from everyday life, belongingness, eustress, and aesthetic.

**Sex and Cosplay.** Before examining whether there exist sex differences in cosplayers' motivations for anime fandom participation, we first tested whether women were more likely than men to cosplay in our sample using a $X^2$ test. As shown in Table 3, women were significantly more likely, and men significantly less likely, than expected to participate in cosplay, $X^2(1, N = 3077)$ = 496.84, $p < .001$, Cramer's V = .402.

**Cosplayer Sex Differences.** To examine sex differences is cosplayers' motivations, we conducted a MANOVA with sex as the independent variable and

motivations as the dependent variables, using only those participants who indicated that they participate in cosplay. The omnibus test was significant: Wilks' $\Lambda$ = .87, $F(10, 1037)$ = 16.23, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2$ = .135. As shown in Table 4, women rated belongingness, family, self-esteem, and escape motivations higher than men. Men were found to rate sexual attraction motivation higher than women. We should note that, with the exception of sexual attraction, the effect sizes of the sex differences are fairly small in magnitude and are likely significant because of the large sample size.

**Discussion**

The purposes of the present research were to examine differences between cosplayers and non-cosplayers' motivations to participate in the anime fandom and to examine potential differences between male and female cosplayers' motivations. We predicted, and found, that cosplayers (vs. non-cosplayers) reported being more motivated to participate in the anime fandom by the sense of belongingness, entertainment, and escapism. Unexpectedly, cosplayers also rated the other motivations significantly higher than non-cosplayers. Cosplayers indicated that entertainment, escape, belongingness, eustress, and aesthetic were significant motivations to participate in the anime community, as indicated by their scores being above the midpoint of the scale. We also found, in accordance with past research, that

women were more likely than men to participate in cosplay. Female cosplayers scored higher on motivations of belongingness, family, self-esteem, and escape, while male cosplayers rated sexual attraction higher as a motivation to participate in the anime fandom.

The present results build upon prior research examining motivations of anime fans (Schroy et al., 2016), showing that cosplayers rated all ten of the assessed motivations to participate in the anime fandom higher than non-cosplayers. This result suggests that, in general, cosplayers are simply bigger fans than non-cosplayers. While the relative pattern of motivation was similar for both cosplayers and non-cosplayers, cosplayers simply scored higher on all of them. Also consistent with prior research regarding cosplayer motivations (Table 1), belongingness, entertainment, and escape were strongly endorsed as motivational factors underlying anime fandom participation in the present data. However, two additional motivations were endorsed by cosplayers – had a mean score above the midpoint of the scale – in the present results (eustress and aesthetics) that were not mentioned in prior research. The present results thus suggest two additional motivations that have been overlooked in prior open-ended or qualitative studies of cosplayers.

The present results also highlight a disparity in the anime fandom between the number of male anime fans and number of male cosplayers. Consistent with prior research (Lotecki, 2012;

Rosenberg & Letamendi, 2013), a higher proportion of women than men indicated participating in cosplay in the present study. Given this odd reversal of sex composition within this subgroup of anime fans, we explored whether motivations differed between male and female cosplayers. Female cosplayers rated belongingness, family, self-esteem, and escape significantly higher than male cosplayers. Male cosplayers rated sexual attraction as a motivation to participate in the anime fandom higher than female cosplayers. However, the effects sizes were relatively small for all of the sex differences with the exception of sexual attraction. That is, given the large sample sizes we do not place much weight in the impact of these sex differences, with the exception of male cosplayers being more motivated than female cosplayers to participate in the fandom for sexual attraction reasons.

Despite the present study being the largest examination of cosplayers' motivations ever conducted, it is not without a number of important limitations. First, an important limitation of the present findings is the use of a scale to assess fan motivation that was derived from research on sport fans. Based on past research involving cosplayers (cited in Table 1), there may exist other motivations that should be included in future research such as artistic expression, practice interacting with other people, overcoming social anxiety, learning crafting skills, and adopting alternative identities. Second, the survey was conducted in English, a

factor which limits its generalizability to English-speaking countries. However, given the similarities in motivations found in past research with cosplayers from different countries, we have little reason to expect that the results would differ dramatically for cosplayers in other cultural settings.

In summary, the present study examined differences between cosplayers and non-cosplayers' motivations to participate within the same fan group – namely anime fans. Cosplayers were found to rate all of the motivations significantly higher than non-cosplayers. The motivations with the highest ratings for cosplayers were entertainment, escape from everyday life, belongingness, eustress, and aesthetic beauty. Women were more likely than expected than men to participate in cosplay. Sex differences in cosplayers' motivations were found, however, the effect sizes for these differences were small indicating little impact for cosplayers on the whole (with the exception of male cosplayers reporting higher sexual attraction as a motivation to participate in the fandom). Based on the present results, cosplayers appear highly motivated anime fans and the reported motivations suggest they gain important psychological needs (e.g., escape from daily stressors, belongingness) from participating in the fandom. The results highlight the need to not only consider less traditional, non-mainstream (i.e., non-sport) fan groups in future psychological research on fandoms, but also illustrates the value of

considering specific subgroups within individual fandoms, which may reveal just how nuanced and heterogeneous fan groups can be.

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Table 1
*Motivations in Anime Cosplay Research*

| Study | BG | FM | AE | SE | EC | EU | ES | EN | AT | SA | *N* | T | C |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Ahn (2008) | X | | | | | | X | X | | | 20* | I | Japan |
| Benino (2014) | X | | | X | | | | X | | | 55 | S | Philippines |
| Bonnichsen (2011) | X | | | | | | | | | | 4 | I | Sweden |
| Chen (2007) | X | | | X | | | X | X | | | 6 | I | Taiwan |
| Davis (2017) | X | | | X | | | | | | | 37 | I | U.S. |
| Flatt (2015) | X | | | | | | X | | | | 49 | S | U.S. |
| Hill (2017) | X | | | | | | | | | | 16 | I | U.S. |
| Kane (2017) | X | | | | X | | | X | X | | 20 | I | Unknown |
| Lamerichs (2014) | X | | | | | | | | X | | 30 | I | Netherlands |
| Langsford (2014) | X | | | | | | | X | | | 8 | I | Australia |
| Lin (2016) | X | | | | | | | | | | 8 | I | Singapore |
| Lotecki (2012) | X | | | | | | | X | | | 529 | S | Canada/U.S. |
| Peirson-Smith (2013) | | | | | | | X | X | | | 40 | I | China |
| Rahman et al. (2012) | X | | | | | | X | X | X | | 15 | I | China |
| Ramirez (2017) | X | | | | | | | | | | 9 | I | U.S. |
| Rosenberg et al. (2013) | X | | | | | | X | X | X | | 198 | S | U.S. |
| Taylor (2009) | X | | | | | | | | | | 11 | I | U.S. |
| K. Wang (2010) | X | | | | | | X | | | | 17 | I | China |
| P.-T. Wang (2010) | X | | | | | | X | X | | | 15 | I | Taiwan/U.S. |
| | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Present Study | X | | X | | | X | X | X | | | 1048 | S | Western |

*Note*. BG = belongingness, FM = family, AE = aesthetic, SE = self-esteem, EC = economic, EU = eustress, ES = escape, EN = entertainment, AT = attention, SA = sexual attraction. * 20 groups (participant number unknown). *N* = sample size, T = type of study, I = interview, S = survey, C = country. Western = mainly U.S./Canada/UK (i.e., western, English speaking countries).

Table 2

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

| Variable | Cosplayer | Non-Cosplayer | $F$(1, 3075) | $p$-value | $\eta_p^2$ |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Belongingness | 4.48 (1.92) | 3.16 (1.89) | 332.39 | < .001 | .098 |
| Family | 2.73 (1.89) | 1.89 (1.40) | 193.88 | < .001 | .059 |
| Aesthetic | 4.14 (2.03) | 3.31 (2.05) | 115.03 | < .001 | .036 |
| Self-esteem | 3.73 (1.94) | 2.56 (1.67) | 306.03 | < .001 | .091 |
| Economic | 2.30 (1.56) | 1.89 (1.34) | 57.43 | < .001 | .018 |
| Eustress | 4.29 (1.99) | 3.49 (2.01) | 112.59 | < .001 | .035 |
| Escape | 5.51 (1.69) | 4.70 (1.95) | 130.51 | < .001 | .041 |
| Entertainment | 6.54 (0.87) | 6.29 (1.15) | 39.41 | < .001 | .013 |
| Attention | 3.44 (2.06) | 2.44 (1.73) | 202.42 | < .001 | .062 |
| Sexual attraction | 2.82 (1.97) | 2.28 (1.69) | 63.04 | < .001 | .020 |

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

Table 3

*Chi-Square Analysis of Cosplay by Sex*

| Sample | Male | Female |
|---|---|---|
| Non-Cosplayer | | |
|     Observed | 1675 | 354 |
|     Expected | 1404.5 | 624.5 |
| Cosplayer | | |
|     Observed | 455 | 593 |
|     Expected | 725.5 | 322.5 |

Table 4

*Means (Standard Deviations) of Cosplayer Motivations by Sex*

|  | Male | Female | $F(1, 1046)$ | $p$-value | $\eta_p^2$ |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Belongingness | 4.32 (2.01) | 4.60 (1.83) | 5.51 | .019 | .005 |
| Family | 2.53 (1.82) | 2.88 (1.93) | 9.20 | .002 | .009 |
| Aesthetic | 4.15 (2.05) | 4.14 (2.05) | 0.01 | .933 | < .001 |
| Self-esteem | 3.55 (1.97) | 3.88 (1.91) | 7.30 | .007 | .007 |
| Economic | 2.36 (1.61) | 2.25 (1.53) | 1.28 | .258 | .001 |
| Eustress | 4.28 (2.03) | 4.30 (1.96) | 0.03 | .858 | < .001 |
| Escape | 5.36 (1.72) | 5.63 (1.60) | 6.15 | .013 | .006 |
| Entertainment | 6.56 (0.92) | 6.54 (0.83) | 0.13 | .716 | < .001 |
| Attention | 3.42 (2.06) | 3.45 (2.07) | 0.04 | .839 | < .001 |
| Sexual attraction | 3.44 (2.08) | 2.35 (1.73) | 86.68 | < .001 | .077 |

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