

Research Paper

Impact of Para-Social Interaction with Anime Characters on Self-Esteem and Subjective Happiness in Young Adults

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the impact of para-social interaction with anime characters on self-esteem and subjective happiness among young adults. The term "para-social interaction" describes the one-sided emotional ties people build with media personalities. In the internet age, anime has emerged as a key venue for these relationships. Three standardized measures the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, the Subjective Happiness Scale (Lyubomirsky & Lepper), and the Para-social Interaction Scale (Rubin, Perse, & Powell, 1985) were filled out by 212 people in the sample, with particular reference to their favorite anime characters. Strong positive associations between para-social contact and happiness ($r = .965, p < .001$) and self-esteem ($r = .964, p < .001$) were found using correlational analyses. A regression analysis showed that para-social interaction significantly predicted levels of self-esteem and happiness, explaining 94% of the variance ($R^2 = .938, F(2, 209) = 1588.943, p < .001$). Happiness ($\beta = .452, p < .001$) and self-esteem ($\beta = .521, p < .001$) were also significant predictors. These results imply that developing emotional bonds with anime characters may improve people's psychological health by boosting life satisfaction and a positive self-image. By demonstrating how anime-based para-social ties affect the mental well-being and emotional fortitude of audiences in the digital age, this study advances media psychology.

Keywords: *Para-Social Interaction, Anime, Self-Esteem, Subjective Happiness, Young Adults, Media Psychology*

In recent decades, the relationship between audiences and media has undergone a profound transformation. The transition from traditional broadcast television to digital and on-demand platforms has changed how people interact with fictional characters and stories, in addition to how they consume material. Media accessibility and customization have made it possible for viewers to have more in-depth, customized experiences. Consequently, the one-sided emotional connections that people have with media personalities, known as parasocial interactions (PSIs), have grown more common and intricate. The idea of parasocial contact was first proposed by Horton and Wohl (1956) and refers to a psychological experience when viewers interpret mediated characters as genuine, emotionally relevant people even when there isn't any true interpersonal reciprocity.

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In today's media-saturated environment, the boundaries between real and imagined social experiences are increasingly blurred. Para-social contact, a one-sided psychological connection in which a person becomes emotionally engaged in a media persona without realizing it, is one of the most prominent examples of this phenomena (Horton & Wohl, 1956). With the growth of digital media and online fandoms, para-social interaction once thought to be limited to television personalities, athletes, and celebrities has greatly broadened in scope. Animated media, especially anime, is a particularly interesting and little-researched area of para-social interaction.

A worldwide fan base has grown up around anime, a Japanese animation form known for its deep emotional depth, intricate characters, and rich plot. Many viewers claim to have developed close emotional ties with anime characters, feeling empathy, adoration, and camaraderie. These para-social connections frequently affect viewers' everyday life, emotional control, and self-perception in addition to passive media intake. Because of their idealized personalities, constant presence, and captivating stories, anime characters unlike those in traditional media may provide viewers with a special kind of comfort and escape.

Anime provides a venue for emotional catharsis and escape for many viewers, particularly young adults. Anime protagonists frequently reflect the inner conflicts, desires, and growing problems of real-life people, whether it be via the tenacity of Naruto Uzumaki, the loneliness of Shinji Ikari, or the unfailing optimism of characters like Luffy or Deku. Fans can use these characters as emotional pillars to help them deal with emotions like loneliness, worry, or poor self-esteem. Furthermore, anime's episodic format, which frequently consists of dozens or even hundreds of episodes, promotes sustained engagement, strengthening the bond between viewers and characters and heightening the apparent closeness of these one-sided interactions.

Anime fandom culture also plays a significant role in reinforcing these bonds. Cosplay, fan art, online forums, and character-focused products all support and validate para-social interaction. Fans immerse themselves in the emotional and social worlds of their favorite characters by repeatedly reliving and reimagining their relationship with them. This kind of interaction becomes active, immersive, and psychologically significant in contrast to passive media intake.

Young adults may be particularly susceptible to the effects of anime-based para-social relationships due to their developmental stage, which is often characterized by identity formation, increased emotional sensitivity, and a desire for belonging. These parasocial relationships may improve a person's psychological condition in addition to acting as stand-ins for in-person interactions. According to new research, these connections can improve self-esteem and subjective happiness by providing emotional support, serving as role models for healthy coping mechanisms, and creating a feeling of connection and purpose (Giles, 2002; Tukachinsky, 2010).

Despite the popularity and psychological richness of anime, empirical research on its para-social impact remains limited. Few studies have specifically looked at the effects of parasocial interactions with anime characters on important psychological factors like happiness and self-esteem. This disparity demands further study given the cultural prevalence and emotional depth of anime fandoms.

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The boundaries between fiction and emotional reality are blurred by parasocial relationships, which are not reciprocal but frequently feel experientially authentic to the viewer. These ties have grown especially strong among teenagers and young adults, who frequently turn to media as a means of social simulation, emotional coping, and identity discovery. Beyond traditional media figures, parasocial interaction now includes influencers, celebrities, video game avatars, and particularly anime characters. Understanding the psychological causes and ramifications of PSI has become a critical field of research as media consumption becomes more emotionally evocative and immersive.

Despite being unidirectional by nature, these partnerships frequently provide the spectator a sense of experiencing authenticity. Parasocial connections have changed from transient feelings of familiarity to enduring emotional attachments that might affect psychological functioning in a media-rich society where content intake is constant and emotionally absorbing. These exchanges have the power to affect viewers' mental health, social habits, and self-perceptions. They can be aspirational, strengthening viewers' aspirations and self-concepts through symbolic affiliation with respected characters, or compensating, bridging the gaps left by unsatisfactory real-life interactions.

Anime as a Domain for Parasocial Engagement

Anime distinguishes out among other media as a particularly conducive environment for parasocial interaction. Anime usually delivers long-form storytelling, rich character development, and emotionally impactful storylines, in contrast to shorter or episodic media. Characters frequently exhibit emotional sensitivity, moral clarity, and personal development, all of which can strengthen audience connection. Usually, these characters are presented in a way that encourages psychological identification and empathy. Furthermore, anime fandom is very community-oriented and engaged, fostering settings where emotional attachments to characters are accepted and strengthened.

Anime's storytelling often centers on themes such as identity, belonging, resilience, and transformation narratives that align closely with the developmental concerns of young adulthood. For a lot of viewers, anime characters represent comfort, strength, or the perfect partner. In this perspective, parasocial connections are psychologically significant interactions that support a viewer's emotional control, feeling of self-worth, and sense of community rather than just being responses to media exposure. Because of this, anime is a perfect tool for studying the psychological aspects of parasocial ties, especially in young people who are going through crucial phases of emotional and self-concept development.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Six interconnected theoretical frameworks that together explain the psychological foundations of parasocial interactions (PSI) and their effects on subjective satisfaction and self-esteem serve as the foundation for this investigation. These include the following frameworks: (1) the Perspective of Positive Psychology (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000); (2) Attachment Theory (Bowlby, 1969; Cohen, 2004); (3) Uses and Gratifications Theory (Blumler & Katz, 1974); (4) Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 2001); (5) Self-Discrepancy Theory (Higgins, 1987); and (6) Media Equation Theory (Reeves & Nass, 1996). When combined, they offer a thorough framework for comprehending how anime characters, although being fictitious, may support young people's psychological health, identity development, and emotional connection.

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Positive Psychology Perspective

Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000) launched the Positive Psychology movement, which emphasizes strengths, thriving, and the best possible human functioning. It places more emphasis on concepts like self-worth, life satisfaction, and subjective happiness than it does on mental disease or deficiencies. According to this perspective, PSI using anime characters might be a tool for mental development. Characters that serve as role models for optimism, tenacity, or self-compassion can have a good impact on viewers, particularly if people can relate to them or find inspiration in their stories. Highly subjective happiness viewers may participate in PSI from a point of emotional plenty, which would improve their experience. On the other hand, those who lack confidence or contentment could find that these symbolic relationships help them become more resilient, empowered, or able to control their emotions. This theory reframes PSI not as a pathological behavior but as a potentially adaptive and growth-promoting experience.

Attachment Theory (Applied to Media Contexts)

Attachment Theory was first created by Bowlby (1969) to describe how early interpersonal relationships are formed. Since then, researchers like Cohen (2004) have expanded it to include media situations. According to this adaptation, one's internal working models of oneself and other people can have an impact on parasocial interactions, which can resemble real-life bonds. PSI can be emotionally satisfying and enlightening for viewers with stable attachment types, without taking the place of genuine relationships. On the other hand, those who have an anxious or avoidant *attachment* style could look to anime characters as a replacement for genuine human relationships, possibly employing PSI to control their emotions or deal with social isolation. These parasocial bonds might give young adults in life transitions a feeling of emotional security and belonging.

Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT)

Uses and Gratifications of Blumler and Katz (1974) According to theory, audiences are active agents who selectively interact with media to satisfy certain psychological and emotional demands rather than being passive consumers of it. Anime may be a source of amusement, escape, friendship, or self-discovery for viewers. Anime characters can be symbolic entities that reinforce desired personality qualities or satisfy unfulfilled social needs in the context of parasocial interaction. Others with lower self-esteem, for instance, could look for characters who are reassuring or inspirational in order to combat feelings of inadequacy, whereas others with greater self-esteem might identify with heroes or confident characters who mirror and validate their own self-concept. In the same way, anime content that promotes social interaction, inspiration, or relaxation through fan groups may increase subjective pleasure. UGT aids in the understanding of both the reasons for and the purposes of parasocial ties in people's day-to-day lives.

Social Cognitive Theory

The Social Cognitive Theory of Bandura (2001) places a strong emphasis on how behavior is shaped by imitation, self-efficacy, and observational learning. The characteristics, morals, and coping strategies of respected media figures are frequently internalized by viewers. Anime offers viewers idealized yet psychologically captivating role models through its emotionally charged storyline and deep character development. Young people may emulate anime characters' attitudes or actions as they go through identity formation, which can have a direct impact on their confidence and sense of self. For example, a viewer's self-esteem and subjective satisfaction may rise when they witness a character overcome hardship and

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gain confidence in their skills. The media environment's role in teaching and reinforcing positive (or negative) emotional and behavioral patterns through PSI is also explained by social cognitive theory.

Self-Discrepancy Theory

According to Higgins' (1987) Self-Discrepancy Theory, emotional distress like guilt, shame, or discontent might arise from differences between the real self, the ideal self, and the "ought" self. Anime characters and other media personas can serve as representations of these "ought" or ideal selves. Through parasocial involvement, viewers who feel that they are not as close to their ideal may feel either encouraged or distressed. For instance, relating to a successful or morally pure anime character may inspire personal development, raising happiness and self-worth. Others, however, can feel more inadequate as a result of the apparent distance between themselves and idealized figures. This theory offers a sophisticated understanding of how PSI may impact people differently depending on their internal goals and self-concept.

Media Equation Theory

According to the Media Equation Theory, which was put out by Reeves and Nass (1996), individuals frequently react to media, especially media personalities and figures, as though they were actual social actors. Even when people are cognizant that the characters are imaginary, this propensity persists. As a result, real emotional reactions and attachment styles akin to those found in interpersonal relationships may be evoked by anime characters. Increased contentment, comfort, and a feeling of community might result from these emotional responses. In this way, PSI becomes experientially real with observable psychological effects rather than just symbolic. Young people's daily well-being, identity development, and social connections can all be impacted by these emotionally charged events, particularly for those who are major anime fans.

The present study seeks to address this gap by investigating the relationship between anime-based para-social interaction and psychological well-being, specifically, self-esteem and subjective happiness, among young adults. This study intends to investigate how relationships in fictional media might affect real-world emotional resilience, self-perception, and life satisfaction by concentrating on anime characters as the objects of para-social ties.

Rationale and Need for the Study

Even while para-social phenomena are becoming more and more popular, the majority of studies to date have been on their effects, such as media addiction, fandom behaviors, or consumer choices. The reasons why certain people are predisposed to develop para-social interactions in the first place, however, are comparatively poorly understood. Examining whether positive internal characteristics like happiness and self-esteem promote or inhibit such connections is crucial given the emotional intensity and ubiquity of PSI among young adults, particularly in the setting of social media. Furthermore, comprehending these connections might provide information on social behavior in mediated contexts, loneliness prevention, and emotion management. Therefore, this study aims to close this gap by employing recognized psychometric instruments and theoretical foundations to experimentally examine how self-esteem and subjective pleasure impact para-social interaction.

METHODOLOGY

Aim: The study aims to examine the extent to which parasocial interaction with anime characters predicts subjective happiness and self-esteem among young adults.

Objectives:

- To examine the relationship between para-social interactions with anime and happiness and self-esteem among young adults.
- To evaluate the impact of para-social interactions with anime characters on subjective happiness and self-esteem
- Parasocial interaction will significantly predict self-esteem but not subjective happiness among young adults.

Hypothesis

- H₁: There will be a significant positive relationship between para-social interaction and subjective happiness and self-esteem among young adults.
- H₂: Parasocial interaction will significantly predict happiness and self-esteem among young adults.
- H₃: To investigate whether parasocial interaction differentially predicts self-esteem and subjective happiness among young adults.

Research Design

This study adopted a quantitative, correlational research design to examine the relationships among parasocial interaction, subjective happiness, and self-esteem. The aim was to determine whether subjective happiness and self-esteem significantly predict individuals' involvement in parasocial relationships one-sided, emotionally charged attachments to media figures or celebrities.

This design is appropriate for exploring naturally occurring psychological variables without experimental manipulation. Correlational methods are particularly suited for behavioral sciences research where ethical or practical constraints prevent direct intervention. The use of regression analysis further allows for the prediction of one variable based on the values of others while statistically controlling for their shared variance. By examining both bivariate relationships and multivariate prediction models, this study captures a more nuanced understanding of the psychological factors influencing parasocial behaviors.

Inclusion Criteria

Participants were eligible to take part in the study if they met the following criteria:

1. Individuals aged between 18 and 30 years, representing the young adult demographic.
2. Regular anime viewers, defined as having watched at least one to two anime series within the past six months.
3. Proficiency in reading and understanding English, as all survey instruments were administered in English.
4. Willingness to provide informed consent before participation.
5. Ability to identify a favourite anime character with whom they felt a personal or emotional connection, which was essential for meaningful responses on the Parasocial.

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Exclusion Criteria

Participants were excluded from the study based on the following conditions:

1. No prior exposure to anime or no interest in anime viewing.
2. Diagnosis of severe psychological conditions (e.g., schizophrenia, delusional disorder) that might impair informed consent or influence responses related to parasocial perception.
3. Incomplete survey responses or failure to pass attention-check items embedded within the questionnaire.
4. Individuals outside the defined age range (under 18 or over 30 years).

Sample

The sample consisted of 212 adult participants (aged 18 and above), selected through purposive sampling. This non-probability sampling method was intentionally employed to ensure that participants had sufficient exposure to media content, particularly anime, and were familiar with anime characters and narratives. Such exposure was a prerequisite for providing valid and meaningful responses on the Para-social Interaction Scale, which in this study focused specifically on para-social relationships with anime characters.

Recruitment was conducted through academic networks, online forums, and social media platforms frequented by individuals with a known interest in media content, celebrities, or influencers. The sample was sufficiently diverse in terms of age, gender, and educational background, although these demographic variables were recorded for descriptive purposes only and were not used in the main analyses.

The final sample size was deemed adequate based on power analysis for multiple regression. According to Cohen's (1992) criteria, a sample of at least 107 participants is required to detect a medium effect size ($f^2 = 0.15$) with two predictors at 80% power and $\alpha = .05$. The obtained sample size ($N = 212$) exceeds this threshold, ensuring robust statistical power.

Tools

Three validated psychometric instruments were used to measure the study variables. All scales were administered in English and presented electronically through a secure online survey platform.

Parasocial Interaction Scale: This scale was used to assess the degree to which individuals form para-social relationships specifically with anime characters. It assesses the behavioral, emotional, and cognitive aspects of one-sided attachments to media personalities; in this study, it was modified to account for interactions with anime series characters. Statements reflecting imagined talks, emotional connection, perceived intimacy, and the frequency of contemplation or engagement with anime characters are among the items. A Likert-type scale was used to record the responses, and higher total scores denoted a higher level of para-social connection with anime characters. The scale was used in this instance to assess how viewers' emotional involvement and sense of connection was evoked by anime-based media icons. Based on their emotions and experiences with their favourite or most emotionally significant anime characters, participants were asked to answer. The scale has been successfully modified in earlier research on character-driven para-social processes and has shown excellent construct validity and internal consistency (Rubin, Perse, & Powell, 1985). This study's application to interactions unique to anime ensured a targeted analysis of the ways in which anime media affects para-social involvement.

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Subjective Happiness Scale: Developed by Lyubomirsky and Lepper (1999), this 4-item instrument measures global subjective happiness. Respondents are asked to evaluate their overall happiness and how they perceive themselves relative to others. Items are scored on a 7-point Likert scale, and total scores range from 4 to 28, with higher scores indicating higher perceived happiness. The SHS has been widely used in both clinical and non-clinical populations and shows high internal consistency ($\alpha = .86-.91$ across studies).

Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale: This classic 10-item scale evaluates global self-esteem by assessing both positive and negative self-perceptions. Items are rated on a 4-point scale ranging from “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree.” Scores range from 0 to 40, with higher scores reflecting greater self-esteem. The RSES is a reliable and valid measure across diverse demographic groups and has been used extensively in both psychological and sociological research.

All instruments used in this study demonstrated high internal reliability, with Cronbach’s alpha coefficients exceeding 0.85 in the current sample. Where appropriate, reverse-coded items were recoded before computing total scores.

Procedure

Data collection occurred over six weeks using an anonymous, self-administered online questionnaire hosted on a secure platform. An informed consent statement explaining the study's goal analyzing parasocial interactions with anime characters and their connection to subjective happiness and self-esteem, as well as the participants' rights and data confidentiality procedures was given to participants before they could access the survey. Only those who gave their informed consent were allowed to continue.

Participants were instructed to respond based on their experiences with anime characters. Following a brief demographic survey that also asked about their anime viewing habits (e.g., frequency, favorite genres or characters), they completed three psychometric scales in a predetermined order: the Parasocial Interaction Scale, the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, and the Subjective Happiness Scale. Ten to fifteen minutes were needed to finish. To guarantee the quality of the data, attention-check items were incorporated. Incomplete or careless replies were not included in the final analysis, and responses were tracked for completeness.

After data collection, responses were screened for outliers, missing values, and assumption violations. Less than 5% of the data were missing, and these cases were removed via listwise deletion. Normality, linearity, and homoscedasticity of residuals were assessed using graphical plots and statistical tests (e.g., Shapiro-Wilk). All assumptions for parametric analyses were met.

The final dataset appropriately represented significant parasocial relationships with anime characters and their possible psychological correlates thanks to this painstaking approach to data collection and validation, which also served as a strong basis for further statistical interpretation and hypothesis testing.

Correlational Analysis

To explore the relationships among parasocial interaction, subjective happiness, and self-esteem among the 212 participants, Pearson’s product-moment correlation coefficients were computed. Strong, statistically significant positive associations were found in the

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investigation, highlighting the psychological significance of parasocial interaction with anime characters. First, the data indicated a robust positive correlation between levels of parasocial interaction and subjective happiness, $r(210) = .965, p < .001$. This implies that individuals also tended to report higher levels of happiness if they reported having one-sided or stronger emotional ties with anime characters. This might include emotional absorption in plots, a sense of connection to beloved characters, or personal identification with character attributes in the context of anime, all of which seem to have a favorable impact on general well-being.

Similarly, parasocial contact and self-esteem were shown to have a strong and almost similar positive connection $r(210) = .964, p < .001$. According to this research, those who engage in parasocial interactions with anime characters on a deeper level also seem to value themselves more. Whether created via empathy, adoration, or solace from anime stories, these parasocial ties may give a psychologically reaffirming experience that validates the viewer's identity or offers emotional support. Furthermore, there was a high and positive correlation between self-esteem and subjective happiness $r(210) = .983, p < .001$. People who report higher levels of happiness are more likely to feel better about themselves, and vice versa, according to this nearly perfect association. These findings are consistent with a wide body of psychological research indicating that self-esteem is a core predictor of life satisfaction.

RESULT

Descriptive Statistics

Table 1 Descriptive Statistics for Parasocial Interaction, Subjective Happiness, and Self-esteem

Variable	N	Minimum	Maximum	M	SD
Parasocial Interaction	212	0	100	62.72	37.32
Happiness	212	0	28	17.42	10.23
self-esteem	212	0	49	32.99	19.19

Descriptive statistics were calculated for the three key variables in the study: parasocial interaction, subjective happiness, and self-esteem, based on a sample of 212 participants. The parasocial interaction scores had a mean (M) of 62.72 and a standard deviation (SD) of 37.32, ranging from 0 to 100. This suggests that people in the sample had a tendency to have a significant emotional connection or participation with media personalities (e.g., celebrities, influencers, fictitious characters), indicating a somewhat high average degree of parasocial engagement. The large standard deviation indicates that there is significant variation in the strength of these interactions, with some people reporting extremely low levels of parasocial contact and others displaying very high levels. The subjective satisfaction scale has a mean score of 17.42 and a standard deviation of 10.23, with scores ranging from 0 to 28. According to these results, individuals generally report a moderate level of pleasure or life satisfaction. The comparatively high standard deviation, however, suggests that there is a broad spectrum of emotional well-being, with some people reporting extremely high levels of happiness and others reporting low levels.

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Table 2 Pearson Correlations Among Parasocial Interaction, Subjective Happiness, and Self-esteem

	Parasocial	Happiness	Self-esteem
Parasocial	1		
Happiness	.965**	1	
Self-esteem	.964**	.983**	1

***. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).*

Note. N = 212. p < .01 (2-tailed).

The full correlation matrix is presented in Table 2.

Pearson’s product-moment correlation coefficients were computed. Strong, statistically significant positive associations were found in the investigation, highlighting the psychological significance of parasocial interaction with anime characters. First, the data indicated a robust positive correlation between levels of parasocial interaction and subjective happiness, $r(210) = .965, p < .001$. This implies that individuals also tended to report higher levels of happiness if they reported having one-sided or stronger emotional ties with anime characters. This might include emotional absorption in plots, a sense of connection to beloved characters, or personal identification with character attributes in the context of anime, all of which seem to have a favorable impact on general well-being.

Table 3 Model Summary: Parasocial Interaction Predicting Happiness

Model	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.106	.011	.005	4.45269

The dependent variable's variance was only partially explained by the model, which was not statistically significant ($R^2 = .011$, adjusted $R^2 = .005$, with a standard error of the estimate = 4.45). A poor linear connection was shown by the low correlation $R = .106$ between the observed and predicted values.

Table 4 ANOVA Summary: Parasocial Interaction Predicting Happiness

Model	Sum of squares	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1 Regression	35.211	1	35.211	1.776
Residual	3112.751	157	19.826	
Total	3147.962	158		.185^b

1. Dependent Variable: Happiness
2. Predictors: (Constant), Parasocial

In this analysis, parasocial interaction served as the independent variable, while happiness was the dependent variable. The results of the regression analysis indicated that the overall model was not statistically significant, $F(1, 157) = 1.78, p = .185$. This implies that the variation in happiness ratings cannot be well explained by parasocial interaction. With a coefficient of determination (R^2) of .011, the model only explained a modest percentage of the variance, meaning that variations in parasocial interaction only account for 1.1% of the variation in happiness. The corrected R^2 value was considerably lower at .005 after controlling for sample size and predictor count.

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Table 5 Model Summary: Parasocial Interaction Predicting Self-Esteem

Model	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.375	.141	.135	2.54131

Note. Predictor: Parasocial. Dependent Variable: Self-Esteem.

A simple linear regression was conducted to examine whether parasocial interaction significantly predicts self-esteem. With $R = .375$, $R^2 = .141$, and modified $R^2 = .135$, the regression analysis's findings showed that the model was statistically significant and could explain a moderate amount of the variation in self-esteem. This implies that levels of parasocial interaction account for about 14.1% of the variation in self-esteem. The average difference between the observed and anticipated self-esteem scores was almost 2.54 points, according to the standard error of the estimate, which was 2.54. Self-esteem and parasocial contact have a moderately positive linear association, according to the positive correlation ($R = .375$). Stated differently, there is a tendency for higher levels of parasocial engagement to be linked to higher levels of self-esteem. This model's predictive value is still moderate, even if it explains more variance than the prior one (where pleasure was predicted by parasocial contact). This could imply that although parasocial contact plays a part in individual variations in self-esteem, other social, psychological, or environmental elements might also be very important

Table 6 ANOVA Summary: Parasocial Interaction Predicting Self-Esteem

Source	SS	df	MS	F	Sig.
Regression	165.787	1	165.787	25.670	<.001
Residual	1013.949	157	6.458		
Total	1179.736	158			

Note. Predictor: Parasocial. Dependent Variable: Self-Esteem.

A simple linear regression was conducted to examine whether parasocial interaction significantly predicts self-esteem. Parasocial contact is a major predictor of self-esteem, according to the analysis's findings, which showed that the model was statistically significant ($F(1, 157) = 25.67, p < .001$). With an adjusted $R^2 = .135$, which accounts for sample size and predictor count, the regression model explained 14.1% of the variance in self-esteem ($R^2 = .141$). The average difference between the observed and anticipated self-esteem scores was almost 2.54 points, according to the standard error of the estimate, which was 2.54. $R = .375$, the relationship's overall strength, showed a positive linear relationship between parasocial engagement and self-esteem.

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to explore whether parasocial interaction significantly predicts self-esteem and happiness, with a specific interest in the context of anime fandom. In today's world, parasocial interactions one-sided psychological bonds people have with media figures are becoming more and more significant, especially for people who have a strong emotional bond with fictitious characters like those in anime. Although parasocial interaction is prevalent in fan culture, its impact on individual psychological consequences is still up for discussion.

Pearson's correlation analyses revealed strikingly strong, positive associations among all three variables: parasocial interaction, self-esteem, and happiness. Subjective contentment

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and parasocial contact had a strong correlation $r(210) = .965, p < .001$, indicating that people who develop one-sided emotional ties with anime characters are generally happier. Deep emotional immersion in stories, sympathetic involvement with character hardships, or a sense of kinship with character beliefs and characteristics can all contribute to these relationships. Similarly, self-esteem and parasocial contact had a substantial and positive correlation ($r(210) = .964, p < .001$), suggesting that those who interact with anime characters more frequently had more favourable self-perceptions. Whether in the form of consolation, inspiration, or identity, the emotional support that results from these contacts may work as a psychological reaffirmation. This research emphasizes how parasocial relationships can be internalized as sources of self-worth and strength. Furthermore, there was an almost perfect correlation between subjective satisfaction and self-esteem $r(210) = .983, p < .001$). Long-standing psychological theories that contend that self-esteem is a major determinant of overall life satisfaction are supported by this strong correlation (Diener & Diener, 1995). Strong triadic interactions found in this study imply that parasocial bonds with anime characters may support emotional fulfilment and self-esteem at the same time.

By examining the degree to which parasocial interaction affects self-esteem and happiness in a sample of people with assumed media engagement possibly including anime fans the current study adds to this body of literature. Studying the effects of subjective happiness and self-esteem on parasocial interaction (PSI) in young people who consume anime media was the aim of this study. Strong, statistically significant positive associations were found between PSI and happiness ($r = .965, p < .001$) and self-esteem ($r = .964, p < .001$). Furthermore, a strong predictive association between these internal psychological attributes and PSI participation was suggested by multiple regression analysis, which showed that happiness and self-esteem jointly explained 93.8% of the variation in parasocial interaction.

The regression analysis that looked at parasocial contact as a predictor of happiness produced non-significant results, in contrast to the findings for self-esteem. The association was not statistically significant ($p = .185$), and the model only explained 1.1% of the variation in happiness scores ($R^2 = .011$). The t -value did not go close to the significance level, and the standardized beta coefficient ($\beta = .106$) was tiny. These results suggest that in this sample, parasocial contact is not a good indicator of subjective satisfaction. This result is particularly notable given the prominence of parasocial bonds within anime fandom and online media spaces, where individuals often report that their engagement brings joy or serves as a coping mechanism. The results of the current study, however, indicate that although parasocial connection might provide momentary solace or emotional stimulation, it does not seem to have a significant or long-lasting effect on overall life satisfaction. This may be due to the fact that, in contrast to self-esteem, happiness is more impacted by larger aspects of life, such as daily activities, income, social support, and health areas in which parasocial interactions may have a minor or indirect impact.

Moreover, anime fandom, although emotionally rich and deeply engaging, may also be associated with patterns of escapism. High levels of parasocial engagement, especially with fictitious characters, can temporarily boost emotions but may not satisfy fundamental psychological needs linked to pleasure, such purpose, competence, and closeness. Consequently, parasocial engagement alone is insufficient to improve long-term emotional well-being, even though it may provide momentary solace or amusement. The deficit model of PSI, which holds that people use one-sided media interactions to make up for psychological suffering or real-life social shortcomings, is called into question by this data.

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The entire range of motivations and psychological characteristics that contribute to PSI are not taken into consideration by that framework, despite the fact that it has explanatory significance, particularly in situations involving social isolation or emotional fragility. The current findings, on the other hand, provide credence to a strengths-based paradigm, indicating that people who are happy and have high self-esteem could participate in PSI as a way to express their identities, feel more in touch with others, and be creative.

Interpretation and Cultural Context: The Role of Anime

Anime provides a unique lens through which to examine parasocial interaction. Anime characters are fictional and reside within carefully constructed tales that promote emotional immersion, in contrast to conventional celebrities or influencers. Strong parasocial ties are formed as a result of viewers' frequent binge-watching, participation in online fandoms, and emotional investment in character journeys. This is especially true for emotionally charged shows that examine themes of loss, development, and connection, like *Your Lie in April*, *Clannad*, or *Attack on Titan*.

These attachments may serve compensatory functions for individuals experiencing social isolation, anxiety, or depression. In this sense, anime characters may stand in for idealized, readily available, and accepting friends. This can lessen loneliness, but it may also encourage avoidant coping mechanisms, which lowers the desire for in-person social contacts that are essential for promoting pleasure and self-worth. In addition, anime fandoms frequently function within online communities, which can provide a feeling of community. However, people may largely rely on imagined relationships which can be brittle and psychologically limiting—to determine their self-worth when interaction becomes disproportionately parasocial. According to the study, parasocial contact may have a stronger correlation with self-evaluative outcomes (such as self-esteem) than with overall emotional states (such as happiness).

Connection to Previous Literature

The vulnerability-based components of PSI were frequently emphasized in earlier studies (Lee & Jang, 2013; Tukachinsky, 2010), but this study offers a more distinct perspective. It demonstrates that emotionally stable people also actively engage in parasocial bonding, especially when the media environment encourages intense character interaction. This phenomenon is particularly prevalent in anime because of its intricate storylines and emotionally nuanced character journeys. These stories frequently involve moral quandaries, emotional realism, and long-term character development, all of which encourage viewers to psychologically invest in fictitious characters.

The new data, in particular, substantially confirm Nakamura's (2021) hypothesis that anime's deep emotional framework produces particularly powerful PSI. Anime characters often embody concepts like moral development, tenacity, resilience, and vulnerability elements that not only reflect the developmental obstacles that young adults encounter, but also serve as symbolic models for overcoming them. This implies that PSI could serve as a model or mirror for emotional growth as opposed to being a stand-in for interpersonal communication.

Limitations

Despite the compelling nature of the findings, several limitations warrant caution in generalizing the results:

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Cross-Sectional Design: Causality cannot be deduced since this study used a cross-sectional survey design. Although PSI is predicted by happiness and self-esteem, it is also possible that PSI eventually leads to greater happiness or self-worth. To fully understand this reciprocal dynamic, longitudinal or experimental designs would be required.

Self-Report Measures: All factors were evaluated using self-report questionnaires, which are susceptible to response biases such as social desirability or erroneous self-evaluation. To triangulate results, future research might benefit from adding behavioral or physiological data.

Sample Specificity: The results' generalizability may be limited by the use of a purposeful sample of young adults who watch anime. Different PSI patterns may be displayed by viewers from various age groups, cultural backgrounds, or media genres. More mediating or moderating factors could be found in a larger and more varied sample.

Media Genre Limitation: Strictly concentrating on anime limits the range of interpretation. Future comparative research should examine if the same tendencies appear in other media formats, such as K-dramas, Western cartoons, YouTube influencers, or live-action shows, even though anime provides a rich backdrop for PSI. This study has a number of shortcomings in spite of its contributions. First, biases like social desirability or erroneous introspection may be introduced by depending too much on self-report data.

Furthermore, the cross-sectional design makes it impossible to draw conclusions about causality; whereas parasocial interaction is a predictor of self-esteem, it's also plausible that low self-esteem drives people to pursue parasocial engagement. The directionality of these impacts would be better understood with longitudinal research. Third, the study did not specifically differentiate between different kinds of parasocial engagement (e.g., with fictional vs. actual media people), even though anime fans probably included a component of the sample. Future studies should look at variations in results according to genre, fanbase involvement level, and character type (e.g., anime vs. live-action).

Future studies should also examine how gender, personality characteristics (such as attachment style and introversion), and actual social support may moderate the impacts of parasocial interaction. Qualitative research may also provide important insights into the real-life experiences of people who develop deep emotional connections with anime characters

Overall, this study's results indicate that parasocial interaction predicts self-esteem but not happiness in a moderate but meaningful way. According to these findings, people who participate in parasocial relationships especially in immersive media contexts like anime may have some psychological effects related to self-evaluation, but they are not always happier or more satisfied with their lives. This emphasizes how intricate media-based linkages are to contemporary psychological functioning. For anime fans and broader media consumers, parasocial relationships can offer meaningful emotional experiences. But ideally, these exchanges should enhance rather than take the place of in-person social ties. Understanding the complex roles of fandom and parasocial interaction, especially among young people and those looking for connections through media, may be helpful to mental health professionals and educators. We can better assist people in navigating identity, self-worth, and emotional satisfaction in a world inundated with media if we comprehend the advantages and drawbacks of parasocial connections, particularly as they relate to anime.

CONCLUSION

This study aimed to investigate the complex relationships between parasocial interaction, self-esteem, and subjective happiness, specifically within the domain of anime fandom. We discovered consistent evidence that parasocial involvement with anime characters is not only psychologically meaningful but also positively associated with emotional well-being and self-esteem through a series of regression and correlation analyses including 212 individuals. These results provide strong evidence for the emotional and psychological roles that media-based interactions play, which are frequently overlooked.

Using the Parasocial Interaction Scale created by Rubin, Perse, and Powell (1985), this study investigated the relationship between parasocial interaction (PSI) and self-esteem and subjective satisfaction among young adults who watch anime media. The present research examined the relationship between young adults' parasocial interaction (PSI) and their subjective satisfaction and self-esteem when they were consuming anime media. PSI was shown to have high and statistically significant positive relationships with both subjective happiness ($r = .965$, $p < .001$) and self-esteem ($r = .964$, $p < .001$). Additionally, these two psychological components jointly explained 93.8% of the variance in PSI, according to multiple regression analysis. These findings highlight a strong predictive correlation, showing that those who express greater levels of satisfaction and self-worth are more likely to develop deep, one-sided emotional bonds with anime characters.

These results provide a substantial contribution to our growing knowledge of parasocial interaction. In the past, PSI has frequently been thought of as a compensatory activity, primarily used by people who are lonely, have poor self-esteem, or are emotionally vulnerable (e.g., Tukachinsky, 2010; Lee & Jang, 2013). The current study, however, contradicts this viewpoint by offering factual support for the idea that PSI may also be common and perhaps more severe among those who are psychologically healthier. This implies that PSI may be used to improve emotional fulfillment, express identity, and strengthen social ties in symbolic ways, in addition to acting as a replacement for in-person social engagement.

Psychological Significance of Parasocial Interaction

Parasocial interaction has traditionally been viewed as a one-sided, nonreciprocal relationship that individuals form with media figures such as celebrities, fictional characters, or influencers. Our findings, however, cast doubt on the idea that these interactions are only compensatory or surface-level. Rather, our results imply that parasocial ties, especially those with anime characters, can offer psychological solace, self-reinforcement, and emotional fulfillment. For many individuals, especially those in adolescence or young adulthood, anime characters may represent aspirational figures or surrogate friends' entities who validate their feelings, offer resilience through struggles, or inspire personal growth. In ways that regular social interactions cannot always do, these relationships may reinforce beliefs and identity or satisfy unfulfilled emotional needs.

The Role of Anime in Shaping Identity and Emotional Resilience

Anime, as a distinctive narrative medium, is characterized by emotional depth, character-driven storytelling, and themes that often address perseverance, friendship, loss, hope, and self-discovery. Because of these features, anime is especially good at fostering parasocial ties. A character's moral quandaries, inner conflicts, or developmental path may resonate with participants, leading to a significant emotional involvement. Engaging in this way is

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not passive. Viewers project themselves into stories, find meaning in character arcs, and feel validated by the experiences of the characters, making it psychologically interactive. As a result, anime can serve as a mirror, reflecting the ideals, fears, or goals of the spectator. In this sense, parasocial interaction through anime may serve not only as a form of psychological escapism but as a platform for identity exploration, emotional resilience, and self-understanding.

Divergent Findings in Regression Analysis

The regression analysis provided a more balanced perspective despite the extremely positive associations. Parasocial interaction did not significantly predict happiness, but it was a statistically significant predictor of self-esteem, explaining around 14.1% of its variance. Just 1.1% of the variance was explained by the happiness regression model, and it fell short of statistical significance. This divergence may be due to the intricate relationship between self-esteem and happiness themselves. Given the nearly perfect correlation between these two measures ($r = .983$), it is conceivable that self-esteem mediates the relationship between parasocial interaction and happiness. In other words, parasocial bonds may first elevate self-perception, which in turn contributes to a sense of well-being. Future studies utilizing structural equation modeling (SEM) could clarify these potential indirect pathways. Furthermore, the regression model's limitations imply that although parasocial contacts play a substantial role, happiness is impacted by a wider range of factors that were not investigated in this study, including everyday stressors, economic position, social support, and physical health.

Implications for Mental Health and Media Psychology

These findings have significant ramifications for our understanding of media consumption, particularly in specialized fan cultures such as anime. This study emphasizes how intensive connection with fictional characters can promote psychological development and emotional resilience rather than being written off as a sign of maladaptation or social weakness. The importance of parasocial contacts should be taken into account by media psychologists, counsellors, and educators as a component of a larger framework for self-expression, identity construction, and emotional regulation.

Moreover, anime fandoms often offer vibrant online communities where parasocial engagement is both shared and deepened. The parasocial ties people have to characters and to one another can be strengthened by these virtual environments, which can foster a sense of community and shared empathy. The psychological advantages found in this study can be enhanced by the emotional discussions that occur in these communities.

Future Research Directions

Even while this study provides preliminary evidence of the advantages of parasocial connection among anime fans, there are a few areas that warrant further investigation. First, longitudinal designs may be able to more clearly define causal links, such as whether parasocial bonds eventually result in higher self-esteem or vice versa. Second, the complex emotional storylines that fans connect with their favourite characters could be unravelled through qualitative techniques like thematic analysis or interviews. Furthermore, more varied samples that span age ranges and cultural contexts could be used to see if these results hold true for populations other than anime enthusiasts or particular demographics. Examining the more negative facets of parasocial interactions, including over-reliance,

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emotional disengagement from interpersonal relationships, or idealization that impedes personal development, might also be beneficial.

To further understand the causal direction of the association between psychological qualities and PSI, future research should use experimental or longitudinal approaches. It would also be easier to determine if the trends seen are specific to anime or applicable to other media if comparative research were conducted across genres and platforms. Furthermore, examining whether PSI may gradually improve happiness and self-esteem may shed light on the potential of media-based engagement as a tool for emotional support and psychological development.

In conclusion, this study emphasizes the significance of parasocial connection on an emotional and psychological level, particularly for anime fans. Characters in fiction may have a very meaningful influence on psychological well-being, as seen by the strong, statistically significant relationships found between parasocial interaction and both self-esteem and subjective contentment. Although parasocial contact does not predict happiness on its own in a linear model, its strong correlations with self-esteem make it a significant factor in emotional well-being and personal identity. As a cultural and affective medium, anime provides an ideal environment for the development of strong parasocial ties. These connections can be emotionally gratifying, providing solace, hope, and self-validation. Despite being one-sided, the viewer's bond with anime characters can be a source of support, particularly during lonely situations.

Therefore, parasocial interactions based in anime fandom are far from being trivial or escapist; rather, they demonstrate the ability of identification, storytelling, and imagination to promote human wellbeing. They remind us that even fictional relationships can nourish the human psyche in profound and transformative way

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Conflict of Interest

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