Perceived Permeability of Group Boundaries as a Mediator Between Belonging to Multiple Fandoms and Loneliness

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The term "brony," a portmanteau of the words "bro" and "pony," refers to an adult (often male) fan of the television show *My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic*. The brony fandom is often characterized as unexpected, given its unusual demographic composition for a show that was initially targeted toward preteen girls, and arose through a fortuitous combination of internet culture, nostalgia, and the show's high production value (Edwards et al.). Despite these unforeseen origins (or perhaps because of them), bronies are especially passionate, loyal both to the show itself and to the fan community which rose up around it for the better part of a decade.

In 2019, the show *My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic* came to an end. In the same year, the largest annual fan convention for the show, BronyCon, announced that 2019 would be its final year. For many fans, the fandom was a social group they felt a greater sense of connection to than even their local neighborhood (Edwards et al.), 2019 was a time of uncertainty for fans, many of whom worried about the fate the brony fandom. Two of the authors, bronies themselves, can personally attest to the bittersweet atmosphere of BronyCon 2019: On the one hand, being at the single-largest gathering of bronies worldwide with an attendance of more than 10,000 while, on the other hand, knowing it would be the last of such gatherings. In many ways, it felt like losing thousands of friends whom one had grown close to over nearly a decade.

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In the present paper we review research relevant to the situation bronies currently face – an existential threat to their fandom – and how this might impact their social connections. We begin by briefly discussing the notion and operationalization of well-being. Following this we review research documenting how fans of other television series have reacted to the end of their favorite show or the loss of their favorite character. Next, we highlight the importance of fandom, and the social connections forged therein, including their relation to the experience of felt loneliness. We then describe a growing body of evidence outside fan research which suggests that belonging to multiple groups is associated with better well-being. From this, we suggest that bronies may be able to mitigate the experience of loneliness associated with the loss of the show and, by extension, the potential loss of the fandom. In particular, we test a model predicting an association between multiple fandom membership and loneliness, an association mediated by the perceived permeability of fandom boundaries. We discuss these findings and finish by presenting some caveats and limitations of our research.

Well-Being

There have been a variety of measures and constructs proposed to serve as indicators of individuals' well-being. For example, Linton, et al. reviewed 99 self-report measures of well-being to find 196 indicators of well-being, from happiness to depression. One of the dimensions they proposed when theoretically categorizing the various measures was social well-being which they defined as "how well an individual is connected to others in their local and wider social community" (Linton, et al.). In general, researchers tend to focus on two main clusters of well-being indicators representing subjective (e.g., happiness, life satisfaction) and psychological (e.g., purpose in life, personal growth) dimensions of well-being. As noted by Keyes et al., one of the main dimensions of psychological well-being is developing and maintaining positive and trusting relationships with others. In the present paper we use loneliness – the absence of positive relationships – as an indicator of well-being.

Breaking up with a Show/Character

The end of a show can create a void – both of emotion and of identity – for fans (Williams, "Post-Object Fandom"). Williams ("Starting at the End") notes that fans

tend to react in three ways when a show ends: (1) expressions of grief and sadness, (2) acknowledging the implications of losing the show for one's day-to-day life, and (3) expressing relief and distancing themselves from the show. Williams ("This Is the Night TV Died") calls the period after an object of fan interest has ceased to be updated (e.g., end of television show) post-object fandom. Williams analyzed message board posts just before, just after, and years after the television show *The West Wing* was cancelled. Additionally, she surveyed 23 fans of the show. Upon learning of the imminent cancellation, fans mentioned posting stories about how the show had impacted their lives. Some fans moved on to similar fandoms to presumably reduce the negative emotions felt from the loss of the fandom by replacing it. Despite this tendency for some fans to move on, Williams also notes that fans continued to use aspects of the show to inform current events in their lives and to keep the connection to the show alive.

Speaking to this idea, in her analysis of the *Twin Peaks* fandom, Williams ("Ontological Security") notes various strategies used by fans to keep their fandom alive. These include constructing an archive, discussion boards, posting about news of a possible revival, creating and sharing fanfiction, and first-time viewing events. Jenkins ("Star Trekrerun") notes that for shows, like *Star Trek*, a fandom can maintain itself, or even grow, well after a show has stopped airing. For example, Kazimirovicz finds that *Twilight* fans continue to generate fan-produced content after the series end through fanfiction, roleplaying, and creating fan art. *Star Trek* fans have likewise created well-produced episodes of their own, supported though crowdfunding (Dobson).

In the case of the television show *Hannibal*, Williams ("Fate has a Habit of Not Letting us Choose Our Own Endings") highlights the unusual position for fans, given that the show, while canceled, had the potential to be revived by a different network. She surveyed 10 fans who participated in an auction of show artifacts and analyzed Twitter feeds regarding the show. Williams suggests that purchase of artifacts from the show offered fans a way to hold onto the meaningfulness of the show. Indeed, after a show has ended, purchasing these artifacts may be especially meaningful, given the sudden scarcity or now-finite quantity of such artifacts. For other fans, purchasing the props from the show affords them the opportunity to be caretakers of the show. She further notes that fans posted unboxing images as a communal event, expressing how the artifacts were meaningful to them. When Bennett examined Facebook posts after the band R.E.M. disbanded, they found that fans mainly continued their love for the band in a manner similar to the fans

mentioned above: by purchasing merchandise (e.g., collector editions), sharing memories of the band, posting updates of what projects the band members were currently working on, and posting promotional photographs of the band as well as past news articles. In short, fans display a high level of nostalgia and connect the music to their life and identity.

In a related vein, Cohen ("Parasocial Breakups") developed a measure of parasocial breakups adapted from assessments of peoples' reactions to romantic breakups. Cohen used the measure in a survey of Israel adults and teens, asking them to imagine their favorite character was no longer on the air and measuring their feelings post-breakup (e.g., angry, lonely, sad, disappointed) as well as their expected behaviors (e.g., watch reruns, follow a different character). People who had formed stronger parasocial relationships showed stronger breakup reactions, with teens in particular experiencing more distress from the dissolution than adults. Far from being a "watered-down" version of real-world breakups, many participants reported being more afraid of a parasocial breakup than they were of a real breakup. In a follow-up study with Israeli adults, Cohen ("Attachment Styles and Relationship Intensity") found that viewers with an anxious-ambivalent attachment style experienced the most distress after an imagined breakup with a favorite character, relative to people with a more secure attachment style, again in-line with research on real breakups.

In another study, Eyal and Cohen sampled U.S. undergraduate students soon after the last episode of *Friends* aired. The researchers examined predictors of parasocial breakup distress. They found that participants' self-rated loneliness, commitment to the show, positive attitude regarding the show, the perceived popularity of their favorite character, and the extent of their parasocial relationship all significantly predicted the extent of the distress felt over the show's end. And when Lather and Moyer-Guse examined U.S. undergraduate students' reactions to a writers strike in 2007-2008, they found that affinity for television in general (e.g., "Watching television is one of the most important things I do each day") and, most presently relevant, the intensity of one's parasocial relationship with their favorite character, significantly predicted breakup distress. Rather tellingly, participants indicated that during the strike, rather than interacting more with friends and family, they instead watched reruns, and spent more time-consuming media. Put simply, people feel the loss of fictional media characters the same as losses of real people, and often turn to other forms of media to cope with the detrimental outcomes –

including loneliness – instead of replacing parasocial interactions with social interactions.

Fan Well-Being and Social Connections

The ending of a show can create feelings of loneliness for fans due to the experience of parasocial breakup. Beyond the loss of beloved characters, however, fans may also experience the very-real possibility of the fandom itself dwindling. The loss of a fan community could mean lower well-being for fans who lose their sense of connection to other fans and the social support contained therein. Indeed, a growing body of research shows that the social connections fans forge are among the best predictors of fans' well-being. Wann ("Team Identification-Social Psychological Health Model") notes, in research on sport fans, that fanship identification – feeling connected to one's fan interest – is related to a variety of indicators of well-being. Wann suggests that a likely mediator between fanship and well-being is the social connections one feels with other fans. And while Wann's subsequent research was unable to find evidence for this mediational model as initially described, Reysen et al. ("Anime Fans to the Rescue") did show that face-to-face friendships, but not online friendships, mediated the association between fanship and well-being in a sample of anime fans.

Reysen, et al. ("Transported to Another World") suggest that while the relation between fanship and well-being may be somewhat tentative, the relationship between fandom identification – felt connection to other fans in the fan community – is far more strongly associated. Supporting this position, Reysen, et al. ("Better Together") surveyed 336 fans of a variety of interests (e.g., music, sport, media) about their motivations for engaging with their respective fandoms (purpose in life, escape from stressors, and social connections), the extent of their fandom identification, and their well-being. The results showed that social connections specifically, and not the other motivations, uniquely mediated the relationship between fandom identification and well-being. This study is far from unique in showing the link between connection to one's fan community and well-being. Wann et al. ("Social Connections at Sporting Events"), for example, sampled sport fans at a game and asked them to complete a measure of loneliness. Three to six weeks later, the same fans were asked to complete the measure again while at home. The results showed that fans reported greater loneliness at home than at the game. Similarly, Ray, et al. surveyed anime fans online or at an anime convention with

respect to their frequency of face-to-face interactions with other fans, felt loneliness, and general well-being. The results showed that fans sampled online (vs. at a convention) reported less face-to-face interactions, greater loneliness, and lower well-being. A serial mediation model found that the difference in well-being between the convention (vs. online) sample was accounted for, at least in part, by the more frequent face-to-face interactions and reduced loneliness experienced by convention-going fans.

Taken together, these studies point to fandom identification in general, and being in the presence of other fans in a face-to-face context specifically, as factors that reduce fan loneliness and ultimately leads to better well-being. In effect, much of a fan's well-being stems from their connections to other fans, especially if those connections are face-to-face. As such, for bronies facing the possibility of losing the fandom that provides them with connections to like-minded others, they may be at risk for the loneliness and reduced well-being that accompany the loss of connection to other fans.

Multiple Group Membership

It is rare to find fans who have only one fan interest, or who belong solely to one fandom (Plante, et al. "FurScience"; Reysen, et al. "Transported to Another World"). Sociologists and psychologists alike have long recognized both that people belong to multiple groups and that there are benefits to doing so (e.g., James; Killian). Thoits, for instance, suggested that people who take on multiple social roles (e.g., friend, partner, employee) may experience better well-being as a result of having a greater number and more diverse set of social connections and access to the resources they provide. If a problem arises in one role or relationship, people with multiple social roles can simply fall back on the other roles and connections they have, providing them with a sense of resiliency. Of course, not everyone agrees with this position. An opposing belief suggests that a greater number of roles can lead to strain and conflict and reduced well-being as a product of the stress associated with these conflicts. There was, for example, a belief that U.S. women joining the workforce during and after WWII would lead to problems with marriage, abandoned children, and poor health (Barnett).

Rather than leading to role confusion, stress, and reduced well-being, however, research has generally found that having multiple roles was ultimately a net gain for women's well-being (Barnett; Crosby). Amatea and Fong, for example,

surveyed U.S. women working at a university (as faculty, researchers, administration) and found that the additional roles (e.g., family, work) predicted increased social support and reduced symptoms of stress. Ruderman, et al. likewise surveyed U.S. working women and similarly found that having more roles was positively associated with life satisfaction, self-acceptance, and interpersonal skills. And in a large longitudinal study of participants in Sweden, both men and women who had a greater number of social roles were more likely to experience reduced susceptibility to illness (Nordenmark). In effect, studies such as these illustrate that having a greater number of social roles in one's life is tied to better overall well-being (Ahrens and Ryff).

Other researchers have reached similar conclusions using other theoretical perspectives. For example, researchers utilizing a social identity approach (Tajfel and Turner; Turner et al.) have also found evidence for the relationship between multiple group membership and well-being, although they refer to identities instead of roles. Iyer, et al. for example, examined multiple group memberships and well-being in students before and after transitioning to college. Identifying with multiple groups before entering college predicted more positive affect after transitioning to college. In a later study, identifying with multiple groups pre-transition was again associated with post-transition life satisfaction, greater self-esteem, and reduced depression. The researchers observed that those individuals who belonged to multiple groups were more willing to take on the new university student identity, which ultimately led to their improved well-being. Other researchers have similarly found that individuals who belonged to multiple groups recovered faster after a physical challenge (Jones and Jetten), better well-being after suffering a stroke (Haslam, et al. "Maintaining Group Memberships"), and greater life satisfaction after living in a homeless shelter (Johnstone). Wann and Hamlet (1994) proposed a "joiners" scale which was suggested to tap the propensity of individuals to join and maintain membership in multiple groups. Higher scores on the measure were related to less negative emotions, depression, and loneliness. In short, identifying with multiple groups seems to be a recipe for resiliency and greater well-being.

One mechanism thought to drive this effect is the greater social support and, by extension, reduced loneliness that results from belonging to multiple groups. Illustrating this, Haslam, et al. ("GROUPS 4 HEALTH") conducted a randomized controlled trial in which people diagnosed with a mental illness or who were clinically depressed were either assigned to receive treatment as usual (control) or were encouraged to join and participate in multiple groups. The results showed that,

four months later, people in the group participation condition reported significantly less loneliness and less social anxiety than those in the control condition. Other researchers similarly suggest that when one's groups are in harmony with one another (i.e., identities are not conflicting), membership in multiple groups yields even greater social support (Brook, et al.; Chang, et al.; Sønderlund, et al.). Taken together, this research suggests that fans who are members of multiple fandoms should report less loneliness and be buffered against the loss of their valued fan identity.

Permeability of Group Boundaries

Presently, we propose a possible mechanism behind the association between multiple group membership and loneliness for bronies experiencing the possible end of their fandom: the perception of group boundary permeability. Tajfel and Turner suggested that some groups are more permeable than others. Permeability thus reflects how easy one believes it is to move between groups. For some groups, leaving the group would be physically difficult (e.g., it is difficult to change the color of one's skin), although the construct also refers to non-physical barriers (e.g., being labeled a traitor, loss of valued friendships). Furthermore, to the extent that the identity brings about material (e.g., resources) or psychological (e.g., self-esteem, social support) benefits, group members may find it especially difficult to leave the group.

There is little research examining the association between permeability of group boundaries and well-being. Plante, et al. ("Interaction of Socio-Structural Characteristics") assessed furries' perceived permeability of group boundaries along with variables such as concealing one's fan identity, self-esteem, and demographics. Permeability was positively correlated with concealing one's fan identity and level of education, but it was not significantly associated with self-esteem. Terry, et al. surveyed Asian international students attending university in Australia regarding permeability (i.e., perceived ease to join in groups with Australian students) near to arrival and psychological (i.e., depressive symptoms), sociocultural (i.e., practical and cognitive), and academic (e.g., confidence in completing stay) adjustment eight weeks into the semester. Greater perceived permeability was positively correlated with sociocultural and academic adjustment, and in a positive, but nonsignificant, direction for psychological adjustment. Thus, the results are mixed with respect to permeability and well-being.

Testing a Model

The purpose of the present study is to test whether permeability of group boundaries mediates the relationship between belonging to multiple fandoms and loneliness in a sample of bronies facing an existential threat to the brony fandom. In 2019, we asked bronies to complete measures about multiple group membership, perceived permeability of group boundaries, and loneliness in the same year that both the show *My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic* and BronyCon were ending. As noted by Eyal and Cohen, loneliness is associated with a show ending (i.e., parasocial breakup), and a wealth of research has shown that belonging to multiple groups is associated with better well-being, including reduced loneliness (e.g., Haslam, et al. "GROUPS 4 HEALTH"). To this end, we predicted that (1) belonging to multiple fandoms would be related to less loneliness, (2) multiple fandom membership would predict permeability, and (3) permeability would mediate the association between multiple fandom membership and loneliness.

Participants and Design

Participants were bronies ($N = 690$, 77.9% male; $M_{age} = 27.17$, $SD_{age} = 8.02$) recruited from a fan-related website ($n = 436$, equestriadaily.com) and at BronyCon 2019 ($n = 254$, Baltimore, MD). As part of a larger study regarding the brony fandom, participants completed measures about fandom membership, permeability of the brony fandom, and loneliness. All measures used a 7-point Likert-type scale, from 1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree (see Table 1 for means, standard deviation, and reliability alphas).

Multiple fandom membership was assessed with two items ("I am a member of many different fandoms," "I am active in lots of different fandoms") adapted from prior research (Haslam, et al. "Maintaining Group Memberships"; Wagoner, et al.). Permeability of group boundaries was assessed with two items ("If I wanted to, it would be easy to change from brony to a non-brony," "If I wanted to, it would not be a problem to move from the brony fan group to a non-brony group") adapted from prior research (Mummendey, et al.; Plante, et al. "Interaction of Socio-Structural Characteristics"). Lastly, six items (e.g., "I feel isolated from others") were adapted from prior research (Russell, et al.) to assess felt loneliness.

Results

We first examined correlations between the assessed variables. As shown in Table 1, multiple fandom membership was positively related to permeability and negatively related to loneliness, and loneliness was negatively related to permeability. Or, to put it another way, those who belonged to more fan groups were more likely to see the boundary between different fandoms as more permeable and were also less likely to report feeling. Moreover, those who saw the boundary between different fandoms as being more permeable were also less likely to feel lonely.

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

Variable	Multi-Fandom	Permeable	Loneliness
Multi-Fandom	--	--	--
Permeable	.18**	--	--
Loneliness	-.09*	-.16**	--
Mean	3.99	3.71	3.46
SD	1.86	1.67	1.50
Alpha	.88	.77	.85

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$.

In light of these findings, we next examined the hypothesized mediation model wherein the link between belonging to more fan groups and feeling lonely was driven, at least in part, by their shared association with greater inter-fandom permeability. We entered multiple fandom membership as the predictor variable, permeability of group boundaries as the mediator, and loneliness as the outcome variable (see Figure 1). The model was tested using the Hayes' PROCESS macro for SPSS, which used a bias-corrected bootstrapping technique to generate 20,000 sample datasets using the mean and variability data of our own data. From this sample of datasets, we were able to estimate the magnitude of each of the associations in our model by calculating a set of confidence intervals within which the magnitudes of 95% of our samples fell. Put simply, if the 95% confidence

interval for an association did not include the value of 0, the association was deemed to be significantly different enough from 0 (a lack of association) to be considered an actual association.

Table 2
Mediation Analyses

Path	Effect (*SE*)	*t*	*p*	CI$_L$	CI$_U$	*Z*
Fandoms → Perm	.16 (.03)	4.81	< .001	.096	.228	
Perm → Lonely	-.13 (.03)	-3.85	< .001	-.200	-.065	
Total Effect	-.07 (.03)	-2.31	.021	-.131	-.011	
Direct Effect	-.05 (.03)	-1.60	.110	-.110	.011	
Indirect Effect	-.02 (.01)	--	.003	-.039	-.009	-2.97

Using this procedure, belonging to multiple fandoms was associated with less loneliness and greater perceived permeability of group boundaries. Furthermore, permeability of group boundaries predicts less loneliness. When permeability was included in the model and statistically controlled for, the direct relationship between multiple fandom memberships and loneliness was reduced, suggesting that perceived permeability may play a role in the association. Speaking to this possibility, the indirect association wherein permeability mediates the association between multiple fandom membership and loneliness was statistically significantly different from zero (see Table 2 for all relevant statistics).

Discussion of Results

The purpose of the present study was to test a model of perceived permeability of group boundaries as a mediator of multiple fandom membership and loneliness at a unique time for the brony fandom. We predicted, and found, that permeability mediated the association between belonging to multiple fandoms and loneliness. The results highlight buffers to potential emotional distress and reduced well-being in a fandom that is potentially about to end.
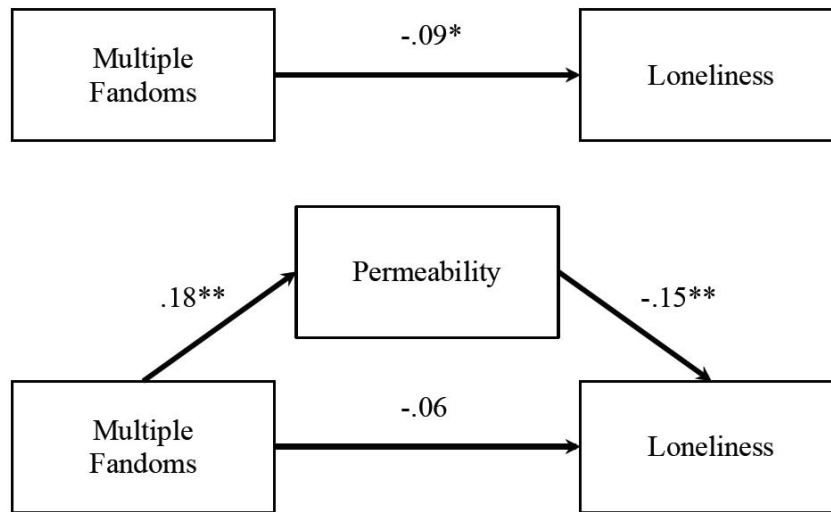
Figure 1. Permeability of group boundaries mediating the relationship between greater number of fandom memberships and loneliness in the brony fandom. Standardized betas presented. * *p* < .05, ** *p* < .01.

Williams ("Post-Object Fandom," "Starting at the End") suggests that the end of a television show can leave fans with both an emotional and identity void leading to feelings similar to grief. The end of a fandom may also result in the loss of valued friendships, a valued identity, and the experience of loneliness. At the time of this study, bronies knew that the source of canonical content and the largest fan convention – BronyCon – was ending. However, the fate of the fandom itself (e.g., other conventions, online groups) was up in the air. Past research shows that belonging to multiple groups (or roles) is generally related to better resiliency, including improved well-being (e.g., Ahrens and Ryff; Jones and Jetten) and less loneliness (Haslam, et al. "GROUPS 4 HEALTH"). When things are going bad for one role or identity, people can turn to other roles/identities for a self-esteem boost or for social support (e.g., Chang, et al.).

In line with this research, we predicted and found that bronies who were members of multiple fandoms reported reduced loneliness at this potentially upsetting time in the fandom. Furthermore, we reasoned that bronies who belonged to multiple fandoms consider it easier to exit the brony community, in no small part because they would be less lonely if they left, since they would presumably have friendship networks in other fandoms. The results suggest that belonging to other

fandoms and perceiving that leaving the group would be easy predicted lower loneliness at a time when the outcome of the fandom was uncertain.

Batchelor describes popular culture as "the connections that form between individuals and objects" (1). Reysen and Branscombe distinguish between fanship – degree of psychological connection with their object of interest – and fandom – degree of psychological connection with other fans of the same interest. Within psychology these constructs have relied on the theoretical backing of a social identity perspective (Tajfel and Turner; Turner, et al.). Fanship reflects a personal identity and helps distinguish one individual from another (e.g., "I really like anime compared to a person who does not") or an individual within a group (e.g., "I am a bigger fan of anime than you are"). Fandom reflects a collective or social identity (e.g., "We anime fans dislike sports"). From a social identity perspective, greater identification with the object or the group represents the extent that individuals are incorporating the object/group into the self-concept. For example, Smith and Henry asked participants to complete a reaction time task to categorize traits (e.g., spiteful, creative) as part of the self. Traits that were more closely connected to the prototype of the ingroup were more quickly and accurately tied to the self. In other words, and in support of a social identity perspective, groups that we belong to become part of the self.

A similar process likely also occurs with parasocial connections. In this instance fans can experience a degree of psychological connection with an individual or character – albeit a one-sided relationship. Rather than the fan object or the fan group, individuals are connecting with a character. However, the exact type of relationship may differ for parasocial connections. Reysen, et al. ("Sex Differences in Parasocial Connection") asked a sample of anime fans to complete various, short measures of parasocial connection regarding their favorite character. A factor analysis showed three dimensions of parasocial connection: identification (e.g., wishful identification, emotional and cognitive empathy, self-expansion), romance (sexual attraction, perception that a character could be a romantic partner), and similarity (e.g., background and attitudinal similarity). Thus, for parasocial connections the dimensions of connection may differ from other types of identification. That said, we suggest that a similar underlying mechanism is present in that there is a connection with the character in which the fan incorporates the character into the self-concept.

A social identity perspective suggests that individuals seek to join and maintain group memberships that are positive and distinct. Researchers have suggested that

this focus on belonging to positively distinct groups is related to individuals' personal and collective self-esteem. If one's favorite team is winning games, the fan feels as though they are winning. If a favorite actor has a leading role in a popular movie, fans of that actor experience that success as their own. In their infamous series of studies on basking in reflected glory, Cialdini, et al. show that when one's self-esteem is threatened (vs. not), fans will connect themselves to their university football team, especially if that team recently won a game. The evidence tends to point toward fans using fan interests as a way to regulate their self-esteem. The results of the present study contribute to this line of research by showing how fandoms can buffer a blow to one's well-being, in this case loneliness, by jumping to another fan interest when one is ending. Indeed, more broadly the results suggest that popular culture can be influential in one's well-being, and that having a broad range of interests can be beneficial.

Limitations

The results of the present study are limited in several important ways. First, the present study was correlational, and therefore causal relationships cannot be ascertained. There is a possibility, for example, that being lonely leads people to join more fandoms. However, based on experimental research (Haslam et al., "GROUPS 4 HEALTH") we suspect that group membership predicts less loneliness. Second, this research may only relate to bronies and only at this specific period of flux and uncertainty for the fandom. Plante, et al. ("Interaction of Socio-Structural Characteristics"), for example, did not observe a relationship between permeability and self-esteem (an indicator of well-being), although the fan group in question was not facing an uncertain future. Similarly, as noted by Reysen, et al. ("Transported to Another World") anime fans may not experience loneliness as suggested by parasocial breakup researchers (Eyal and Cohen) after a show ends or a major character dies as fans in that community are used to switching shows continually (as most shows only last one season for 12-13 episodes). As such, the results observed here may represent an idiosyncrasy of the brony fandom at this specific point in time or may generalize only to fandoms based around a single source of canon which has recently come to an end. Despite this limitation, however, the results provide an interesting look at a possible factor, branching out and belonging to other fandoms, that may buffer fans against fan loneliness when a show ends.

Conclusion

To conclude, in the present research we tested a mediation model of multiple fandom membership on loneliness through perceived permeability of group boundaries. The results suggested that bronies with greater fandom membership experienced less loneliness through viewing it as relatively easy to leave the community. The results highlight the benefits of belonging to more than one fandom, as well as the general well-being benefits of fan group membership. All shows eventually end and not every fandom linked to those shows will live on. The results of this study suggest that finding and creating social connections within multiple fandoms can aid in buffering potential loss if a show or major fan event ends. Given the ubiquity of fandom and the influence of fan consumption on one's self and identity, greater research is needed regarding the psychological mechanisms of how people engage with popular culture.

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