

PSYCHOLOGICAL NEEDS PREDICT FANSHIP AND FANDOM IN ANIME FANS

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Abstract

We examined whether the psychological needs fulfilled by group membership predicted fanship (identification with a fan interest) and fandom (identification with other fans) among anime fans. Self-identified anime fans completed measures of fanship and fandom, as well as measures assessing the psychological needs met by their participation in the anime community. The results showed that there are similarities and differences between male and female anime fans in the needs met by fandom participation. Furthermore, these differences in fulfilled needs predicted differences in fanship and fandom scores. However, overall, there existed few differences between male and female anime fans in motivation to engage with the anime fandom.

Keywords: anime, fan, fanship, fandom, identification, needs

Introduction

People belong to groups as a way of fulfilling a variety of psychological needs (e.g., Vignoles, Regalia, Manzi, Gollidge, & Scabini, 2006). For example, social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) posits that

individuals belong to groups to maintain positive and distinct social identities as part of a broader need for positive self-evaluation. Others suggest that group participation fulfills a variety of needs, including efficacy, meaning, continuity (the need to feel a connection between the past, present, and future), belongingness, interpersonal distinctiveness (see Vignoles, Regalia, Manzi, Gollidge, & Scabini, 2006), uncertainty reduction (Hogg, 2000), friendship (Wann, 2006), social support (Haslam, Jetten, Postmes, & Haslam, 2009), formation of a world-view (Turner & Onorato, 1999), and self-validation (Swann, Kwan, Polzer, & Milton, 2003; Turner & Onorato, 1999). In the present study we examine these psychological needs in members of the anime fandom, testing whether self-identification as an anime fan fulfills these needs and whether this fulfillment predicts the extent and nature of fan participation.

Fandom, Fanship, and Fan Motivation

In their research on fans, Reysen and Branscombe (2010) found evidence for two related, yet empirically distinct constructs, *fanship* and *fandom*. Fanship refers to one's

felt connection to a fan interest, while fandom refers to one's felt connection to the fan group (i.e., other fans of the same interest). To illustrate: the statement "I love watching anime" reflects fanship, as it refers to a personal interest and identification with particular content; in contrast, the statement "I love the anime community" reflects fandom, as it refers to group identification and other fans, not to content. Psychological research on fans has focused primarily on team identification (Wann & Branscombe, 1993), a construct analogous to fanship. Only recently have researchers begun to study fandom, typically doing so from a social identity perspective (Reysen, Plante, Roberts, & Gerbasi, 2015). And while fanship and fandom intuitively seem to go hand-in-hand, research has shown that they need to be considered independently. For example, in one study examining fan motivations (e.g., belongingness, escape), researchers found that sexual attraction to others predicted the extent to which furies, which are fans of anthropomorphism (art, cartoons, costuming, literature), identified with furry-themed content, but did not predict the extent to which they identified with other furies (Schroy, Plante, Reysen, Roberts, and Gerbasi, in press). Put another way, sexual attraction motivated furies to like furry content, but did not motivate them to identify with the broader furry community.

To this point, the reviewed literature has shown that fans differ in their underlying motivation and in the nature of their fan interest. Researchers have also discovered that sex plays an important moderating role in fan participation. For example, female fashion fans express greater fanship than

male fashion fans (Pentecost & Andrews, 2010), male sport fans show more extreme fan behavior (e.g., aggressive language) than women (Pentecost & Andrews, 2010), female literary fans purchase more merchandise than men (Bihagen & Katz-Gerro, 2000; Park, Kim, & Forney, 2005), and women tend to interpret fan content more artistically than men; that is, females have a greater appreciation for the artistic nature of anime and manga, whereas men seem to be more interested in the action and story (Chen, 2004). Sex differences in the motivations underlying fan participation have also been found, particularly in the domain of sport fans (Wann, 1995; Wann, Schrader, & Wilson, 1999). For example, male sport fans tend to be more motivated than female fans by aesthetics, entertainment, economic incentives, escapism, eustress, and self-esteem, whereas female fans are more motivated than male fans by family. Reinforcing these findings, Dietz-Uhler, Harrick, End, and Jacquemotte (2000) found that these sex differences could be explained by differences in social motivation: females' primary motive for being a fan was to attend games and watch sporting events with friends and family, while male interest was more likely to be driven by prior experience playing sports and wanting to acquire sports information (Dietz-Uhler et al., 2000). Taken together, this research suggests that females enjoy being a part of a sport fandom for the social interaction it allows, while males tend to prefer the entertainment value and sense of escapism provided by the interest.

The Anime Fandom

Anime fans are enthusiastic admirers of Japanese animation and comic books (manga), the extent of which can be illustrated by the success of anime in North America despite geographic, cultural, and language barriers (Leonard, 2005). Anime fans express their interest in multitudinous ways, including watching anime and reading manga novels, creating their own artwork, costuming (i.e., cosplay), and other fan-produced content (e.g., fan dubbing). As a group, anime fans tend to be young (e.g., college students), male, introverted, and to identify with other aspects of geek culture (e.g., video games; Reysen, Plante, Roberts, Gerbasi, & Shaw, in press). Anime fans are stigmatized by non-fans (Reysen, Plante, Roberts, Gerbasi, Mohebpour, & Gamboa, 2016), in part because anime fans are atypical in comparison to sport fans, who tend to be the prototype of a stereotypical fan (Reysen & Shaw, in press). Anime fans have been shown, in past research, to be motivated by the need to belong and by the entertainment provided by anime (Schroy et al., in press). Others (e.g., Chen, 2004) have suggested that female anime fans, in particular, are motivated to interact with other anime fans as a means of escaping social oppression, gender discrimination, and to express desires for an ideal romantic relationship.

While prior research has studied the motivational factors underlying anime fans and the way in which these factors predict fandom and fanship among anime fans, these motivating factors were derived from research on sport fans (Wann, Melnick,

Russell, & Pease, 2001). In the present research we attempt to broaden the perspective and test the relationships between many other psychological need by testing the relationship between a variety of other psychological needs (e.g., distinctiveness, efficacy, meaning in life) and scores of fanship and fandom.

Current Study

The purpose of the present study is to explore sex differences in the psychological needs (e.g., self-esteem, belongingness) motivating anime fans and to study whether these needs explain sex differences in fanship and fandom. Self-identified anime fans completed measures assessing psychological needs fulfillment, fanship, and fandom. Although this study is exploratory, we predicted, based on prior research (Schroy et al., in press), that belongingness would emerge as a predictor of participants' fanship and fandom scores. We did not, however, have any other a priori predictions.

Methods

Participants and Procedure

Participants ($N = 923$, 57.6% male; $M_{\text{age}} = 26.06$, $SD = 7.86$) included self-identified anime fans recruited at A-Kon (anime convention in Dallas, TX) and through anime-related websites. As part of a longer questionnaire, participants completed measures related to psychological needs, fanship, and fandom. All measures used a 7-point Likert-type response scale, from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*.

Measures

Psychological needs. To assess the psychological needs met by anime fandom participation, we adapted six items (“Being a member of the anime community gives me a sense of self-esteem,” “Being a member of the anime community makes me feel like a competent or capable person,” “Being a member of the anime community gives me a sense of “meaning” in my life,” “Being a member of the anime community gives me a sense of continuity—between past, present, and future—in my life,” “Being a member of the anime community makes me feel close to, or accepted by, other people,” and “Being a member of the anime community makes me distinct and unique compared to other people”) from Vignoles and colleagues (2006). These items were used to assess the extent to which the anime community fulfilled participants’ needs for self-esteem, efficacy, meaning, continuity, belongingness, and distinctiveness. Additionally, we constructed items assessing other well-studied psychological needs, including reduction of uncertainty (“Being a member of the anime community reduces the uncertainty in my life”), friendship (“Being a member of the anime community provides me a way to make and maintain friendships”), social support (“Being a member of the anime community provides me with social support when I need it”), world-view (“Being a member of the anime community provides me with a world-view (a perspective to view the world”), and self-verification (“Being a member of the anime community validates my world-view”).

Fanship. We adapted three items (“I am emotionally connected to being an anime fan,” “I strongly identify with being an anime fan,” “Being an anime fan is part of me”) from Reysen and Branscombe (2010) to assess fanship ($\alpha = .91$).

Fandom. We adapted three items (“I strongly identify with other anime fans in the Anime community,” “I am glad to be a member of the anime community,” “I see myself as a member of the anime community”) from prior research (Doosje, Ellemers, & Spears, 1995; Reysen, Katzarska-Miller, Nesbit, & Pierce, 2013) to assess identification with the fandom ($\alpha = .89$).

Results

We began by examining correlations among all assessed variables. As shown in Table 1, all of the variables were significantly positively related to one another. Next, we examined differences between men and women on the assessed variables using a MANOVA with sex as the independent variable and the remaining variables as the dependent variables. The overall test was significant, Wilks’ Lambda = 0.97, $F(13, 909) = 2.24$, $p = .007$, $\eta_p^2 = .031$. As shown in Table 2, women rated the anime fandom as providing significantly more self-esteem and social support than men. We next conducted a pair of multivariate regressions (one for males, one for females), entering all of the psychological needs simultaneously as predictors of fanship. The regression was significant for males, $F(11, 520) = 39.06$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .45$, and females, $F(11, 379) =$

35.01, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .50$. As shown in Table 3, fulfillment of self-esteem, meaning in life, continuity, and distinctiveness needs predicted fanship for men, whereas, for women, fanship was predicted by anime's ability to fulfill self-esteem, meaning in life, and world-view needs. Another pair of regression analyses were run, this time predicting fandom instead of fanship (see Table 4). The regression was significant for males, $F(11, 520) = 34.83$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .42$, and females, $F(11, 379) = 27.15$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .44$. For men, fandom scores were predicted by the fulfillment of self-esteem, meaning in life, distinctiveness, uncertainty reduction, and friendship needs, while for women, fandom was predicted by the fulfillment of meaning in life, belongingness, and distinctiveness needs.

Discussion

The purpose of the present study was to explore sex differences in psychological needs as predictors of fanship and fandom in anime fans. We predicted, based on prior research, that belongingness would emerge as a unique predictor of fanship and fandom. This hypothesis was only partially supported, as belongingness was not a significant predictor of fanship, but was a significant predictor of fandom for women (but not men). The results showed that there were more similarities than differences between sexes: while some predictors were significant for one sex but not the other, these differences (as indicated by examining whether the betas were significantly different) were small enough to suggest that these are differences of magnitude rather

than of kind.

The present findings reveal that male and female anime fans were generally comparable in the relationship between their psychological needs and their degree of fanship and fandom. This conclusion is supported by three findings. First, self-esteem was a significant predictor of fanship and fandom for both men and women. These findings, particularly the fandom result, are consistent with social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), which suggests that individuals seek to belong to groups that allow them to maintain positive and distinct social identities. Put succinctly, anime fans like anime, in part, because it provides them a positive evaluation of the self. Second, the need for meaning in life significantly predicted fanship and fandom for both men and women, a finding consistent with the idea that being a member of a group or organization can provide one with a people a sense of purpose (Grant & Hogg, 2012; Vignoles et al., 2006). Finally, distinctiveness predicted both fanship and fandom in both men and women. This finding is consistent with optimal distinctiveness theory (Brewer, 1991), which emphasizes that people have a need to stand out meaningfully from others: liking anime and participating in the fandom may provide anime fans with a relatively distinct identity (e.g., compared to more prototypical sport fans). In sum, the data suggest that men and women do not differ in the extent to which anime's ability to provide them with a sense of self-esteem, meaning, and distinctiveness contributes to their sense of fanship and fandom.

Despite these similarities, however,

some evidence suggests that male and female anime fans may differ in the relationship between need fulfillment and fan participation. It is worth noting that the only significant difference in betas was for worldview, where the relationship between worldview and fandom and fanship was significantly stronger for women than for men. Women may be more interested in the social aspects, which is tied to worldview validation (Turner & Onorato, 1999). Female students considered fan behavior to be appearing at, viewing, or cheering at sports events with friends and family (Dietz-Uhler et al., 2000). This is an indicator that females consider social aspects, such as being with friends and family, more of a motivation to be a part of a fandom than men, who believe being an active part of a fandom entails participation in events, rather than cheering on the sidelines (Antunovic & Hardin, 2012).

Although related, fanship and fandom have been found, in prior research, to be empirically distinct constructs, as the motivation to be a fan and the motivation to be an active participant in the fandom may not always align (Schroy et al., in press). The results of the present study support this point with examples of fandom and fanship being distinctly predicted by different psychological needs, and extending the point by showing that these differences themselves differ by sex. For example, for women in the present sample, self-esteem predicted fanship, but not fandom; in contrast, belongingness predicted fandom, but not fanship. were stronger predictors of women's connection to other fans. In contrast, for men, continuity predicted

fanship, but not fandom, whereas uncertainty reduction and friendship predicted fandom, but not fanship. While these examples illustrate the importance of considering fandom and fanship as distinct constructs in psychological research on fans and suggest that there may be sex differences in the relationship between fan motivation and these constructs, the reasons for these differences are beyond the scope of the present paper. Future research would do well to more fully explore the nature of these differences and the possible mechanisms underlying them.

Several limitations of the present research are worth noting. First, the present study was correlational. As such, it is impossible to draw causal conclusions from the data. Second, the items used were imperfect operationalizations of the constructs under study – sometimes measured indirectly, or using a single item. Although prior research has utilized a subset of these items (see Vignoles et al., 2006), future studies should employ more thorough measures to provide greater construct validity. Finally, although the sample consisted of both convention-going fans and fans from a variety of countries solicited online, the sample was predominantly comprised of individuals from Western countries. This is likely a likely product of the survey being available only in English. The results may vary if the sample contained more individuals outside these Western cultural spaces, and it remains for future research to not only test the replicability of the present findings, but to also test their generalizability to other cultural contexts.

Conclusion

The present study was a unique examination of the relationship between numerous psychological needs and fanship and fandom among anime fans. Overall, our results suggest that male and female anime fans are more alike than different with respect to the psychological needs they fulfill by participating in the anime fandom. Nevertheless, preliminary data suggested that there were some differences between male and female anime fans, which future researchers would do well to investigate to better understand the mechanisms underlying fandom involvement and to test whether men and women experience fandoms and fan cultures differently.

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Table 1

Correlations between Assessed Variables Split by Sex (Males Top of Diagonal, Females Bottom of Diagonal)

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
1. Fanship	--	.77	.55	.51	.58	.58	.54	.56	.45	.46	.50	.45	.49
2. Fandom	.78	--	.57	.51	.53	.52	.54	.53	.40	.50	.52	.39	.46
3. Self-Esteem	.59	.56	--	.84	.68	.65	.68	.58	.57	.58	.67	.46	.55
4. Efficacy	.56	.54	.85	--	.72	.67	.69	.58	.56	.56	.68	.50	.60
5. Meaning	.63	.55	.68	.72	--	.76	.65	.60	.62	.52	.63	.54	.62
6. Continuity	.58	.50	.62	.67	.69	--	.68	.58	.59	.55	.66	.58	.60
7. Belongingness	.59	.60	.73	.73	.67	.68	--	.58	.54	.70	.72	.48	.54
8. Distinctiveness	.56	.54	.66	.68	.62	.60	.70	--	.57	.52	.56	.51	.58
9. Less Uncertainty	.55	.48	.55	.61	.74	.69	.62	.59	--	.47	.58	.48	.56
10. Friends	.51	.54	.61	.61	.59	.59	.73	.59	.55	--	.71	.49	.45
11. Social Support	.57	.56	.64	.64	.63	.63	.75	.59	.64	.74	--	.56	.55
12. Worldview	.57	.49	.55	.60	.62	.62	.61	.60	.61	.51	.60	--	.74
13. Self-Verification	.54	.48	.59	.64	.71	.64	.61	.61	.69	.55	.63	.80	--

Note. All correlations significant at $p < .001$.

Table 2

Means (Standard Deviation) of Motivations, Fanship, and Fandom by Sex

Variable	Men	Women	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	η_p^2
Fanship	4.80 (1.64)	4.69 (1.75)	1.01	.316	.001
Fandom	4.91 (1.54)	4.84 (1.66)	0.41	.523	.000
Self-Esteem	4.08 (1.77)	4.36 (1.80)	5.37	.021	.006
Efficacy	3.93 (1.72)	4.13 (1.84)	2.68	.102	.003
Meaning	3.82 (1.81)	3.95 (1.98)	1.18	.278	.001
Continuity	4.29 (1.84)	4.27 (1.89)	0.03	.854	.000
Belongingness	4.44 (1.72)	4.57 (1.84)	1.20	.273	.001
Distinctiveness	4.20 (1.85)	4.36 (2.03)	1.61	.204	.002
Less Uncertainty	3.41 (1.85)	3.51 (1.96)	0.70	.404	.001
Friends	4.80 (1.71)	4.86 (1.83)	0.31	.575	.000
Social Support	4.09 (1.81)	4.40 (2.03)	6.07	.014	.007
Worldview	4.36 (1.92)	4.55 (1.99)	2.22	.137	.002
Self-Verification	3.64 (1.85)	3.71 (1.94)	0.35	.554	.000

Note. 7-point Likert-type scale, from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*.

Table 3

Motivations Predicting Fanship by Sex

Variable	Men		Women	
	β (95% CI)	<i>p</i> -value	β (95% CI)	<i>p</i> -value
Self-Esteem	.198 (.040, .359) _a	.014	.217 (.067, .387) _a	.004
Efficacy	-.134 (-.292, .022) _a	.089	-.125 (-.287, .035) _a	.124
Meaning	.185 (.051, .309) _a	.003	.268 (.129, .407) _a	< .001
Continuity	.164 (.036, .291) _a	.011	.114 (-.023, .262) _a	.101
Belongingness	.076 (-.050, .196) _a	.221	.027 (-.122, .183) _a	.682
Distinctiveness	.245 (.139, .355) _a	< .001	.122 (-.002, .239) _a	.055
Less Uncertainty	-.031 (-.132, .079) _a	.605	.018 (-.114, .150) _a	.804
Friends	.044 (-.072, .152) _a	.467	.011 (-.115, .140) _a	.886
Social Support	.005 (-.122, .125) _a	.941	.109 (-.033, .247) _a	.130
Worldview	.036 (-.087, .163) _a	.542	.224 (.090, .360) _b	.002
Self-Verification	.060 (-.061, .180) _a	.325	-.109 (-.252, .030) _a	.124
<i>R</i> ²	.452		.594	
<i>F</i> -value	39.06		35.01	
<i>df</i>	(11, 520)		(11, 379)	

Note. Standardized betas with different subscripts differ significantly ($p < .05$). Bootstrapping with 5,000 iterations (95% confidence intervals).

Table 4

Motivations Predicting Fandom by Sex

Variable	Men		Women	
	β (95% CI)	<i>p</i> -value	β (95% CI)	<i>p</i> -value
Self-Esteem	.300 (.150, .451) _a	< .001	.157 (-.024, .332) _a	.085
Efficacy	-.129 (-.274, .012) _a	.074	-.070 (-.251, .114) _a	.428
Meaning	.115 (.009, .232) _a	.035	.164 (.012, .301) _a	.035
Continuity	.101 (-.017, .219) _a	.097	-.012 (-.142, .130) _a	.899
Belongingness	.054 (-.068, .173) _a	.382	.177 (.009, .346) _a	.041
Distinctiveness	.194 (.095, .290) _a	.001	.147 (.016, .275) _a	.027
Less Uncertainty	-.096 (-.190, -.006) _a	.038	-.034 (-.142, .086) _a	.578
Friends	.149 (.026, .273) _a	.017	.123 (-.029, .269) _a	.129
Social Support	.056 (-.061, .171) _a	.338	.097 (-.046, .236) _a	.188
World-View	-.047 (-.155, .068) _a	.450	.144 (-.006, .279) _b	.064
Self-Verification	.090 (-.032, .209) _a	.136	-.103 (-.254, .048) _a	.175
<i>R</i> ²	.424		.441	
<i>F</i> -value	34.83		27.15	
<i>df</i>	(11, 520)		(11, 379)	

Note. Standardized betas with different subscripts differ significantly ($p < .05$). Bootstrapping with 5,000 iterations (95% confidence intervals).