

Stephen Reysen*

Texas A&M University-Commerce
Department of Psychology

Courtney N. Plante**

MacEwan University
Department of Psychology

**FANS, PERCEIVED MATURITY, AND WILLINGNESS TO FORM A ROMANTIC
RELATIONSHIP: APPLICATION OF A SHORT MATURITY MEASURE**

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In the present research we examine the association between perceived maturity of a group and willingness to form a romantic relationship with a member of that group. In Study 1, we tested the validity of a 2-item measure of self-reported maturity by assessing its relationship with existing measures of maturity and other related measures. The new measure showed evidence of being valid. In Study 2, we modified the scale to examine participants' perceptions of the maturity of fans of various interests (e.g., sport, music, media) and their degree of willingness to form romantic relationships with a member of each fan group. Results revealed a positive correlation between perceived maturity and willingness to date. Together, the results validate the short measure of maturity and demonstrate its utility in finding associations between perceived maturity, content of leisure interests, and prospects of romantic relationship formation

Key words: maturity, romantic relationship, dating, fans, fandom

1. Introduction

In recent years there has been a growing belief that Western adults are becoming more immature and less willing to "grow up" (Kimmel, 2008; West, 2007). Others have argued that there is a generational shift toward greater narcissism, entitlement, and focus on things that generate pleasure for the individual (Twenge, 2006). All of these shifts suggest a general, and growing, immature Western population. This notion of arrested development is perhaps best exemplified in the stereotypes that exist of fans of various interests, particularly those which deviate from mainstream interests (e.g., sport fans, Reysen & Shaw, 2016). For example, cartoons are often believed to be produced for consumption by children. As such, fans of shows like *My Little Pony*

* Department of Psychology, Texas A&M University-Commerce, Commerce, TX, 75429, USA; e-mail: Stephen.Reysen@tamuc.edu.

** Macewan University, 10700 104 Ave NW, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, T5J 4S2; e-mail: plantec5@macewan.ca

(Reysen, Chadborn, & Plante, 2017), Japanese animation (Reysen et al., 2016), or Disney cartoons featuring anthropomorphic animals (Plante, Reysen, Roberts, & Gerbasi, 2016) are stigmatized and branded as immature. This stigmatization plays into the longstanding popular belief that fans—ardent and enthusiastic supporters of an interest (Reysen & Branscombe, 2010)—are isolated, lonely, and lack social skills (Cohen, Seate, Anderson, & Tindage, 2017; Jenkins, 1992; McCutcheon & Maltby, 2002). In the present research we empirically assess the potential relationship between specific fan interests, perceived maturity, and their possible impact on interpersonal relationships.

1.2. Conceptualizing maturity

Research on the concept of maturity has a long and complex history in the field of psychology (Blatterer, 2007; Doll, 1935). Much of this work has examined maturity in the context of cognitive and social development, mental deficiency, vocational effectiveness, decision-making, moral reasoning, and the legal capacity for judgment making (e.g., Greenberger & Sørensen, 1974). Owing, in part, to the vast number of studies examining maturity and similar concepts (e.g., ego identity), the literature is complex and includes numerous definitions of maturity, many different theoretical approaches to the subject, and a multitude of different ways to assess it (Beail, 2003; Roberts & Côté, 2014; Weinberger, 1991). Nevertheless, one can find convergences in both lay perception and quantitative measurement of maturity. As an illustrative example, when kids are asked to describe a mature person, most responses involve concepts such as autonomy and self-reliance, responsibility, ability to effectively express emotions and resolve disputes, being non-judgmental, caring, and the ability to maintain a good work/fun balance (Tilton-Weaver, Vitunski, & Galambos, 2001). Both children and adults alike would likely agree that these concepts are at very least related to the concept of maturity, and at most are essential components of it.

The construal of maturity by social scientists is largely in accordance with that of laypersons, in that it also mainly focuses on one's ability to function effectively in society. For example, Greenberger and Sørensen (1974) suggest that maturity encompasses three dimensions: the capacity to function on one's own, interact with others, and contribute to societal cohesion. Within this framework, mature individuals are autonomous and meet the normative expectations of the society in which they are embedded. Going beyond merely functioning well in society, and following Erikson's stages of identity formation, Roberts and Côté (2014) suggest that maturing into an

adult involves – among other things – developing a sense of wholeness and continuity of the self, differentiating oneself from others, finding a place or role in the world that allows one to contribute to society and a felt sense of meaning and purpose in life. From this perspective, maturity and identity resolution are synonymous (Blatterer, 2007). Yet another perspective, that of the Big Five personality dimensions, refers to the maturity principle, which posits that, over time, individuals mature, reflected in higher scores on the dimensions of agreeableness, conscientiousness, and emotional stability (Caspi, Roberts, & Shiner, 2005). It should be noted that, in accordance with the above conceptualizations of maturity, such traits are conducive to social interaction and productive functioning in society.

In short, while laypersons and researchers alike may provide different definitions of or frameworks for understanding the concept of maturity, they tend to converge on the idea that mature people are capable of playing a functional role in society and, most relevant to the present work, have social skills necessary to form positive relationships.

1.3. Correlates of maturity

In line with the existing literature, measures of maturity are often used as means of assessing mental functioning and one's ability to adapt and function in the world (Beail, 2003). As such, it is theoretically consistent that scores on maturity scales have been found to correlate with academic achievement and intelligence (Cohn & Westenberg, 2004; Harrison, 1987). In a related vein, maturity scores have also been found to be negatively associated with anti-social decision-making (Cauffman & Steinberg, 2000; Monahan, Steinberg, Cauffman, & Mulvey, 2009). For example, while high school children show positive relationships between maturity and grade point average, school orientation (attachment toward school), and academic competence (perception of intelligence and capability at school), as well as negative relationships between maturity and misconduct, drug use, and delinquency (Lamborn, Mounts, Steinberg, & Dornbusch, 1991). Other studies have shown that maturity is positively related to self-esteem, and negatively related to neuroticism and anxiety (Greenberger, Josselson, Knerr, & Knerr, 1975). Collectively, such studies illustrate the myriad of benefits associated with mature individuals and illustrate the importance of assessing maturity as a psychological variable.

Given the theoretical relationship between maturity and identity formation, it is unsurprising that measures of ego achievement and identity resolution show similar

patterns of associations. For example, in a sample of college students, identity resolution was positively correlated with felt student-university match, felt connectedness to the campus, and problem-focused coping, and was negatively related to emotion-focused coping and perceived stress (Menard, 2015). Identity resolution has also been shown to be related to somatic and emotional health (Roberts & Côté, 2014), while related measures similarly show it to be positively related with self-esteem, internal locus of control, and intimacy with others (de Man, Harvey, Ward, & Benoît, 2008; Tan, Kendis, Fine, & Porac, 1977) and negatively related to interpersonal conflict, emotional exhaustion, psychological strain, borderline-pathological celebrity worship, obsessive compulsive tendencies, fantasy proneness, and dissociation (de Man et al., 2008, Maltby, Day, McCutcheon, Houran, & Ashe, 2006). The research can thus be summarized as strongly and consistently showing that maturity is associated with positive outcomes in one's life, including one's own interpersonal relationships.

1.4. Maturity, relationships, and immature fans

Among the characteristics people cite as most desirable in a potential partner, maturity is one of the top cited (Buss, Shackelford, Kirkpatrick, & Larsen, 2001). It is not hard to see why: among those currently dating, perceived maturity is associated with self-esteem, adjustment, relationship satisfaction, and sexual satisfaction (Nelson, Hill-Barlow, & Benedict, 1994). Emotional maturity is similarly positively correlated with marital adjustment (Cole, Cole, & Dean, 1980; Dean, 1966), and lower marital conflict for women (Helson & Wink, 1987). Indeed, women who perceive their partner as immature are less happy in their relationship (Dalla, Marchetti, Sechrest, & White, 2010). For those seeking a partner to date and eventually marry, maturity – which includes interpersonal skills and the ability to play a functional role in society – plays an important role in relationship satisfaction.

This raises an interesting conundrum for fans. As noted earlier, fans of some interests – especially non-prototypical ones – are frequently stigmatized. Among these stereotypes is the belief that they are immature. As such, it is plausible that being a fan of an interest that is viewed by many as immature may undermine one's ability to attract a possible mate and form a romantic relationship. Speaking to this possibility, in a recent study about the perception of anime (Japanese animation) fans, Reysen and colleagues (2016) asked non-anime-fans to rate their desired social distance from an imagined person. Non-anime fans reported a willingness to associate with anime

fans for relatively benign interactions or situations such as being a neighbor or coworker. However, non-fans did not want anime fans to be someone they were dating. Cohen and colleagues (2017) obtained similar results when asking participants to rate the physical and social attractiveness of science fiction fans. These findings illustrate that being a fan – at least for those who are fans of a stigmatized fan interest – may make one less attractive as a romantic partner. Given the link commonly observed between immaturity and relationship satisfaction, coupled with the prevailing stereotypes of fans as immature, it seems to follow that perceived immaturity of specific fan groups may be directly linked to their attractiveness as a potential relationship partner.

1.5. Present research

The purpose of the present study is to examine the association between perceived maturity and willingness to date fans of a variety of different interests. Prior to examining this association, however, we sought to test the validity of a novel short measure of maturity. Many existing measures of maturity tend to be long and multi-faceted, which can lead to participant fatigue and concerns about the number of other measures researchers can include in a study. To address this concern, in Study 1, participants completed a short, 2-item, face-valid measure of maturity alongside a variety of previously-validated measures of maturity and ego/identity achievement. Validity of the 2-item scale is contingent upon its showing strong positive correlations with these prior measures. In Study 2, participants rated fans of 40 different fan interests with regard to their perceived maturity and the participant's willingness to date a fan of each interest. Based on prior research (Cohen et al., 2017; Reysen et al., 2016), we predict a positive relationship between the perception of maturity and willingness to form a romantic relationship.

2. Study 1

The purpose of Study 1 is to examine the validity of a short, 2-item measure of maturity. Convergent validity of the measure is being assessed through the presence or absence of a strong positive correlation with previously published measures of maturity and ego/identity achievement.

2.1. Method

2.1.1. Participants and procedure

Participants ($N = 230$, 52.2% women; $M_{\text{age}} = 37.39$, $SD = 11.94$) were solicited from Amazon's Mechanical Turk, an online crowdsourcing platform. Participants completed a variety of measures related to maturity, presented in random order, in exchange for \$0.75.

2.2. Measures

2.2.1. Short maturity measure

We constructed a short two-item ("I am a mature person," "Other people would describe me as a mature person") measure of self-rated maturity ($r = .82$). Participants rated the items on a 7-point Likert-type scale, from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*.

2.2.2. Vineland social maturity scale

To assess social maturity, we adapted 55 items from Doll's (1935) Vineland Social Maturity Scale (for full list of items used in present study see Cox, 2012). The measure contains five dimensions, each containing 11 items, including self-help (e.g., "I always get a glass when I want something to drink"), communication (e.g., "I enjoy talking to others"), self-direction (e.g., "I take care of my own money"), socialization (e.g., "I contribute to the community"), and occupation (e.g., "I enjoy working"). Responses were made on a scale from 1 = *never* to 5 = *always*.

2.2.3. Psychosocial maturity inventory

We included the Psychosocial Maturity Inventory (Greenberger, Josselson, Knerr, & Knerr, 1975) as another measure of maturity (for list of items see Oh Hwang, 1994). The measure contains three dimensions, each containing 10 items, including self-reliance (e.g., "I feel very uncomfortable if I disagree with what my friends think" (reversed)), work-orientation (e.g., "I seldom get behind in my work"), and self-identity (e.g., "I am not really accepted or liked" (reversed)). Responses were made on a scale from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 4 = *strongly agree*.

2.2.4. Adjustment

The Weinberger Adjustment Inventory (Weinberger, 1991) was included as a general indicator of maturity (for list of items see Ebbighausen, 2005). The measure contains four dimensions, including suppression of aggression (7 items; e.g., "People who get me angry better watch out" (reversed)), impulse control (8 items; e.g., "I

stop and think things through before I act”), personal responsibility (8 items; e.g., “I make sure I stay out of trouble”), and consideration of others (7 items; e.g., “I try very hard not to hurt other people’s feelings”). Responses were made on either a scale from 1 = *false* to 5 = *true*, or 1 = *never* to 5 = *almost always*.

2.2.5. Big five personality

To assess personality, we adopted Gosling, Rentfrow, and Swann’s (2003) 10-item measure of the Big Five domains of personality. The subscales include extraversion, agreeableness, conscientious, emotional stability, openness to new experiences.

2.2.6. Identity issues inventory

To assess perceived degree of identity resolution, we adopted 48 items from the Identity Issues Inventory (Roberts & Côté, 2014). The measure contains four subscales each containing 12 items, including integration (e.g., “I feel like I have grown into a “whole” person”), differentiation (e.g., “Others would recognize me as a self-sufficient adult”), work roles (e.g., “I have certain skills or talents that I use in my life”), and worldview (e.g., “I often speak up about what I believe in”). The measure uses a 6-point Likert-type scale, from 1 = *completely disagree* to 6 = *completely agree*.

2.2.7. Eriksonian ego identity

To assess ego, another indicator of maturity, we adopted a 12-item measure from Tan, Kendis, Fine, and Porac (1977). Participants are asked to choose between two statements which best reflects oneself for each item. For example, “I enjoy being active in clubs and youth groups” versus “I prefer to focus on hobbies which I can do on my own time, at my own pace.” Higher scores indicate a stronger ego identity as conceptualized by Erikson.

2.3. Results

The two items comprising the short maturity scale were found to strongly positively correlate with one another, providing some evidence that the two items were assessing the same latent construct. Second, as shown in Table 1, the short maturity measure was significantly positively associated with all existing measures of maturity and ego/identity achievement, including all of the subscales of these measures. In addition, there were strong correlations between the short maturity measure and

components of the Big Five traditionally thought to capture maturity (agreeableness, conscientiousness, emotional stability). To examine which components of maturity uniquely predict the short maturity measure we conducted a regression with the previously published measures simultaneously predicting the short measure, $F(22, 207) = 12.42, p < .001, R^2 = .57$. As shown in Table 1, self-direction, suppression of aggression, impulse control, emotional stability, work roles, and Eriksonian ego identity significantly predicting the short measure of maturity.

Table 1

Means (Standard Deviation), Correlations with the Short Maturity Scale, and Regressions Predicting Short Maturity Scale

Variable α	r	β	Mean (SD)	
Vineland Social Maturity				
Self-Help	.30**	.01	3.02 (0.66)	.74
Communication	.31**	.05	3.08 (0.64)	.78
Self-Direction	.51**	.20*	3.50 (0.59)	.75
Socialization	.13*	.03	2.50 (0.83)	.90
Occupation	.35**	-.04	3.03 (0.71)	.81
Psychosocial Maturity Inventory				
Self-Reliance	.49**	.10	3.23 (0.53)	.85
Work-Orientation	.51**	-.09	3.17 (0.57)	.86
Self-Identity	.58**	.15	3.26 (0.63)	.90
Weinberger Adjustment Inventory				
Suppress Aggression	.29**	-.27**	3.95 (0.76)	.85
Impulse Control	.45**	.29**	3.87 (0.79)	.86
Personal Responsibility	.44**	-.05	4.16 (0.77)	.89
Consideration of Others	.36**	.04	3.71 (0.76)	.84
Big Five Dimensions				
Extraversion	.14*	-.02	3.50 (1.66)	.49 ^a
Agreeableness	.44**	.06	5.42 (1.21)	.30 ^a
Conscientiousness	.57**	.13	5.67 (1.20)	.53 ^a
Emotional Stability	.47**	.15*	5.07 (1.56)	.72 ^a
Openness	.20**	.05	4.97 (1.38)	.44 ^a
Identity Issues Inventory				
Integration	.60**	.15	4.47 (0.84)	.88
Differentiation	.62**	-.02	4.54 (0.88)	.90
Work Roles	.58**	.20*	4.40 (0.84)	.87
Worldview	.45**	.01	4.09 (0.77)	.82
Eriksonian Ego Identity	.36**	-.16*	6.99 (2.47)	.62

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$. ^a r is presented instead of Cronbach's alpha.

Next, we conducted a factor analysis with an oblimin rotation to examine which measures would load on the same factor as the short maturity measure. Oblimin rotation was chosen because as just mentioned, the measures were correlated with one another. As shown in Table 2, the short maturity measure loaded on the first factor together with the subscales of the psychosocial maturity inventory, three subscales of the Weinberger adjustment inventory, conscientiousness and emotional stability dimensions of the Big Five, all of the subscales of the identity issues inventory, and the Eriksonian ego identity scale. The Vineland social maturity dimensions were found to load on the second factor. This may be due to how these items are worded (i.e., specific behaviors rather than statements about beliefs).

Table 2

Factor Analysis (Oblimin Rotation) of Assessed Measures

Variable	Factor 3	Factor 4	Factor 1	Factor 2
Short Maturity Scale		.574	.273	.034
Vineland Social Maturity				.041
Self-Help	.031		.807	.223
Communication	-.016		.670	-.088
Self-Direction	.261		.733	.106
Socialization	-.248		.588	-.397
Occupation	.096		.662	-.236
Psychosocial Maturity Inventory				
Self-Reliance		.816	-.134	-.062
Work-Orientation		.762	-.039	.104
Self-Identity		.867	-.068	-.114
Weinberger Adjustment Inventory				
Suppress Aggression		.434	-.123	.264
Impulse Control		.598	-.059	.484
Personal Responsibility		.569	-.069	.362
Consideration of Others		-.107	.151	-.031
				.822
Big Five Dimensions				
Extraversion	.213		.028	-.483
Agreeableness	.147		-.044	-.068
Conscientiousness	.698		.159	.239
Emotional Stability	.538		.091	-.242
Openness	.107		.052	-.301
Identity Issues Inventory				
Integration		.724	.036	-.144
Differentiation		.869	.070	-.037
Work Roles		.754	.137	-.085
				-.046

Worldview	.429	.105	-.099	.292
Eriksonian Ego Identity	.597	.048	-.325	-.033
Eigenvalue	9.53	3.18	1.66	1.07
Variance Accounted	41.41	13.84	7.23	4.64

Note. Factor loadings above |.40| are bolded.

2.4. Discussion

Consistent with the purpose of Study 1, initial evidence was observed for the validity of a short, 2-item measure of maturity. Convergent validity of the measure was shown with positive correlations with previously published measures of maturity and ego/identity achievement. Furthermore, we conducted a factor analysis including the short measure of maturity and prior measures. The short maturity measure loaded on the first factor together with dimensions reflecting emotional control (e.g., emotional stability, impulse control), responsibility, and identity resolution (e.g., identity integration, Eriksonian ego identity). These dimensions loading with the short maturity measure suggest that the short measure is tapping into the broader construct of maturity as theorized and assessed by academics (e.g., Greenberger & Sørensen, 1974) and the prototype of a mature adult described by children (Tilton-Weaver et al., 2001). The results of the factor analysis also suggest that the construct of maturity is relatively synonymous with concepts such as ego achievement and identity resolution as these measures loaded on the same factor as maturity. With a valid measure of maturity, we next sought to examine the relationship between perceived maturity and willingness to form a romantic relationship in Study 2.

3. Study 2

Having established the validity of the short maturity scale, the purpose of Study 2 was to examine the association between perceived maturity and willingness to date fans of a variety of different fan interests using the scale. We hypothesize a positive association between perceived maturity and willingness to form a romantic relationship consistent with prior maturity and relationship research.

3.1. Method

3.1.1. Participants and procedure

Participants ($N = 209$, 74.6% female; $M_{\text{age}} = 23.20$, $SD = 6.74$) were undergraduate college students participating in the study for course credit at Texas

A&M University-Commerce. Participants completed measures assessing their perception of fans of different interests as mature and their willingness to date fans of those interests.

3.1.2. Measures

Participants were asked to rate the maturity of fans of 40 different fan communities and their willingness to date a person who is a fan of each of the interests. The 40 groups were adopted from prior research examining perceptions of different fan groups (Reysen & Shaw, 2016). We chose these interests because each have relatively large fan communities in the U.S. and reflect the four main types of fan interests (sport, music, media, and hobby: Reysen & Branscombe, 2010). To assess perceived maturity of fans, we adapted the short maturity measure to reference each fan group ("Fans of this interest are mature people," "Other people would describe fans of this interest as mature people"). Responses were made on a 7-point Likert-type scale, from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*. To assess willingness to date fans of each interest, we asked participants to rate the extent they would personally date a devoted and loyal fan of each fan interest on a 7-point response scale, from 1 = *would never date* to 7 = *would definitely date*.

3.2. Results

First, we examined the mean perceptions of maturity for each of the fan groups. As shown in Table 2, fans of popular, conventional interests such as cooking, golf, and quilting were perceived as mature, while fans of unconventional interests such as the music group Insane Clown Posse, Barbie doll collecting, and the television show *My Little Pony* were perceived as immature. Of primary interest was the correlation between perceived maturity and willingness to date. As expected, the two variables were strongly positively correlated ($r = .53, p < .001$; see Figure 1 for a scatter plot of the association).

Table 3
Means (Standard Deviation) of Perceived Maturity of Fans and Willingness to Date

Fan Interest	Maturity Mean (SD)		Willing to Date Mean (SD)	
Cooking	5.65	(1.26)	5.98	(1.36)
Golf	5.55	(1.41)	4.31	(1.77)
Quilting	5.50	(1.42)	4.11	(1.89)
The Beatles	5.36	(1.34)	4.77	(1.62)
Tennis	5.35	(1.36)	4.41	(1.69)
Cricket	5.11	(1.57)	3.80	(1.75)
Crafts	5.08	(1.31)	5.18	(1.64)
Michael Jackson	5.04	(1.20)	4.78	(1.65)
Game of Thrones	4.89	(1.49)	4.55	(1.89)
Scrapbook Making	4.88	(1.25)	4.46	(1.82)
David Bowie	4.87	(1.37)	4.42	(1.68)
Hunting	4.81	(1.43)	4.56	(1.90)
Stamp Collecting	4.81	(1.50)	3.85	(1.86)
Volleyball	4.79	(1.26)	4.60	(1.84)
Baseball	4.68	(1.27)	5.25	(1.74)
Pink Floyd	4.63	(1.37)	4.45	(1.73)
Star Wars	4.59	(1.44)	4.65	(1.95)
Lord of the Rings	4.57	(1.44)	4.49	(1.95)
Soccer	4.54	(1.30)	4.94	(1.73)
Harry Potter	4.43	(1.42)	4.79	(1.96)
Basketball	4.38	(1.14)	5.16	(1.60)
Jimmy Buffet	4.37	(1.35)	4.08	(1.70)
Doctor Who	4.36	(1.38)	4.19	(1.78)
Hunger Games	4.36	(1.31)	4.63	(1.69)
Bruce Springsteen	4.34	(1.32)	3.74	(1.80)
Football	4.11	(1.29)	5.17	(1.71)
Star Trek	4.03	(1.41)	3.99	(1.90)
Hockey	3.99	(1.44)	4.63	(1.79)
NASCAR	3.82	(1.29)	3.56	(1.89)
Video Games	3.77	(1.33)	4.82	(1.84)
Lego Building	3.75	(1.34)	3.93	(1.89)
Lady Gaga	3.71	(1.27)	3.91	(1.77)
Grateful Dead	3.64	(1.24)	3.26	(1.78)
Comic Books	3.62	(1.34)	4.02	(2.06)
Anime (Japanese animation)	3.41	(1.33)	3.54	(2.21)
Anthropomorphic Art and Cartoons (Furries)	2.81	(1.41)	2.54	(1.74)
Justin Bieber	2.77	(1.32)	3.33	(1.73)
Insane Clown Posse	2.70	(1.25)	2.42	(1.61)
Barbie Dolls	2.40	(1.32)	2.22	(1.53)

My Little Pony Television Show 2.33 (1.38) 2.29 (1.68)

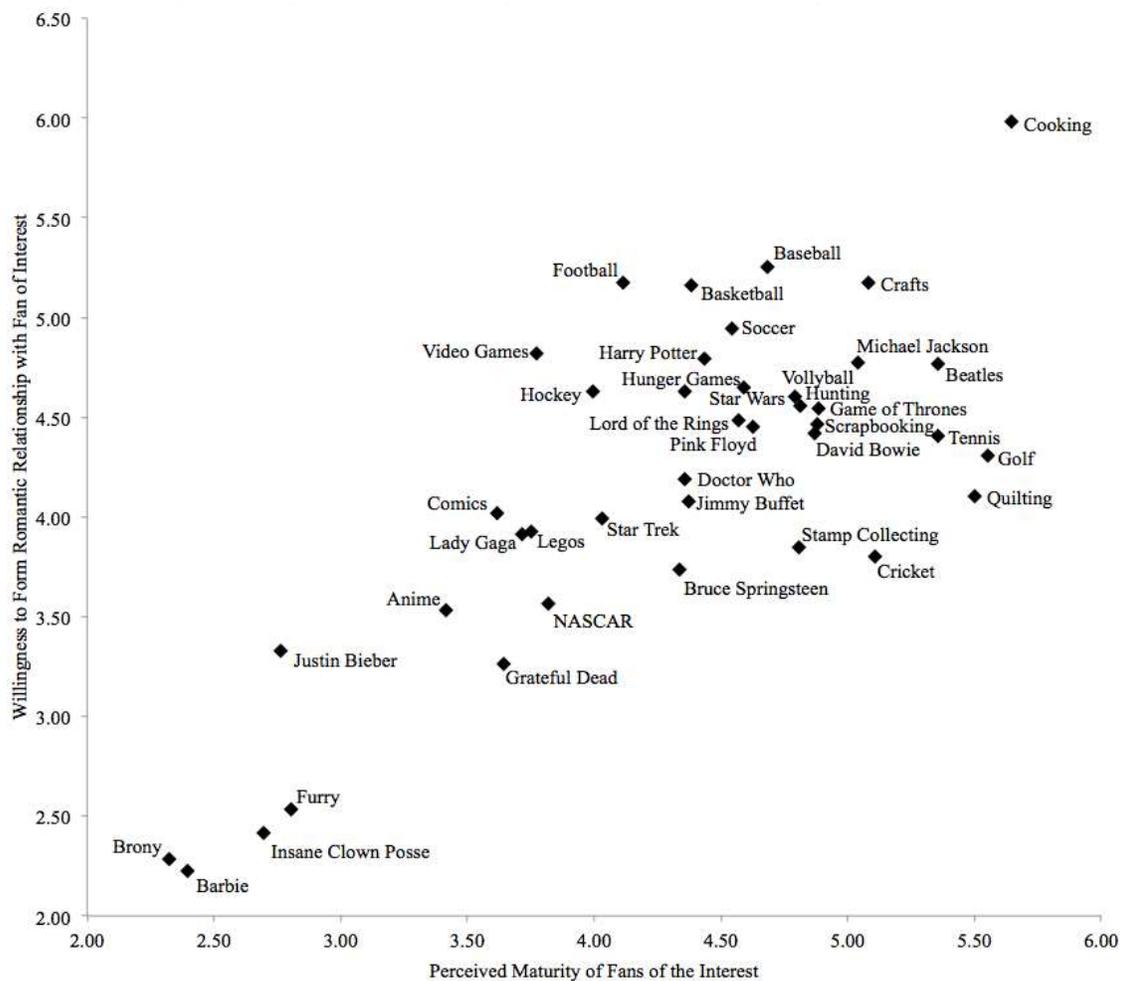


Figure 1. Scatter plot of association between perceived maturity of fans and willingness to form a romantic relationship with fans of different interests.

3.3. Discussion

As hypothesized, the results showed a positive correlation between perceived maturity and willingness to form a romantic relationship. The results supports the notion that individuals who are fans of interests that are perceived to be immature, or fans of those interests are stereotypically immature, influences the degree to which one feels a willingness or desire to form a romantic relationship with a fan of that interest. Past research shows that non-fans report low ratings of a desire to date an anime fan (Reysen et al., 2016) or a science fiction fan (Cohen et al., 2017). The results of the present study suggest that this lack of desire may be, at least partly,

attributable to the perceived maturity of fans of these interests. This lack of willingness may be considered another form of prejudice, a desire to keep one's distance, from fans of interests are perceived as non-mainstream (e.g., furrries, Barbie collectors).

4. General Discussion

The purpose of the present research was to examine the association between perceived maturity and willingness to date fans of different interests using a novel two-item measure of maturity. As expected, the short maturity measure was positively associated with prior measures of maturity and related constructs, providing evidence for its validity. This was further bolstered by many of the dimensions of past maturity measures loading on the same factor as the short maturity measure. In Study 2, we observed the hypothesized positive relationship between perceived maturity of fans and participants' reported willingness to date.

Much of the prior research examining the construct of maturity has revolved around the assessment of mental capacity and adolescents' transition to adulthood. Researchers have constructed various measures with multiple dimensions that, although not overlapping in terminology, converge on the basic notion that maturity is the ability to effectively work and live in society. As many of these prior measures are relatively long and assess a construct that, for laypersons (including children: Tilton-Weaver et al., 2001), is fairly intuitive, we presently sought to construct and validate a short measure of maturity that focused more on capturing the amount of maturity a person has in a holistic fashion, rather than focusing on the nuances and constituent facets of maturity. The results of Study 1 provide some initial evidence of the validity of this approach to briefly assessing maturity. The new measure was positively correlated with all of the previously published measures of maturity and related constructs (i.e., ego achievement) and proved itself to be flexible in its application. Furthermore, many of the past dimensions of maturity loaded onto the same factor as the short measure of maturity. The other dimensions loading on the same factor as the short measure reflect the basic notion of maturity as the ability to function effectively in society (e.g., Greenberger & Sørensen, 1974; Roberts & Côté, 2014). This new measure will aid future researchers by providing a short, straightforward, and face-valid measure of maturity, especially in instances where a number of maturity ratings are required.

Social scientists have noted that there is a generational and cultural shift toward individuals giving greater value to individualistic pursuits of happiness and a general

lack of willingness or desire to be mature (Twenge, 2006; West, 2007). Maturity is related to a variety of constructs such as academics (Harrison, 1987; Lamborn et al., 1991; Menard, 2015), well-being (Greenberger et al., 1975; Menard, 2015; Roberts & Côté, 2014), and romantic relationships (Buss et al., 2001; Cole et al., 1980; Dalla et al., 2010). Given that fans of some fan interests are stereotyped as consisting of relatively immature individuals (Cohen et al., 2017; McCutcheon & Maltby, 2002), and given that there is growing interest in the consequences and well-being of such fans (e.g., Mock, Plante, Reysen, & Gerbasi, 2013; Roberts, Plante, Gerbasi, & Reysen, 2015), there is considerable worth in knowing what the consequences of these stereotypes are for the social well-being of such fans. In Study 2 we examined the association between maturity and romantic relationship formation. A strong positive relationship was found between perceived maturity and willingness to date. Such results are consistent with those found in prior research (Buss et al., 2001), in that people have a clear preference to date mature partners. The results are also consistent with prior research on fan groups (Cohen et al., 2017; Reysen et al., 2016) in that individuals do not perceive fans of stereotypically immature fan groups as attractive, or at least as potential romantic partners. Future research may examine the extent that fans of stereotypically immature fan interests are indeed immature. Furthermore, future research may examine whether romantic relationships with a fan of stereotypically immature fan interest shows that same negative outcomes as seen in other relationships (e.g., relationship satisfaction: Nelson et al., 1994). Notably, there was variation with respect to maturity and attractiveness among the different fan interests. The most immature and least dateable fans (e.g., furrries, bronies) were those that, in other work, have been shown to be the most stigmatized fans (Reysen & Shaw, 2016). Future research may examine maturity as an additional factor driving the stigma directed toward some fan groups.

The present research is not without its limitations, however. First, a myriad of issues commonly arise when discussing short measures. The short maturity scale was constructed to reduce fatigue in participants, who had to complete the same measure 40 separate times. While functional in this regard, the scale is limited in its ability to speak to individual dimensions of maturity recognized in prior research. Nevertheless, the short scale is related to most of those same dimensions, suggesting that the measure captures most – the precision to distinguish between them. A second important limitation of the present research is its correlational nature. Presently, we are unable to make causal claims about the relationship between maturity and

willingness: it is entirely possible that instead of immaturity driving a lack of willingness to date a member of a fan group, a lack of willingness to date may lead to perceptions of fans as immature. Further research, including longitudinal or experimental studies, is needed to fully map the causal direction between these two variables before strong causal statements can be made about the impact of perceived immaturity on fans' relationship prospects. As a final limitation, the present research was conducted using primarily U.S. participants, limiting its potential generalizability to other cultures. Indeed, as noted in previous work (Reysen & Shaw, 2016), the stereotypes associated with fan groups will certainly differ in other cultural spaces. For example, fans of cricket would be associated with different stereotypes in India or the United Kingdom compared to the U.S. Future research may explore whether the association between perceived maturity and willingness to date holds as well.

To conclude, the present research examined the relationship between perceived maturity of different fan groups and willingness to date fans of those interests using a novel short maturity scale. The scale's convergent validity was demonstrated through its positive association with numerous existing measures of maturity and related constructs. Consistent with past research, maturity was shown to be related to one's willingness to form a romantic relationship for members of fan groups. The results highlight a possible impact of fan group engagement – especially for members of stigmatized fan groups – that has, to date, been relatively unexplored. Given the growing prevalence of fan groups and the importance of fan and leisure activities for well-being, greater research examining the role of perceived immaturity of and among fans is warranted.

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