Sex Differences in Parasocial Connection to Favorite Anime Characters: A Multifactor Approach

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Abstract

In the present study, we explored the associations between dimensions of parasocial connection and sex differences in connection of anime fans' favorite character. Anime fans listed their favorite anime character and rated dimensions of parasocial connection. Male and female fans did not differ in their choice of either male or female favorite characters. A factor analysis of the dimensions of parasocial connection showed three factors representing identification (identification, wishful identification, self-expansion), romance (romance, sexual attraction), and similarity (background, attitude, identification). In general, fans tended to feel more similar to same-sex (vs. opposite sex) characters. Male fans were more identified with a same-sex (vs. opposite sex) character. Both male and female fans felt greater sexual attraction toward opposite (vs. same-sex) characters. Additionally, female (vs. male) anime fans reported identification and similarity with their favorite character. The results are largely consistent with prior research examining parasocial connections with non-anime media figures. The practical and theoretical implications of these findings, as well as the limitations of the present study, are discussed.

Keywords: anime, character identification, sex differences, homophily, wishful identification, self-expansion

Approach

For as long as stories have existed, characters in those stories—both real and fictional—have resonated with audiences (Caughey, 1984). Media researchers have long been interested in understanding the parasocial connections that emerge from this resonance, including connection with newscasters, soap opera characters, hosts on shopping networks, and characters from specific shows (Giles, 2002; Turner, 1993). Parasocial relationships are defined as a one-sided relationship with a media figure. Such relationships are experienced similar to a real-life, face-to-face relationship (e.g., friendships) (Eyal & Rubin, 2003). Parasocial relationships are different than

parasocial interactions. Parasocial interactions are behaviors (e.g., speaking out load to a character in a movie) and cognitions (e.g., inferring what a character is thinking) that individuals engage in with a character, similar to how they would with a personal acquaintance (Giles, 2002). While parasocial interactions are thought to be temporary or in the moment, parasocial relationships are considered to be more long-term. Far from being simple, one-dimensional relationships, researchers have suggested that these parasocial connections include elements such as companionship, perceived similarity, empathy, identification, and attraction (Giles, 2002; Tsay & Bodine, 2012). Despite the vast array of dimensions proposed to represent a parasocial connection, no research has examined the associations among the various dimensions. To address this limitation, we presently explore the various dimensions of parasocial connection among male and female anime fans (fans of Japanese animation and graphic novels) with respect to their favorite character.

We begin by briefly reviewing research on the various dimensions that have been proposed to capture the concept of parasocial connections. Next, we summarize research suggesting that male and female fans may differ when it comes to the extent to which they experience these different dimensions of felt connection to a character. In this review, we briefly summarize what little research exists on parasocial connections experienced by anime fans. We then present the results of a large study of anime fans' connection to their favorite character. We finish by discussing the practical and theoretical implications of the study's results, as well as limitations of the study and potential directions for future studies on this topic.

Dimensions of Connection to Media Characters

Homophily. Homophily is the degree of similarity one perceives between two people (McCroskey, McCroskey, & Richmond, 2006). McCroskey and colleagues (2006) note that the construct of homophily can be separated into two distinct, yet correlated, variables: attitudinal and background similarity. Put another way, two people may be perceived as being similar if they have attitudes and beliefs in common or if they hail from comparable sociocultural environments. Both attitudinal and background homophily have been shown to predict the extent to which a person feels a sense of attraction toward someone, including parasocial interactions, wherein an audience member feels a sense of relationship with a media character (Turner, 1993). For example, attitude homophily predicts stronger parasocial relationships among fans with the fictional character Harry Potter (Schmid & Klimmt, 2011). Beyond parasocial relationships, homophily is also positively correlated with wishful identification (discussed later) with television characters (Eyal &

Rubin, 2003; Hoffner & Buchanan, 2005). Research examining homophily outside parasocial connections with media figures shows that homophily is associated with the perceived credibility of teachers (Wheeless, Witt, Maresh, Bryand, & Schrodt, 2011) and others in online social support networks (Wright, 2000). In short, feeling a sense of similarity with another person is related to one's felt connection with that person, be they a real person or a fictional character.

Character identification. What it means to identify with a favorite media character has been conceptualized in at least two different ways by researchers. On the one hand, identification with a media character can be thought of as feeling a sense of psychological connection to the character while maintaining a sense of distinction between yourself and the character. On the other hand, identification with a media character may entail temporarily becoming the character, experienced as a sort of perspective-taking activity.

Reysen, Chadborn, and Plante (2017) note that people can feel this psychological connection to groups (e.g., community of fans) and fan interests in general (e.g., anime), but may also feel a sense of psychological connection toward specific characters. Adapted from social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987) and research on fans in particular (Reysen & Branscombe, 2010), this sense of connection can be measured by asking

fans about their felt connection to one's favorite character in the television show. Research on bronies (adult fans of the television show *My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic*), for example, has found that identification with one's favorite character from the show mediates the relationship between past activist behavior and greater frequency of watching the program (Reysen, Chadborn, & Plante, 2017). Other research has adapted this same measure to better understand the relationship of anime cosplayers to their cosplay characters (Reysen, Plante, Roberts, & Gerbasi, 2018a).

Cohen (2001) defines identification as "an imaginative process through which an audience member assumes the identity, goals, and perspective of a character" (p. 261). According to this conceptualization, identification involves temporarily "becoming" the character. Igartua and Burrios (2012) proposed a measure to assess this conceptualization of character identification through three dimensions: emotional empathy (becoming emotionally involved and feeling what the characters feel), cognitive empathy (taking the point of view of the character), and the sensation of becoming the character (loss of self-awareness and sense of being the character). Identifying in this way with a show or its characters has been found to significantly impact the fans' emotional and behavioral responses to the show (Godlewski & Perse, 2010), with perceived similarity, liking, and

imitation of one's favorite character (Shen, 2009), and with a greater sense of transportation or immersion into the show (Woolley, 2012). Across this wide array of research, the results suggest that identification with a character is related to felt connection, engagement, and behaviors taken in support of the character.

Wishful identification. Hoffner and Buchanan (2005) define wishful identification as "the desire to be like or act like the character" (p. 325). Research has shown that the extent to which people wishfully identify with another is associated with parasocial interactions and other fan behavior, such as amount of media consumption and perceived similarity (Cuesta, Martinez, & Cuesta, 2017; Dibble, Hartmann, & Rosaen, 2016; Kistler, Rodgers, Power, Austin, & Hill, 2010).

Parasocial relationships. Tuchakinsky (2010) proposed that not all parasocial relationships were the same, and that they could be conceptually divided into two types: romantic love (e.g., liking, love, desire to be physically close to a character) and friendship (e.g., liking, solidarity, and trust of a character). Adam and Sizemore (2013) found that parasocial romance is associated with a number of benefits (e.g., makes one happy, feel less alone), and other work has found that parasocial romance is associated with differences in how the characters themselves are viewed (e.g., Liebers and Schramm, 2017). Parasocial relationships are often considered to have a dark side, however:

Schnarre and Adam (2018) found that a majority of participants view a romantic partner's parasocial relationship as an act of betrayal and potentially harmful to a relationship (e.g., feeling inadequate). Taken together, a review of the research on parasocial relationships makes it clear that parasocial relationships and real-life relationships may share a number of psychological correlates and can both have considerable consequences for those who experience them.

Self-expansion. The self-expansion model (Aron & Aron, 1986) posits that humans have a central motivation to expand their sense of self, as expanding oneself provides people with additional resources, perspectives, and identities that may assist them in pursuing their goals. One method of expanding the self is to include others in one's self-concept (Aron et al., 2004), which can be done by forming relationships with close others. Self-expansion is typically studied within the context of real interpersonal relationships, finding increases in commitment, for example, within romantic relationships (e.g., Mattingly, Lewandowski, & McIntyre, 2014) and in the workplace (McIntyre, Mattingly, Lewandowski, & Simpson, 2014). Self-expansion has, on rare occasions, been studied within the context of parasocial relationships, where it has been found to positively correlate with greater viewer enjoyment (Eden, Daalmans, & Johnson, 2017) and stronger parasocial relationships with characters (e.g., Greenwood & Long, 2009).

Sex Differences in Connection with Characters

Numerous studies have examined whether there exist sex differences in individuals' tendency to experience parasocial relationships with media characters and the nature of these connections. Research, across a variety of age groups, tends to show a preference and greater wishful identification with same-sex character (Hoffner, 1996; Hoffner & Buchanan, 2005; Steinke, Applegate, Lapinski, Ryan, & Long, 2012). However, this is not always the case. In a study on parasocial breakups, Cohen (2003, 2004) observed that men tended to choose male characters; however, women were about equal in choice of sex of favorite media character. Chory-Assad and Yanen (2005) also found that male participants overwhelmingly chose male characters while a slight majority of female participants preferred male characters. Researchers also tend to find that female (vs. male) viewers report stronger parasocial relationships (Cohen, 2003, 2004; Eyal & Cohen, 2006) and parasocial interactions (Chory-Assad & Yanen, 2005). In effect, the results tend to show that individuals chose a same-sex character as their favorite (although this is stronger for males than females) and women feel a stronger connection to their favorite character.

The present research examines parasocial connection with one's favorite character specifically within the context of anime fans. Compared to research on other types of fan groups (e.g., sport fans,

Wann, Melnick, Russell, & Pease, 2001), there has been relatively little research on anime fans, despite the considerable size and growing nature of the anime fandom (Reysen et al., 2016). Even fewer studies have specifically examined sex differences among anime fans, though there have been studies suggesting that important differences exist. For example, although the majority of anime fandom members are male (Reysen, Plante, Roberts, Gerbasi, & Shaw, 2016), women are more likely to cosplay than men (Reysen, Plante, Roberts, & Gerbasi, 2018b). Within the anime fandom some fans have a *waifu* (female character one is attracted to, akin to a wife) or *husbando* (male equivalent), which may be considered a form of parasocial relationship. Recent research shows that 28.3% of fans have a waifu/husbando, and of those that do, female (vs. male) fans report a stronger emotional connection to the character.[1]

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[1] Participants ($N = 923$, 57.6% male; $M_{age} = 26.06$, $SD = 7.86$) included self-identified anime fans solicited at A-Kon (anime convention in Dallas, TX) and from anime-related websites. Participants were first asked if they had a "waifu/husbando." Overall, 28.3% of participants indicated having a waifu (29.3% of male participants and 26.9% of female participants). For individuals who indicated having a waifu/husbando, they were then asked to rate on a 7-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*) the extent that they feel an emotional connection ("I feel a strong emotional connection with my waifu/husbando") and sexual attraction ("I feel a sexual attraction to my waifu/husbando"). Female participants ($M = 5.40$, $SD = 1.89$) reported a stronger emotional connection than male participants ($M = 4.77$, $SD = 2.11$), $t(257) = 2.48$, $p = .014$, $d = .311$. No difference was found between female ($M = 4.58$, $SD = 2.26$) and male ($M = 4.83$, $SD = 2.02$)

This result suggests not only that parasocial relationships may be quite prevalent among anime fans, but that sex differences may exist in both the strength and nature of this attraction. Little research has been conducted examining parasocial connections in the anime fandom. Ramasubramanian and Kornfield (2012) that female fans showed greater wishful identification than male fans with a female heroine in shōjo genre anime. Savage and Walling (2016) find that female *Sailor Moon* fans often mention perceived similarity when describing a favored character. Given the myriad of mechanisms underlying parasocial relationships and the surprising commonality of such relationships among anime fans, more research is needed on the topic, which the present study aims to address.

Present Study

The reviewed research demonstrates that numerous dimensions are thought to underlie parasocial relationships, specifically the connections people feel with fictional media characters. Far from mutually exclusive, a small, but growing body of research suggests that these dimensions may be related to one anther (e.g., Dibble et al., 2016; Eden et al., 2017). Moreover, research also suggests that males and females may differ in the extent to which these mechanisms drive parasocial relationships (Cohen, 2003, 2004; Eyal & Cohen, 2006; Hoffner,

1996; Steinke et al., 2012). As such, the purpose of the present research is two-fold: (1) to examine the associations between dimensions of parasocial connection with a favorite media character, and (2) to examine sex differences in one's degree of connection with a character and the nature of this connection. Anime fans recruited from an anime convention and through anime websites were asked to indicate their favorite anime character and then complete measures related to their connection with that character (e.g., homophily, identification). Although we have no a priori hypotheses of how, or whether, there are underlying dimensions of parasocial connection, we do expect these variables to be positively associated with one another based on prior research (e.g., Dibble et al., 2016; Eden et al., 2017). We also predict, based on past research, three results with respect to sex differences: (1) anime fans will be more likely than chance to choose a same-sex favorite character (Hoffner, 1996), (2) individuals will report stronger connections with same-sex (vs. opposite sex) favorite character (Hoffner, 1996; Steinke et al., 2012), and (3) overall, women will display a stronger connection to their favorite character (Cohen, 2003, 2004; Eyal & Cohen, 2006).

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participants for sexual attraction, $t(257) = 0.95$, $p = .342$, $d = .118$.

Method

Participants and Procedures

Self-identified anime fans ($N = 1059$, 54.9% male; $M_{age} = 25.00$, $SD = 7.12$) were recruited at AnimeFest ($n = 366$, anime convention in Dallas, TX) and solicited from anime related websites ($n = 693$). As part of a larger study of the anime fandom, participants indicated their favorite anime character, sex of character, and rated items regarding their connection to the character. All measures used a 7-point Likert-type response scale, from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*.

Materials

Homophily. To measure homophily we adapted six items reflecting two dimensions from a previously published measure (McCroskey et al., 2006). The two dimensions included attitudinal homophily ("My favorite character thinks like me," "My favorite character is similar to me," "My favorite character shares my values;" $\alpha = .81$) and background homophily ("My favorite character's background is similar to mine," "My favorite character's life as a child was similar to mine," "My favorite character is from an economic situation similar to mine;" $\alpha = .78$).

Character identification. We adapted a single item ("I strongly identify with my favorite anime character") from previously-published measures of identification (Reysen & Branscombe, 2010; Reysen, Katzarska-

Miller, Nesbit, & Pierce, 2013) to assess identification with one's favorite character.

Two items ("While watching this character, I feel as if I am part of the action," "While watching this character, I forget myself and become fully absorbed") were adapted from Cohen (2001) to assess the extent to which viewers identified with their favorite characters by imagining themselves as the character ($r = .52$).

Six additional items were adapted from previous research (Igartua & Barrios, 2012) to assess three dimensions of character identification. The three dimensions included emotional empathy ("I feel emotionally involved with my favorite character's feelings," "I understand how my favorite character acts, thinks, and feels;" $r = .56$), cognitive empathy ("I imagine how I would act if I were my favorite character," "I have tried to see things from my favorite character's point of view;" $r = .55$), and sensation of becoming the character ("I felt as if I were my favorite character," "I have had the impression of living my favorite character's story myself;" $r = .72$).

Wishful identification. We adapted three items ("My favorite character is the sort of person I want to be like myself," "Sometimes I wish I could be more like my favorite character," "I'd like to do the kinds of things my favorite character does") from previous research (Hoffner & Buchanan, 2005) to assess wishful identification ($\alpha = .82$).

Parasocial relationship. We adapted six items from Adam and Sizemore (2013) that assess dimensions of friendship ("I think my favorite character could be a friend of mine," "I could reveal negative things about myself honestly and fully to my favorite character," "I could have a warm friendly relationship with my favorite character; " α = .85) and romance ("My favorite character is very physically attractive," "My favorite character could be the perfect romantic partner," "Sometimes I think that my favorite character and I are just meant for each other;" α = .75).

Self-expansion. We adapted two items ("My favorite character makes me feel a greater awareness of things," "My favorite character gives me a larger perspective on things") from prior research (Mattingly & Lewandowski, 2013) to assess one's favorite character as expanding the self ($r = .80$).

Sexual attraction. We constructed two items ("I am sexually attracted to my favorite character," "My favorite character is sexually arousing") to assess sexual attraction to one's favorite character ($r = .87$).

Results

Correlations

As a preliminary analysis, we assessed zero-order correlations between all variables. As shown in Table 1, the majority of associations were significant and positive. However, variables related to romance and sexual attraction showed low or nonsignificant associations with the other types of connections with one's favorite anime character. Given the apparent overlap among many of these constructs, we next conducted a factor analysis.

Factor Analysis

To examine possible underlying factors of fans' connection to their favorite characters, we conducted a factor analysis with an oblimin rotation, as we assumed the factors themselves would be related to one another. As shown in Table 2, cognitive empathy, character identification (Cohen, 2001), emotional empathy, self-expansion, wanting to become the character, and wishful identification loaded on the first factor. Parasocial romance and sexual attraction loaded on the second factor. Attitudinal similarity, character identification (Reysen & Branscombe, 2010), and background similarity loaded on the third factor. Friendship did not load highly on any of the three factors. For the purpose of the present paper, we term factor 1 "identification," factor 2 "romance," and factor 3 "similarity."

Participant and Character Sex

To examine whether participant sex was related to the sex of their favorite character, we conducted a chi-square analysis between these two variables. As shown in Table 3, no significant differences were found with respect to

the sex of participant and sex of one's favorite character, $X^2(1, N = 1059) = 1.11, p = .293$, Cramer's V = .032.

Participant and Character Sex for Connection to Character

To examine whether sex of participant and sex of favorite character relate to the degree of connection to their favorite character, we conducted a MANOVA with sex of participant and favorite character as the independent variables and the three factors (identification, romance, similarity) as dependent variables. The omnibus tests for the main effect of participant sex, Wilks' $\Lambda = .99$, $F(3, 1053) = 2.99$, $p = .030$, $\eta_p^2 = .008$, and character sex, Wilks' $\Lambda = .95$, $F(3, 1053) = 17.47$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .047$, were significant. Furthermore, the interaction between participant and character sex was also significant, Wilks' $\Lambda = .77$, $F(3, 1053) = 102.98$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .227$.

With respect to the main effects of sex of participant, female fans ($M = 4.49$, $SD = 1.23$) reported higher identification than male fans ($M = 4.33$, $SD = 1.22$), $F(1, 1055) = 6.64$, $p = .010$, $\eta_p^2 = .006$. The main effect of sex of character showed that participants identified more with male ($M = 4.47$, $SD = 1.22$) than female ($M = 4.30$, $SD = 1.23$) characters, $F(1, 1055) = 4.17$, $p = .041$, $\eta_p^2 = .004$. An interaction was observed between participant and character sex for the degree of identification with the character, $F(1, 1055) = 7.22$, $p = .007$, $\eta_p^2 = .007$ (see Figure 1). Simple effects

showed that male participants rated identification higher for male (vs. female) characters, $F(1, 1055) = 12.21$, $p < .001$, while female participants' degree of identification did not differ between male and female characters, $F(1, 1055) = 0.19$, $p = .662$. For male characters, male and female participants did not show different levels of identification, $F(1, 1055) = 0.01$, $p = .931$, while for female characters, female participants identified more than male participants, $F(1, 1055) = 11.50$, $p = .001$.

No difference was observed between female ($M = 3.10$, $SD = 1.57$) and male ($M = 2.83$, $SD = 1.68$) fans for sexual attraction, $F(1, 1055) = 0.43$, $p = .649$, $\eta_p^2 < .001$. Greater sexual attraction was felt toward female ($M = 3.33$, $SD = 1.72$) than male ($M = 2.70$, $SD = 1.53$) characters, $F(1, 1055) = 30.08$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .028$. An interaction was observed between participant and character sex for the degree of sexual attraction with the character, $F(1, 1055) = 246.22$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .189$ (see Figure 2). Simple effects showed that male participants rated their sexual attraction more strongly toward female rather than male characters, $F(1, 1055) = 244.66$, $p < .001$. Female participants showed the same trend with greater attraction toward male characters than female characters, $F(1, 1055) = 48.07$, $p < .001$. For male characters, female participants expressed greater sexual attraction than male participants, $F(1, 1055) = 145.97$, $p < .001$. For female characters, male participants rated sexual attraction higher than

female participants, $F(1, 1055) = 108.19$, $p < .001$.

Female fans ($M = 3.79$, $SD = 1.28$) also rated similarity higher than male fans ($M = 3.68$, $SD = 1.23$), $F(1, 1055) = 5.61$, $p = .018$, $\eta_p^2 = .005$. No differences for similarity were found for male ($M = 3.71$, $SD = 1.25$) and female ($M = 3.76$, $SD = 1.26$) characters, $F(1, 1055) = 0.91$, $p = .341$, $\eta_p^2 = .001$. An interaction was observed between participant and character sex for the degree of similarity with the character, $F(1, 1055) = 25.54$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .024$ (see Figure 3). Simple effects showed that male participants rated greater similarity to male than female characters, $F(1, 1055) = 9.18$, $p = .003$. Similarly, female participants rated greater similarity to female than male characters, $F(1, 1055) = 16.64$, $p < .001$. For male characters, male (vs. female) participants rated similarity higher, $F(1, 1055) = 4.54$, $p = .033$, while for female characters, female (vs. male) participants rated similarity higher, $F(1, 1055) = 22.86$, $p < .001$.

Discussion

The purposes of the present research were to examine the associations between dimensions of parasocial connection with a favorite media character, and to examine sex differences in one's degree of connection with a character and the nature of this connection. We made four hypotheses in this research. First, we predicted that the dimensions of parasocial connection were positively correlated with one another. This hypothesis was partially supported, as most of the dimensions were correlated. Second, we predicted that fans would be more likely than expected to choose a same-sex character as a favorite character. This hypothesis was not supported, as both male and female fans showed a preference for male characters. Third, we predicted that fans would report a stronger connection with same-sex characters. This hypothesis was partially supported, as we found higher ratings for same-sex characters on identification (for male participants) and similarity (both male and female participants). Fourth, we predicted that women (vs. men) would show stronger connections with characters overall. This hypothesis was also largely supported with female fans expressing greater identification and similarity with characters compared to male fans.

Given the variety of different dimensions of one's connection to a media figure (Giles, 2002; Tsay & Bodine, 2012), one of the primary purposes of the present study was to explore the associations between dimensions of a parasocial connection. We expected, based on prior research (e.g., Dibble et al., 2016; Eden et al., 2017), that the various dimensions of fan connection to their favorite characters would be positively correlated. The results largely supported this hypothesis. With the exception of romance and sexual attraction, the different dimensions of character connection were positively associated with one another.

Romance and sexual attraction were strongly and positively related, but showed low, or nonsignificant, associations with other dimensions of parasocial connection. Furthermore, supporting past research regarding self-expansion as a component of real life romantic relationships (Mattingly et al., 2014), romance was also positively correlated with self-expansion. In effect, the associations observed for one's favorite anime character are similar to those found in real life relationships.

Given the apparent overlap between different measures of identification and connection to one's favorite character, we conducted a factor analysis to explore possible underlying dimensions of connection. The results showed that identification measures (i.e., Cohen, 2001; Igartua & Barrios, 2012), wishful identification, and self-expansion loaded onto a common factor. Thus, although wishful identification and self-expansion are conceptually different, they show overlap with prior measures of character identification. We should note that prior researchers (Tropp & Wright, 2001) consider self-expansion as an alternative measure of identification, albeit with groups rather than individuals. The present results support this interpretation of self-expansion as a measure of identification. Understandably, viewing one's favorite character in a romantic light and sexual attraction loaded together on a factor. Romance is an emotional feeling of love for another person and is associated with sexual attraction. Thus, it is understandable

these two constructs would cluster together. The third factor represented similarity to the self and included attitudinal and background homophily along with the single-item measure of identification. This was an unexpected result, as we suspected that this measure of identification would load together with the other identification measures. In trying to explain this finding, it should be noted that in prior studies using this conceptualization of character identification (Reysen, Chadborn, & Plante, 2017; Reysen et al., 2018a), the measure represents, and is correlated with, similarity with one's favorite character. We suspect that participants are responding to the somewhat conceptually unintuitive question about "identifying with" one's favorite character by answering a simpler question about how similar one is to one's favorite character. Future researchers may want to use more items, instead of a single item, to examine whether a longer measure would associate more strongly with similarity or with identification constructs.

A second goal of the present research was to examine sex differences in anime fans' connection to their favorite character. The research examining waifu/husbando described in the present paper and Ramasubramanian and Kornfield's (2012) study of female heroines in shōjo genre anime suggests that there exist sex differences among anime fans with respect to their degree of felt connection to their favorite characters. Building upon past research

(Hoffner, 1996), we expected, but did not find, differences in preference for the sex of one's favorite character. In general, both male and female fans showed a preference for male characters. We suggest two possible reasons for this result. First, male and female fans may have selected an opposite sex character as their favorite character because their favorite character represented a waifu/husbando. As the anime fandom has popularized the notion of having a waifu/husbando, when asked one's favorite character they immediately thought of their opposite sex significant other. We should note that the majority of anime fans lean toward a heterosexual orientation.[2] Indeed, 83% of anime fans report being either exclusively or predominantly heterosexual. A second possible reason for this result is that there are fewer female characters with which to feel a connection. Prior research (Reysen, Katzarska-Miller, Plante, Roberts, & Gerbasi, 2017) indeed shows that male characters are over-

represented in popular anime. Thus, given the overabundance of male characters, both male and female fans may report a slight preference for male characters as their favorite.

Prior research tends to show that individuals show a stronger connection with same-sex (vs. opposite sex) characters (Hoffner, 1996; Steinke et al., 2012). We predicted, and partially found, a similar trend in the present study. Both male and female participants showed stronger similarity with a same-sex (vs. opposite sex) character. Furthermore, male fans were found to identify more strongly with a male (vs. female) character. However, female fans showed an equal degree of identification with male and female characters. The reverse was observed for romance, as both male and female participants showed stronger romance for opposite sex (vs. same-sex) anime character. As previously noted, the majority of the anime fandom tends toward a heterosexual orientation. Thus, we would expect to see higher sexual romantic attraction toward an opposite sex character. With respect to overall mean differences, supporting prior research (e.g., Cohen, 2003, 2004; Eyal & Cohen, 2006) and our hypothesis, female (vs. male) anime fans showed higher identification and similarity with their favorite character. No difference between male and female fans was observed for the main effect of sex of participant on one's degree of romantic attraction. This result is similar to that reported in the introduction concerning waifu/husbandos, with no difference

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[2] Participants (N = 3,122, 68.2% male, 1.4% other sex; M_{age} = 23.25, SD = 6.64) included self-identified anime fans solicited at A-Kon (anime convention in Dallas, TX) and from anime-related websites. Participants were asked to select a response for the question "What is your sexual orientation?" The frequency of responses included "exclusively heterosexual" (62.1%), "predominantly heterosexual, only incidentally homosexual" (15.4%), "predominantly heterosexual, but more than incidentally homosexual" (5.5%), "equally heterosexual and homosexual" (4%), "predominantly homosexual, but more than incidentally heterosexual" (0.9%), "predominantly homosexual, only incidentally heterosexual" (1.4%), "exclusively homosexual" (1.8%), "pansexual" (3.1%), "asexual" (4.1%), or "other" (1.7%).

observed in degree of sexual attraction for participants with a waifu/husbando. Thus, the results are largely consistent with prior work regarding sex differences for media figures in general and specific to anime fans.

The present research, while consistent with past results, is limited in its generalizability. First, the study was conducted in English and therefore excludes non-English speaking individuals. Thus, the sample in the present research is largely composed of fans from Western countries. Second, we used short measures to assess the dimensions of parasocial connection with one's favorite anime character. We chose items that appeared face valid and/or showed high factor loadings in the original publications. This limitation was due to the limited space in the research instrument. Future research, where space limitations are not a concern, may include the full measures to assess whether the factor structure and associations can be replicated in a non-anime-fan sample. Third, the study's cross-sectional design makes it impossible to test the stability of one's felt connection to their favorite character over time or to test the possibility that some factors precede or lead to changes in other factors. Given that, like real relationships, a fan's felt connection to their favorite character is dynamic, it may prove fruitful for future studies to track changes in these dimensions and their relationships over time.

To conclude, in the present study we examined the associations between dimensions of parasocial connection and sex differences in relationship with a favorite anime character. The results showed that dimensions of connection with a character reflect identification, romance, and similarity. No significant difference was observed with respect to the sex of participants and favorite character chosen. Participants reported greater similarity with same-sex (vs. opposite sex) characters. Male fans identified more strongly with a same-sex character. Additionally, collapsing across sex of favorite character, female (vs. male) fans tended to report stronger identification. Given the sex disparity of the anime fandom as a whole (Reysen et al., 2016), we suspect there are further differences for future research to fruitfully explore.

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Table 1

Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations between Assessed Variables

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1. Attitude	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
2. Background	.42**	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
3. Reysen ID	.61**	.36**	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
4. Cohen ID	.30**	.18**	.44**	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
5. Emotion	.36**	.19**	.44**	.54**	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
6. Cognitive	.38**	.24**	.44**	.50**	.51**	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
7. Become	.44**	.35**	.49**	.46**	.36**	.57**	--	--	--	--	--	--
8. Wishful ID	.44**	.23**	.45**	.41**	.41**	.46**	.44**	--	--	--	--	--
9. Friendship	.43**	.21**	.45**	.36**	.44**	.33**	.33**	.50**	--	--	--	--
10. Romance	.07*	.05	.17**	.21**	.26**	.14**	.17**	.19**	.34**	--	--	--
11. Expand	.33**	.24**	.39**	.42**	.48**	.46**	.44**	.43**	.39**	.26**	--	--
12. Attraction	-.06*	-.02	.03	.10**	.15**	.03	.03	.01	.12**	.69**	.15**	--
Mean	4.27	2.45	4.47	4.65	5.53	4.76	2.83	4.56	4.83	3.32	4.09	2.57
Standard Deviation	1.44	1.40	1.84	1.66	1.32	1.67	1.82	1.66	1.68	1.53	1.79	2.03

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$.

Table 2

Factor Analysis (Oblimin Rotation) of Assessed Constructs

Variable	Factor 1 Identification	Factor 2 Romance	Factor 3 Similarity
Cognitive	**.774**	-.103	-.010
Cohen ID	**.766**	-.003	-.094
Emotion	**.690**	.077	-.014
Expand	**.580**	.092	.057
Become	**.511**	-.043	.239
Wishful ID	**.448**	.011	.272
Romance	.001	**.943**	.075
Attraction	-.021	**.740**	-.088
Attitude	-.057	-.032	**.875**
Reysen ID	.236	.026	**.579**
Background	-.007	-.016	**.498**
Friend	.275	.200	.341
Eigenvalue	4.77	1.72	1.01
Variance	39.77%	14.30%	8.45%
α	.83	.80	.72

Note. Pattern matrix is presented. ID = identification.

Table 3

Chi-Square Analysis of Participant Sex by Favorite Character Sex

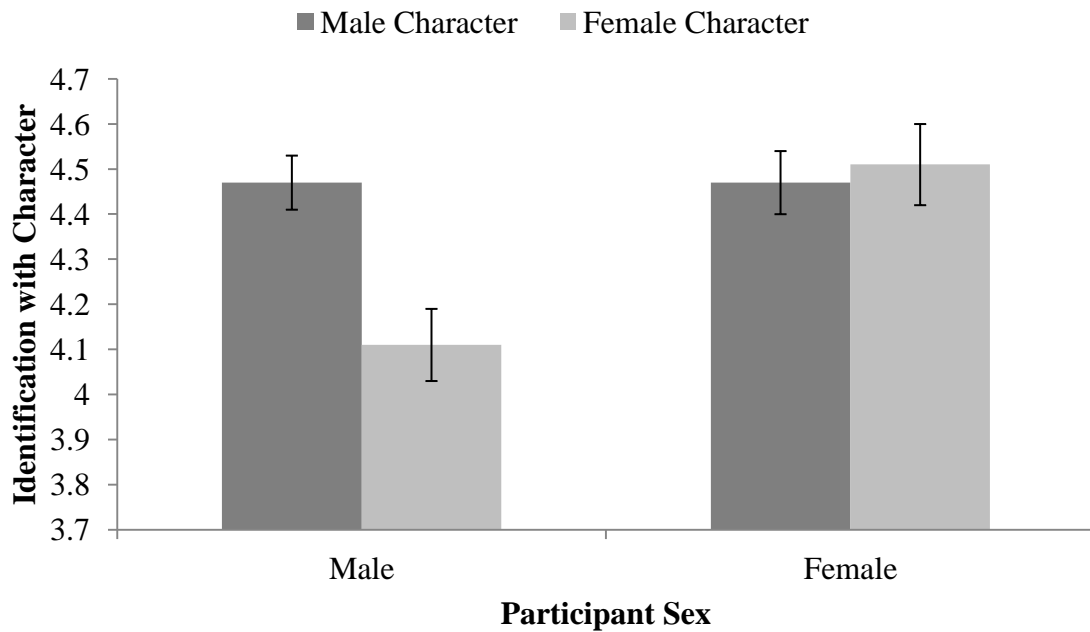|		Character	
Participant		Male	Female
Male			
	Observed	360	221
	Expected	351.7	229.3
Female			
	Observed	281	197
	Expected	289.3	188.7

Figure 1: Interaction of sex of participant and sex of character for identification with character. Error bars represent standard error.
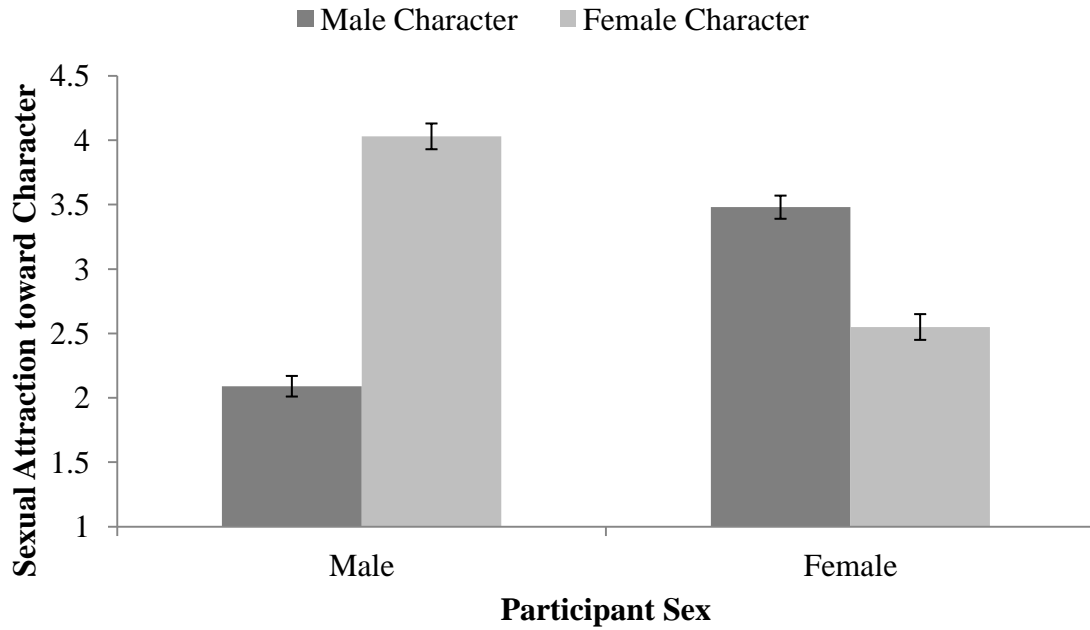
Figure 2: Interaction of sex of participant and sex of character for sexual attraction toward character. Error bars represent standard error.
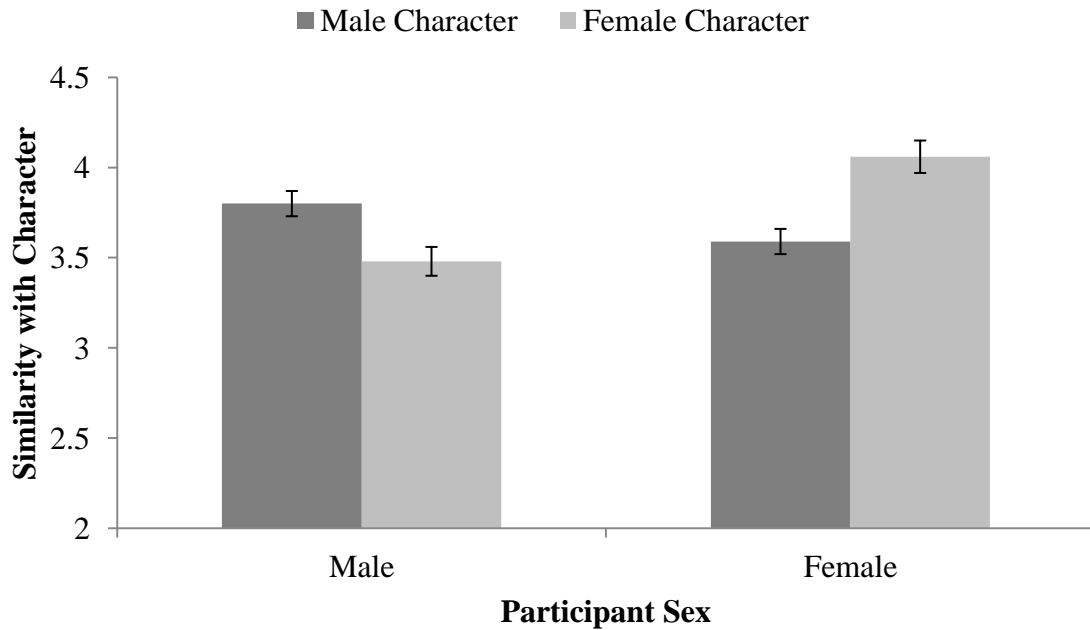

Figure 3: Interaction of sex of participant and sex of character for similarity with character. Error bars represent standard error.