

BEING A MUSIC FAN: FANDOM EFFECTS ON THE PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING OF ITS PARTICIPANTS

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A 50-year old woman who has watched the US serial “General Hospital” (ABC) since early childhood muses: “What I have learned about myself over years of viewing is that my perception of which characters I love and why has grown and changed with my life experience. My feelings were understood only by the same fans, the joy of communicating with them, increased the joy of watching serial”.

Fans are enthusiastic and ardent supporters of an interest [3]. Within psychology, fan research has largely been limited to the examination of sport fans; however, outside of psychology fans and fan communities as a whole have been viewed through an expansive literature within the humanities from a number of different perspectives, including gamers, sci-fi fans, and the rarer examinations of sport and music fans [4].

For many fans, their fandom is more important to them and central to their identity than other traditional connections or relationships, such as one’s residential neighborhood [1]. One prominent manner in which many non-sports fans (e.g., media fans) interact is at fan gatherings such as conventions, which provide members with a sense of social connection [5]. As such, for many media-based fans, fandom is associated with such social experiences which, in turn, are associated with greater well-being (e.g., music festival fans) [2].

The positive physiological and psychological effects of music on health and wellbeing are well researched in the field of music psychology. Music can positively impact people’s mental health by supporting mood regulation, social relationships, and increasing positive emotions and self-esteem. However, in the field of music

information retrieval (MIR), there is limited research exploring the connections between music and the mental health of the listener. In particular, the complex context of being a music fan involves online communities and social media, as well as the fan's perceived relationship with the artists which will inevitably influence the impact of music on listeners' mental health. Yet, there is a dearth of research exploring the holistic context of the listener, including external factors related to music such as the social relationship of listeners to artists and other fans.

We analyzed the existing theoretical studies of the fandom effects on the psychological well-being of its participants and made the following conclusions:

- *feeling comforted, understood, and not alone* (when discussing comfort, participants often imagined the songs giving them a hug);
- *self-growth through understanding and accepting oneself* (many participants reported feeling cathartic after listening to music, commenting on how it helped them understand and articulate their own emotions);
- *intentional coping through various music* (participants talked about accessing specific songs when they wanted to attain a certain mood such as energy for work, relaxing after a tough day, or calming anxiety);
- *connection of listeners and songs through support from textual and visual elements* (these imagined connections provided real comfort to the participants and helped them develop emotional resilience for self-coping: music helped to escape or forget their difficult reality momentarily which people could not control (e.g., the pandemic or abusive household); it helped them connect with reality, and provided space for articulating and normalizing negative experiences, feelings of loss, and emotions that are a part of one's lived experience but are hidden, stigmatized, and/or feared in the society);
- *connections with artists beyond music* (most participants experienced connections with artists beyond music through the artists' live conversations with fans, personal stories, struggles, behind the scenes stories of the song/album, art, and imagery; these participants valued the authenticity of the

artists in various types of work, explaining how easy it was to relate to them on a personal level);

- *feeling of creativity or contribution* (fan art, covering music, projects, etc);
- *connections with other fans through discussion of music* (participants spoke about feeling an abstract connection with “others out there” who might be listening and relating to the same music; this reduced their sense of loneliness).

Fanship has its roots in the more general construct of group identification. Early psychologists such as Freud and Kagan argued that identification described a process by which people include attributes or characteristics of the group as part of themselves. As a result, a notable consequence of group identification is that the individual may –react to events occurring to the group as if they occurred to him. More recently, researchers in the tradition of social identity and self-categorization theories have advanced the view that group identification constitutes a condition under which the actions of a group are a central component of one’s social identity. One’s categorization as a member of a group is important and significant to the individual.

Beyond the benefits associated with being a fan, such as greater well-being, fans are motivated to participate in the fan interest for a variety of reasons, such as entertainment, to escape the stresses of their day-to-day lives, or to fulfil a need for belonging and through this gain an array of positive benefits. For some fans this participation provides a purpose in life and inspiration. In some this is generated through the source material which may inspire the production of art, music, or other works, from both the fandom itself as both a model for behavior and a source for new ideas.

The perspective of this theoretical analysis is an empirical study of the "La joie de Lavoie" fandom effects on psychological well-being of its participants, in particular during the COVID-19 pandemic.

References:

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