



Gender Differences in the Impact of Fan Engagement on Social Life and Well-Being in College Students

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INTRODUCTION

- Intercollegiate athletics enhances college life for fans by fostering unity, school pride, and personal development. Research has also identified that fan engagement strengthens emotional connections and sense of community, contributing to a more meaningful student experience (Vanover & DeBowes, 2016).
 - Fan Engagement:** can serve as a social and psychological resource for students to adapt to campus social life (Choi et al., 2023).
 - Social Adaptation:** students' ability to adjust to the social environment can be enhanced through campus sport culture, fostering social identity, peer interaction, and a sense of belonging (Fu, 2024).
 - Life Satisfaction:** reflects students' overall evaluation of their well-being, which can be positively influenced by sport involvement and fandom, increasing social support and connectedness (Ji et al., 2024).
 - Gender Differences:** Male students often report higher levels of sport identification compared to female students. There are gender differences in social and psychological benefits tied to sports (Wann et al., 2025).
- The purpose of this study is to examine and compare the relationships among college sport media consumption, social adaptation to campus, and life satisfaction between female and male students.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Social Identity Approach: Social Identity Theory & Self-Categorization Theory

- Social Identity Theory:** Explains how individuals define themselves through ingroup membership (Tajfel & Turner, 1979).
Fans maintain a positive self-image through: (Hirshon, 2020)
BIRGing → sharing in team success; **CORFing** → distancing from failure
- Self-Categorization Theory:** a social and personal identity process that simultaneously shapes group membership (Rees et al., 2015).
- Three Components of SCT:** (Rees et al., 2015).
 - Individuals' perception of their ingroup.
 - Individuals' assessment of whether their values align with shared social identity.
 - Individuals' efforts to align with shared group behavior.

Gender Schema Theory

- Explains how cultural norms shape gendered expectations and behavior (Bem, 1981).
- A culture-based theory that explains how gendered discourses (masculine and feminine behavior) are developed at a young age (Allison & Knoester, 2021).
- This theory helps explain gender differences in fan identity and engagement, especially within a primarily masculine system, like sports (Esmonde et al., 2015).

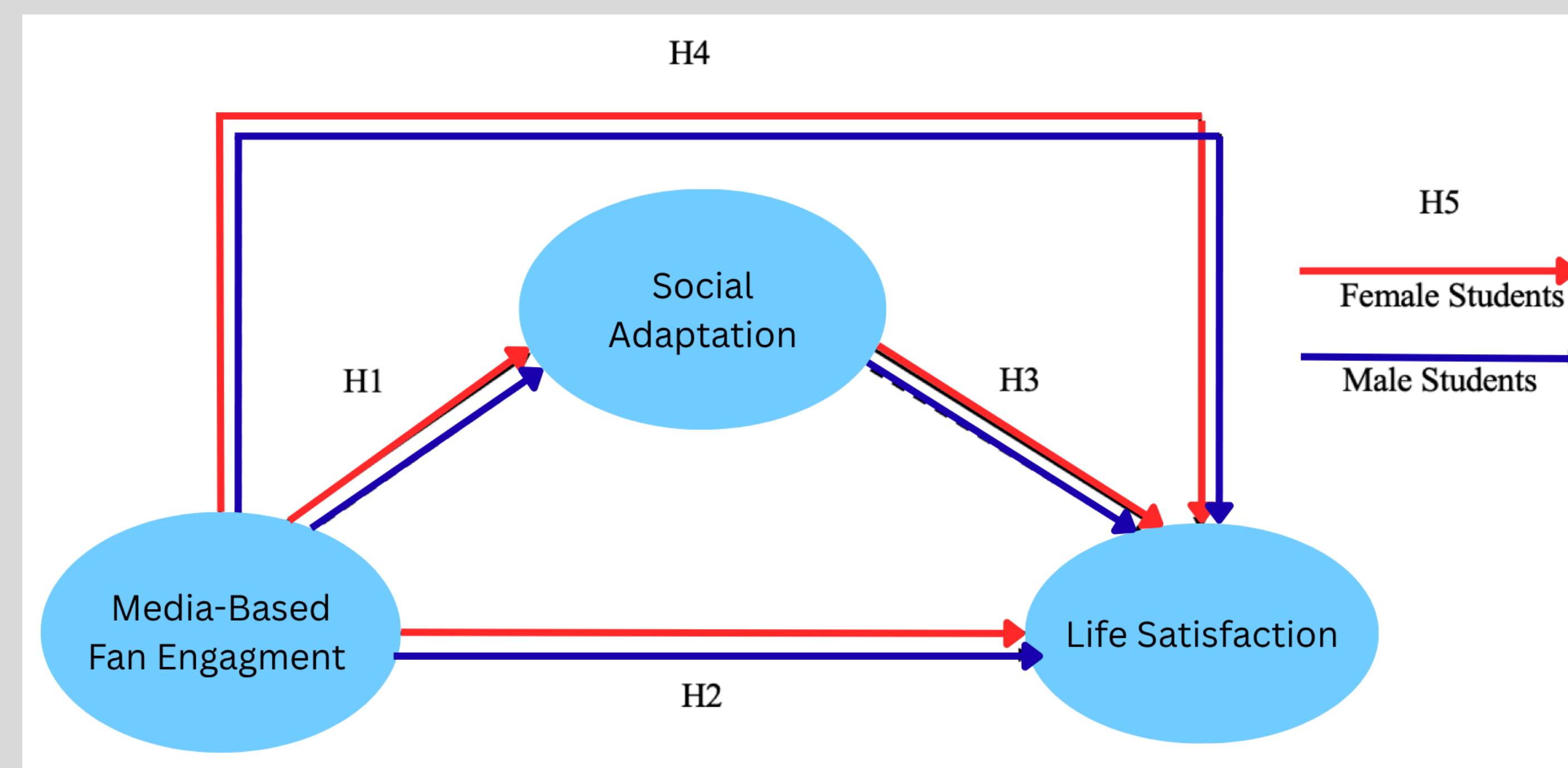
METHOD

- Participants:** Total 485 undergraduate college students (male: 41%, female, 59%) recruited from a large Midwestern University. Participants ranged in age, with an average age of 20.89 years ($SD= 1.95$).
- Data Collection:** Data were collected from in-person and online surveys.
- Measures:** Media-Based Fan Engagement (Yoshida et al., 2024), Student Adaptation to College (Baker & Siryk, 1999), and Satisfaction with Life (Diener et al., 1985).
- Data Analysis:** Data were analyzed using confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to establish measurement model fit, followed by measurement invariance testing across groups. Multi-group structural equation modeling (Sem) was then employed to examine the proposed relationships among variables.

HYPOTHESIS

- Hypothesis 1:** Higher fan engagement leads to higher social adaptation.
- Hypothesis 2:** Higher fan engagement leads to higher life satisfaction.
- Hypothesis 3:** Higher social adaptation leads to higher life satisfaction.
- Hypothesis 4:** Higher social adaptation leads to higher life satisfaction through social adaptation.
- Hypothesis 5:** There are gender differences in the relationships between fan engagement, life satisfaction, and social adaptation.

RESULTS



Path	β [95% bias-correct CI]		$\Delta\beta$	Z-value
	Male	Female		
MBFE → SA	.247**	.377***	-.129	-1.350
	.149*	.402***	-.253	-2.798**
SA → LS	.396***	.339***	.057	.246
MBFE → SA → LS	.098 [.036, .208]	.128 [.080, .269]	-.030	-.793
R ²	SA	LS		
	Male	20.8%	6.1%	
	Female	37.9%	14.2%	

Note. β represents standardized regression weights; $\Delta\beta$ represents the difference between the coefficients of international and domestic students; MBFE= media-based fan engagement; SA = social adaptation; LS = life satisfaction; * denotes $p < .05$, ** denotes $p < .01$, *** denotes $p < .001$; numbers in bold represent confidence intervals that does not include "zero".

RESULTS

- Fan Engagement → Social adaptation (**H1 supported**): Fan engagement was a significant positive predictor of social adaptation, **male ($\beta = .247, p < .01$); female ($\beta = .377, p < .001$)**
- Fan Engagement → Life Satisfaction (**H2 supported**): Fan engagement was a significant positive predictor of Life Satisfaction, **male ($\beta = .149, p < .05$); female ($\beta = .402, p < .001$)**
- Social Adaptation → Life Satisfaction (**H3 supported**): Social Adaptation was a significant positive predictor of Life Satisfaction, **male ($\beta = .396, p < .001$); female ($\beta = .339, p < .001$)**
- Fan Engagement → Life Satisfaction THROUGH Social Adaptation (**H4 supported**): Fan Engagement was a significant positive predictor of Life Satisfaction through Social Adaptation, **male ($\beta = .098, p < .05$); female ($\beta = .128, p < .05$)**
- Partial support for Hypothesis 5:** A gender difference emerged between Fan Engagement and Life Satisfaction: females showed greater significance. **Males < Females ($\Delta\beta = -.253, p < .001$)**

DISCUSSIONS

- The current study highlights the positive effects fan engagement has on social adaptation and life satisfaction of college students.
- Females have a greater statistically significant relationship between media-based fan engagement and life satisfaction compared to males.
- Possible explanations can include:**
 - Social relationships have a greater impact on women's well-being, and fan engagement can foster a sense of community (Shin & Park, 2023).
 - Women are also more likely to engage in media-related consumption from which to generate more social activities (Correa-Chavez et al., 2024).
- Theoretical Implications:**
 - Guided by the Social Identity Approach, our study uncovers the internal mechanisms of fan engagement through which to facilitate social and well-being outcomes.
 - Our study challenges traditional Gender Schema Theory by highlighting the benefits that sport media-based fan engagement theory has on females.
- Practical Implications:**
 - Athletic departments can collaborate with campus wellness programs to create sport-related events that encourage community-building and provide students with an accessible coping outlet.
 - Orientation programs introduce incoming students to campus sport media (team socials, campus sport broadcast, game schedules) to help them feel connected and ease the transition into college.