

A Brief Report on the Association between Fandom and Well-Being

Stephen Reysen¹, Courtney N. Plante²

¹*East Texas A&M University*

²*Bishop's University*

Prior research (Reysen et al., 2024) has found an association between fans' fandom scores (identification with a fan group), but not their fanship scores (identification with a fan interest), predicts their well-being, but hinted at the possibility that this tendency may be stronger for a fan's favorite fan interest in particular (as opposed to a lesser interest they have). We tested this possibility in a cross-sectional study of undergraduate students who rated their degree of fanship and fandom with their top four favorite fan interests and also completed two measures of well-being. The results showed that fandom (but not fanship) identification with their first-favorite fan interest, and not fanship or fandom identification with their fourth-favorite fan interest, predicted scores on two different measures of well-being. The results are discussed in relation to the mental health benefits of fandom participation.

Keywords: fans, fanship, fandom, identification, well-being

INTRODUCTION

Based on prior research of sports fans, Daniel Wann (2006) proposed the Team Identification–Social Psychological Health Model, which suggests that the association between team identification and indicators of well-being previously found are mediated by social connections (e.g., number of friends). In effect, greater identification with one's favorite team predicts greater social interaction (with other fans), which, given that humans are a social species, is associated with greater well-being. Despite the theoretical soundness of this model, however, subsequent studies found mixed empirical support for it, with three finding no support (Wann et al., 2011, 2015) and two finding support (Inoue et al., 2020; Wann et al., 2017). Reysen et al. (2024) suggested that the reason for this inconsistency in support for the proposed model may lie in the distinction between fanship and fandom, a distinction not made in these studies.

Author info: Correspondence should be sent to: Stephen Reysen, Department of Psychology and Special Education, East Texas A&M University, P.O. Box 3011, Commerce, TX, 75429. E-mail: stephen.reysen@etamu.edu

North American Journal of Psychology, 2026, Vol. 28, No. 3, 1234-1241
© NAJP <https://doi.org/10.65696/001c.163875>

Fanship refers to one's felt psychological connection to an object of interest (e.g., a sport team, a musical group, an activity such as scrapbooking, a celebrity, etc.), while fandom refers to one's degree of psychological connection with others who share their interest (akin to ingroup identification). Stated differently, fanship reflects a personal identity, while fandom reflects a social identity. While highly correlated and conceptually overlapping, the two constructs have been shown to be empirically distinct (Reysen & Branscombe, 2010), and meaningfully so. In general, fanship is a stronger predictor of fan-related consumption (e.g., watching media, buying merchandise) and excessive fan behavior (e.g., problematic purchasing), while fandom is a better predictor of interpersonal fan behavior (e.g., conversing with other fans) (Reysen & Plante, 2023). Failure to take into account this conceptual overlap between fanship and fandom may explain why prior research (see Wann, 2006) found that team identification was inconsistently associated with well-being through social connections.

Reysen et al. (2024) provided support for this notion, showing that fandom, with its stronger association to the social aspects of fan behavior, and not fanship, is the main driver of the relationship between fan identity and well-being. In Study 1, undergraduate college students indicated their favorite fan interest and completed measures of fanship, fandom, social connections, and psychological well-being. Regression analyses found that fandom, but not fanship, significantly predicted well-being. Furthermore, social connection with other fans mediated the association between fandom and well-being. Follow-up studies with furies (Study 2)—fans of media featuring anthropomorphized animal characters—and anime fans (Study 3) similarly assessed fanship and fandom, as well as measures of various fan activities (in-person gatherings, online engagement, media consumption) and well-being. Once again, fandom, but not fanship, was a significant predictor of well-being. Subsequent mediation analyses showed that in-person fan activities (where fans were more likely to interact with other fans), but not online or consumption behaviors, mediated this association. Taken together, these studies suggest that the overlap between fanship and fandom may have been driving the association between team identification and well-being, and that failing to take into account this distinction may lead to inconsistent results. When both fanship and fandom are included in the same model, fandom emerges as the better predictor of fan well-being.

The present study is driven by another interesting finding in the results of Reysen et al. (2024): The standardized beta weight of the association between undergraduate students' fandom scores for their favorite fan interest and their well-being scores was .43, while the same weight was considerably smaller in the sample of furies (.15) and anime fans (.16). We suggest that this difference is the result of undergraduate students completing the measures, as instructed, for their favorite fan interest, while furies and anime fans completed those same measures with respect to a particular interest which may not have been their favorite interest. Thus, it is possible that the previously-observed association between fandom and well-being may be strongest for a person's favorite interests—the ones which they may invest the most time and effort going to events or

interacting with other fans for—relative to their other, less-engaging interests. We test this idea presently.

The purpose of the present study was to directly test a hypothesis derived from the findings of Reysen et al. (2024), examining whether fandom identification with a top fan interest will significantly predict well-being above and beyond fandom identification with a fourth favorite fan interest. In the present study participants rated their degree of fanship and fandom for their top four favorite fan interests and well-being. We predicted that fandom identification with their first favorite fan interest will predict well-being above and beyond fanship and fandom of their fourth favorite fan interest. Additionally, while Reysen et al. (2024) used a short measure of psychological well-being, in the present study we employed not only the same measure, but also a longer, multi-faceted measure of well-being.

METHOD

Participants and Procedure

Participants ($N = 459$, 81.5% women; $M_{\text{age}} = 21.32$, $SD = 5.66$) were comprised of undergraduates participating for class, or extra, credit at East Texas A&M University. Participants were solicited in the psychology research participant pool, were given informed consent, completed the study, and were then debriefed and thanked (East Texas A&M IRB #2362). Participants listed and completed measures of their degree of fanship and fandom for their top four favorite fan interests along with two measures of well-being. All measures used a 7-point Likert-type response scale, from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree* (see Table 1 for scale means, standard deviation, and Cronbach's alphas).

Materials

Fanship

We included a three-item (e.g., “Being a fan of this interest is part of me”) measure of fanship validated in prior research (Reysen & Branscombe, 2010) to assess fanship.

Fandom

We included another three-item (e.g., “I am glad to be a member of the community of fans of this interest”) measure of fandom identification from prior research (Doosje et al., 1995; Reysen et al., 2013).

Well-Being—Psychological

We adopted six items (e.g., “I seek out new experiences to grow as a person”) from prior research (Reysen et al., 2020) to assess Ryff's (1989) conceptualization of psychological well-being.

Well-Being—Multi-Faceted

We adapted 24 items (e.g., “I am satisfied with myself and my achievements”) from prior research (Kinderman et al., 2011) as a broader, more multi-faceted assessment of participants' overall well-being (i.e., a combination of physical, psychological, and relationship well-being).

RESULTS

We first examined whether participants' degree of fanship and fandom differed for their first and fourth favorite fan interest with paired samples t -tests. As one would expect, the ratings for fanship, $t(458) = 2.67$, $p = .008$, $d = .12$, and fandom, $t(458) = 3.76$, $p < .001$, $d = .18$, were significantly lower, but above the midpoint of the measure, for the fourth (vs. first) fan interest. Next, we assessed correlations between all of the

assessed variables, finding significant positive associations between all of them (see Table 1). Most presently relevant for testing our hypothesis, we conducted regression analyses, allowing fanship and fandom scores for first and fourth ranked fan interests to simultaneously predict the short (Ryff) and longer (BBC) measures of well-being. As shown in Table 2, fandom identification with the first ranked fan interest was the only significant predictor of both well-being measures. Although, the beta weights for fandom identification with the first and fourth favorite fan interests did not differ significantly from one another for the Ryff (Wald = 0.91, $p = .34$) and BBC (Wald = 1.35, $p = .25$) models. The results show that the fandom identification with the first, but not the fourth, fan interest was significant.

Table 1. Means, Standard Deviation, Reliability, and Correlations between Assessed Variables

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. #1 Fanship	--	--	--	--	--	--
2. #1 Fandom	.79**	--	--	--	--	--
3. #4 Fanship	.52**	.46**	--	--	--	--
4. #4 Fandom	.41**	.49**	.81**	--	--	--
5. Ryff Average	.21**	.28**	.27**	.29**	--	--
6. BBC Average	.13**	.20**	.12**	.16**	.72**	--
Mean	5.19	5.11	4.99	4.82	5.36	4.97
Standard Deviation	1.61	1.58	1.66	1.69	1.15	1.09
Alpha	.91	.92	.93	.93	.87	.95

Note. ** $p < .01$.

Table 2. Regression Analyses of First and Fourth Favorite Fan Interest, Fanship, and Fandom Predicting Well-Being Measures

Variable	β	t	p	VIF
Ryff Average				
#1 Fanship	-.07	-0.89	.374	3.08
#1 Fandom	.22	2.92	.004	3.00
#4 Fanship	.09	1.13	.261	3.50
#4 Fandom	.13	1.61	.109	3.33
BBC Average				
#1 Fanship	-.08	-1.02	.309	3.08
#1 Fandom	.23	2.89	.004	3.00
#4 Fanship	-.01	-0.10	.925	3.50
#4 Fandom	.08	1.00	.317	3.33

Note. Ryff model, $F(4, 454) = 13.92$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .11$, BBC model, $F(4, 454) = 5.67$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .05$.

DISCUSSION

The purpose of the present study was to test a hypothesis, derived from prior research (Reysen et al., 2024), that the association between fandom and well-being may be at least partly contingent upon one's rating of the interest as one of their favorites. The hypothesis was supported in the present study, with fandom identification scores significantly predicting well-being for participants' first-favorite fan interest, but not their fourth-

favorite fan interest. The results also provided a conceptual replication and extension of Reysen et al. (2024), showing that fandom emerged as a significant predictor of well-being when both fanship and fandom were included in the same model, and did so not only with the same measure of psychological well-being as in the original study, but also with a broader, multi-faceted measure of well-being as well.

The results of the three studies by Reysen et al. (2024) suggested that the inconsistencies observed in tests of Wann's (2006) Team Identification–Social Psychological Health Model may stem from the decision to assess fanship (i.e., team identification) and not fandom identification. The results of the present research provide further support that fandom identification is the component of fan identity that significantly predicts fans' well-being when both fanship and fandom are included as predictors. This is likely because of fandom identification is associated with social aspects of fan behaviors and with in-person interactions with other fans. The present study also adds to the growing body of evidence (see Reysen & Plante, 2023) that fan identity is comprised of both fanship and fandom, with the distinction between them being of, as stated, theoretical importance, as well as of practical importance.

A practical implication of the present research is its suggestion that fandom participation, like group participation in general, may be beneficial for mental health (Haslam et al., 2018). Fandoms are groups in which people come together to discuss and revel in their shared fan interest. Participating, in-person, in fandom discussions and activities is likely beneficial, particularly for those who feel isolated or lacking in social connections otherwise, and may generally contribute to better mental health. Given that most people are likely a fan of something, there is great potential for most people to benefit from sharing these interests with like-minded others as a source of social support. With the concerns about the increasingly fragmented nature of society and the loss of social support this entails (e.g., Putnam, 2000), it may be more important now than ever for people to turn to fandom as a source of social support and resilience.

The present research shows some overlap with research utilizing the celebrity attitude scale, which contains three factors representing increasing levels of absorption-addiction: entertainment-social, intense-personal, and borderline-pathological (for reviews see Brooks, 2021; McCutcheon, 2025). At higher levels of the spectrum (i.e., intense-personal and borderline-pathological) the measure is associated with poorer well-being (Brooks, 2021). Although the evidence is mixed (Brooks, 2021) at the lower level of the model with the entertainment-social dimension sometimes associated with positive well-being, such as greater social well-being (Nnubia et al., 2020) and satisfaction with life (Chia & Poo, 2009). This is notable because that dimension of the measure contains items regarding both enjoyment and interacting with friends. Future research may assess celebrity worship alongside measures of fanship, fandom, and frequency of in-person interactions to delve into the association between celebrity attitude and well-being.

The present research findings should be considered within the context of their limitations, the most apparent of which is in its reliance upon a cross-sectional design. Owing to this limitation, we are unable to assess

whether participants' fandom participation improves well-being through gratifications and interactions within their fan community, or whether participants with better well-being are predisposed to seek out interactions with others and, by extension, to feel more connected with the fandom as a result. A longitudinal study of fans over time that assesses fan identification, in-person interactions, and well-being would aid in disentangling these possibilities. Additionally, participants rated their four favorite fan interests and then well-being. There may be order effects that randomizing the order of scale presentation may have avoided.

In conclusion, the present study examined the association between fanship and fandom scores with well-being for fans' first- and fourth-favorite fan interests. Fandom identification for one's favorite fan interest, but not for their fourth-favorite, emerged as a significant predictor of well-being, while fanship scores did not. The results support prior research showing that felt connection to one's fan group, over and above liking a fan object, may be what predicts fans' reports of resilience and well-being. Future research into how fans become more identified with their fandoms may pave the way for practical interventions with clinical implications in the future.

REFERENCES

- Brooks, S. K. (2021). FANatics: Systematic literature review of factors associated with celebrity worship, and suggested directions for future research. *Current Psychology*, 40(2), 864–886. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12144-018-9978-4>
- Chia, S. C., & Poo, Y. L. (2009). Media, celebrities, and fans: An examination of adolescents' media usage and involvement with entertainment celebrities. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 86(1), 23–44. <https://doi.org/10.1177/107769900908600103>
- Doosje, B., Ellemers, N., & Spears, R. (1995). Perceived intragroup variability as a function of group status and identification. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 31(5), 410–436. <https://doi.org/10.1006/jesp.1995.1018>
- Haslam, C., Jetten, J., Cruwys, T., Dingle, G. A., & Haslam, S. A. (2018). *The new psychology of health: Unlocking the social cure*. Routledge.
- Kinderman, P., Schwannauer, M., Pontin, E., & Tai, S. (2011). The development and validation of a general measure of well-being: The BBC well-being scale. *Quality of Life Research*, 20(7), 1035–1042. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11136-010-9841-z>
- McCutcheon, L. E. (2025). Admiring celebrities: A critique of the celebrity attitude scale and the absorption-addiction model. *ISAR Journal of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences*, 3(3), 35–41.
- Nnubia, U. I., Ezeonyeche, C. L., Nnodim, E. J., & Okenwa, U. E. (2020). Celebrity worship and its association with subjective mental health of adolescent undergraduates in Nigerian tertiary institutions. *African Journal for the Psychological Studies of Social Issues*, 23(2), 10–21.
- Putnam, R. D. (2000). *Bowling alone: The collapse and revival of American community*. Simon & Schuster.
- Reysen, S., & Branscombe, N. R. (2010). Fanship and fandom: Comparisons between sport fans and non-sport fans. *Journal of Sport Behavior*, 33(2), 176–193.
- Reysen, S., Katzarska-Miller, I., Nesbit, S. M., & Pierce, L. (2013). Further validation of a single-item measure of social identification. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 43(6), 463–470. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ejsp.1973>
- Reysen, S., & Plante, C. N. (2023). Being furry: Fanship versus fandom. In C. N. Plante, S. Reysen, C. Adams, S. E. Roberts, & K. C. Gerbasi (Eds.), *Furscience: A decade of psychological research on the furry fandom* (pp. 131–155). International Anthropomorphic Research Project.
- Reysen, S., Plante, C. N., Lam, T. Q., Kamble, S. V., Katzarska-Miller, I., Assis, N., Packard, G., & Moretti, E. G. (2020). Maturity and well-being: Consistent associations across samples and measures. *Journal of Wellness*, 2(2), Article 10. <https://doi.org/10.18297/jwellness/vol2/iss2/10>
- Reysen, S., Plante, C. N., Roberts, S. E., & Gerbasi, K. C. (2024). Social activities mediate the relation between fandom identification and psychological well-being. *Leisure Sciences*, 46(5), 681–701. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01490400.2021.2023714>

- Ryff, C. D. (1989). Happiness is everything, or is it? Explorations on the meaning of psychological well-being. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 57(6), 1069–1081. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.57.6.1069>
- Wann, D. L. (2006). Understanding the positive social psychological benefits of sport team identification: The Team Identification-Social Psychological Health Model. *Group Dynamics: Theory, Research, and Practice*, 10(4), 272–296. <https://doi.org/10.1037/1089-2699.10.4.272>
- Wann, D. L., Hackathorn, J., & Sherman, M. R. (2017). Testing the team identification–social psychological health model: Mediation relationships among team identification, sport fandom, sense of belonging, and meaning in life. *Group Dynamics: Theory, Research, and Practice*, 21(2), 94–107. <https://doi.org/10.1037/gdn0000066>
- Wann, D. L., Waddill, P. J., Brasher, M., & Ladd, S. (2015). Examining sport team identification, social connections, and social well-being among high school students. *Journal of Amateur Sport*, 1(2), 27–50. <https://doi.org/10.17161/jas.v0i0.4931>
- Wann, D. L., Waddill, P. J., Polk, J., & Weaver, S. (2011). The team identification-social psychological health model: Sport fans gaining connections to others via sport team identification. *Group Dynamics: Theory, Research, and Practice*, 15(1), 75–89. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0020780>