



# The Impact of Role-Playing and Cosplay Drama on Individual Anxiety

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**Abstract.** This study explores how role-playing activities, including cosplay, impact the mental well-being and social dynamics of high school and college students. Grounded in Goffman's dramaturgical theory, the research analyzes how these activities aid in anxiety management, self-presentation, and social interaction. Through semi-structured interviews, the study reveals that role-playing offers therapeutic benefits, providing participants with emotional release, confidence building, and the development of social networks. It also highlights the dual roles individuals perform—"frontstage" and "backstage"—and their implications for stress relief and identity management. The research contributes to understanding the social and psychological effects of creative expression, suggesting potential integration of role-playing in mental health interventions.

**Keywords:** Role-playing; Cosplay; Anxiety management; Goffman's dramaturgical theory

## 1 Introduction

### 1.1 Background

As the pressure of modern life increases, people are increasingly turning to role-playing, cosplay, and theatrical activities as a means of stress relief and anxiety management. Role-playing acts as a distinctive human endeavor that influences various facets of life [1]. Cosplay, a role-playing activity where individuals dress and act as fictional characters, has been found to play a role in identity formation, particularly for female cosplayers exploring new aspects of themselves, and it is a modern mass practice where individuals publicly imitate the costumes, images, and behaviors of popular mass culture heroes from movies, cartoons, comics, and video games at festivals and club activities[2]; [3]. These activities serve as a form of entertainment with profound social functions.

From a sociological perspective, studying the impact of role-playing drama (including cosplay) on individual stress is a promising research direction, particularly when combined with Goffman's dramaturgical theory. Why can this theory be applied to research role-playing and cosplay? This is because Goffman's dramaturgical theory views

social interactions as a performance, exploring how individuals manage their self-image by "playing roles." [4]; [5]. Goffman suggests that social life can be seen as a stage where everyone "performs" certain roles during social interactions. For example, Goffman also defines the "front stage" self as the aspect of an individual that they consciously present to others, while the "backstage" refers to the private space where identity is shaped[20]. He argued that the self is collaboratively constructed and shaped by social contexts, with both a team of performers and an audience playing crucial roles in the process, as the audience's willingness to accept the presented character is essential for legitimizing the performance. Ultimately, the self emerges from these social arrangements, which highlight the importance of audience consent over the performance itself. It is role-playing and cosplay that allow individuals to express and release emotions by adopting roles in specific contexts, which may help alleviate stress in real life.

## 1.2 Purpose of the Study

There is lot of research that has intriguingly applied Goffman's dramaturgical theory across a spectrum of social activities. For instance, a study delved into the intricate relationship between Goffman's framework and self-presentation on online social networking platforms, revealing how users "perform" like actors, skillfully adapting their personas in response to the nuances of their social environment and the images they aspire to project[5]. Similarly, a study harnessed Goffman's insights to scrutinize the unraveling of feminist bloggers' identities, uncovering critical factors such as a deficiency in rational feminist discourse, the allure of commercial temptations, and inadequate impression management, while offering thoughtful recommendations for fostering a more robust feminist presence online[8]. Nevertheless, there remains a conspicuous gap in the literature concerning the application of Goffman's theory to role-playing as a potent form of stress relief. This study seeks to scrutinize, from a sociological lens, the profound impact of role-playing and theatrical activities on individual mental health, particularly their efficacy in alleviating stress; it aspires to provide fresh perspectives on mental health research and drama education.

From a sociological standpoint, this research explores the following questions:

1, How does role-playing affect individual self-perception and self-presentation? Through Goffman's theory, we can analyze how individuals manage their "frontstage" and "backstage" performances in drama and cosplay, thereby reducing psychological stress.

2, What is the social function of role-playing? By participating in cosplay or theatrical activities, individuals may gain social support and build social relationships, which can be studied from a sociological perspective.

This research direction helps students understand the social significance of role-playing for individuals and groups while providing theoretical support for drama clubs and cosplay enthusiasts. Therefore, this topic is entirely feasible within the field of sociology.

### 1.3 Preview of the study

This study will delve into the psychological and social impacts of role-playing activities, such as cosplay, on high school and college students, focusing on how these activities influence self-presentation, anxiety management, and social connections through the lens of Goffman's dramaturgical theory.

## 2 Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

### 2.1 Role Playing and Decreasing Anxiety

Role-playing and cosplay have surged in popularity in recent years, emerging as vibrant creative outlets and dynamic forms of self-expression. Cosplay—an artful practice of embodying characters from films, books, or video games—has transformed into a global phenomenon deeply intertwined with fandom culture. This immersive experience not only fosters personal development and identity exploration but also cultivates a sense of community and belonging [6]. Furthermore, cosplay offers significant mental health benefits, creating a haven where individuals can temporarily escape the pressures of daily life while honing essential social skills and forging meaningful connections with others[7].

Building upon this mental health focus, a key area of research in cosplay examines its impact on body image. As an appearance-centered activity, cosplay encourages participants to compare themselves to fellow cosplayers and the characters they portray, which can have both positive and negative effects on body image. One study found that while some cosplayers experienced increased self-consciousness, many reported boosted confidence due to the support and feedback from the community. While cosplay can heighten self-consciousness for some, its supportive community often fosters increased confidence and positive body image for many participants[9].

Beyond its effects on individual body image, cosplay's therapeutic potential extends to broader social advantages. Cosplay conventions and online communities create safe environments for individuals, particularly those with social anxiety, to build confidence through repeated positive social interactions[7]. These experiences help participants enhance their social skills while challenging negative self-perceptions. Thus, cosplay fosters individual growth and cultivates inclusive social spaces where participants can develop essential social skills and challenge negative self-perceptions through positive, supportive interactions.

In addition to these social advantages, the psychological benefits of role-playing are well-documented beyond cosplay. Previous literature on the psychological benefits of role-playing, including cosplay, highlights both commonalities and distinctions across various studies. All sources emphasize the positive effects on mental health, with one study showing that role-playing reduces anxiety and improves social skills[10], while one study found similar benefits in language learning contexts through drama-based role-playing[24]. One study extends this by exploring how role-playing fosters deeper social interaction and self-expression, with focusing specifically on how digital cosplay spaces provide a sense of belonging and agency for autistic individuals facing socio-

spatial exclusion[11]. However, one study reveals a different dimension, showing that cosplayers often face stigmatization when their portrayed character's gender conflicts with their social gender, pointing to identity-related challenges unique to cosplay [21]. One study used Grounded Theory contrasts with the more general methodologies of the other studies, but all agree that role-playing serves as a powerful tool for enhancing social and psychological well-being[11]. Based on the above analysis, this study provides the following research question:

RQ1: How do role-playing drama activities help individuals reduce anxiety?

## **2.2 Goffman's Dramaturgical Theory and Role-Playing in Anxiety Management**

Goffman's dramaturgical theory masterfully employs the metaphor of a theatrical performance to elucidate how individuals skillfully navigate the complexities of daily social interactions by curating their self-presentation for an audience. Within this captivating analogy, settings such as a hospital come alive, where doctors, nurses, and patients each inhabit distinct roles, donning lab coats, uniforms, and wielding medical tools as their essential "props" ([20]). This insightful framework accentuates the idea that life unfolds as a series of intricate performances, where individuals meticulously orchestrate their portrayals to influence how they are perceived by others, revealing the artistry inherent in our social existence.

Building on Goffman's dramaturgical theory, Cosplay, as a modern manifestation of Goffman's concept of identity performance, extends this theatrical metaphor. By donning costumes and embodying characters, participants physically engage in a form of "masking" that allows them to express alternate identities. This role-playing mirrors Goffman's idea of performing specific social behaviors to create a desired self-image. For instance, in cosplay, the selection of a character, costume, and skit allows individuals to enact a version of themselves that is either validated or dismissed by their audience ([22]).

In addition to identity performance, central to Goffman's theory is the concept of role distance, which refers to the individual's ability to detach themselves from the roles they play, thereby revealing aspects of their private self. Goffman argued that people behave in ways that align with their social context and the image they want to convey, similar to how "actors" take on roles on different "stages" in social life [5]. Of course, in social media, the clear distinction between front- and backstage behavior is blurred due to the absence of real-time, non-verbal cues like body language, leading to delayed adjustments in communication, which can result in unintended transgressions and the rapid escalation of conflicts [12]. Cosplayers often exemplify this process, using their performances to communicate personal traits while remaining concealed behind their characters. Even though they may appear to be "masked," Goffman suggests that through these performances, elements of their true self are revealed.

Furthermore, Goffman's ideas on self-presentation and audience interaction resonate strongly with cosplay's social dynamics. Role-playing within cosplay often involves a negotiation between the performer and the audience, where both parties shape the outcome of the interaction. Cosplayers are keenly aware of how they are perceived, much

like in everyday social performances, where individuals carefully curate their public image to project a particular identity ([20]).

Additionally, Goffman's exploration of gender roles in social performance also finds relevance in cosplay. He argues that gender display, the exhibition of culturally recognized gender attributes, is a form of performance where individuals seek to align with societal expectations ([23]). In the context of cosplay, participants engage in gender displays through character portrayal, which can either conform to or challenge traditional notions of masculinity and femininity.

Moreover, Goffman introduced the concept of "face," a term that refers to the positive public image an individual strives to maintain during social interactions (Goffman, 1967). In cosplay, the performance of "face" is crucial, as participants manage their own self-presentation while simultaneously navigating the social image of others in the community. Consequently, maintaining "face" in cosplay becomes an intricate balancing act of self-expression and social harmony within the subculture.

Ultimately, Goffman's dramaturgical theory, which offers a valuable lens, helps in understanding the role of role-playing in anxiety management. By allowing individuals to distance themselves from their everyday identities, cosplay and other forms of role-playing provide a structured yet liberating environment where they can express themselves, connect with others, and reduce stress. This perspective underscores the therapeutic potential of role-playing, suggesting that it offers individuals a way to delve into new facets of their identity while managing the pressures of social performance. Based on the above analysis, the following research question is proposed:

RQ2: How does Goffman's dramaturgical theory explain the role of role-playing in stress management?

### 3 Methodology

The target of this research is to detect the psychological and social impacts of role-playing, especially concentrating on its effects on stress relief and self-presentation. The research focuses on high school and college students who are actively immersed in drama clubs and cosplay, delving into their unique experiences through extensive interviews. Employing semi-structured interviews conducted via videoconferencing, the study captures rich, nuanced perspectives on role-playing as a vibrant creative outlet, a means of navigating social interactions, and a therapeutic avenue for alleviating anxiety. By rigorously adhering to ethical guidelines, the study prioritizes confidentiality, ensures voluntary participation, and engages in meticulous analysis, ultimately illuminating the psychological benefits associated with role-playing activities. This comprehensive approach seeks to unveil the transformative impact these creative pursuits can have on young individuals' mental well-being.

#### 3.1 Participants

The target group for this study consists of high school and college students, who are actively involved in drama clubs and passionate about cosplay. The group consists of

22 participants, with ages ranging from 15 to 20 years old. The gender distribution is balanced, including both male and female students. Interviews, each lasting approximately 30 minutes, were conducted using advanced recording equipment, transcribed into text, and during which participants shared their past experiences, emotions, and future aspirations. Table 1 provides an overview of the interviewees' basic information.

**Table 1.** Basic information of the Interviewees

<b>Respondents</b>	age	Gender	Occupation	Location
Interviewee 01	18	male	Student	Shenzhen
Interviewee 02	18	female	Student	Shenzhen
Interviewee 03	19	male	Student	Shenzhen
Interviewee 04	17	male	Student	Shenzhen
Interviewee 05	16	female	Student	Shenzhen
Interviewee 06	15	female	Student	Shenzhen
Interviewee 07	19	male	Student	Shenzhen
Interviewee 08	18	female	Student	Shenzhen
Interviewee 09	20	male	Student	Shenzhen
Interviewee 10	20	male	Student	Shenzhen
Interviewee 11	16	Female	Student	Shenzhen
Interviewee 12	18	Female	Student	Shenzhen
Interviewee 13	15	Male	Student	Shenzhen
Interviewee 14	18	Female	Student	Shenzhen
Interviewee 15	15	Male	Student	Shenzhen
Interviewee 16	16	Male	Student	Shenzhen
Interviewee 17	18	Female	Student	Shenzhen
Interviewee 18	19	Male	Student	Shenzhen
Interviewee 19	20	Female	Student	Shenzhen
Interviewee 20	18	Male	Student	Shenzhen
Interviewee 21	19	Male	Student	Shenzhen
Interviewee 22	16	Female	Student	Shenzhen

### 3.2 Procedure

The researcher contacted the interviewees via WeChat and arranged meetings at a coffee shop between August and September 2024. The research process began with an explanation of the informed consent form, followed by recording the interviews. Not only did the researcher adhere to the prepared syllabus, but they also occasionally added follow-up questions, such as asking about the reasons for participating in cosplay. The communication flowed smoothly, and the audio recordings were later transcribed and proofread for accuracy. The semi-structured interview guide included open-ended questions that allowed participants to freely express their experiences, as well as more focused questions related to three key areas previously identified in research as affecting psychological well-being: cosplay as a creative outlet, social connections, and the psychological effects of embodying a character.

### 3.3 Interview Questions

The interview questions in this research commence by collecting essential background information about the participants, who are invited to introduce themselves with foundational details such as age, grade, and academic major. After this initial introduction, participants are encouraged to reflect on their diverse experiences in various role-playing activities, such as vibrant pursuits like theater and cosplay. They are further prompted to elaborate on the duration of their involvement in these activities, as well as the frequency with which they engage in them, allowing for a comprehensive understanding of their personal journeys within these creative realms.

Next, there are questions that explore the relationship between role-playing and self-presentation. Participants are asked to reflect on how they present themselves during role-playing activities and whether there is a difference between their portrayal and their daily life persona. The interview also delves into the concepts of "front stage" and "backstage," as introduced by Goffman, to examine how participants perceive the distinction between their public and private selves in role-playing contexts. They are encouraged to discuss whether these activities have helped them better manage their social image, with specific examples.

The third section focuses on role-playing and stress relief, seeking to understand how role-playing activities affect the participants' mental state. The interview questions ask whether participants believe role-playing helps reduce stress and anxiety, and they are invited to share specific examples where role-playing activities contributed to stress relief. Additionally, participants are asked to reflect on whether they feel more relaxed or anxious during these activities and to explain the reasons behind their emotions. The interview also probes whether certain roles or scenarios in role-playing are particularly effective in helping participants cope with stress.

Moreover, the interview touches on the social functions of role-playing. Participants are asked whether they have formed new friendships or expanded their social networks through role-playing activities, and how these relationships have impacted their lives. They are also encouraged to discuss whether these activities have improved their social

skills or boosted their confidence, providing examples that are applicable where relevant.

The interview concludes with thought-provoking questions that invite participants to explore the long-term effects of role-playing, encouraging them to reflect on how these activities have shaped their lives and transformed their perspectives on themselves and others. In this reflective dialogue, participants are also asked about their intentions to continue engaging in role-playing activities in the future. Additionally, they are invited to suggest areas they believe merit further research, fostering a deeper understanding of the ongoing impact of these creative pursuits on personal growth and community dynamics.

### **3.4 Ethics of the Research**

The research adheres to ethical guidelines by ensuring voluntary participation, confidentiality, and informed consent. The participants, who are high school or college students with role-playing experience, are informed that their involvement is entirely voluntary, and they are also made aware that they can withdraw at any time without facing any penalties. Personal information and interview data are kept strictly confidential, and results are presented anonymously to protect participant identity. The study explicitly states that no identifying information will be used in any reports, so that participants' privacy and rights are respected throughout the research process.

## **4 Results**

The interviews were meticulously recorded digitally and transcribed by the researcher to ensure accuracy and depth. The researcher reflected on their own background, including their personal connection to the research topic, and considered how this might influence their interpretation of the data. To ensure the credibility of the findings, the researcher referred to one study's ([18]) thematic analysis evaluation framework and reflected on potential challenges in conducting thematic analysis. Employing reflexive thematic analysis[19], the research aimed to uncover intricate patterns woven throughout the interviews. Initial codes, which were generated inductively, captured both explicit and nuanced implicit content, with thoughtful revisions that were made during the analytical process. These codes were subsequently organized and, where applicable, synthesized to reveal broader themes within a more manageable dataset, facilitating a richer understanding of the participants' experiences and insights. The following are the main themes and detailed analysis based on the respondents' responses:

### **4.1 The Social Function of Role-Playing**

Several interviewees mentioned in the interview that by participating in role-playing activities, they were able to make new friends and expand their social circles, particularly with people who share similar interests at large-scale events such as comic exhibitions. Interviewee 01 mentioned that by participating in role-playing activities, he



"expanded" many new friends and kept in touch and interacted with these friends during the activities. The interviewees also emphasized that these interactions brought them many pleasant social experiences, and sometimes they even participated in multiple role-playing activities with friends. These phenomena show that role-playing serves as both a form of entertainment and an important channel for many participants to expand their social circles.

This social function extends far beyond merely meeting new friends; it encompasses the vital establishment of social support networks. Interviewee 07 shared that through role-playing, they forged meaningful friendships that offered essential emotional support and encouragement in their everyday lives. During times of stress or confusion, these social connections became a source of profound emotional sustenance. This highlights that role-playing activities facilitate surface-level interactions and cultivate a deeper, more resilient support system for participants, fostering genuine connections that enhance their overall well-being.

## **4.2 The Impact of Role-Playing on Psychological State**

The positive impact of role-playing on mental health emerged as a prominent theme throughout the interviews. Participant 02 shared that engaging in role-playing, particularly after attending comic conventions, brought him a profound sense of relaxation and joy. He viewed role-playing as a unique opportunity to momentarily escape the pressures of reality, enabling him to experience essential emotional release during these activities. In a similar vein, Participant 06 highlighted how role-playing significantly boosted their self-confidence, especially when showcasing their roles and receiving affirming compliments from others. This exchange of positive feedback not only enhanced their self-esteem but also effectively alleviated the anxiety and stress they faced in their daily lives, reinforcing the therapeutic potential of role-playing as a powerful tool for mental well-being.

The impact of role-playing on psychological state is not limited to short-term improvement of emotions but can also help participants establish long-term emotional regulation mechanisms. Interviewee 12 mentioned that by participating in role-playing, they can find ways to release stress in the role, especially when they feel academic pressure, role-playing allows them to temporarily withdraw from the real world and relax their minds. This evidence shows that role-playing provides both entertaining and emotionally therapeutic benefits, contributing to stress management as well.

## **4.3 Self-presentation and Identity Transformation**

In role-playing, participants often encounter an alternate self that contrasts sharply with their everyday personas, immersing themselves in characters that embody qualities far removed from their own. Interviewee 09 revealed that, despite their naturally introverted disposition, they frequently gravitate toward extroverted and exuberant characters in role-playing, allowing them to express aspects of their personality that remain largely unvoiced in daily life. This transformative experience not only offers a valuable emotional release but also expands the avenues of self-expression through the art of

role-playing. Similarly, Interviewee 16 shared that embodying the Monkey King from "Journey to the West" enabled him to showcase the character's mischievousness and cleverness while also imparting crucial lessons on self-expression in real life, particularly when navigating conflicts. In this way, role-playing emerges as a powerful tool for character building and self-reflection, fostering personal growth and deeper understanding of oneself.

Identity transformation in role-playing also involves participants re-identifying with their own identities. Interviewee 13 mentioned that when he played Naruto, he was deeply inspired by the character's positive and tenacious qualities, which he integrated into his real life, making role-playing a form of self-expression while also helping participants establish a positive identity in everyday life.

#### **4.4 Differences Between "Front-End Performance" and "Back-End Performance"**

Many interviewees mentioned the concepts of "frontstage performance" and "backstage performance" during the interview, that is, there is a difference between the performance in public activities and the real self in private. Interviewee 04 mentioned that in role-playing, his frontstage performance is to show the image to the audience, while the backstage performance is his true inner state. Through role-playing, participants can present different selves in various situations and manage their self-image through roles, aligning with Goffman's concepts of frontstage and backstage in drama theory, and reflecting the diversity of self-management and identity performance in role-playing.

This distinction between frontstage and backstage performance also helped participants to adapt to self-image management more flexibly in different social situations. Respondent 18 mentioned that in role-playing activities, he learned how to adjust his performance according to the occasion in order to better adapt to different social situations. This shows that role-playing is not only an entertainment activity, but also provides participants with a practical opportunity to better manage their social image in daily life.

#### **4.5 The Impact of Role-Playing on Social Skills and Self-Confidence**

Although role-playing is fundamentally a virtual form of expression, many interviewees highlighted in their discussions that their social skills and self-confidence have experienced remarkable growth through these activities. Interviewee 07 shared that receiving praise for his character during role-playing brought him immense joy, and this positive external feedback significantly bolstered his self-confidence. Similarly, Interviewee 17 noted that engaging in role-playing equipped him with essential skills for expressing himself more effectively in front of strangers, enhancing his confidence in interpersonal communication. Through these enriching experiences, role-playing not only serves as a creative outlet but also acts as a catalyst for personal development and social empowerment.

Role-playing provides a way to improve self-confidence while helping participants engage more actively in social activities in real life. Interviewee 12 said that through

role-playing activities, his social skills in school life have been significantly improved, especially the interaction with like-minded friends who share role-playing experiences, which has increased his confidence in interacting with others in other situations. This evidence suggests that role-playing helped participants enhance both their performance skills and their social confidence, as well as their interpersonal abilities.

#### **4.6 Willingness to Participate in Role-Playing in the Future**

Most of the interviewees expressed a strong desire to continue to participate in role-playing activities. Interviewee 02 and Interviewee 16 both said that if they have the opportunity in the future, they will continue to participate in role-playing activities, because these activities bring social and psychological pleasure and have become an important part of their lives. These answers show that role-playing is not just a temporary hobby. For many participants, it has become an indispensable part of life, helping them to gain emotional satisfaction and social growth.

Through in-depth analysis of these topics, role-playing activities have brought many aspects of influence to the participants. These activities serve as a form of self-expression and entertainment while having a profound impact on the interviewees, particularly in areas such as social function, psychological relaxation, identity recognition, and self-confidence. Through role-playing, participants can broaden their social circles, relieve stress in life, and improve their self-management ability through the conversion of front-stage and back-stage performances. In the future, many participants said that they will continue to actively participate in role-playing activities as a continuous experience and growth path in life.

## **5 Conclusions and Discussion**

### **5.1 Summarization of the Results**

This study aimed to scrutinize the psychological and social effects of role-playing, particularly cosplay, on high school and college students, using Goffman's dramaturgical theory and semi-structured interviews to examine how role-playing influences self-presentation, anxiety management, and social interaction.

The findings of this research underscore the profound positive impact of role-playing on participants' psychological well-being. Many interviewees articulated how role-playing offered a valuable escape from the pressures of daily life, functioning as a therapeutic tool for managing anxiety and bolstering self-confidence. This resonates with prior studies ([6]; [10]) that emphasize the potential of cosplay and role-playing as vital creative outlets for emotional release and effective stress management. Such insights illuminate the essential role these activities play in enhancing mental health, showcasing their capacity to foster resilience and emotional growth in participants.

Additionally, Goffman's theory of "frontstage" and "backstage" performance was supported by the experiences of participants, who often differentiated between their public persona in role-playing activities and their private self. This distinction allowed participants to manage their social image more flexibly, which enhanced their social

skills and emotional resilience, and, moreover, the transformation of identity through role-playing, as some interviewees reported, proved to be particularly significant. As participants embodied different characters, they could express latent personality traits, which helped them broaden their understanding of themselves and others.

Socially, role-playing has cultivated a profound sense of belonging and community among participants. Many individuals formed lasting friendships and emotional support networks through these activities, underscoring the idea that role-playing transcends mere entertainment to serve as a vital social function. This perspective aligns with existing literature on cosplay communities, which emphasizes the significance of these networks in fostering safe spaces for individuals to explore their identities and navigate social interactions ([7]; [11]). Such connections enhance participants' experiences while contributing to a richer, more inclusive social landscape. Role-playing, particularly in cosplay, offers numerous benefits for psychological health and social functioning, as its therapeutic potential lies in providing emotional release, fostering self-expression, and building social connections. Therefore, this study contributes to the growing body of research on the psychological benefits of creative and performative activities.

## 5.2 Answers to Research Questions

In addressing RQ1 ("How do role-playing drama activities help individuals reduce anxiety?"), the findings reveal that role-playing drama activities, such as cosplay, serve as powerful tools for anxiety reduction by providing both an emotional release and a temporary escape from the stresses of daily life. Many participants explained that stepping into the shoes of fictional characters allowed them to create a mental distance from their real-world concerns, which provided a liberating emotional outlet. This, in turn, facilitated the expression of feelings they might otherwise suppress, and as a result, enhanced their ability to regulate their emotions more effectively. Furthermore, as participants received positive feedback from peers during these activities, their confidence was significantly boosted, fostering a supportive social environment that further alleviated anxiety. Through their engagement in role-playing, participants, who discovered personal stress relief, also forged meaningful social connections that reinforced their overall emotional well-being in the process.

In exploring RQ2 ("How does Goffman's dramaturgical theory explain the role of role-playing in stress management?"), Goffman's dramaturgical theory offers valuable insights into how role-playing activities facilitate stress management by enabling participants to navigate their "frontstage" and "backstage" selves. According to this theory, individuals meticulously curate their public personas (frontstage) while concealing their authentic selves in private (backstage). Within the framework of role-playing, participants are afforded the opportunity to experiment with their self-presentation in a structured environment, liberating themselves from societal expectations and norms. This freedom allows them to manage their identities and emotions more effectively. The study illuminated that through role-playing, participants were able to express facets of their personalities that might otherwise remain dormant in their daily lives, yielding

significant emotional relief and alleviating stress. Consequently, Goffman's theory elucidates how role-playing activities act as a therapeutic tool, providing a controlled space where individuals can harmonize their public and private identities, thereby easing the burdens of everyday social performance.

### 5.3 Comparison of Other Research

The current research emphasizes how role-playing, particularly cosplay, helps participants reduce anxiety, build social connections, and manage their identity through Goffman's dramaturgical theory. Similarly, as other studies (e.g., [13]; [14]) demonstrate, role-playing serves as a therapeutic tool for managing stress, enhancing social skills, and providing an emotional outlet for participants. Both findings, which illustrate role-playing as a means for individuals to express themselves creatively, highlight its offering of emotional relief and social benefits.

However, there are notable differences between other studies and the present study. The current study focuses more on Goffman's "frontstage" and "backstage" theory, showing how participants manage their social persona in cosplay, while one study observes a more fluid boundary between these two stages in cosplay settings[15]. Furthermore, while the present research emphasizes the role of peer feedback in anxiety reduction, two studies ([16]; [17]) point out the empowerment participants, especially women, gain in combating stigma and expressing authentic identities through cosplay. Hence, while both other studies and the present study acknowledge the therapeutic potential of role-playing, the nuances of identity management and social dynamics vary across contexts.

### 5.4 Limitations and Future Research

This research has limitations, particularly the small sample size and focus on high school and college students, which may limit the generalizability of the findings. Expanding the research to include a more diverse age group and broader geographic range could provide more comprehensive insights. Furthermore, while this study utilized semi-structured interviews, future research could benefit from a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative measures of stress and anxiety with qualitative insights.

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