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“Story of My Life”: Why One Direction fans are still participating

Julia R. Jameson
Trinity University

Despite the boyband’s continued years-long hiatus, One Direction (*ID*) fans continued actively engaging in fan activities. A mixed methods online survey distributed in 2020 sought to explore how and why fans were still participating. In early 2020, the top four activities respondents were engaging in were listening to *ID* music, supporting members’ solo careers, reading *ID* fan fiction, and rewatching videos of/about *ID*. Through a thematic analysis, common motivations among participants were found; across activities, fans had often been participating because of missing the band, to feel like the band was still together, to feel closer to the band, to remember other times, and because the band had made lifelong impacts.

Keywords: fandom, boyband, One Direction, fan motivations, fan studies, pop music

In 2010, British–Irish boyband One Direction (*ID*) formed on the singing competition show *The X Factor* (Cunningham, 2020). Harry Styles, Liam Payne, Louis Tomlinson, Niall Horan, and Zayn Malik auditioned as strangers but were grouped together as a band (Cunningham, 2020). Despite placing third, they signed a record deal and released five albums in five years, headlining tours for the first four (One Direction Wiki, n.d.). Their concert/documentary film *One Direction: This Is Us* ranked as the fourth-highest grossing concert movie in history (Box Office Mojo, n.d.), and *One Direction: Where We Are—The Concert Film* sold over 1.2 million tickets during its one-weekend showing, scoring the event cinema record (Clarke, 2018). Their first album, *Up All Night*, made them

the first British band to reach #1 on the U.S. Billboard 200 (Caulfield, 2012). 1D became the first band with three, then four, albums debuting at #1 on the U.S. Billboard charts (Caulfield, 2014). They had 2013's best-selling album worldwide (IFPI, 2014) and were 2014's second-biggest artist worldwide (IFPI, 2015). The band was 2016's second-highest earning "celebrity" (O'Malley Greenburg, 2016a); in 2015, they brought in the highest-ever yearly earnings for a boyband (O'Malley Greenburg, 2016b).

During the fourth tour, Zayn quit the band to "be a normal 22-year-old who is able to relax and have some private time out of the spotlight" (One Direction, 2015). The rest kept touring, made another album, and went on hiatus in January 2016. All five have solo music that has reached the U.S. Top 40 (McIntyre, 2017). Not officially split, the band has enjoyed a so-called "18-month hiatus" for over five years (Devoe, 2015). Still, significant *ID* fan activity remains. *ID* was 2020's fifth most popular band on Tumblr (Fandom, 2020); Harry and Louis were AO3's sixth most popular "ship," or fan-desired relationship between celebrities or fictional characters (Shipping Wiki, n.d.), of 2019 (Centreoftheselights, 2019); and the band had over 25 million monthly Spotify listeners as of April 2021 (Spotify, n.d.).

Through a mixed methods online survey, I sought to figure out how and why the *One Direction* fandom partakes in "beyond-band engagement," the term I have coined to describe enduring participation in a band's fandom after the group is no longer together, whether it be a temporary break or permanent split. With no formal study done on the current *ID* fandom, this paper provides an up-to-date look. More broadly, this study tries to help fill the void of research about younger, traditionally female, boyband audiences. These groups remain underrepresented in research, and hopefully this study continues to dispel stereotypes about them.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Three major topics appeared to be most relevant to the study: first, fan activities, including types that exist and motivations for participation; second, the *One Direction* fandom in particular and how it has historically been portrayed; and, third, how and why fans participate in a fandom long-term. This study emerges from the intersection of all three.

Fan Activities

Scope. "Fan" is a broad term encompassing anyone with an "intensive affective bond with a particular property," even if it is kept private and is as simple as following something on social media; fandom, however, "refers to those who claim a common identity and a shared culture with other fans" (Jenkins, 2018, p. 16). A wide array of fan activities occurs within any fandom. While fandom scholarship often focuses on creative, time-intensive activities, everyday fan activities deserve scholarship, too (Théberge, 2005); valuable insights lie within studying less participatory fans (Bury, 2017). Activities like commenting on posts or coding websites are still valuable gifts to a fan community (Turk, 2014). After all, why are fan fiction, videos, and art made if not to be viewed and enjoyed by others (Turk, 2014)? Similarly, fans run "update accounts" on social media, relaying the latest news and information about a person, group, show, etc.; information practices, such as this, are prevalent activities, worthy of study (Price & Robinson, 2016). An analysis of *ID* fans' Tumblr usernames revealed a large variety of fan labor and unique ways that fans contribute to the fandom, such as the running of fashion accounts that link items worn by the band (Donlan, 2017).

Additionally, both online and offline fan activities deserve recognition. As scholars tend

to study the newest online activities, continued exploration of the offline realm would provide a fuller picture of current fan practices (Bennett, 2014). Current fandom is not as fundamentally different from past fandom as the increased scholastic emphasis on online activities suggests; in reality, digital activities influence, but do not wholly represent, contemporary fan participation (Booth & Kelly, 2013). Lady Gaga fans, for example, form offline friendships through interacting in online fan communities (Dilling-Hansen, 2015). *One Direction* fans have similarly planned offline “meet-ups” with fellow fans met online (Lacasa et al., 2016).

Motivations for Pop Music Fandom Participation. Fans participate for a multitude of reasons; each fan, within each fandom, has their own. Fans of Brazilian pop rock band *Restart* used Twitter to seek recognition from the band as well as fellow fans (Recuero et al., 2012). At a more core level, the fans felt a commitment to the band and that it was their job to spread the music. *ID* fans used the social media site similarly, hoping to become “micro-celebrities” among fellow fans by successfully organizing Trending Topics on Twitter, while also expressing their dedication and commitment to the band (Arvidsson et al., 2016). *One Direction* fans used fan fiction site Wattpad, however, to express themselves and open their work up to critique (Korobkova, 2014).

Fans of 1990s band *Take That* globally circulated friendship books—decorative books logging information and bartering interests—for creative expression and to meet additional “penpals” (Löbert, 2015). Despite occurring before ubiquitous Internet usage, these motivations likely drive modern fan activities. Rather than crafting book pages, fans today share physical and digital artwork online; penpals have been replaced with more conversations on social media and messaging platforms. As Hellekson (2015) explained, regardless of platform, “fan activity remains a search for community, a way to unabashedly love something, a desire to engage critically but also viscerally, and a mode of personal expression unlike any other ...” (p. 125).

One Direction Fandom

Representations of *ID* and their fans follow those of their boyband predecessors. Facebook hate pages exist for essentially every big boyband out there (Duffett, 2012), but it is not just online strangers who share this sentiment. In one study, for example, 14–17-year-olds who even tried to make a positive comment about *ID* or Justin Bieber were criticized by peers (Allen et al., 2015). Media have also discussed the fandom negatively and depicted *ID* fans (*Directioners*) as an unprecedented sort of fans more extreme than others. The documentary *Crazy About One Direction* labeled *Directioners* “a new breed of fan” (Asquith, 2013) and focused on those considered “craziest,” such as those who wished harm on the band members’ girlfriends, while essentially omitting less expressive behaviors (Ewens, 2016). The fandom grew infuriated with its portrayal, with many feeling that the documentary inaccurately depicted the majority of the fandom’s practices (Ewens, 2016). This one-dimensional depiction presents a major issue, for fandoms are not homogeneous (Donlan, 2017); fandom members partake in different fan activities and in different ways. Additionally, the behaviors exhibited were not exclusive to the *ID* fandom or as idiosyncratic as the documentary suggested (Proctor, 2016).

The film also caused backlash by exposing “Larry Stylinson,” commonly Larry, to the public. Larry is a portmanteau for the extremely popular ship between band members Harry and Louis. A substantial portion of the fandom believes the two are, or were, in a romantic relationship (McCann & Southerton, 2019); many also just used the pair for fan fiction. While Larry supporters sought legitimacy and recognition from within the fandom, they avoided Larry-related hashtags on Twitter to remain

hidden from the general public (McCann & Southerton, 2019). Moreover, *ID* fan fiction writers envisioned their communities on Wattpad, a social website built around reading and writing user-generated stories (Wattpad Wiki, n.d.), as private worlds inhabited only by teens and, thus, felt betrayed to have their seemingly private territories invaded (Korobkova & Black, 2014). The director agreed that Tumblr served as “an almost sacred space” of privacy but felt no remorse for bringing Larry public because she believed it required documentation and celebration (Asquith, 2016, p. 87). McCann and Southerton (2019) similarly wrote how Larry dispelled a long-standing belief that all boyband fans dream of relationships with the band members. Larry fan fiction, based on real people, is Real Person Fiction (RPF); specifically, it is Real Person Slash (RPS), for the stories revolve around the pair being in a same-sex romantic or sexual relationship (Fanlore, n.d.). Although One Direction’s RPS became the most talked about, slash shipping had been a part of music fandom for a long time (Roach, 2018). RPF is actually quite commonplace; technically “any media ‘based on a true story!’ is RPF” (Arrow, 2013, p. 331). Additionally, most fans view the people in these stories as mere characters, based on the celebrities’ public personas rather than true lives (Fanlore, 2021).

Even in 2019, Larry remained culturally relevant as HBO’s *Euphoria* featured a character named Kat who wrote smut fan fiction, with her most famous piece about Larry; the show brought it to life further with an animated, explicit scene of a sexual encounter between Louis and Harry (Torres, 2019). Though the scene was intended to demonstrate escapism and many teens’ realities, *ID* fans were naturally upset, feeling the show had gone too far, especially when Louis had previously expressed that Larry-shipping had hurt his and Harry’s close friendship (Torres, 2019). Louis even replied to a Tweet about the scene: “I can categorically say that I was not contacted nor did I approve it” (Tomlinson, 2019). Later, interviewing with *The Guardian*, he said, “I know, culturally, it’s interesting, but I’m just a bit tired of it”; further, “No, I’m not going to lie, I was pissed off. It annoyed me that a big company would get behind it” (Saner, 2019).

British GQ, too, got into trouble with the fandom when its interview with the band pressured teenaged Harry to disclose information about his sexual history (Heaf, 2015). The magazine also wrote that the band’s fans would “just as easily bop about to the sound of Peppa Pig sitting on a giant pink keyboard” (Heaf, 2015, para. 36). Fans expressed their anger with *British GQ* directly via Twitter; in return, *British GQ* mocked the fandom by publishing an article full of these tweets titled, “The Most Terrifying Responses to Our One Direction Covers,” revealing that the tweets left them “fearing for [their] lives” (2014, para. 2). Fans technically threatened extreme measures, such as bombing *British GQ*’s headquarters, but within the context of private fan forums, these highly performative behaviors express anger rather than true intentions (Jones, 2016). Once the messages moved to public platforms, they lacked context and were seen as irrational by fandom outsiders (Jones, 2016). Social media’s increasing prevalence has created spaces fans can use to “publicly defend their taste and behavior as legitimate or to challenge simplistic representations of girls”; *ID* fans should get to pick how they are represented, and stereotypes of “teenyboppers” must be challenged in order to shed light on the less-simplistic truths about these fans and their practices (Dougher & Pecknold, 2016, p. 408).

Long-Term Fandom

Accountability and Activities. Media often mischaracterize pop music as a teen-only, fleeting phenomenon, but enduring relationships with mainstream music do exist. For example, Kate Bush and her music continued to hold an important place in her fans’ lives as they aged (Vroomen, 2004);

growing older, they continued listening but had different fannish practices, likely ascribed to societal norms. Harrington, Bieby, and Bardo (2011) similarly revealed that aging fans feel they must adhere to certain age norms and, thus, have trouble maintaining some fan activities and practices of their youth. Just as friends of the adult Kate Bush fans questioned whether listening to her popular music was “proper” or “right” (Vroomen, 2004, p. 242), post-youth *Backstreet Boys* fans received mockery from peers (Driessen, 2015). Despite others’ remarks, the *Backstreet Boys* fans continued participating (Driessen, 2015), not feeling as accountable to age norms or as challenged in their continued participation as Harrington et al. (2011) had expressed.

Another study found that post-youth Dutch *Backstreet Boys* fans no longer hung posters but kept digital pictures and purchased new albums; band-related items were not displayed but were held onto (Driessen, 2018). As their life priorities changed, they still regularly checked the band’s websites and other online forums. With the increased social and financial freedom of adulthood, some even attended a special 2013 Bahamas cruise with the band and fellow fans. Traveling overseas for concerts and driving around to track down the band may have been impossible while living under parents’ roofs and relying on others for rides (Driessen, 2018).

Long-Term Fandom Motivations. Long-term fandom participation is multifaceted. Long-term *New Kids on the Block (NKOTB)* fans turned to the band for strength through difficult times (Sanderson, 2009). For adult *Duran Duran* fans, performing the same fannish activities of their teenage years brought a sense of “euphoric empowerment” (Anderson, 2012, p. 240). Adult *Backstreet Boys* fans felt the music served as a safe haven that brought them back to easier, more carefree periods of life (Driessen, 2019); further, the music served as a constant to grasp onto when everything else in life seemed to be changing. *NKOTB* fans felt the same (Sanderson, 2009). Bennett (2013) believed fans stay so connected to popular music as they age because it has become natural for them; after spending years heavily invested in popular music, the fans still participate not because of who they are trying to be but because of who they have become. Further, the music has “informed their biographies in ways that significantly shape current and ongoing aspects of their everyday lives” (Bennett, 2013, p. 14). When *NKOTB* members made blog posts about reuniting after 14 years, fans left comments about feeling thankful for the band’s impact on their lives and how they still felt connected to the band as they had longed for its return (Sanderson, 2009).

All of this literature considered, a few questions remained to understand *One Direction* fandom participation as of 2020. Though modern *ID* fans likely participated in similar activities and for reasons similar to those just discussed, in order to confirm and gain further insights, these questions were explored:

RQ1: What activities are *One Direction* fans participating in in 2020?

RQ2: Why are fans of *One Direction* participating in 2020?

RQ3: Are *One Direction* fans exhibiting long-term motivations for participation?

METHODS

Once Trinity University’s Internal Review Board (IRB) approved this study, an online survey was circulated to explore current *ID* fans’ participation and motivations.

Participants

The participants' (N = 2,535) ages ranged from late teens to the 70s, the median falling between 21 and 23 (Mdn = "21–23"). The makeup overwhelmingly female (n = 2,549), participants with other genders did participate. With over 88 countries represented, the United States made up almost half of all participants (n = 1,352); the other most common were Canada (n = 164), Great Britain/UK/North Ireland (n = 156), Germany (n = 143), Australia (n = 110), and India (n = 81).

Procedures

To investigate why fans were still participating four years into the hiatus, I administered an online mixed methods Qualtrics survey between March 27 to April 10, 2020. The sample was not limited by geography, gender, or age, as long as participants were 18 years or older. All participants gave consent that their answers could be used in an academic publication if they remained anonymous. For the purpose of this study, anyone who partook in fannish activities is considered a fan, regardless of whether or not they would self-identify as one. Through snowball sampling, I distributed the survey via social media and fan forums, including Facebook, Reddit, Instagram, Twitter, and Tumblr. I did receive skepticism from fandom members who disclosed that past participation in *ID* fandom research ended in exploitation, but after making it clear that I was part of the fandom, too, they often expressed that they felt increased comfort and willingness to divulge honest information. In all, 2,831 people completed the survey (N = 2,831). I downloaded and imported the data into SPSS Statistics for analysis, and the open-ended questions underwent a thematic analysis.

Measures

Participants were first asked about their age, gender, and country of residence. In order to answer RQ1 and determine the most prevalent activities in the fandom at the time, they were then asked, "*Which of the following One Direction (ID) activities did you participate in during the past 3 months? Select all that apply.*" I compiled the list of 32 items from the research cited in this study as well as my own working knowledge of the fandom, though participants were given four additional blanks to write in activities not listed. The list included a wide range of activities, such as "Ran a *ID*-related social media account," "Sought information about *ID*," "Created *ID* memes," and "Conversed online with fellow fans." Those who checked that they "did not do ANYTHING at all related to *One Direction*" were eliminated and sent to the end of the survey. From the list of all activities that a fan had marked they had recently participated in, they were asked to "*Please select up to 3 activities which you have spent the most time participating in during the past three months.*"

Respondents were then given a set of specific follow-up questions for each of the three, or less, activities they chose. The sets always contained a question quantifying the time spent participating. For example, those who chose "Listened to *ID* music" were asked "*Approximately how many hours do you spend listening to One Direction's music per week? (This does not include music from their solo careers),*" and answers ranged from "0–2" up to "71–80," with a write-in "Other" option, too. Helping answer RQ3, the set often asked how long fans had been participating in the activity, such as, "*For approximately how many years have you been writing One Direction fan fiction?*" The answer choices always had one-year intervals, though the options depended on the activity. For instance, the fan fiction question's answers ranged from "0 (less than a year)" to "Around 10 (since they were formed)." However, the choices for "Made *ID*-related TikToks" naturally only ranged from "0 (less than a year)" to "3 (since TikTok began)." Some activities required more context; using the fan fiction example again, those asked "*How would you best describe the One Direction fan fiction that you have read within the*

last 3 months? Check all that apply” could choose from 20 types plus a write-in “Other.” Similarly, those who said they had rewatched videos were given a list of 22 options, with an additional write-in “Other,” and asked to check all the types they had rewatched in the past three months.

In order to answer RQ2, each set also included a question asking why the respondent participated in that specific activity. For instance, those who chose “Met up offline with *ID* fans you met online/Meet-ups” were asked, “*Why do you meet up with fellow One Direction fans?*” and could type out a response up to 20,000 characters. For the four most common activities among respondents, I explored the open-ended “why” responses with a reflexive thematic analysis, a flexible method of identifying themes without a predefined codebook (Byrne, 2021), and there was no set numeric threshold in order for a motivation to be included in this study. The motivations found were then compared to existing research on long-term fandom in order to answer RQ3 and determine whether the modern *ID* fans exhibit long-term motivations.

RESULTS

The activities that the most fans had participated in during the three months prior to the survey were listened to *ID* music ($n = 1,805$), supported members’ solo careers ($n = 1,532$), read *ID* fan fiction ($n = 634$), and rewatched videos of/about *ID* ($n = 425$).

Fans who chose “listened to *ID* music” as a top three activity listened to a median of 3–5 hours of *One Direction* music per week ($Mdn = “3–5”$), some even listening between 71–80 hours weekly ($n = 27$). Fans had been listening to *ID*’s music for a median of eight years ($Mdn = 8$), or since a year after the band first released music. Only around 14% (13.62%) of fans had started listening to *ID*’s music within the four prior years, the approximate length of the band’s hiatus at the time, implying that respondents were generally longer-term fans.

The fans who chose supporting band members’ solo careers as a top activity and continued answering questions ($n = 1,417$) listened to Harry’s solo music for a median of 6–10 hours weekly ($Mdn = “6–10”$), Niall’s and Louis’s each for 3–5 hours ($Mdn = “3–5”$), and Zayn’s and Liam’s each for 0–2 hours ($Mdn = “0–2”$).

Those who chose “read *ID* fan fiction” as a top activity and continued answering questions ($n = 596$) had recently been reading male/male ($n = 465$), which revolve around a homosexual relationship between two men; alternate universe ($n = 400$), in which the story deviates from canon/original material; smut ($n = 399$), which are sex-focused stories; fluff ($n = 381$), which are happy, short, and sweet; angst ($n = 360$), which involve physical or emotional torment; and slow burn ($n = 320$), in which characters slowly fall in “love or lust” before starting a relationship (Moonbeam’s Predilections, 2017). Fans read *ID* fan fiction a median of 9–11 hours weekly ($Mdn = “9–11”$), some reading upward of 40 hours per week ($n = 29$). The group had been reading *ID* fan fiction for a median of six years ($Mdn = 6$), but around one-third (33.05%) had started reading within the previous four years.

The majority of those who chose “rewatched *ID* videos” as a top activity and continued answering questions ($N = 391$) had been rewatching official music videos ($n = 322$), “best moments” ($n = 316$), live performances ($n = 315$), and talk show interviews ($n = 313$). *The X Factor* performances ($n = 212$), behind-the-scenes footage ($n = 208$), and *The X Factor* video diaries ($n = 200$) were also rewatched by over half of the group. The median weekly hours spent rewatching was 3–5 hours ($Mdn = “3–5”$). The fans had been rewatching *ID* videos for a median of six years ($Mdn = 6$), and around one-

third (34.52%) ($n = 135$) had started rewatching within the previous four years; however, the most common answer was “around 10” years ago ($n = 67$), when the band first formed.

DISCUSSION

For the four most commonly chosen top activities, responses underwent analysis for major themes about why the fans had recently participated in the activity. Direct quotations have been extracted from responses and copied below verbatim.

Listened to One Direction Music

Remembering Another Time. Survey participants cited the music’s ability to remind them of another time as a reason for recent listening. Comments often sounded like, “it reminds me of being young.” Similarly, “there are soo many memories related with those songs ... It’s like a trip down memory lane.” Some comments further distinguished that these memories belonged to a less-stressful period of life. One fan expressed, “I feel like i’m young again only worried abt [*sic*] their lifes [*sic*], and makes me forget about college problems.” These resemble adult *Backstreet Boys* fans’ comments about the band providing a “safe haven” that brings them back to an easier time (Driessen, 2019, p. 36) and adult *Duran Duran* fans’ comments about the brand bringing them back to their youth (Anderson, 2012). While most of these comments about reminiscing referred to general periods of life, some expressed how the music helped recall specific experiences, including attending *One Direction* concerts, going on trips with friends, and playing the music during school recess.

Qualities of the Music. Many comments focused on the music’s qualities. For instance, “their voices ... melt beautifully together, it gives me goosebumps sometimes,” and “I love the lyrics. They are very thought provoking.” Respondents also often listened because of the band’s versatile discography; “you can go from dancing and screaming the words to crying in a corner.” Additionally, “their 5 albums provide a good variety of sounds from pop to folk to rock and ballads.” With the band’s “wide” music range, fans said they could find a song for any occasion. They often stated that every, or almost every, song was a “bop” or “banger,” slang terms connoting really good songs (@Exothekings, 2016; @DMH79, 2005). Overall, fans listened because of how “good” they found the music; “their music is unironically objectively good.” Some even found it the best: “I’d consider myself mental if I didn’t listen to their music knowing that they have the best music I can ever find.” These comments align with North, Hargreaves, and Hargreaves’s (2004) finding of “simple enjoyment” as the most popular motivation for listening to music (p. 71).

On another note, some fans differentiated that they listened to the band’s first three albums for nostalgic reasons and last two albums for the mature sound and craftsmanship. As the albums progressed, the band members grew increasingly involved in the creative process. Accordingly, 457 and 421 participants preferred the band’s last two albums, *Four* and *Made in the A.M.*, respectively, and only 38 participants favored the first album, *Up All Night*.

Provided, and Provides, Strength. Fans cited still listening to *ID* years into the hiatus because the music once helped them through difficult times. Fans left statements such as, “it’s offered me a lot of emotional comfort during difficult periods,” and often further detailed the periods of their lives that the band helped them through. One wrote, “I was incredibly suicidal from ages 10–15, and when I hit rock bottom ... it felt like they were the only thing worth living for.” Another revealed, “They got me through trauma, bullying, coming out as a lesbian, three breakups, four heartbreaks, and into my happiest

relationship ever :).” These comments were not anomalies; many detailed the situations overcome with the help of the band and its music. These mirrored *NKOTB* fans’ comments about strong connections to the band even after its 14 years apart; the band provided strength during challenging times (Sanderson, 2009). Similarly, David Bowie fans have discussed how the music brought healing during tough times and also accompanied happier ones (Stevenson, 2009).

Respondents also often discussed the music’s ability to help them feel good; “it makes me feel happy in a cruel world.” Similar comments were common, yet fans discussed the music’s uplifting ability further. The music did not solely lift their spirits but boosted self-esteem and confidence. Fans wrote about the music, “its beautiful and makes me realize my worth,” “it makes me fall in love with myself,” and “it makes me feel more confident and powerful. It motivates me every single day.”

Fun. Fans frequently used the word “fun” to explain 2020 listening. Not only was the music “fun” but also the activity of listening. For example, participants responded that *ID* songs are “For happy dancing moments :)” and are “sing in the car’ worthy.” Fans additionally described the ways that the music made otherwise boring tasks a little more exciting. Describing their morning routine, one fan outlined, “particularly when I started working at my job, nothing better to start my day by listening to *FOUR* in its entirety.” Comments often centered around listening while accomplishing chores. Fans wrote that *ID*’s music is “perfect cleaning music”; “I usually put it on when I’m doing something I don’t want to do, like household chores.” The sentiment of music making mundane activities more pleasurable matched Driessen’s (2015) observations.

Long-Lasting Life Importance. Many respondents had been *ID* fans for large portions of their lives. If someone in their early 20s became a fan when the band began, they had been a fan for over a decade, and as one fan put it, “I’ve known them for half of my life.” Oftentimes, *ID* and its music were important parts of the fans’ lives during important times in the fans’ lives; the music benchmarked milestones. Fans wrote, “some of the songs have marked my life,” and “One Direction’s songs are the soundtrack to my life.” Additionally, “their music was my company growing up.” The fans had grown accustomed to this music being part of their daily lives; “I grew up listening to One Direction so their songs are a part of me.” Another wrote, “I listen to them because it’s been part of my routine for 10 years.” These statements reinforced Bennett’s (2013) findings that fans stay connected to pop music because it has become natural and is part of who they are. Many fans expressed how the band and its music are so deeply engrained into myriad elements of their own lives’ stories that they would not stop listening simply because the band was apart.

Supported Solo Careers

Real-Life Connection. Just as Brown and Knox (2017) found that fans attend pop concerts to see their idols in real life, respondents in this study reported attending solo concerts for the feeling of being in the same room as their idols. Fans wrote how “It’s ... thrilling to be in the same room as them,” and how “seeing your idol in real life is truly a wonderful experience.” After listening to these artists’ solo and collective albums, the fans wanted to experience the music live. Fans here discussed the special feeling of sharing music with the artists in a way that listening to prerecorded songs could not deliver. Moreover, fans felt disconnected from reality after spending so much time on these five larger-than-life strangers, but these concerts helped “make it real.” One said, “Sometimes I feel dumb for spending all my time online keeping up with people I’ve never met, so seeing them in person helps me realize ... I’m not just a fan of some digital person.”

Previously Unable. Respondents noted attending solo concerts because of previous inability to attend *ID* concerts. For some, the band had not visited their region or did so rarely; “i always wanted to see them live, but as a band they only came to my country 1 time.” Others joined the fandom during the hiatus; “I wasn’t a fan of 1D until after the breakup ... I’m trying to make up for the fact that i never saw them all together.” Essentially, “It gives me the one direction experience I never got.” Fans mentioned age and affordability, often connected, as other reasons for inability to attend *ID* concerts. Respondents stated how in recent years they finally could afford their own tickets to solo concerts and had the freedom to choose when, where, and how many concerts they would attend. One fan wrote, “now that I am older and have the money to afford tickets, I want to see their solo concerts.” Another, “I was never able to afford to go to One Direction shows ... As I got older I was able to spend my own money on concert tickets.” These statements, similar to those in Driessen’s (2018) adult *Backstreet Boys* fans study, illustrate additional social and financial freedom bringing amended participation.

Supporting Individuals. Respondents explained that aside from loving the collective *ID*, they cared deeply about each individual member. Fans echoed the sentiment, “I care about them as individuals so I want to support them.” Another stated, “I support those artists not because they were part of one direction but because they are genuinely good people.”

Brown and Knox’s (2017) finding that people attend pop concerts to show appreciation to the band was reinforced here. While many fans’ rationale for attending solo members’ concerts was to show support, fans also listened to solo music to provide unwavering support. Participants wrote, “I didn’t just love 1D. I loved the members,” and “i support them in everything they do, they are my idols.” Further, “they could release two hours of them playing the bagpipes and I’d dig it.” Hiatus or not, the fans will stay; “They made me the happiest during 5 years but it didn’t stop with the break. I’ll support them forever.” Some comments framed the continued support as returning a favor; “they were there for me when no one else was so Ill be there for them.”

Fans expressed that they were happy as long as they boys were happy. One wrote, “it’s another feeling seeing your fav enjoying himself and making what makes them happy.” Again, “I like how they are being themselves and I support that.” While listening to the solo music started as mere support for some, they often grew to truly like it; “At first I just wanted to support them because I loved them. Now I do because i genuinely like the music they’re making.” It became “10% because they are 1D. 90% because I enjoy the kind of music they make.”

Making and Meeting Up With Friends. Survey participants attended solo concerts to network with other *ID* fans. Some met up with friends previously made through the *ID* fandom; one said, “mainly to see friends—it feels like meeting up for the holidays or something,” and another said these concerts provided “an excuse to travel and see friends in different cities (like those i met as a 1D fan in 2013–2015).” Others attended to finally meet up with fellow fans they had talked with online, resembling the *ID* fan “meetups” Lacasa et al. (2016) discussed. These also highlight Yates’s (2015) claim that fans use media platforms more to connect with fellow fandom members than with the object of fandom.

Fans even discussed going to solo concerts to make new friends, explaining the ease of doing so in that setting; “You can make friends with the person sitting next to you because you know they understand how much love you have for them. It’s one big party!” Similarly, “The fans are so different

to any other artists'. It ... feels like you know lots of people." Others reported attending for a mixture of these reasons; "I make friends and reunite with old friends!"

Atmosphere. Respondents discussed enjoyment of concerts overall while distinguishing *ID*'s and solo members' concerts as even better; "I love concerts in general. But 1D shows, solo and together, are a different experience." Fans felt that these concerts' crowds greatly differed from other artists'; "No other concert has the level of passion or intensity." Respondents pointed to the fellow fans as one reason. Some attend to "feel the common love fans have for them," touching on the level of comfort and acceptance felt at the solo concerts. Since "Everything other than support and love for the artist is shed at the door," the "atmosphere ... is incredibly welcoming" and the concerts have been "such safe spaces [*sic*] where I can be exactly who i want to be."

Qualities of the Music. Just as fans listened to *ID* music because of its qualities, fans similarly listened to solo members' music for its qualities, once again matching North et al.'s (2004) finding of listening to music for "simple enjoyment" (p. 71). Fans wrote, "i genuinly [*sic*] love the songs, lyrics, the vibe," "love their voices," and "I like that it allows them to express themselves as individuals." Some clarified that they "wouldn't listen just because it's their music. i listen because I enjoy it." In particular, fans enjoyed the solo music's mature sound. One fan wrote, "i like how they're growing with me." Commonly, fans preferred the solo music to *ID*'s music; "the music styles are closer to my preferences than One Direction ever was." Again, "They each have a unique sound that is more appealing to me than listening to One Direction as a whole." Stated more simply, "They r [*sic*] better as solo artists."

Knowing More About the Band Members. Fans listened to solo music in early 2020 to learn information about the members. Because each artist was extremely involved in their solo music creation and was writing songs solely for themselves, rather than the group, fans could find out more about each member's musical influences and personal life. One fan said the solo music "gives some more insight as to who they are as a person." Another explained, "They write their songs, they write their souls ... it is them, real them not what management told them to be." One fan even likened it to "getting to know a new friend instead of hanging out with an old one." Despite already feeling close to the boys, fans believed hearing the solo music provided even more connection; it "helps me get to know them even better than I already do."

Only Options. Respondents cited listening to solo members' music to try to make up for the lack of new *ID* music. As one stated, "its the next best thing to one direction." These fans would "take anything I can get at this point" and believed that, in terms of why they listen, "part of it is missing One Direction and wanting to hear new music from its members." Even so, some fans felt it did not make up for *ID*'s absence; "their solo work gets me halfway there." Fans gave the same rationale for attending solo members' concerts, which "feels like an extension of attending a 1D show." These concerts gave fans the "chance to still see my pop idol from so many years ago live again," and "Sometimes they do 1D songs!" Some acknowledged that they "probably won't ever see One Direction together again so it's as close as I can get."

Read Fan Fiction

Qualities of the Stories. Fans discussed their enjoyment of reading, in general, but found *One Direction* fan fiction—or fanfic—stories to be of superior quality. Participants commonly expressed that they "read fanfics that are better than published books." These stories were also deeply impactful; "Some of the absolute best, most life-changing stories Ive read have been fan fiction." Some even "don't

read normal books anymore” because of how much they enjoy *ID* fanfic. Fans often pointed to the writers’ imaginations and creativity as reasons for enjoying the stories. The writers’ abilities to each portray the band members’ characters so differently fascinated fans; “It’s interesting to see how different people put a spin on familiar characters/people.”

Plot Focus. Fans enjoyed reading *ID* fanfic because they already knew the characters well. First, the reading was easier because they could concentrate less on building mental character profiles; fans “know these characters and it doesn’t require ‘mental capacity’ to get used to them.” They found it “so much easier than reading a book because you already know everyone who’s in the story.” Second, because of their preexisting knowledge of the characters, fans could focus on the creative aspects of the authors’ works; “There’s an already-established familiarity with the characters that really highlights the plot.” For another, the familiarity “Leaves more of my mind free to enjoy the story—like reading a long-running series, but jumping through multiple parallel universes.” The fans acknowledged that these stories were fiction but enjoyed having a starting point; “I don’t actually see the characters as representative of the real life people. However, I do like reading about characters that I can visualise.” Fans even found it easier to stay focused and interested while reading *ID* fan fiction, compared to other literature, because of their interest in the band’s members.

Ideal Situations. A multitude of comments discussed reading fanfic for its optimistic possibilities not seen as available within reality. Some pertained to relationships between band members. Talking about shipping, fans enjoyed these alternate worlds where Larry, or another ship, was confirmed as real and was thriving. These comments match the most-read fanfic category by survey participants, “male/male.” In a platonic nature, fans enjoyed reading these narratives where the boys continued interacting as friends. Reading *ID* fan fiction gave “just one more way to feel like they are still together somehow.” Fans “do not get a lot of interactions of the boys ... although it is not real it feels like new content.” For some, it fills “a void since they’re not around as a band anymore and in most fan fictions they’re all friends and know each other.”

Even though the band had separated, fans appreciated how fanfic offered a peek at how the band may have continued. Fans could “envision what could’ve been” and “‘hang on’ to 1D times and imagine them as a band still.” One expressed, “In a way, they are still alive and together in the words written, and I feel ... Satisfied to find they still do things together (even if it’s only fictional).” These storylines could be considered “alternate universe,” the second most-read fanfic type from these respondents recently. One-third of those who chose reading *ID* fan fiction as a top activity had begun within the four years prior to this study, aligning with comments about reading to make up for no new, official content; even those reading fanfic pre-hiatus may have sought out this type of content once the hiatus began. These insights match Williams’s (2015) findings about fans’ lasting connections with television series once production has halted; fans would either rewatch the series or turn to fan-created works for a continuation of the narrative world they had grown accustomed to. Although her study was about television series, similarities appear here in boyband music fandom. With *ID* on hold, the fandom has sought out fan fiction to explore how things would have continued. Speaking of, fans mentioned reading to “feel closer to them during their hiatus” when they are feeling distant. Reading even helped improve their perceived relationships with the band members: “Reading about the boys whom I love so much makes me feel closer to them,” even if the stories are fictional.

Taking an even more personal route, readers “wish I was the girls in the stories.” It makes

them “happy to imagine what a relationship with the boy(s) would entail” and “wish the protagonist was me :(.” By reading the fan fiction, they could also picture “being best friends with The other boys.” Interestingly, the fans did not always seek those fictional relationships or experiences because of the boys per se. For some, it was just “To ‘engage’ in a perfect relationship I’ve never had,” not necessarily one with a band member.

Rewatched Videos

Funny. Survey respondents often rewatched videos of *ID* because they found the members funny. Participants called the members “Funny guys!,” one even calling them “one [*sic*] of the most funniest people in the world.” The group’s second most-rewatched category was “best moments,” often compilations of what the video’s creator perceives to be the band’s funniest moments. Live performances were third most-rewatched; during shows, band members pulled pranks, changed lyrics, and cracked jokes. The commonly rewatched category of talk show interviews includes funny remarks that reveal the members’ personalities as well. Additionally, fans had often recently rewatched *The X Factor* video diaries, which the band released weekly during their time on the show; these silly videos created a lot of inside jokes within the fandom.

Missing the Band. Fans additionally were rewatching videos because they missed the collective band. A large number of comments mirrored, “i miss them together as a group.” Aside from singing, the members used to appear to be great friends. Fans “miss the camaraderie between them,” and watching the videos “reminds me of ... when they were really close to each other ... I’ve always loved their friendship.” As the hiatus brought minimal public contact between members, fans “miss seeing them interact with each other” and turned to rewatching.

Not only did rewatching fill this void, it made some fans “feel like they are still together” and “as if they’re still a band.” After years of a hiatus, “rewatching is the only option left until they come back” with new content, though some shared doubts about their return. Once again, Williams (2015) discussed this motivation in her study of post-object television show fans. Just as fans studied by Williams (2015) rewatched the series or turned to fan-created works, these *ID* fans here rewatched both the official content, such as music videos; and the fan-created content, such as “best moments” video compilations.

Comparing Changes. Fans were rewatching videos to see the members’ changes over time. Sometimes, it was about members’ singing abilities and wanting “to see how much they have improved.” Some “love seeing how far they have come in their careers” and how much the members had accomplished together and separately. Some even studied “how their styles have changed and even their personalities and friendships with the other band members.” Other times, fans wanted to reminisce on the band’s beginnings: “I like seeing their faces and remembering where they came from”; “want to see where it all started and compare it to where they are now.” Only 16–18-year-olds when the band formed, *ID* members were in their late 20s at the time of this study. Time since the band’s formation brought countless career and life changes, with some becoming fathers, and they each established unique identities.

Remembering Another Time. Many comments discussed rewatching to remember other times, similar to those within the section about listening to *ID* music. Fans often explained that it is almost as if they are reliving those moments; “It feels nice, especially after the hiatus, it feels good to relive all these moments again.” Similarly, “To relive the old times” and “To relive the glory days.”

Improves Moods. Frequently, fans commented on rewatched videos' abilities to improve their moods. The videos "make me smile because they're silly," and they are "fun, safe, predictable." One respondent revealed, "It's sort of therapeutic in a way," and another stated that the videos "have made me happy before, so seeing them again will make me happy yet again." Anderson (2012) has also discussed this idea of watching old videos of the band for comfort and to feel happy.

Reminder and Reassurance of Fanship. Others rewatched at this stage of the hiatus to remember their experiences of becoming a fan. One rewatched to "feel that spark I felt when I was first getting to know them"; another wanted to "relive the emotions I felt when I first listened to them!" The viewers could "see how I fell in love with them" and see "why I fell in love with One Direction in the first place." Fans were also reminded of content they once knew so well. One fan wrote about how they "love how I can remember part of the videos I watched a lot, I think it's satisfying." As the years went by and the band's hiatus continued, some fans lost sight of what they were supporting or how they got connected to the band in the first place. Rewatching these videos, they reaffirmed their decisions to invest so deeply in the fandom. One respondent liked to "watch them to remind myself why I chose to support them and how much I really did enjoy watching them while they were still active as a band." As another put it, "It cements why and how much I admire them."

CONCLUSION

Before discussing further, it is important to note that this study has its limitations. Only offered in English, the survey could not be taken by all fans. Fans under 18 could not participate either, and these younger fans' motivations may differ from those discussed in this paper. The sample was also limited because of the survey's exclusively online distribution. Additionally, those who do not interact with any *ID*-related online sources likely would not have encountered this survey; participants represented in this study likely skew more involved within the fandom.

All data are self-reported, so responses were taken at face value. Plus, this study is cross-sectional; the survey was distributed at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic as people across the world began to quarantine. *ID* fandom participation at the time the survey was conducted likely skews more active than in the months prior. There may also be prevalent fan activities that were left out of the questionnaire; though nothing was written in the "Other" option's responses with an overwhelming presence, some uncreative, mundane activities—which are nonetheless worth of study—might have been omitted.

Despite all of this, it remains clear that even with *ID*'s indefinite hiatus, fans partake in "beyond-band engagement" as they continue to participate in a variety of fan activities for the currently nonexistent group. This study sought to explore how and why fans were participating four years into the band's hiatus, independent of when those fans had become fans. Throughout early 2020, fans surveyed had most often been listening to *ID* music, supporting the members' solo careers, reading *ID* fan fiction, and rewatching videos of/about *ID* they had seen before. Though often overlooked in scholarship, these non-"creative" fan activities can unravel an abundance of valuable insights. Numerous motivations across activities pertained to participating to feel closer to the band, to improve their lives on a long-term and short-term basis, and to be reminded of other times in life. As most participants appeared to be longer-term fans, they felt they have long-lasting connections with the band and considered *One Direction* a touchstone element in their lives. Another common motivation described

filling a gap until the band comes back, if ever. Further, fans participated to feel like the collective band never left and to envision what the band could have been. The majority of these motivations matched other scholars' works about long-term fandom and how participation changes as fans age. Yet, most preexisting studies about long-term fandom involved fans older than the ones represented in this study; considering that half of the participants of this study were between 18 and 23, perhaps the motivational and participatory shifts occur earlier than expected. The band formed only a decade ago and had been apart for four years at the time of this study, but a fan who became a fan at 12 years old, saw the group begin hiatus at 18 years old, and remained part of the fandom at 22 years old had undergone multifaceted life changes throughout their time as a fan. For the *One Direction* fans studied here, their ongoing membership in the fandom is considered "long-term," in relation to their total life, and is clearly encompassing of changes.

As this research did not explore motivations of fans under 18, scholars interested could continue to research these younger fans' activities and motivations. Some studies cited were about younger *Directioners*, but they took place during the height of the band's popularity. In a more modern study, younger fans would likely exhibit different behaviors, especially if joining the fandom post-Direction. Going another direction (no pun intended), fellow researchers could attempt to differentiate whether fans, such as the *ID* fans studied here, have such long-lasting connections because they have been fans for large portions of their lives or because they became fans during an impressionable period in life, whether it be during adolescent years or simply another impactful period. Is the amount of someone's life that they have been a fan, or the time in life when they became a fan, more important in determining how strong and lasting their fanship will be?

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About the Author(s)

Julia R. Jameson graduated from Trinity University in May 2020, earning a B.S. in business administration (marketing concentration) and communication.

Online Connections

E-mail: juliarivajameson@gmail.com

LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/in/juliarjameson/>