

# QUEST MOTIVATION UNIQUELY PREDICTS OUTGROUP EVALUATION IN FAN COMMUNITIES

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## Abstract

The present research tests the hypothesis that quest motivation – the pursuit of answers to existential questions – is a motivational factor underlying fan engagement in a manner analogous to that of religious groups. Through a survey study of members of various fan groups we found that quest motivation was uniquely associated with fan-related attitudes such as one's attitude toward members of other fan groups – a finding consistent with the role of quest motivation in religion. Future research on fans may benefit from assessing quest motivation among other motivational factors underlying fan engagement, while future research on quest motivation would do well to consider its application outside the context of religious groups.

*Keywords:* fandom, motivation, religion, quest, prejudice

## Introduction

Psychologists typically study the topic of motivation within the framework of extrinsic and intrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan, 1985).

Extrinsic motivation involves external incentivization of behavior (e.g., money, social pressures), whereas intrinsic motivation involves an internal incentive (i.e., something being enjoyable or rewarding in and of itself). Far from being a superficial categorization, research consistently finds that the nature of one's motivation to engage in an activity is associated with thoughts and behaviors related to the activity (e.g., Lepper, Greene, & Nisbett, 1973). Additional motivational categories, such as quest motivation – being driven by existential questions – are less frequently studied, but may nevertheless also play important role in determining cognitive or behavioral outcomes of an activity (Batson, 1976). Quest motivation has been found, for example, to play an important role in religion-related activities (Beck, 2004). To date, however, there has been far less work testing whether quest motivation plays a similarly significant a role in the outcomes of non-religious activities or in non-religious contexts (Batson & Schoenrade, 1991a, 1991b).

To this end, the present study tests whether outcomes associated with quest motivation in religious contexts (i.e.,

lower prejudice) are also observed in non-religious contexts. We report the results of a cross-sectional survey study that included members of various fan groups and discuss the results within the context of both the research on fan groups and the research on motivation more broadly.

### **Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivation**

According to self-determination theory, motivation can largely be divided into two different types: intrinsic and extrinsic (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Intrinsic motivation refers to internal factors that compel behavior, and include doing something out of personal interest or for the inherent enjoyment of the activity itself. Activities driven by intrinsic motivation are typically associated with more positive outcomes, including enjoyment of the experience, improved task performance, higher quality learning, and creativity (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Extrinsic motivation, in contrast, involves behavior driven by an external consequence, whether obtaining a desired outcome (e.g., being paid for doing your job) or avoiding an undesirable one (e.g., doing a term paper to avoid failing a class, Deci & Ryan, 1985). Unlike intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation tends to be associated with less positive outcomes and more negative outcomes, including greater resentment toward, or disinterest in, the activity itself (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Together, the constructs of extrinsic and intrinsic motivation have been applied, both directly and indirectly, to understanding a wide range of behaviors. For example, research in school settings has found that students motivated by extrinsic rewards like gold stars or awards tend to undermine students' intrinsic motivation and, by extension, their interest, curiosity, overall academic performance (Deci, 1971; Deci, Koestner, & Ryan, 2001; Deci & Ryan, 1995). Others have similarly found important distinctions between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation (e.g., personality, Maltby, Talley, Cooper, & Leslie, 1995; health and well-being, Gorsuch, 1988; altruism, Batson & Gray, 1981). Perhaps one of the best-studied contexts for this research is the domain of religious behavior, where intrinsic and extrinsic motivation differently predict church attendance (Kirkpatrick & Hood, 1990), tithing (Showers, Showers, Black, Beggs, & Cox, 2015), and what people get out of their religion (Donahue, 1985; Maltby, 1999).

Work on extrinsically religious motivated individuals suggests that extrinsic motivation is correlated with negative traits such as intolerance (Beck, 2004; Hoge & Carroll, 1973;) and has little to no association with positive traits such as altruism (Batson & Gray, 1981). Extrinsically religious people are motivated by conformity, tradition, and a need to avoid stigma and reap the benefits of being a member of a group (Gorsuch, 1988; Maltby, 1999; Hall, Matz, & Wood, 2010), whereas

intrinsically religious motivated individuals tend to be more committed and experience greater purpose and meaning in life and reduced anxiety (Donahue, 1985). Intrinsic religious motivation is also associated with altruism and helping (Batson & Gray, 1981), both ingroup members and outgroup members (Hall, Matz, & Wood, 2010; Herek, 1987).

In sum, prior research examining extrinsic and intrinsic motivation, drawn primarily, but not exclusively from religious research, suggests that when it comes to attitudes toward outgroup members, those whose group membership is intrinsically motivated should be more likely than those whose membership is extrinsically motivated to hold more positive attitudes toward outgroup members. Or, put another way, extrinsically motivated group members are more likely than intrinsically motivated group members to hold negative evaluations of outgroup members.

### **Quest Motivation**

While much of the work on religious motivation has focused on intrinsic and extrinsic religiosity, others have proposed alternatives to this two-dimensional model. One of the better-known of these models proposes three dimensions (Batson, 1976), recognizing extrinsic and intrinsic religiousness while also including a third dimension – questioning and seeking answers. More than Allport and Ross's (1967) "true

believer," such individuals are postulated to more openly question their beliefs and are less likely to associate with a formal religious belief (Batson, 1976). This motivation frames religion as a quest, seeking answers to a variety of philosophical and spiritual questions forged in doubt and contradiction.

Compared to intrinsic and extrinsic religiousness, those motivated by this quest tend to score higher on social factors, including being less intolerant of others and more accepting of other viewpoints (Beck, 2004), and showing less need to conform to social desirability, fundamentalism, and dogmatism (Genia, 1991, 1996). While research has largely validated the construct of quest motivation (e.g., Batson & Schoenrade, 1991a, 1991b; Beck, 2004), its definition relative to other concepts like existential religion (Beck, 2004) remain somewhat contested. Moreover, and most relevant to the present study, the concept of quest motivation has not been systematically examined outside the context of religion. To this end, we aim to test whether quest motivation in non-religious groups, such as fan groups, will be at least as useful as implicit and explicit motivation in predicting relevant fan-related beliefs (i.e., outgroup prejudice).

### **Fan Engagement**

Fans are enthusiastic supporters of an interest, personally engaging with it (Yoshida, Gordon, Nakazawa, & Biscaia, 2014), identifying with it (Reysen &

Branscombe, 2010; Sheffrin, 2004), and gathering with others who share the same interest (Obst, Zinkiewicz, & Smith, 2002). Fans and fan communities have been studied by psychologists (e.g., sports fans, Wann, 1995) and non-psychologists alike (e.g., science fiction fans, Hills, 2002; music fans, Sandvoss, 2005; gamers, Jenkins, 2006). One of the primary areas of fan research has focused on fan motivation, seeking to understand the extent to which factors such as entertainment, belongingness, and a positive sense of identity drive fan-related behavior (e.g., Reysen & Branscombe, 2010; Wann, 1995). To this end, researchers have examined fan motivation through the lens of intrinsic motivators such as entertainment (Fisher & Wakefield, 1998; Schroy, Plante, Reysen, Roberts, & Gerbasi, 2015). Others have found evidence for intrinsic motivation in music fans, who are motivated by the need to engage in self-reflection (Click, Lee, & Holladay, 2013) and fans of the television show *My Little Pony*, who are motivated by creativity (Edwards, Griffin, Chadborn, & Redden, 2014). In contrast, extrinsic motivation has been found to underlie cosplayers (individuals who dress in and design costumes), who emphasize the social outcomes of cosplay (Rosenburg & Letamendi, 2013), furies, who use the fandom as a place to gain self-acceptance (Mock, Plante, Reysen, & Gerbasi, 2013), and fans who display their fanship through purchased items (i.e., shirts) as a way of demonstrating group membership (Chadborn, Edwards,

& Reysen, in press). Of course, within any of these groups, individual fans may engage in their fan interest for intrinsic or extrinsic reasons, even among those engaging in the activity for similar reasons. For example, social engagement can be intrinsically motivating, or it may be a means of networking and building social capital.

Previous research on fan motivation has largely focused on the categorization of idiosyncratic fan motivations such as ‘entertainment’ or ‘belongingness.’ There has been far less effort devoted to assessing the broader motivational categories of ‘intrinsic’ and ‘extrinsic’ motivation, and there has been virtually no research looking at the role of quest motivation relative to these two constructs among fans. We address these shortcomings in the current study.

### **Current Study**

The purpose of the current study is to build upon the existing motivation literature by examining quest motivation in a non-religious context and testing the relative contribution of quest motivation to group-relevant beliefs relative to intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. To this end, we conducted a cross-sectional survey of members of a variety of fan communities, assessing their intrinsic, extrinsic, and quest motivation, as well as their attitudes toward members of other fan groups. We hypothesize, in line with existing research on religious groups (e.g., Allport & Ross, 1967; Batson, 1976; Batson & Gray, 1981),

that the extent of participant's intrinsic motivation and quest motivation, but not their explicit motivation, should be associated with lower prejudice toward outgroup members – in this case, members of other fan groups (Allport & Ross, 1967, Baston, 1976).

## Methods

### Participants and Procedure

Participants ( $N = 354$ , 84.7% women;  $M_{\text{age}} = 21.60$ ,  $SD = 5.34$ ) were undergraduate students participating for partial or extra credit in a psychology class at Southeastern Louisiana University and fans solicited from online fan websites and forums. Similar to prior research (Reysen & Branscombe, 2010), participants' favorite fan interests were coded into one of four categories representing an interest in sport ( $n = 96$ ), music ( $n = 79$ ), media ( $n = 130$ ), or hobby ( $n = 49$ ). After indicating their favorite fan interest, participants completed measures regarding their intrinsic, extrinsic, and quest motivations with regard to their fan interest, as well as a measure of their attitudes toward stigmatized fan groups.

### Materials

**Motivation.** Intrinsic, extrinsic, and quest motivation was assessed using a short religious motivation scale (Katzarska-Miller, Barnsley, & Reysen, 2014), that was adapted to refer to fan interest instead of religion. The scale

consists of six items assessing intrinsic motivation (e.g., "My fan beliefs are what lie behind my whole approach to life,"  $\alpha = .91$ ), extrinsic motivation (e.g., "The fandom I belong to is my most important as a place to form good social relationships,"  $\alpha = .85$ ), and quest motivation (e.g., "Questions are far more central to my fan experience than are answers,"  $\alpha = .85$ ). Items were rated on a 7-point Likert-type scale, from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*.

**Attitudes toward fan outgroups.** Highly disliked and stigmatized fan communities were included based on the 10 lowest-rated fan communities assessed in an earlier study (Reysen & Shaw, 2015). The groups assessed were the Insane Clown Posse, *My Little Pony* television show, anthropomorphic art and cartoons (furries), Grateful Dead, Barbie dolls, cricket, Justin Bieber, stamp collecting, anime (Japanese cartoons), and Bruce Springsteen. Although there were 6 people who were fans of one of the groups in this index (e.g., anime fans), removing them did not substantially change the results. Therefore, we present the results with these individuals included. Participants rated how positively or negatively they viewed fans of each of the above interests on a 10-point Likert-type scale, from 1 = *cold* to 10 = *warm*. We combined these ratings to form a measure of attitudes towards fan outgroups ( $\alpha = .89$ ).

## Results

We began by calculating all zero-order correlations and descriptive statistics for the assessed variables, shown in Table 1. To assess whether members of different fan groups differed in their motivations we first conducted a MANOVA with fan interest category (media, music, sport, hobby) as the independent variable with intrinsic, extrinsic and quest motivation as the dependent variable. There was a significant difference in group reports of extrinsic motivation,  $F(3, 350) = 5.23, p = .002, \eta^2 = .043$  with post hoc analysis using Tukey's HSD showing significant difference between media ( $M = 2.95, SD = 1.78$ ) and both sport ( $M = 3.61, SD = 1.73$ ) and hobby ( $M = 3.95, SD = 1.60$ ). There was however, no significance between the four fan categories in intrinsic motivation,  $F(3, 350) = 2.33, p = .075, \eta^2 = .020$ , and quest motivation,  $F(3,350) = 1.58, p = .194, \eta^2 = .013$ , suggesting that intrinsic and quest motivation scores were homogenous across fan types.

Next, we examined whether intrinsic, extrinsic, and quest motivations uniquely predict prejudice toward fan outgroups by conducting a multiple regression analysis. The motivations were simultaneously entered as predictor variables, while attitudes toward fan outgroups was entered as the dependent variable. The overall regression predicted a significant amount of variance in participants' attitude scores,  $F(3,350) = 7.30, p < .001, R^2 = .06$ .

Quest motivation was significantly associated with attitude scores ( $\beta = .236, p < .001$ ). In contrast, both extrinsic motivation ( $\beta = -.018, p = .784$ ) and intrinsic motivation ( $\beta = .024, p = .813$ ) were not significantly associated with prejudice. This result somewhat supports our hypothesis that both quest motivation and implicit motivation are associated with less outgroup prejudice, and support the hypothesis that quest motivation would uniquely predict prejudice scores above and beyond other motivations.

## Discussion

The present study sought to examine quest motivation in a non-religious context by testing quest motivation as a predictor of outgroup attitudes relative to intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. The analysis somewhat supports our hypotheses, in that quest motivation was associated with more positive attitudes toward outgroup members, as predicted. However, intrinsic motivation was not significantly associated with positive attitudes toward group members as was expected. Based on prior research regarding quest motivation, we would expect intrinsic motivation to be associated with a reduction in negative attitudes towards out-groups. This lack of association may be due to the significant association between quest and intrinsic motivations, with their shared variance ultimately suppressing or masking the relationship between

implicit motivation and attitudes toward out-groups.

Unexpected findings aside, the present research has the potential to inform the existing work on motivation and fan communities. While some academics have speculated that assessing fan communities in the same manner as religious groups would diminish or trivialize the work of previous research and religion as a whole (Duffett, 2004), both represent a collective of individuals with a shared interest. Insofar as religions and fan groups share these characteristics, it stands to reason that the motivational factors underlying these identities may also be similar (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Moreover, comparisons between fan groups and religious communities have been made by other scholars (*Star Trek* fans, Jindra, 1994; fandoms in general, Porter, 2009), and there are examples of religious identities who have their origins within fan communities (e.g., Jediism, Davidsen, 2013). With previous research showing that some fans are motivated through a need to find purpose and meaning in their lives (Chadborn, Edwards, & Reysen, 2016), this work illustrates the importance of focusing on the relation of quest motivation and associated concepts among some fans. For example, it may prove fruitful to test whether individual differences in quest motivation predict fans' trajectory into the fandom or their tendency to remain in the fandom over time in a longitudinal study.

While many view fan experiences such as sport attendance, cosplaying as

one's favorite television character, or engaging in a variety of hobbies to be trivial, the present research makes it clear that some fans experience their fan interest more deeply than some might assume. The current research suggests that for many fans, their interests are be deeply significant and positively impact their lives. Fan activities, for these fans, are far from a waste of time or driven purely by a need for entertainment, and may play a substantative role in helping fans develop a sense of identity and an understanding of how they fit into the world.

### **Limitations**

While these findings are novel, they do come with several limitations. This initial analysis of motivaitonal factors is limited by the size of the survey used. Further analysis using a more varied and expansive measure of motivational factors that includes quest motivation would help us to better assess the nature of quest motivation relative to other motivations. In addition, this study, while examining a wide range of fan groups in which individuals identify, did not explicitly assess fan identity (i.e., extent of fanship, fandom identification). Future research, looking at specific fan communities, may be able to determine how identification with one's fan interest and community may influence quest motivation and may look for community-level differences in this relationship.

Future research may also benefit from examining the similarities and interactions between quest, intrinsic, and extrinsic motivation and the motivational factors examined more traditionally in relation to fan groups. Additionally, focusing on a single group or fan community may garner more insight into how different interests may facilitate the answer-seeking nature quest epitomizes. For religion, the existential or more general philosophical questions that are asked may be more likely to show up in media fans (i.e., books and movies) as opposed to sport fans, where extrinsic and intrinsic may dominate.

### Conclusion

The present research tests the hypothesis that quest motivation – the pursuit of answers to existential questions – underlies fan engagement in a manner analogous to that of religious groups, through the greater acceptance and favorability of out-groups. Through a survey study of members of various fan groups, we found that quest motivation was uniquely associated with one's attitude toward members of other fan groups. Future research may offer further insight into the various motivational factors that underlie fan engagement and suggest the importance of assessing quest motivation outside the context of religious groups.

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Table 1

*Means (Standard Deviation) and Correlations*

Variable	1	2	3	4	Mean (SD)
1. Outgroup Attitudes	--	--	--	--	3.19 (1.88)
2. Intrinsic Motivation	.19	--	--	--	2.95 (1.77)
3. Extrinsic Motivation	.15	.71	--	--	3.40 (1.79)
4. Quest Motivation	.24	.74	.63	--	3.18 (1.67)

*Note.* All correlations significant at  $p < .01$ .