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Fans, Crimes and Misdemeanors: Fandom and the Ethics of Love

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Abstract
Is it permissible to be a fan of an artist or a sports team that has behaved immorally? While this issue has recently been the subject of widespread public debate, it has received little attention in the philosophical literature. This paper will investigate this issue by examining the nature and ethics of fandom. I will argue that the crimes and misdemeanors of the object of fandom provide three kinds of moral reasons for fans to abandon their fandom. First, being a fan of the immoral may provide support for their immoral behavior. Second, fandom alters our perception in ways that will often lead us to be fail to perceive our idol's faults and even to adopting immoral points of view in order to be able to maintain the positive view we have of them. Third, fandom, like friendship, may lead us to engage in acts of loyalty to protect the interests of our idols. This gives fans of the immoral good reason to abandon their fandom. However, these reasons will not always be conclusive and, in some cases, it may be possible to instead adopt a critical form of fandom.

Keywords Love · Fandom · Ethics of love · Fame · Ethics of fame · Ethics of fandom

1 Introduction

In a thought-provoking article in *The Paris Review,* the author Claire Dederer (2017) confronts her own love for the work of 'monstrous men' and Woody Allen in particular. Allen's *Annie Hall*, Dederer argues, "is the greatest comic film of the twentieth century […] because it acknowledges the irrepressible nihilism that lurks at the center of all comedy." Moreover, she claims that: "To watch *Annie Hall* is to feel, for just a moment, that one belongs to humanity. Watching, you feel almost mugged by that sense of belonging. That fabricated connection can be more beautiful than love

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itself. And that's what we call great art." Despite this, Dederer describes the difficulties she now has in appreciating Allen's work, due both to his relationship with Soon-Yi Previn, the adopted daughter of his former partner Mia Farrow, and to the sexual abuse allegations made against him by his daughter Dylan Farrow. Dederer describes being unable to watch Allen's *Manhattan* in a single sitting, due to the uncomfortable feelings it was provoking in her. Dederer is far from alone in raising this issue. In the wake of the #metoo campaign, writers have produced a great swathe of thought pieces about how we should respond to the work of singers, actors and directors who are judged to have acted immorally.

Similar discussions have also taken place in the world of sport. Twelve years ago, *Guardian* journalist Simon Hattenstone (2008) wrote that he could no longer be a fan of Manchester City Football Club because they were owned by the former Prime Minister of Thailand, Thaksin Shinawatra, who had been accused by the organization Human Rights Watch of being "a human rights abuser of the worst kind" (Austin 2007). Writing again in 2018, Hattenstone confessed that his attempt to 'divorce' Manchester City had failed. In the face of new human rights allegations facing the club's new owner Sheikh Mansour, Hattenstone (2018) wrote, "If I were as principled as I'd like to be, I'd denounce my club and walk away—of course, human rights trump a football club."

Is it ok for Dederer to continue to be a fan of Woody Allen and his films in the light of the accusations against him? Is Hattenstone doing something wrong by continuing to support Manchester City despite the owner's involvement in human rights abuses? Both these examples involve fans questioning whether they can permissibly maintain their fandom in the light of the immorality of its object. This paper will investigate this issue by examining the nature and ethics of fandom. The goal will not be to provide an answer to the particular questions raised by Dederer and Hattenstone but rather to this more general question of whether the immorality of the object of fandom affects the duties of the fan.

While I do not pretend to have a complete answer to this problem, I will argue that the crimes and misdemeanors of the object of fandom provide three kinds of moral reasons for fans to abandon their fandom. First, being a fan of the immoral may provide support for their immoral behavior. Second, fandom alters people's perceptions in ways that may lead them not to perceive their idol's faults and even to adopting immoral points of view in order to be able to maintain the positive view they have of them. Third, fandom may lead people to engage in acts of loyalty to protect the interests of their idols, just as friendship leads people to protect the interests of their friends. These three kinds of reason show that fandom for those who act immorally is morally dangerous, by which I mean it brings significant risks of leading the fan to act immorally. As a result, fans of the immoral often have good reason to abandon their fandom. However, these reasons will not always be conclusive and in some cases it may be possible to adopt a critical form of fandom rather than abandon one's fandom altogether.

This paper will contribute to a small but developing literature on how we should respond to immoral public figures. Philosophers have investigated the related issues of whether an artist's private immorality ought to affect our evaluation of the work (Bartel 2019), the ethics of honoring and admiring immoral artists (Archer and

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Matheson 2019a), the issue of how to respond to racist statues (Burch-Brown 2017; Demetriou and Wingo 2018; Frowe 2019; Lai Forthcoming; Schulz 2019) and the ethics of call-out culture as a form of social punishment (Radzik 2020). However, until now no one has approached this issue by examining the ethics of fandom.[1]

This paper will also contribute to the literature in the philosophy of sport on the ethics of fandom. This literature has investigated whether it is better to follow sport from the point of view of a partisan (a fan of a team or player) or that of a purist (Dixon 2001, 2016; Feezell 2013; Mumford 2011; Russell 2012). In addition, Erin Tarver's (2017) work on fandom has explored how fandom raises ethical issues connected to race, gender and sexuality. However, this literature is also yet to examine the question of whether the immorality of the object of fandom provides moral reasons for fans to abandon their fandom.

The paper will proceed as follows. First, I will investigate the nature of fandom by building on Nicholas Dixon's (2001) analogy between fandom and love. I will argue that there are good reasons to think of fandom as a form of love. This is because fandom involves an appreciation of particular qualities, a shaping of identity and changes in how we perceive the world. I will then draw on this discussion of the nature of fandom to argue that continued fandom of the immoral is morally dangerous. Finally, I will consider the implications of this for how fans ought to respond.

2 Fandom and Love

To investigate the ethics of fandom we must first look into the nature of fandom. What does it mean to be a fan? What does fandom involve? These are the questions I will explore in this section. My starting point will be Dixon's (2001: 151–152) analogy between sports fandom and romantic love.[2] My aim here is not to provide a comprehensive account of the nature of love and fandom. I will not then, take a stand on the debate about what the most plausible conceptual analysis of love is.[3]

2.1 Appreciation of Particular Qualities

Dixon's (2001: 151–152) starting point is Robert Nozick's (1989: 82) claims that when we fall in love with someone this may begin with an appreciation and admiration of their positive qualities. However, over time our love will become less dependent on these qualities and more focused on the way that our beloved uniquely instantiates those properties. While we may be attracted to someone for their beauty,

[1] Though see Archer and Matheson (2019b) for a discussion of why it is appropriate for sports fans to feel shame in response to the moral transgressions of their team.

[2] Mumford (2011) also draws an analogy between fandom and love claiming that both arise from some form of accident, have an intentional object and persist through time.

[3] The four most prominent such accounts are: Love is an emotion (Abramson and Leite 2011; Naar 2013), love as valuing (Keller 2000; Kolodny 2003), love as robust concern (Soble 1990; Frankfurt 2004) and love as a union of identities (Nozick 1990; Friedman 2003).

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intelligence and sense of humor, over time our love for that person will not be focused on these abstract qualities but on the particular way that they embody them. Dixon claims that this account explains why people are reluctant to 'trade up' their beloved when they meet someone who is funnier and more beautiful, as our love is not just an appreciation of beauty and humor but of this particular beauty and this particular humor.[4] It also explains why love may survive the loss of the qualities that led us to fall in love with someone in the first place, as our love has focused on the special identity of the person, not just their impressive qualities.

In the same way, Dixon claims that being a fan of a sports team is not just an appreciation of some abstract qualities, such as their skill or ability to win matches, but also an appreciation of their unique instantiation in this particular team. Similarly, a fan of a sports team will not just trade in their team when another team starts to display higher levels of skill or begins to win more matches. Rather their fandom will continue even if the team loses some of the qualities that attracted the fan to this team in the first place. In fact, we might question whether someone who switched their allegiance as soon as their team started performing badly could really count as being a fan at all. Of course, this does not mean that the fan should continue to love their team no matter what. As with romantic love, if the object of fandom loses all of the positive qualities that first the fan then we might expect the fan to stop loving their team. Like romantic love though, a key feature of fandom is that its target is someone or something in particular not just an appreciation of their qualities understood in an abstract way. Though Dixon's focus is on supporting sports teams, he points out that everything he says here may equally apply to arts lovers who are fans of particular performers (Dixon 2001: 156).

2.2 Practices of Attachment

A second point of similarity between love and fandom concerns the centrality in both of certain social practices designed to signal and strengthen attachment. As Sara Protasi (2016: 216) notes, love often involves the participation in a range of associated cultural practices. This may involve formal and legal institutional practices, such as marriage, or less formal practices such as dating, introducing one's lover to friends and family and exchanging cards and gifts. Of course, some of these practices will be highly dependent on context. Courtship rituals for example, may vary significantly between different cultures and within the same culture may alter significantly over time. Practices of attachment also plays a central role in religious love, where the involvement in practices such as collective worship and prayer may play a central role.

Similarly, fandom is also associated with social practices that foster attachment. Tarver (2017: 28) describes her fandom for LSU Tigers as involving the ritual of

[4] An interesting issue that arises from this is how to combine the thought that loving someone involves valuing them for who they are and also valuing their well-being when aspects of the practical identity of the person we love are bad for their well-being. For a discussion of this issue see Matthes (2016) and Lopez-Cantero (2019: 27–36).

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studying of the sports pages of the newspaper every morning before school, collecting LSU paraphernalia, learning the words to the songs sung in the stadium, and finding ever more creative ways to display LSU's colours on her body. The acquiring, displaying and testing of knowledge about the club also forms a key part of American sports fandom (Tarver 2017, Ch. 2). As Kevin Quinn points out, these practices help to reinforce the devotion of fans in a similar way to religious practices: "Going to church becomes more meaningful as church attendance becomes more frequent. Similarly, the time that a fan spends following the local team today results in greater enjoyment when following the team tomorrow."(Quinn 2009: 105). Such rituals are not restricted to sports fandom. An important point emphasized by many working in fan studies is that fandom is an active practice. Mark Duffett makes this point persuasively by describing the practices of those involved in running a Marilyn Monroe fan club:

> The network of individuals who run the Immortal Marilyn club do not just put their energies into creating a Website. They hold pilgrimages to Hollywood, make and upload their own videos, write articles, create wallpapers, hold memorial services, raise charity donations, review books, sketch pictures and much more. (Duffett 2013: 165–166).

Fandom, then, is far from passive but, like love, involves the participation in social practices that play an important role in reinforcing the devotion of fans.

2.3 Identity

Another point of similarity between love and fandom is in the way both shape our identity. The idea that love involves a change in the lover's identity has been a familiar part of discussions of love in the Western philosophical tradition at least since Plato's *Symposium.* Here, Aristophanes describes how the god Zeus divided humanity in two and love is the search for an individual's lost half so that he might "join with and melt into his beloved, so that instead of two they should become one" (193a). Love, as Aristophanes understands it, is this desire to merge one's identity with that of the beloved. In his words: "the desire and pursuit of the whole is called love" (193a). One approach to capturing this change in identity is to offer a union account of love. According to these accounts, love involves a joining of identities. Nozick (1990) understands this as the formation of a joint identity constituted by pooling the lovers' autonomy, well-being and desires. Marilyn Friedman (2003), on the other hand, views this shared identity as similar to a federation, the two individual entities join together for some joint ventures but also maintain an individual identity with individual powers. Robust concern accounts offer another way of trying to understand the way in which love shapes one's identity. According to Harry Frankfurt's (2004: 62) version of this view, love is a particular way of caring for another person that involves identifying with that person's interests such that they are incorporated into one's own interests. Bennett Helm (2010) criticizes both accounts and proposes an alternative account

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designed to capture the most plausible elements of both views. According to this account, love involves the sharing of an evaluative perspective between the lover and the beloved.

It is not important for my purposes to settle the discussion of which of these accounts provides the most plausible view of the way in which love changes and shapes one's identity. It is enough for my purposes to emphasize that love involves a change in a lover's *self-concept* (Lopez-Cantero and Archer 2020). By this, I mean the beliefs a person has about herself and her identity (Baumeister 2005). Cocking and Kennett (1998) make this point persuasively in relation to friendship. On their view, when people are friends with each other they are receptive to each other's interests. This may involve developing new interests in response to the interests of their friend. For example, someone with no interest in ballet may come to develop one, as they become friends with a ballet enthusiast (Cocking and Kennett 1998: 504). When someone loves another, their self-concept changes in response to the interests and identity of their beloved.

But it is not just the beloved that changes one's self-concept; the existence of the love itself will also alter how one views oneself. Becoming a lover, spouse or friend is likely to change how one views oneself and one's identity in ways that are not exhausted by the new receptivity to the interests of the beloved. This will be especially true in societies in which there are a set of widely held common assumptions about people and how to treat them based on their relationship status. For instance, in a society that thinks that married women are to be treated with more respect than single women, being married is likely to influence how a woman sees herself in ways that go beyond how their spouse shapes her self-conception. While this is particularly clear in the cases where someone is in a relationship with their loved one, the effect on self-concept is likely to hold for other kinds of love as well. Someone whose love is unrequited may also have her sense of identity shaped by viewing herself as an unrequited lover. Love itself then also shapes people's self-concepts.

Fandom shapes people's identities in similar ways. Consider how Tarver describes becoming a fan of the Louisiana State University Tigers:

> As I grew into a fully-fledged fan, I began to care deeply about how 'we' did from one season to the next, to understand myself as 'a Tiger fan', to feel pride in that status, and to feel resentment for those 'fans' whose devotion, participation, or attention during games did not match mine. (2017: 1).

Tarver's increasing fandom involved an increasing sense of identification with the team. The Tigers began to shape her sense of who she was and what her interests were. Similarly, Jon Rubin (2015) provides a memorable articulation of the importance of fandom for identity in his artwork *You Don't Know Who You Are*. In this work, Jon Rubin produced a scarf for Partick Thistle Football Club. On one side of the scarf are the words "We are Thistle" while on the other side it reads, "You Don't Know Who You Are". Here, again, we see the thought that in becoming a fan of a particular team we develop an idea of who we are, something that those who are not fans may lack. In his study of football fandom, Amir Ben-Porat (2010: 280) describes how fandom shapes both the schedule of a fan's lives and his relationships

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with others to such an extent that their football club can be considered their, "primary reference other: a critical element in his identity profile".

It is not just sports fandom that involves this kind of identification. In John Caughey's study of imaginary social relationships he explains how those who intensely admire a celebrity, "speak of their hero as a 'friend', 'older sister', 'father figure', 'guide' or 'mentor'" (1984: 53). They may also incorporate that figure's "values and plans" into their own life in the same way they would with the values and plans of a friend or lover (Caughey 1984: 59). Similarly, in a qualitative study of a dedicated group of Lady Gaga fans, Click et al. (2013) found that these fans not only identify with Lady Gaga's values and attitudes but also describe her as being a mother figure for them. Likewise, in his study of fans of David Bowie, Nick Stevenson (2009: 90) explains how, "for many of the male fans, Bowie operated as a kind of father figure."

One worry that might be raised here is that fandom and love have different relationships to identity. Love, it might be claimed, is primarily something that *changes* our identity while fandom primarily *expresses* an existing identity. In meeting someone and falling in love with them I open myself up to transforming my self-concept as I respond to the interests and attitudes and values of my beloved. On the other hand, becoming a fan of Glasgow Celtic Football Club might appear to be more an expression of an existing identity, for example that of a left-leaning, Irish Catholic living in the West of Scotland.

However, this worry can also be dismissed, as on closer inspection both fandom and love involve both an expression and a changing of identity. First, as Troy Jollimore (2011: 26) points out, "love can be seen as an expression of the lover's identity." In loving someone, we express what it is we find valuable and the kind of person we want to spend time with and to shape our lives. Second, fandom also involves opening oneself up to a change in one's identity. As I have already discussed, one may begin to follow a sports team out of an accident of geography. In moving to a new city, someone may decide to follow the local team. This may lead to them becoming a fan of the team, which is likely to change their self-concept as they start to view their identity as at least partially informed, by the values and attitudes of the team and its supporters.

2.4 Perception

The final point of similarity between love and fandom that I wish to focus on concerns the way in which both alter our perception. While much can and has been said about the way in which love alters our perception,[5] I will concentrate on two such claims. According to Jollimore (2011) love involves a certain way of viewing and attending to the world. It is a way of viewing another person and the world that puts that person at the center of the lover's world. Jollimore (2011: 29) describes love as, "largely a matter of paying close attention to a person." As an inevitable

[5] I will set aside Iris Murdoch's (1970) claim that loving attention is the central moral attitude. See Wolf (2014) for a helpful discussion of this view.

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consequence of paying close attention to our beloved, we pay comparatively less attention to other people. Someone in love then pays special attention to their beloved in comparison to the attention they pay to others. According to Jollimore (2011: 29), this involves a lack of attention to the needs of others in favor of the needs of the beloved.[6]

Jollimore claims that love also involves a second kind of altered perception. Love not only makes us comparatively less sensitive to the interests of those who are not our beloved, it also changes how we view the beloved. Love, says Jollimore (2011: 48), involves a lack of attention "toward some of the beloved's own characteristics, particularly those that would threaten, challenge, or stand in the way of love." Love disposes the lover to view their beloved in a positive light and to overlook those aspects of their beloved that might undermine this positive view.

Love may also alter our perception in a way that aligns it more closely to that of the beloved. Given that love involves the sharing of an evaluative perspective with the beloved, the lover's perceptions may change to be closer to the perceptions of their beloved. Someone who falls in love with a ballet enthusiast may begin to perceive ballet differently as they begin to see it in a way that more closely resembles the way their beloved perceives it. Loving someone involves not only paying closer attention to them than others and viewing them in a positive light, but also seeing the world from their point of view.

Fandom changes our perceptions in similar ways. Being a fan involves paying close attention to the object of fandom and comparatively less attention to other people. Fans of sports teams for example, are likely to consume sports news in a way that pays close attention to the news concerning their team and a far more cursory attention to news concerning other teams. In watching a match, they are likely to pay far closer attention to the performance of their own team than that of the opposition. Similarly, fans of a particular actor are not only likely to seek out films he stars in over others but also pay closer to him while watching the film. Fandom also involves overlooking the faults of the beloved. Obsessive fans of a particular musician, Bob Dylan say, may be able to find something of value in even their most dreadful work, such as his novelty Christmas album.

Being a fan can also alter people's perceptions in such a way that they view the world in a way that favors the perspective of the object of their fandom. This is especially clear in sports fandom. Mumford (2011: 11–12) argues that fans perceive a match differently from neutral observers as they perceive the game through the lens of "competitive interest". In other words, they are viewing the game from the perspective of the object of their fandom, in much the same way that lovers might see the world through the eyes of their beloved.

[6] Jollimore uses the term 'blindness' here but I prefer to avoid this term.

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2.5 Fandom as Love

Given these ways in which fandom is similar to other kinds of love, I think there is good reason to think that fandom is not just *similar* to love but actually one *form* of love. This may seem strange to some people. One reason to doubt this idea is the thought that love involves mutual relationship. Standard love relationships like a romantic relationship or a friendship, involve a mutual shaping of identity. My lover or friend does not just influence my own self-concept; they also have their self-concept shaped by me. According to some views of love, this relationship is crucial for love. For example, according to Kolodny (2003: 147–150), love involves primarily valuing a personal relationship that you have with someone. In the case of fandom though, it might seem that the process of identification would be in one direction only. While fans of Lady Gaga might have their self-concept shaped by their idol, they are unlikely to have a major influence on Gaga's concept of herself. If this were right then it would cast doubt on the analogy between fandom as love, as fandom would involve a different form of identification from other kinds of love.

There are two responses to this objection. First, there is good reason to think that the relationship between fans and their idols involves some mutual shaping of identity. In Cornel Sandvoss's study of fandom, he explains how fans not only respond to the object of their fandom but also project their own selves onto it. They, "superimpose attributes of the self, their beliefs and value systems and, ultimately, their sense of self on the object of fandom." (2005: 104) The way in which fans project their own selves is likely to have at least some impact on the self-conception of their idols. The case is even more plausible where sports teams are concerned. This is because there is good reason to think that the identity of a sports team is at least partly constituted by its fans, as several philosophers of sports have argued (Mumford 2011; Tarver 2017; Wojtowicz 2021).

Second, there is good reason to think that viewing love as necessarily involving a mutual shaping of identities is too restrictive. One reason for this is that it would rule out many unrequited loves from counting as genuine love, as the target of unrequited love will often fail to have her identity shaped by the person who loves them.[7] As Protasi (2016: 227) points out, "Unrequited love can be as genuine and valuable as reciprocated love." It is a mistake then, to insist that love has to involve mutual shaping of identities. The kind of love involved in fandom may be closer to unrequited love than to the kind of love that exists in a romantic partnership but this does not give us reason to think that it is not a form of love.

Another worry we might have is that love is an emotion we have towards other people. Going back to Kolodny's (2003) view, love is a response to a *personal* relationship, so it only makes sense to love other people. Similarly, according to David Velleman (1999: 365), love is a response to a *person's* rational will. This is no problem for fandom that concerns a particular person such as fandom for Woody Allen

[7] As Price (2012: 224) points out, Kolodny's view can allow for some forms of unrequited love but only in cases where there is an existing familial relationship or in cases where the lover wrongly believes that a loving relationship exists.

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or Lady Gaga. However, it does raise a problem for the idea that being a fan of a sports club could be a form of love. This form of love is not focused on a person but on a collective entity. This may be enough to persuade some people that this form of fandom cannot be a form of love.

However, there is good reason to reason to think that limiting love to other human beings is too restrictive. First, there is good reason to think that we can love non-human animals, as any pet lover will know.[8] Second, people may love objects, such as the book they have dedicated their life to writing (Shpall 2018: 96). More relevantly for my purposes here, patriotism may be understood as a form of love, the love for one's country. According to Martha Nussbaum (2013: 208) loving one's country involves loving a collective entity that one identifies with. In fact, in making her case for this, Nussbaum compares the love of one's country with the love of a sports team. If we accept that we can love collectives like countries then it also makes sense to think that we can love sports teams. Moreover, as Shpall (2018) points out, love that is not directed towards persons can be a source of great value and meaning. There does not seem to be any good reason, then, to think that love can only be directed towards other people.

Of course, some people may insist that the term love can only be used to describe an emotion that people feel towards other people. This is an odd thing to insist upon, given that the use of the word is not limited in this way. However, it is not crucial for my purposes that the reader accept that fandom actually is a form of love. I have explained why I think it should be seen as a form of love but for the remainder of the paper, it is enough if I have established that fandom is strongly analogous to love. Both fandom and love involve an appreciation of particular qualities, the performance of social practices of attachment, a shaping of identity, and a change in people's perception.

3 Fandom and Moral Danger

I will now draw on these connections between fandom and love to investigate the risks associated with being a fan of the immoral. I will argue that fandom can be morally dangerous, by which I mean it brings significant risks of leading the fan to act immorally.

3.1 Fandom and Support

The first reason to worry about fandom is that through being a fan we may be providing encouragement and support for the immoral behavior of the object of fandom. The various practices involved with fandom all involve providing or expressing support for the object of fandom. For example, in purchasing tickets or fan merchandise fans provide financial support to the object of their fandom and in wearing

[8] For a full defense of the idea that we can and should love non-human animals see Rudy (2011).

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or displaying this merchandise, they express their support for this person or group. These forms of support can encourage their targets to continue acting as they do. For example, if fans of a film director continue to go to see his films despite their increasingly misogynistic content then that director is being encouraged to continue producing such films. Similarly, if a sports team cheats its way into victory but acquires more fans as a result then they given a clear incentive to continue cheating. In these cases, the incentive is both financial and emotional, with the rewards being money and continued love and adoration.

This support may be immoral as it may enable the objects of fandom to continue to harm their victims. According to Bradley Elicker (2021), by providing financial support or public displays of approval for artists who act immorally, we are enabling those artists to continue harming their victims. The reason for this is that the financial and public support provide the artist with wealth and fame and this wealth and fame makes it easier for the artist to avoid punishment for their behavior and to put professional pressure on their victims. The wealthier and more publicly celebrated someone is, the more likely they are to avoid punishment when they harm others and the easier it will be for them to ruin the professional reputations of those who speak out against them. This means that in contributing to someone's wealth and fame we are make it easier for them to harm other people by removing barriers that might otherwise prevent or discourage them from this harm. As the practices of fandom directly contribute to people's wealth and fame, these practices enable artists who harm others to continue doing so. When we pay to watch a director's film or a singer's album we provide direct financial support to them. Similarly, when we wear a t-shirt or display a poster expressing our devotion to an artist is a clear public expression of support for that person which may, albeit in a small way, increase their fame.

While Elicker's argument concerns individual artists, similar arguments can be made for supporting teams. If fans of a sports team continue to pay to watch a team that cheats then this provides encouragement for that team to continue cheating. Perhaps even more directly, when fans cheer when their team deceives the referee into awarding them a penalty, they are providing a direct form of emotional support for these actions and encouraging the team to continue cheating. Similarly, the wealthier and more popular a sports team is, the more difficult it will be for authorities to punish them. The club's expensive lawyers will deter authorities from any punishment that may be legally challenged and the club's popularity will deter the authorities from taking action, particularly anyone in a democratically elected position. This means that these forms of financial and public support directly enable the team's cheating by providing incentives for it to continue and removing barriers that might prevent this cheating.

In addition to these direct forms of support, fandom may provide more indirect forms of support for the object of our fandom by sending the message that their behavior is acceptable. To see why let us first consider Archer and Matheson's (2019a: 253) argument for the claim that honoring an artist can serve to condone their immoral behavior. By this they mean that it sends the message that this is behavior that ought to be tolerated even if it is not approved of. They consider the case of giving a lifetime achievement award to Roman Polanski, one of the world's

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leading film directors and a self-confessed rapist. They argue that honors such these may serve to condone the immoral behavior by sending the message that the object is someone we ought to admire rather than condemn.[9] In this case, both the emotions of admiration and blame would be appropriate and fitting responses to different aspects of the artist's conduct. The award is sending the message that we ought to prioritize our fitting emotional reaction to their artistic talent over our fitting emotional reaction to their immoral behavior.

Importantly, Archer and Matheson argue that these awards may express that this is how we should prioritize these emotions even if that is not the intention of those giving the awards. This is because the *public meaning* of such awards, the meaning other people may justifiably attribute to our actions, will not always be the same as the *intended meaning*, the meaning we intend our actions to express. They argue that the public meaning of giving out such awards to self-confessed rapists is to condone this behavior. This is particularly true given the background conditions of a film industry with a history of sexism and facilitating the mistreatment of women. It is also particularly problematic when an industry's leading institutional authorities, such as an Oscar jury, sends this message, as they have a particularly high impact on the culture within the industry.

My interest here is not in the ethics of honoring with awards but whether fandom might also send a similar message of emotional prioritization. To begin, it is worth noting the important differences between continuing to be a fan of someone on the one hand and honoring them with a lifetime achievement award on the other hand. First, for most people the worry about having a particularly high impact on the culture of an industry will not apply. Second, being a fan of someone does not seem to send the same message about how other people ought to respond. In giving an award to someone we are not only honoring them but sending the message that this is someone who *ought* to be honored and admired (Archer and Matheson 2019a: 248). No such claims appear to be made in the case of someone who is a simply a fan of a singer, actor or a sports team. Such fandom does not make any claims about how other people ought to respond to that person or team.

Despite these important differences, continued fandom does send the message that this is how this particularly person prioritizes these emotions. In continuing to be a fan of Woody Allen or Manchester City, a fan sends the message that they prioritize her feelings of adoration for her idol or her team over expressing blame and anger at the (alleged) transgressions. This will be particularly true for those fans that continue to engage in the social practices associated with fandom. Continuing to wear a City club's shirt or displaying a poster of *Manhattan* in the office, makes it clear that this person's feelings of adoration trump any feelings of anger they may have towards their team or their idol. Even those who stop engaging in such practices might still send such a message. The mere fact that someone continues to be a fan might be enough to send the message that they are happy to overlook such behavior. After all, by maintaining their fandom they continue to allow the object of

[9] Archer and Matheson (2019a: 253–255) also argue that such awards may also condone the artist's immoral behavior by picking them out as an exemplar.

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their fandom to inform and shape their identity and how they perceive the world. In doing so, they may reasonably be interpreted as being willing to overlook or tolerate the immorality of the object of their fandom. Note that this message might be communicated even if this is not the fan's intention, as it is something that others might reasonably infer from the continued engagement in the practices of fandom.

Moreover, while continued fandom may not send a clear message that others ought to continue as well, it may contribute to a culture in which overlooking such behavior is considered normal. In the case of Allen, it may contribute, albeit in a small way, to the social practice of making allowances for the sexual misdemeanors of talented or powerful men. There is then, good reason to worry that continued fandom sends a message that the fan condones the immoral behavior of their idol.

It is worth noting that the message expressed through supporting a team may be more open to contestation or interpretation than that expressed by supporting an individual. Sports teams typically have longer histories than individuals and persist through significant change in that time. During this history, they may come to represent a particular region and the positive qualities associated with those that live there. In 2017, Hurricane Harvey devastated the city of Houston, forcing thirty thousand people from their homes and damaging over 300,000 structures (Amadeo 2020). The Houston Astros baseball team began a campaign to help people in their local community. More remarkably, later that year the team won the World Series for the first time in their history. The team became a symbol of Houston's resilience and perseverance during such difficult times and offered hope to the residents during the rebuilding of the city. However, it was later discovered that during this season, the team had engaged in sign stealing. This involved the illegal use of cameras to reveal the signs that opposing catchers were making to their pitchers and relaying them to their team's batters. In the wake of this scandal, Astros fans debated how they should respond. Would wearing their team's jersey be a sign of support for their team's cheating? Many responded by saying that although the behavior of those involved was disgraceful, the Astros should not be defined by those players. Long standing fan Tony Adams, for example, created a website devoted to logging every instance of sign stealing he could find by the Astros in the 2017 season. Despite this commitment to revealing the extent to which the Astros cheated, he continues to be a fan and thinks it is unfair to blame the Astros as a whole for the actions of these individuals (Parker 2020). Because the Astros represent much more than the team of players who cheated, wearing an Astros jersey need not be seen as a sign that the wearer condones the clubs cheating.

It is also worth noting that fans may find ways to continue being a fan and engaging in fan practices without sending a problematic message of condonation. For example, many fans of the 1980's band *The Smiths* have become disenchanted with the behavior of the band's front man Morrissey for a series of seemingly racist statements, such as his claim that "You can't help but feel the Chinese people are a subspecies" (Armitage 2010), together with his expressions of support for far-right, anti-immigrant parties like For Britain. Some fans have responded by grudgingly abandoning their love for *The Smiths* or at least their overt expressions of such love. Others however, have sought to find ways to continue expressing their love for *The Smiths* while making their lack of tolerance for Morrissey's views clear. For

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example, Debbie Smith, formerly of the band *Echobelly*, said in an interview "I've no time for him [Morrissey] but still a fan of the Smiths" (Surtees 2019). Similarly, fans have sought to send the same message by wearing T-shirts with the logo 'Love The Smiths Hate Morrissey'. What this example shows is that there are ways for fans to continue engaging in the practices of fandom without sending the message that they condone the behavior of their idol.

The fans of the Astros and the Smiths show that it is possible to remain a fan without condoning the immorality of the object. Nevertheless, this is a danger of continued fandom and fans should be aware that they may be expressing condonation, and so providing indirect support for immorality, even if they do not intend to do so.

3.2 Fandom and Perception

The next worry concerns the way in which fandom alters our perceptions. As we have seen, being a fan alters the way we perceive the world. We pay closer attention to the object of our fandom in comparison to other things, closer attention to their merits than their flaws and may be more likely to view the world from their perspective rather than from the perspective of other people.

This raises a number of worries about continuing to be a fan of the immoral. The first worry is that we may become unable to perceive the moral failings of our idols. It is after all, a common phenomenon for lovers not to notice the moral failings of their beloved. In the same way, many fans fail to perceive the moral failings of the object of their fandom. Consider again the case of Morrissey. As Colin Snowsell (2011: 90) notes, amongst his most dedicated fans the allegations of racism, "hardly seemed to make a dent in Morrissey's reputation." Indeed, some committed fans of Morrissey go to extraordinary lengths to explain away the apparent racism in his interviews and his support for far right political movements. For example, the critic Armond White (2019) was able to interpret Morrissey's decision to wear a "For Britain' badge in support of the Fascist organization Britain First, as sign of his talent as "a political artist" who "makes protest music personal". Similarly, White (2017) dismisses those who criticize Morrissey's views on race as "the usual 'Morrissey is racist' fake news complaint" whilst constructing a detailed defense of Morrissey's seemingly racist statements.

This seems like a clear case of fandom making someone insensitive to the faults of their idol. But it is not of great importance for my purposes whether the reader agrees with my assessment of this case. The important point here is the way in which fandom in general might lead someone to overlook their idols faults in this way. There are three ways in which this happen. First, by paying more attention to our idol we give them an important form of epistemic power, by which I mean the power to influence what people believe (Archer et al. 2020). Attention provides people with a platform to have their ideas heard by others and to shape how other people interpret their behavior. By giving people attention then, we allow their way of interpreting their behavior to have a greater influence over us than that of other people.

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Second, because fandom involves paying close attention to the merits of our idols and to overlook their faults, fans are likely not only to have a greater awareness of their idol's point of view but also to be especially sympathetic to it and to interpret what they have to say charitably. This means that we are more likely to believe our idol over others.

Third, because fandom involves sharing an evaluative perspective with the object of fandom, fans are likely to give their idols' interests, needs and desires a disproportionate role in how they view the situation. Fans of Morrissey then are likely to give disproportionate weight to the potential damage to Morrissey's career and reputation of being viewed as a racist when interpreting his statements. This makes us more likely to respond to our idols with empathy, compassion and forgiveness than we would to other people. These responses are not bad in their own right. However, the fact that we are more likely to respond in this way to our idols than to others may make it easier for those with a wide fan base to get away with wrongdoing.

The perceptual changes that fandom involves may make it hard for us to see our idol's moral failings. This by itself may not seem like a major issue. Failing to condemn someone who should be condemned is not ideal moral behavior but nor is it usually a major wrong. There is a bigger problem here though. In viewing our idols' behavior from their point of view and paying close and sympathetic attention to how they interpret it we may end up adopting a morally objectionable point of view. The worry with Morrissey fans is not simply that they may fail to view Morrissey as blameworthy, perhaps because they believe he was being quoted out of context. The bigger problem is that fans may view this statement as acceptable by adopting a racist point of view towards Chinese people. As Snowsell (2011: 90) describes, in the aftermath of Morrissey's comments, "a rash of Morrissey fanatics emerged as heretofore closeted anti-Chinese racists." These fans may have already held such views and felt emboldened to express them due to Morrissey's comments. However, we can see how the desire to view Morrissey in a sympathetic light and to see things from his point of view could have created or at least shaped these anti-Chinese attitudes. The worry then is that the selective attention involved in fandom may not only lead us to overlook the faults of our idols but also to adopt an immoral point of view.

We might think that the issue of selective perception does not arise so clearly when the object of fandom is a team rather than an individual. In particular, because teams are groups rather than individuals, it is harder to attribute a clear point of view to teams in the way we do to individuals like Morrissey. Given this, we might think that there is less reason to worry about fans adopting the evaluative perspective held by the object of their fandom.

However, the phenomenon of adopting an immoral point of view also occurs with team fandom. For example, Matthew Hedges was a British PhD student who was arrested whilst conducting research in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). He was detained without trial, denied legal assistance, drugged and subjected to prolonged periods of solitary confinement before being given a life sentence after being forced to sign a false confession (Hedges 2019). He was subsequently released and granted clemency after an international outcry by the British government and human rights organizations. During Hedges' imprisonment, a number of sports journalists pointed out that the owner of Manchester City, Sheikh Mansour, was not only a member

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of the UAE royal family but also the deputy prime minister and the brother of the president. The important point for our purposes, is the way in which Manchester City fans responded to Hedges' arrest. Sports reporter Jonathan Wilson describes this reaction:

> Something extraordinary happened: significant numbers of Manchester City fans on social media came out in support of the legal system of Abu Dhabi. This is so bizarre it's worth reiterating. A proportion of supporters of a football club in the north-west of England decided to back the flawed legal apparatus of an oppressive regime 4,500 miles away against a British man who, whether he had been spying or not, had been treated appallingly for six months. (2019)

In this case, the selective perception involved in fandom appears to lead fans to adopting a point of view according to which a legal system which can detain someone in solitary confinement without trial is a morally acceptable one. Here, again, the love the fans have for the object of their fandom is leading to the adoption of an immoral point of view.[10]

3.3 Fandom, Loyalty and Retaliation

The final problem with fandom of the immoral concerns the acts we may perform out of loyalty to our idols. The starting point for my argument here is Dean Cocking and Jeanette Kennett's (2000) claim that friendship is morally dangerous. According to Cocking and Kennett, friendships make demands on us and these demands may sometimes call on us to perform immoral actions. They illustrate this with an example from the film *Death In Brunswick* in which the main character, Carl, asks his friend, Dave, to help him dispose of the body of someone who died whilst trying to attack him (Carl). In this case, Cocking and Kennett (2000: 280) say that Dave's friendship with Carl provides reasons for Dave to help in this case. In fact, it may even be "a requirement of close friendship" (Cocking and Kennett 2000: 280) that Dave help in this case. This requirement, though, would not be a moral requirement but is rather a requirement of the relationship. It is a requirement that stems from the fact that friends take each other's interests to be reason-providing and to shape each other's self-conception. Moreover, it is the kind of requirement that can, and in this case does, conflict with what we are morally required to do. Our attachment to our friends and the loyalty we have towards them are morally dangerous, as they can lead us to act in ways that violate our moral requirements.

In the same way, the relationship between fans and their idols may also be morally dangerous. The fact that fans identify closely with their idols, take their interests as reason-providing and allow them to influence their self-conception can lead them to act in ways that conflict with morality. This fan relationship may also provide reasons for fans to do this. We can see this clearly by returning to the example of

[10] Of course, it may still be the case that this phenomenon is less likely to occur when the object of fandom is a team rather than an individual. For my purposes though, it is enough to note that this problem still arises for this form of fandom.

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Manchester City fans defending the UAE legal system. While some fans were showing their support for the UAE's legal system, others sought to cast doubt upon the integrity of Tariq Panja, the journalist who uncovered the story for the *New York Times,* by claiming that the newspaper was biased against Manchester City (Wilson 2019). Other journalists who covered the story were accused by City fans on Twitter of displaying "a lack of objectivity" and of twisting the facts (City_Rabin 2019). We can see here the moral danger involved in fandom, as the love that City fans have for their club leads them to defend the legal system of a regime with an appalling human rights record and to accuse journalists who uncover these abuses of corruption and dishonesty.

Similarly, when a sexual abuse scandal at Crewe Alexandria came to light, the response of some fans was to publicly criticize, condemn and abuse those raising difficult questions of the club. Crewe fan Charles Morris (2019: 300–301) describes how many fans, "responded with ugly comments on social media towards journalists or anyone else who questioned or criticized the club." Worse than this was the online abuse of one the victims of the sexual abuse which led two fans to receive year-long jail sentences (Morris 2019: 301). This kind of behavior is also identified in Elizabeth Delia's (2019) study of fans of Syracuse University Men's Basketball team in response to program sanctions. Delia found that some fans responded to this situation by engaging in outgroup derogation (publicly criticizing those who were not fans of the team). One of the explanations Delia (2019) gives for this behavior is that fans are willing to go to great lengths to protect a positive sense of identity for their team when this identity comes under threat.

It is not just sport fans who are led into this kind of moral danger. The documentary *Leaving Neverland*, featured interviews with two men who claimed to have been sexually abused by the late 'King of Pop' Michael Jackson during their childhood. Dedicated fans of Michael Jackson responded by protesting against the broadcasting of the documentary on British television. In addition, many accused the men interviewed in the documentary of making up the story for personal gain (Reilly 2019). Again the moral dangers of fandom are clear here. Devotion to an idol may lead fans to do what they can to protect their idol's reputation, even if this means resorting to blaming the victims and retaliating against those who threaten the idol's reputation. The practices of support that fans engage in may empower their idols at the expense of those who speak against them.

4 Ethics of Fandom

I have outlined three reasons to worry about continued fandom of the immoral. First, this fandom may support the immoral behavior of our idol. Second, the way in which fandom alters our perception may lead us to be ignore our idol's faults and even to adopting immoral points of view in order to be able to maintain the positive view we have of them. Third, fandom, like friendship, may lead us to engage in acts of loyalty to protect the interests of our idols and retaliate against those who threaten these interests. We have then good reason to worry about the moral danger involved in our continued fandom for the immoral.

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How should we respond to this moral danger? The first thing to note is that this danger gives us moral reason to abandon our fandom, as in this way we would avoid the risks associated with it. However, it would be too quick to think that these reasons will always be conclusive. While it is true that fandom involves moral danger, so do friendship and love. It would be a mistake to conclude that this moral danger shows we should abandon friendship and love. These are important sources of meaning in our life and a morality that demands this from us is not one that we should endorse (Cocking and Kennett, 2000). Similarly, fandom is an important source of meaning and identity for many people and we should be wary of concluding too quickly that people have a duty to abandon this aspect of their identity. Charlie Morris describes how his love for Crewe Alexandria not only provided a historical connection to his uncle and grandfather who had also been fans but was also an important source of comfort after the death of his mother while he was still a child. These connections have important roles in people's lives and their sense of who they are. In many cases, abandoning our fandom will involve a significant sacrifice. This gives us reason to think that in many cases, while abandoning one's fandom may be the morally preferable option it is not morally required. It would instead be an act that is supererogatory or beyond the call of duty.

However, there is an important difference between love and friendship on the one hand and fandom on the other. In the case of love and friendship, against the moral reasons we have to abandon our friendship in order to avoid moral danger, we also have moral reasons to maintain it. One reason to think so is that the history of our relationship with the object of our love creates what Neil Delaney (1996: 346) calls "historical relational properties". These may include, "having been her dance partner at the USO social in '44, or having been the one who proposed to her on the Champs-Élysées," (Delaney 1996: 346). According to Delaney it is through building up these shared properties pertaining to the history of a relationship with someone that one has reasons to go on loving that person. But these properties also generate moral reasons to continue to love that person. Someone who ends a loving relationship with another not only deprives herself of a relationship built on these historical relational properties but also deprives the other person of this. In addition, breaking up a friendship or a loving relationship deprives the other person of a co-shaper of their self-concept, which can be a profoundly disorientating and painful experience (Lopez-Cantero and Archer 2020). Finally, in the course of building such a relationship, someone may well have brought about legitimate expectations that this relationship would continue.

These reasons will be far weaker in the case of fandom, if they exist at all. It is true that a singer may have historical relational properties with her fans, such as that they were there when she gave her best performance or being the ones who chanted her name before she came on stage. However, an individual fan is unlikely to have built historical relational properties that are of any significance to the object of their fandom. While it may mean a lot to the fan that they were there at their idol's greatest performance, this is unlikely to have much significance for the idol. What will be significant is that their fans in general were there, rather than that any particular fan was there. This is likely to be a far less personal historical relational property for the idol than exists between two friends or two romantic partners. Because of this, it has

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far less force as a moral reason to maintain the fandom. The same is true for identity shaping. While someone's identity may be shaped in important ways by their fans, it is unlikely that any one fan will play an important role in the shaping of their idol's identity. Finally, while an idol may have legitimate expectations that some of their fans may continue their fandom, in most cases they are unlikely to have the kind of relationship with any individual fan that would support a legitimate expectation of continued fandom.

What this means then is that all three of the moral reasons that speak in favor of continuing a friendship or loving relationship are likely to be far weaker in the case of fandom and may not exist at all. This may seem to support the idea that a virtuous person would abandon their fandom of the immoral in order to avoid the moral danger attached to such fandom. However, while the moral reasons in favor of continued fandom may be weaker than for friendship, there remain important reasons for the fan to continue her fandom. While the historical relational properties and identity shaping may be of little significance to her idol, they may well play an important role in the life of the fan. For example, this may have been the singer whose songs were the soundtrack to her first love and provided comfort during the subsequent heartbreak. In asking fans to abandon their fandom, we may be asking them to give up on these historical connections or at least on a certain way of viewing these connections. This gives us further reason to think that even when there are good moral reasons to abandon one's fandom, these reasons may fail to generate a moral obligation to do so.

It is also worth noting that fans usually have more control than friends or lovers over the nature of the relationship. It is up to the fan to decide what form they want their fandom to take. They may decide to continue their fandom in private, watching Manchester City at home in their living room, rather than in public. They may also decide to stop participating in the practices of attachment that are part of fandom. They may stop wearing club colors in public and contributing to fan clubs. In doing so, they may be able to avoid communicating any kind of condonation of the owner's alleged links to human rights abuses. Moreover, as noted before, there are ways in which a fan can continue to express their fandom in critical ways. Fans of The Smiths who wear T-shirts with the logo 'Love The Smiths Hate Morrissey' are both continuing to engage in the practices of fandom while publicly condemning Morrissey's views.

A form of critical fandom may also be able to avoid some of the problems associated with the dangers arising from fandom's influence on perception and loyalty. It is possible to be a fan of a person or a team whilst maintaining a critical stance towards them. While it would be a mistake to think that this is fully under the fan's control, it will not be subject to the same form of interpersonal coordination that typically is involved in determining the precise nature of a loving relationship. Whether or not this is a viable option will depend on whether the fan is capable of maintaining a critical distance between themselves and their idol. There is reason to be cautious here. We might think that those who are able to judge that their idol has betrayed them show that they are able to maintain such a distance. This is what Dederer (2017) displays when she says of Woody Allen, "I took the fucking of Soon-Yi as a terrible betrayal of me personally. […] I had always seen him as one

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of us, the powerless. Post-Soon-Yi, I saw him as a predator." However, on closer inspection we have reason to be cautious about our ability to take such a critical distance. Dederer (2017) describes rewatching Allen's *Manhattan* in which Isaac, a middle-aged man played by Allen, is out for dinner with his friends and his date Tracy, who is a seventeen-year-old high-school student:

> The really astonishing thing about watching this scene is its nonchalance. NBD [no big deal], I'm fucking a high schooler. Sure, he knows the relationship can't last, but he seems only casually troubled by its moral implications. Woody Allen's character Isaac is fucking that high schooler with what my mother would call a hey-nonny-nonny. Allen is fascinated with moral shading, except when it comes to this particular issue—the issue of middle-aged men fucking teenage girls.

The American critic A.O. Scott (2018) makes a similar point:

> What I find most ethically troubling about Mr. Allen's work at present is the extent to which I and so many of my colleagues have ignored or minimized its uglier aspects. A sensibility that seemed sweet, skeptical and self-scrutinizing may have been cruel, cynical and self-justifying all along.

What both Dederer and Scott find so shocking here is that Allen's attitude towards middle-aged men acting in a predatory way towards young women was far from hidden. His attitudes were there for all of his fans to see and many managed not to.

We have reason then, to be humble about our ability to successfully take a critical distance towards our idols. While critical fandom provides a potential way of avoiding the moral dangers involved with being a fan of the immoral without abandoning our fandom altogether, some level of moral danger is likely to remain.

5 Conclusion

I have been exploring the moral danger involved with fandom of the immoral. First, I investigated the nature of fandom by drawing on Dixon's claim that fandom is a form of love. I argued that fandom, like love, involves an appreciation of particular qualities, a shaping of identity and changes in how we perceive the world. I then argued that because of this, continued fandom of the immoral is morally dangerous. Finally, I will consider the ethical implications of this moral danger. While this moral danger may seem to suggest that we have an obligation to abandon our moral fandom of the immoral, I argued that this conclusion is too quick. Given that fandom can be an important source of meaning and identity for many people and we should be wary of concluding too quickly that people have a duty to abandon this aspect of their identity. Moreover, fans can choose to adopt a more critical stance to their idol rather than abandoning their fandom altogether. However, I finished by pointing out that we have good reason to be cautious about our ability to take a truly critical distance towards our idols.

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In asking whether fans should abandon their fandom when its object is immoral, I have sought to move the discussion of the ethics of fandom beyond the question of whether it is better to be a partisan or a purist. This opens up a number of new issues that could be explored in future research. For instance, what duties do fans have towards their idol or their team? Can fans wrong their team or their idols by abandoning their fandom? What duties do fans owe to their fellow fans? In addition, I have sought to broaden the philosophical discussion of fandom beyond its focus on sport. While the discussion of fandom in sociology and cultural studies covers a range of different kinds of fandom, the philosophical discussion of fandom has remained focused on sports fandom. I have sought to investigate the similarities between these forms of fandom in this paper but future work could investigate the differences between these kinds of fandom. Future work in this area could also seek to investigate the nature of the relationship between fans and their idols in more detail and to explore in more detail the effects each has on the identity of the other. It would also be interesting to explore the consequences of fandom in the political realm, including both fandom for political parties and for individual politicians.[11] Finally, while I have focused on the connections between love and fandom, and existing work has looked at admiration and shame, future work in this area could investigate the connections between fandom and other emotions such as pride, grief, anger and hate.

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[11] See Eylon (Forthcoming) and Ottonelli (Forthcoming) for discussions of the related issue of partisanship in politics.

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