

AI-04672 Spectatorship Living vs Engaging

What psychological or neurotic pattern might explain a person who becomes intensely attached to a sports team, athlete, or sport and spends countless hours watching and following it, while remaining largely passive and never physically participating in the sport themselves? What emotional needs, avoidance mechanisms, identity issues, or compensatory behaviors might this passive spectatorship be serving? physically.

Explain, list the pillars, list 22 examples What it means? Deep dive and provide the psychological pillars. Describe how a person typically thinks, behaves, and makes decisions. Provide 22 concrete examples demonstrating these traits in real-life situations. Then create a 22-point guidelines from the discussion.

Are these concepts of spectator psychology applicable as well to the crazy BTS fandom followers where 30-60 yof follows every concert anywhere in the world?

Tell more about emotional attachment object , would that mean that there is a missing object in a person's life and new external object becomes a proxy? How to tell?

How does emotional attachment object (replacement) contrast with Karen Horney's "search for glory concept? Are they similar concepts where a person is not happy or satisfied and constantly seeking the object or other object?

I'm also attached to my 2.4 miles swim every Sunday, Wednesday, Friday and 40-50 miles gravel cycling every Saturday, Tuesday, Thursday (even at 60). How is that related to emotional attachment object or the search for glory? Those activities are not an easy feat and at the beginning of each activities is the feeling of exuberance and satisfaction but somewhere near 50 miles, it becomes a survival specially in Texas 100°F heat and I always say, "I need to get outa' here" re: J Croce song. I need to home to Cebu back to my hiatus retirement. Yet on the following day, I'm on the bike or pool rinse and repeating. Pathological or just a mere retirement hobby. Tell more

Yes. There is a useful psychological distinction here:

Loving sports is not neurotic. Watching a team can be healthy entertainment, community, tradition, excitement, and social connection.

The potentially problematic pattern is **intense identification + enormous time investment + passive consumption + little corresponding action in one's own life.**

When those four occur together, sports can become a psychological *substitute*: the person gets achievement, belonging, excitement, identity, conflict, hope, and emotional release **without personally having to risk failure, exertion, exposure, or change.**

A useful way to conceptualize it is:

"I experience someone else's life intensely because experiencing my own life intensely feels harder, riskier, or less rewarding."

That is a hypothesis—not a diagnosis.

1. The Core Psychological Pattern

The deepest issue isn't necessarily *sports*.

It is the possibility of **vicarious living**.

The spectator psychologically attaches himself to an external object:

Team → Athlete → Sport → Tribe → Identity

and begins experiencing the object's successes and failures as if they were partially his own.

Instead of:

I train → I compete → I improve → I achieve

the psychological pathway becomes:

I watch → I identify → They compete → They win → I feel victorious.

The emotional reward is real even though the achievement is not personally his.

That distinction is extremely important.

The substitution

Active life	Passive substitute
I train	I watch training
I compete	I watch competition
I improve	I analyze players improving
I take risks	I debate who will win
I accomplish	My team accomplishes
I belong	I belong to the fan tribe
I experience excitement	I consume excitement
I build identity	I borrow identity
I struggle	I watch others struggle
I win	"We won"

The danger isn't watching.

The danger is when the substitute begins replacing the original.

2. The 12 Psychological Pillars

Pillar 1 — Vicarious Achievement

The person experiences another person's achievement as emotionally meaningful to himself.

A championship can produce genuine pride despite the spectator having contributed nothing to the accomplishment.

Psychologically:

Their achievement → my emotional reward.

This is especially powerful when one's own life feels ordinary, stagnant, or insufficiently rewarding.

Pillar 2 — Identity Fusion

The team becomes part of the person's self-concept.

Instead of:

“I follow the Cowboys.”

it becomes:

“I'm a Cowboys fan.”

And eventually:

“We won.”

The boundary between **self and team** becomes psychologically blurred.

The team's reputation can therefore influence self-esteem.

Pillar 3 — Borrowed Identity

The team supplies characteristics the person wishes to possess:

- strength
- dominance
- courage
- toughness
- excellence
- masculinity
- discipline
- status
- belonging
- heroism

The person doesn't necessarily embody these characteristics.

He **attaches himself to people who do**.

The athlete becomes a kind of psychological avatar.

Pillar 4 — Emotional Substitution

Sports generate extremely efficient emotional stimulation:

anticipation → anxiety → hope → fear → anger → relief → euphoria.

Real life can be comparatively monotonous.

Therefore sports become an emotional stimulant.

The person may unconsciously use games to manufacture feelings that ordinary life isn't producing.

3. Pillar 5 — Safe Risk

Competition produces uncertainty.

But the spectator doesn't personally risk anything.

The athlete can:

- fail
- get injured
- be criticized
- lose
- embarrass himself
- recover
- succeed

The spectator gets the emotional roller coaster **without personal exposure**.

This makes sports psychologically attractive to someone who wants intensity but avoids vulnerability.

4. Pillar 6 — Avoidance

This may be the most important pillar.

Sports can become an extraordinarily effective distraction from:

- career dissatisfaction
- relationship problems
- loneliness
- aging
- boredom
- unfinished projects
- financial anxiety
- lack of purpose
- physical inactivity
- existential questions

Instead of confronting:

“What am I doing with my life?”

the mind asks:

“Did the coach make the right call?”

The second question is much easier.

5. Pillar 7 — Control Through Expertise

Passive spectatorship can create an illusion of mastery.

The person knows:

- statistics
- player histories
- strategies
- trades
- formations
- injuries
- draft prospects

- coaching decisions

Consequently he can feel highly competent within a domain in which he does not actually participate.

This can become:

knowledge without agency.

He knows everything about the game while doing almost nothing in the game—or in his own equivalent domain.

6. Pillar 8 — Tribal Belonging

Humans have powerful affiliation needs.

A sports team provides an instant tribe:

“us” versus “them.”

The fan gets:

- language
- rituals
- symbols
- heroes
- enemies
- traditions
- shared memories
- social belonging

This can be particularly attractive to someone whose offline social identity is weak.

7. Pillar 9 — Externalized Self-Esteem

The team's success becomes a temporary self-esteem injection.

Team wins → I feel good.

Team loses → I feel bad.

The person's emotional state becomes externally controlled.

This is why some fans experience an astonishing emotional reaction to something over which they possess virtually no control.

8. Pillar 10 — Fantasy and Identification

The athlete becomes a psychological projection screen.

The spectator may imagine:

“If I were him...”

or:

“That's the kind of person I would be.”

The athlete represents a version of the self that may never have been developed.

Sports therefore provide **identity fantasy**.

9. Pillar 11 — Passive Consumption Reward Loop

Modern sports are designed to maximize attention.

The cycle is:

Game → dopamine → anticipation → highlights → analysis → social media → speculation → next game.

Then repeat.

The person isn't simply watching a game.

He's consuming an **infinite content ecosystem**.

Game.

Postgame.

Highlights.

Podcasts.

Commentary.

Trade rumors.

Fantasy leagues.

YouTube.

Reddit.

Sports radio.

News.

Debates.

And then the next game.

The activity can consume enormous amounts of time while producing very little personal development.

10. Pillar 12 — Agency Deficit

This is the deepest contrast:

Passive spectator

Attention → emotion → opinion

Active participant

Attention → effort → discomfort → adaptation → competence → achievement

The first produces stimulation.

The second produces development.

A person can therefore become extremely sophisticated at **observing achievement without practicing achievement**.

11. What This Person May Be Thinking

The internal dialogue might sound like:

"I know everything about this team."

"This is my team."

"We need to win tonight."

"That coach is an idiot."

"If they make the playoffs, this could be our year."

"I can't miss this game."

"I'll exercise later."

"I'll work on that project tomorrow."

"I've got to see what happens."

"I don't play, but I understand the game better than most people."

Notice something important:

The vocabulary becomes active while the behavior remains passive.

"We."

"Our."

"We need."

"We're going to win."

But the actual person:

doesn't train, compete, build, create, or physically participate.

12. 22 Concrete Examples

1. The championship substitution

A person experiences enormous pride after his team wins a championship but hasn't personally achieved anything comparable in years.

Pattern: vicarious achievement.

2. The exercise paradox

He watches three hours of professional cycling but doesn't ride his own bicycle.

Pattern: observing physical excellence replaces physical participation.

3. The fantasy athlete

He knows exactly how an elite athlete should train but has no consistent training routine himself.

Pattern: intellectualized mastery.

4. The Monday emotional crash

His team loses Sunday, and his mood is terrible Monday morning.

Pattern: externally regulated self-esteem.

5. The “we” phenomenon

He says:

“We destroyed them.”

Yet he was sitting on a couch for four hours.

Pattern: identity fusion.

6. The perpetual offseason

The season ends and he immediately becomes obsessed with trades, drafts, free agents and predictions.

Pattern: maintaining emotional stimulation.

7. The argument addict

He spends hours arguing online about whether an athlete is overrated.

Pattern: displaced aggression and identity defense.

8. The neglected project

He postpones a business, hobby, education or personal project because there's an important game tonight.

Pattern: avoidance disguised as entertainment.

9. The expert spectator

He knows advanced statistics but cannot explain what he is currently building or improving in his own life.

Pattern: competence without agency.

10. The athlete-as-self

He becomes deeply offended when someone criticizes his favorite athlete.

Pattern: criticism of the athlete is experienced as criticism of himself.

11. The tribal enemy

He dislikes people primarily because they support a rival team.

Pattern: group identity replacing individual judgment.

12. The manufactured excitement

Nothing particularly exciting is happening in his life, but sports provides nightly drama.

Pattern: emotional stimulation substitute.

13. The physical contradiction

He spends hours watching people exercise while remaining physically inactive himself.

Pattern: consumption replacing embodiment.

14. The retirement vacuum

After retirement, a person dramatically increases sports consumption because the loss of occupational identity creates empty time.

Pattern: identity replacement.

15. The fantasy conversation

He frequently discusses what *he* would do if he were the coach, GM, or athlete.

Pattern: imagined agency.

16. The statistical rabbit hole

He spends six hours analyzing historical statistics but won't spend 45 minutes developing his own skill.

Pattern: productive-looking avoidance.

17. The emotional dependency

He needs the team to win before he can enjoy his weekend.

Pattern: emotional dependence on an external event.

18. The replay loop

He watches the same highlights repeatedly after a victory.

Pattern: repeated emotional reward.

19. The identity vacuum

Ask:

“What are you accomplishing?”

and the answer quickly becomes:

“My team is doing great this year.”

Pattern: borrowed achievement.

20. The conversation monopoly

Almost every social conversation eventually returns to sports.

Pattern: narrowing identity.

21. The unrealized competitor

The person possesses enormous competitive energy but directs it entirely toward watching others compete.

Pattern: displaced competitive drive.

22. The life substitution

Years pass and the person can recount thousands of games, players and statistics—but has very few comparable stories about things **he personally attempted**.

Pattern: spectatorship replacing autobiography.

This final example is the most profound.

13. The Central Psychological Equation

A useful conceptual model is:

Unmet need



Sports attachment



Identification



Vicarious experience



Emotional reward



Temporary relief



Less motivation to confront the original unmet need



More spectatorship



Stronger attachment

That's how a healthy hobby can potentially become a psychological maintenance loop.

14. What Needs Might Be Being Satisfied?

Emotional need	Sports provides
Achievement	Winning
Belonging	Fan community
Identity	Team affiliation
Excitement	Competition
Meaning	Season narrative
Status	Association with winners
Mastery	Statistical knowledge
Competition	Rivalries
Masculinity/strength	Athletic heroes

Connection	Shared fandom
Escape	Hours of distraction
Hope	"Next season"
Emotional release	Victories/losses
Structure	Games and seasons
Fantasy	Identification with athletes

This is why simply telling someone:

"Stop watching sports."

usually misses the point.

You have to ask:

"What is sports doing psychologically for this person?"

15. The Karen Horney Connection

This becomes particularly interesting through **Karen Horney's theory of neurosis**.

Horney's framework emphasizes the movement away from the authentic self toward an **idealized self-image** and various strategies for coping with basic anxiety.

Sports fandom can theoretically become another arena in which this occurs.

The person doesn't develop:

actual competence → actual confidence → actual identity

Instead:

idealized identification → fantasy competence → borrowed confidence

The athlete becomes an external representation of the person he would like to be.

16. The "Idealized Self" Mechanism

Imagine someone who unconsciously wants to experience himself as:

strong + disciplined + courageous + competitive + respected.

But his actual life is:

sedentary + repetitive + cautious + isolated + unchallenging.

Watching an elite athlete temporarily closes the psychological gap.

He can experience:

"That's who I am."

without enduring the difficult process of becoming that person.

That is potentially **idealized-self compensation**.

17. The Critical Distinction: Healthy vs. Neurotic

Don't diagnose the behavior based on hours alone.

A person could watch 20 hours of sports a week and still have a healthy relationship with it.

The better diagnostic questions are:

Does it interfere with life?

Does it replace activity?

Does identity depend upon it?

Does mood depend upon outcomes?

Does it function primarily as escape?

Does the person repeatedly choose watching over doing?

Does the person have difficulty stopping?

Is there increasing narrowing of interests?

Does fandom compensate for an unfulfilled identity?

The more **yeses**, the more reasonable it is to consider the behavior maladaptive.

18. The "Watch vs. Do" Test

One of the simplest psychological tests is:

How much time does the person spend consuming other people's achievements versus producing his own?

Consider:

10 hours watching sports + 0 hours participating

versus

10 hours watching + 5 hours training

The psychological meaning is dramatically different.

The first may represent **substitution**.

The second may represent **inspiration**.

That's a crucial distinction.

19. The 22-Point Guidelines

These aren't rules against sports. They're guidelines for preventing **spectatorship from becoming a substitute for living**.

1. Watch—but don't only watch.

Pair consumption with participation.

2. Turn admiration into imitation.

If you admire endurance, develop endurance.

3. Convert inspiration into behavior.

Every inspiring athlete should produce an action in your own life.

4. Protect your identity.

Be more than a fan.

5. Don't borrow achievement.

Enjoy their accomplishments without pretending they're yours.

6. Notice "we" language.

Ask yourself whether "we" really means you.

7. Separate entertainment from identity.

A team should be something you enjoy, not who you are.

8. Don't outsource your mood.

Your weekend shouldn't depend on a scoreboard.

9. Maintain physical participation.

Your body should experience some of what your mind watches.

10. Watch your time.

Entertainment should have boundaries.

11. Protect your goals.

Don't repeatedly sacrifice your own objectives for games.

12. Examine avoidance.

Ask: **"What am I not doing while I'm watching this?"**

13. Build your own scoreboard.

Track your own progress.

14. Compete with yesterday's self.

Create personal challenges.

15. Develop real mastery.

Know less trivia if necessary and acquire more actual skill.

16. Create your own stories.

Do things worth remembering.

17. Maintain multiple identities.

Friend, spouse, athlete, reader, builder, creator, learner—not merely fan.

18. Use sports as fuel, not anesthesia.

Inspiration is useful; escape is costly.

19. Practice voluntary disengagement.

Be capable of skipping the game without distress.

20. Examine emotional dependence.

If losing ruins your day, investigate why.

21. Replace vicarious achievement with direct achievement.

Ask:

“What did I accomplish this week?”

not merely:

“Did my team win?”

22. Become the protagonist.

The ultimate question is:

“Am I watching other people live, or am I actually living?”

20. The Deepest Interpretation

The psychological problem isn't:

“This person watches too much sports.”

The deeper possibility is:

“This person has discovered an extremely efficient way to experience achievement, competition, belonging, excitement, identity and emotional intensity without having to personally enter the arena.”

That's why the behavior can become so compelling.

The spectator gets almost everything psychologically rewarding about competition:

anticipation

- **uncertainty**
- **struggle**
- **conflict**
- **mastery**
- **victory**
- **belonging**
- **celebration**

while avoiding:

discipline

- **fatigue**
- **vulnerability**

- **failure**
- **embarrassment**
- **physical discomfort**
- **responsibility**
- **personal accountability.**

And that creates the fundamental distinction:

Vicarious life vs. embodied life

Vicarious life:

"I watched someone do something extraordinary."

Embodied life:

"I did something difficult myself."

Healthy spectatorship says:

"That inspires me."

Potentially neurotic spectatorship says:

"That substitutes for me."

And perhaps the most revealing question is:

If the person suddenly couldn't watch sports for an entire year, what would he be forced to confront, build, learn, repair, experience, or become?

Whatever the answer is may reveal **what the spectatorship has been protecting him from.**

Are these concepts of spectator psychology applicable as well to the crazy BTS fandom followers where 30-60 yof follows every concert anywhere in the world?

Yes—the **same psychological framework can apply very strongly to extreme celebrity/K-pop fandom**, including a person who travels internationally to attend concert after concert. But there is an important distinction:

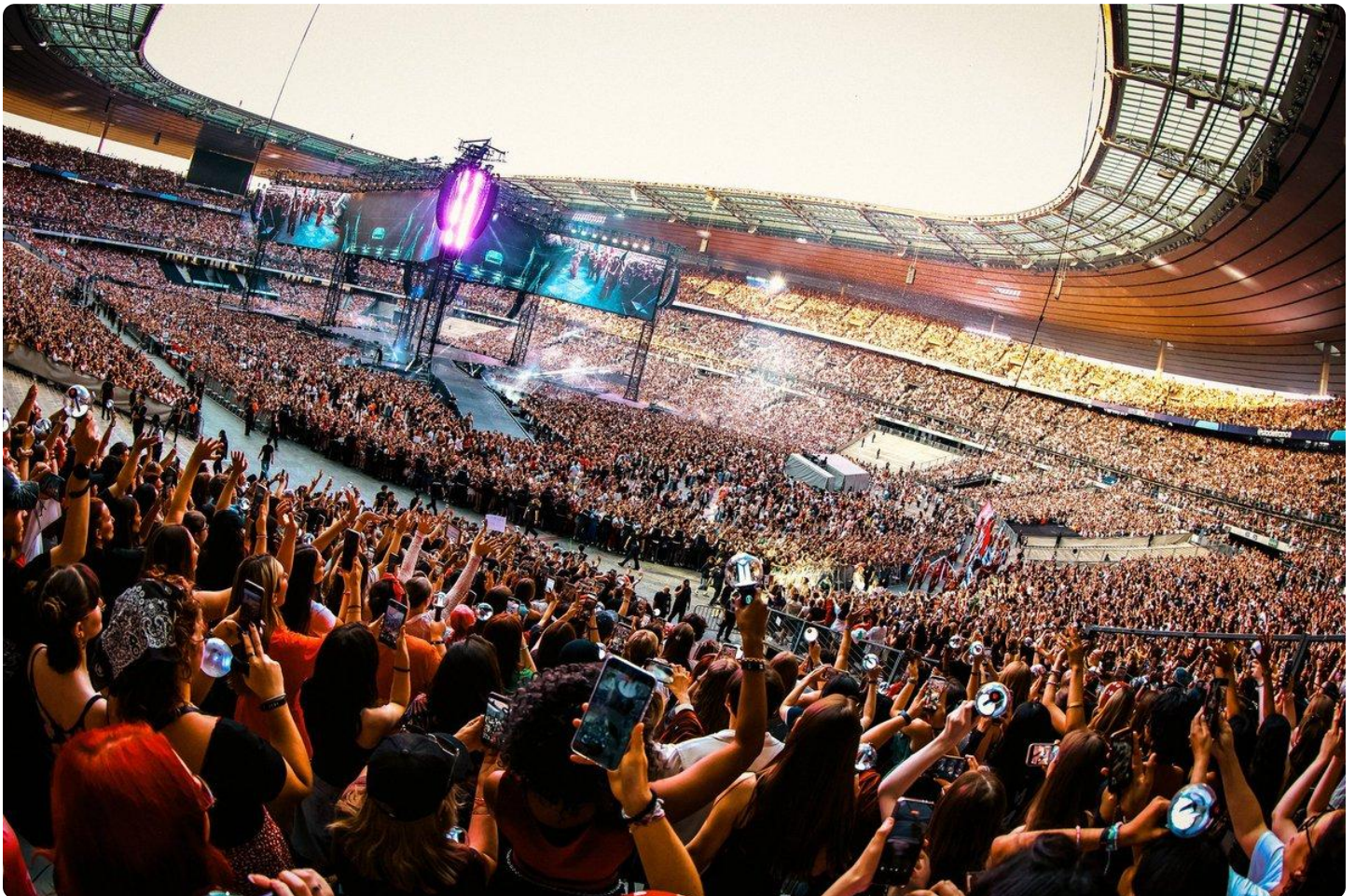
Intense fandom is not automatically neurotic, pathological, or unhealthy. Someone can genuinely love BTS, have the money and freedom to travel, make friends through ARMY, and derive meaningful joy from concerts.

The psychological question is not **"Why does a 40- or 60-year-old woman like BTS so much?"**

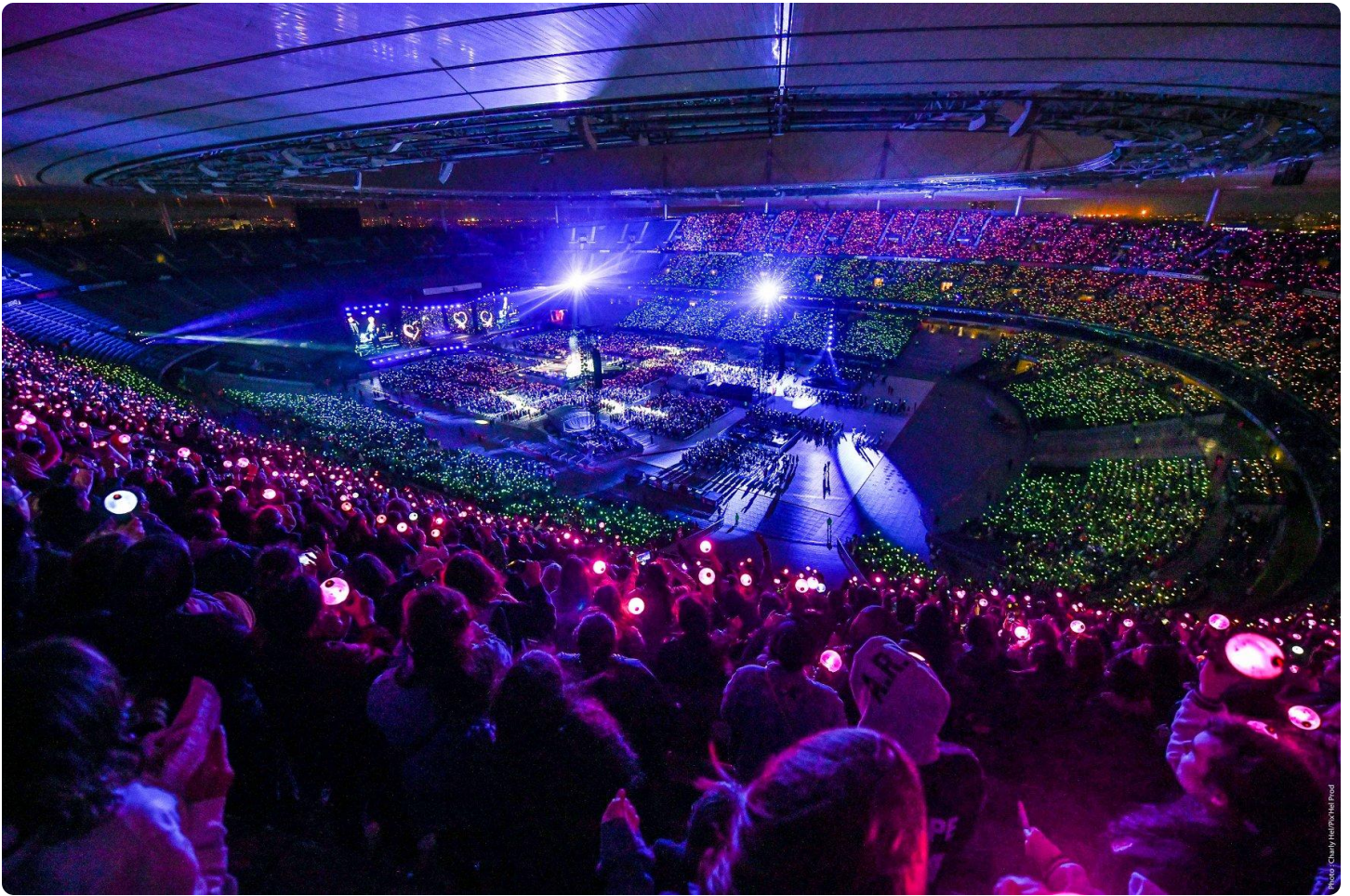
It's:

"What psychological function does BTS fandom perform in her life, and what happens to the rest of her life because of it?"

That is a much more interesting question.







The same mechanism—just with a different object

With sports:

Athlete → identification → vicarious achievement → emotional reward

With celebrity fandom:

Celebrity → attachment → imagined intimacy → emotional reward

And with extreme fandom:

Celebrity → identity → community → purpose → ritual → emotional dependency

The psychological architecture can therefore be remarkably similar.

1. The biggest difference: achievement vs. attachment

A sports fan primarily experiences:

"My team won."

A celebrity fan may experience:

"They understand me."

That's a different psychological mechanism.

Sports often satisfy the need for:

- competition
- achievement
- tribal identity
- excitement
- mastery

Celebrity fandom can additionally satisfy:

- attachment
- intimacy
- romance/fantasy
- companionship
- admiration
- belonging
- emotional security
- identity
- meaning

This makes intense celebrity fandom potentially **more psychologically intimate** than ordinary sports spectatorship.

2. Parasocial attachment

One of the most important concepts here is **parasocial relationship**.

The fan repeatedly sees the celebrity:

- interviews
- concerts
- livestreams
- behind-the-scenes footage
- social media
- documentaries
- photographs

- personal stories

The brain receives an enormous amount of information about the celebrity.

But the relationship is fundamentally asymmetric.

The fan may know:

- his favorite food
- his personality
- his childhood
- his habits
- his favorite songs
- his friendships
- his struggles
- his jokes
- his preferred clothing

while the celebrity doesn't know the individual fan.

Psychologically, however, **familiarity can feel like intimacy.**

3. The celebrity becomes an emotional attachment object

This is where the phenomenon becomes particularly interesting.

A person may have insufficient sources of:

connection + excitement + admiration + belonging + emotional intimacy

in ordinary life.

Then the celebrity becomes a concentrated source of all five.

The fan can experience:

- "They make me happy."
- "Their music got me through a difficult time."
- "ARMY is my family."
- "I feel alive when I go to their concerts."

Those statements can be completely genuine.

The psychological issue arises when the relationship becomes:

supplement → substitute.

4. The "emotional boyfriend/girlfriend" phenomenon

This doesn't necessarily mean the fan literally believes the celebrity is her partner.

It's subtler.

The celebrity can occupy some of the **psychological territory normally occupied by intimate relationships.**

For example:

Loneliness → BTS

Boredom → BTS

Stress → BTS

Sadness → BTS

Need for excitement → BTS

Need for belonging → ARMY

Need for admiration → idol

Need for fantasy → imagined relationship

The celebrity becomes an **emotional regulation system**.

5. Why traveling to every concert matters

Going to one BTS concert?

Normal fandom.

Traveling occasionally?

Still completely ordinary.

But suppose someone:

flies to Seoul → flies to Tokyo → flies to Los Angeles → flies to London → flies to Paris → follows multiple tour dates → spends enormous money → rearranges her entire life around the schedule.

Then the psychological question becomes:

Why does the experience have to be repeated at such intensity?

One possible explanation is **diminishing reward requiring repeated exposure**.

The first concert produces:

WOW!

The tenth produces:

I need another one.

The psychological reward becomes tied to anticipation itself.

6. The concert becomes a pilgrimage

This is particularly fascinating.

Extreme fandom can develop religious-like structures without literally being a religion:

Sacred object: idol/group

Sacred texts: lyrics/interviews/content

Rituals: concerts, streaming, collecting

Pilgrimage: traveling to concerts

Community: ARMY

Symbols: light sticks, merchandise

Calendar: comeback/tour schedule

Heroes: individual members

Enemy: critics/antis

Conversion experience: discovering BTS

Testimony: "BTS saved me."

Again, none of this means the person is mentally ill.

It illustrates how humans naturally organize **meaning, identity and belonging around symbolic objects.**

7. The "borrowed life" phenomenon

This connects directly to your original spectator question.

Imagine someone whose personal life has become:

work → home → television → routine → repeat

Then BTS introduces:

anticipation → travel → concerts → friends → excitement → photographs → memories → stories

Suddenly her life has an adventure narrative.

The celebrity doesn't merely provide entertainment.

The fandom becomes her life project.

That's where the distinction between healthy enthusiasm and psychological compensation becomes particularly important.

8. 12 possible psychological pillars

1. Parasocial attachment

Feeling emotionally connected to someone who doesn't personally know you.

2. Vicarious achievement

Feeling proud through another person's success.

3. Identity fusion

"BTS fan" becomes a major component of self-definition.

4. Belonging

ARMY provides an immediate social tribe.

5. Emotional regulation

BTS becomes a reliable mechanism for changing one's mood.

6. Escapism

Fandom provides relief from dissatisfaction or boredom.

7. Fantasy intimacy

The celebrity becomes a psychologically intimate figure.

8. Idealized-self projection

The idol embodies qualities the fan admires or wishes to possess.

9. Novelty and stimulation

Comebacks, concerts and travel create continual excitement.

10. Ritual

Repeated behaviors create structure and anticipation.

11. Community validation

Other fans reinforce the identity and behavior.

12. Existential meaning

The fandom provides something to look forward to and live for.

9. Here's where it becomes potentially neurotic

Imagine two women.

Person A

She loves BTS.

She attends one or two concerts.

She has a career, marriage, friendships, exercise, hobbies, financial discipline and other interests.

BTS makes her life **richer**.

Person B

Her life revolves around BTS.

She spends enormous amounts of money.

She travels constantly.

She neglects relationships.

She spends hours every day consuming BTS content.

Her emotional state depends on BTS.

She fights with people who criticize BTS.

She increasingly identifies herself through the fandom.

She has few meaningful activities outside it.

BTS isn't enriching her life anymore.

It is replacing it.

That's the psychological dividing line.

10. The 22-question “Fandom Dependency Test”

These questions are more useful than simply counting hours.

1. **Could she stop following BTS for six months without significant distress?**
2. **Does fandom interfere with relationships?**
3. **Does she spend money she cannot comfortably afford?**
4. **Does she repeatedly prioritize concerts over important obligations?**
5. **Does her mood depend heavily on BTS-related events?**
6. **Does she describe BTS as her primary source of happiness?**
7. **Does she have meaningful goals unrelated to BTS?**
8. **Does she participate physically in her own hobbies?**
9. **Does fandom replace rather than supplement friendships?**
10. **Does she experience criticism of BTS as a personal attack?**
11. **Does she spend more time watching idols live than living her own life?**
12. **Does she use BTS primarily when lonely, anxious, bored or distressed?**
13. **Has her fandom progressively intensified?**
14. **Does she constantly need the next concert, album, merchandise or event?**
15. **Does she fantasize about personal relationships with members?**
16. **Does she believe the idols uniquely understand her?**
17. **Does she neglect physical health or exercise because of fandom?**
18. **Does she derive status primarily from belonging to the fandom?**
19. **Would losing access to BTS leave a major identity vacuum?**
20. **Does she have difficulty forming comparable real-world relationships?**
21. **Does fandom provide a sense of purpose that her ordinary life lacks?**
22. **If BTS disappeared tomorrow, what would remain of her identity?**

That last question is probably the most revealing.

11. The psychological equation

You can conceptualize extreme fandom as:

Unmet psychological need

↓

Celebrity attachment

↓

Emotional reward

↓

Identity formation

↓

Community reinforcement

↓

Repeated consumption

↓

Increasing emotional investment

↓

More time + money + attention

↓

Less investment in alternative sources of fulfillment

↓

Greater dependency on fandom

That can become a self-reinforcing loop.

12. And there is an important gender/age misconception

I would **not** explain a 30–60-year-old female BTS fan simply as:

“She’s immature.”

That’s too simplistic and psychologically weak.

A better question is:

What does this fandom give her that her existing life does not?

Possibilities include:

- youthfulness
- excitement
- sexuality
- beauty
- friendship
- adventure
- community
- admiration
- emotional connection
- novelty
- freedom
- identity outside motherhood/work/marriage
- a break from routine
- an arena where she feels young again

And that last one can be significant.

Someone approaching middle or later adulthood may experience increasing:

routine + responsibility + aging + empty nest + retirement + relationship monotony + shrinking social circles.

A fandom can suddenly reopen:

excitement + novelty + community + anticipation + fantasy + travel.

That’s psychologically understandable.

13. The really interesting question

Instead of asking:

“Why is this woman obsessed with BTS?”

I'd ask:

“What psychological economy has developed between the woman and BTS?”

What does she **give** the fandom?

Time

Money

Attention

Identity

Emotion

Travel

Loyalty

And what does the fandom **give back**?

Excitement

Belonging

Identity

Meaning

Fantasy

Connection

Adventure

Emotional regulation

If the exchange is enriching her existing life:

Healthy fandom

If the exchange is replacing her existing life:

Potentially compensatory fandom

If she becomes unable to regulate herself without it and experiences substantial impairment:

Potentially problematic/dependent behavior

That's a much more psychologically sophisticated continuum than simply calling someone a "crazy fan."

The deepest parallel to your original sports example

There is a striking common denominator:

Sports spectator

“I watch people live the life of competition.”

Extreme celebrity fan

“I follow people who provide the emotional life I am missing.”

Active participant

“I create the experiences myself.”

So the fundamental psychological distinction isn't really:

Sports vs. BTS.

It is:

CONSUMPTION vs. PARTICIPATION

Watching → identifying → feeling

versus

Doing → struggling → developing → becoming

The healthiest relationship with either sports or celebrity culture is therefore:

Let other people's excellence inspire your life—not replace your life.

And the most revealing question remains:

“If I removed the team, athlete, celebrity, fandom, television and endless content from this person's life, what would the person actually be left doing?”

If the answer is **“quite a lot,”** the fandom is probably an addition to life.

If the answer is **“almost nothing,”** then you've probably found the psychological function of the fandom.

Tell more about emotional attachment object, would that mean that there is a missing object in a person's life and new external object becomes a proxy? How to tell? Tell more.

Yes—but I would refine the idea of a **“missing object.”**

In psychodynamic language, an **object** doesn't mean a physical thing. It means an internalized representation of a significant person or relationship: *someone who loves me, sees me, admires me, understands me, challenges me, protects me, or gives me a sense of belonging.*

So when we say someone may use BTS, a sports team, an athlete, or another celebrity as an **emotional attachment object**, we don't necessarily mean:

“There is a missing person, so they found a replacement person.”

It is more precise to say:

An important emotional function may be insufficiently supplied by the person's real relationships or inner psychological life, and an external figure becomes unusually important in supplying that function.

That is a much more nuanced proposition.

1. What is an “attachment object”?

Think of a person's psychological world as having several emotional jobs.

A healthy network of relationships can provide:

Attachment → “I belong somewhere.”

Mirroring → “I am seen and valued.”

Idealization → “There is something/someone admirable that I can look up to.”

Companionship → “I’m not alone.”

Regulation → “Someone helps me feel calm, safe, or energized.”

Identity → “I know who I am.”

Meaning → “My life matters.”

Excitement → “There is something to anticipate.”

Normally, these functions are distributed across many things:

spouse + children + friends + work + hobbies + community + goals + spirituality + physical activity + intellectual pursuits + one’s own accomplishments.

But sometimes one external object begins carrying a **disproportionate amount of psychological weight**.

That’s when the concept becomes interesting.

2. The “proxy” idea

Your word **proxy** is useful.

Suppose someone has an unmet need for:

Belonging

Instead of developing several real-world relationships:

BTS/ARMY → belonging

Excitement

Instead of creating challenging experiences:

concert → excitement

Admiration

Instead of developing personal mastery:

idol → idealized figure

Emotional intimacy

Instead of cultivating reciprocal relationships:

parasocial relationship → perceived intimacy

Identity

Instead of developing a multidimensional identity:

“I am ARMY” → identity

The external object becomes a **proxy provider**.

But—and this is important—the underlying need isn’t necessarily pathological.

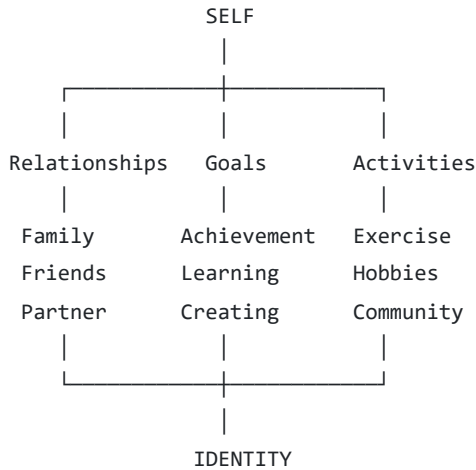
Humans naturally use external objects to meet needs.

The problem is **overdependence**.

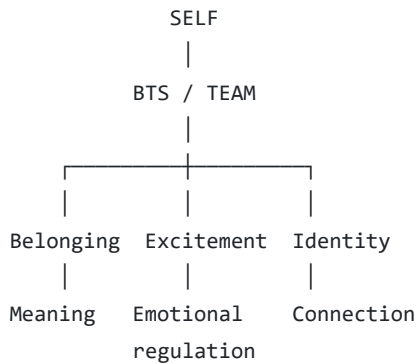
3. Think of it as an emotional “load-bearing wall”

This analogy is useful.

A healthy person has many load-bearing structures:



Now imagine:



The second structure isn't automatically unhealthy.

But if **one external object is carrying nearly everything**, its psychological importance becomes enormous.

Then:

BTS succeeds → I feel good.

BTS disappears → I feel empty.

Concert happens → life feels exciting.

Concert ends → ordinary life returns.

That is the dependency pattern to investigate.

4. The key concept is not “missing person.”

It's **missing psychological function**.

This distinction is crucial.

Someone can have:

- a loving spouse
- children
- friends
- money
- a successful career

and still have an unmet need for **novelty, admiration, excitement, identity, youthfulness or adventure.**

Therefore:

A person doesn't have to be lonely to become excessively attached to a celebrity.

They might instead be:

understimulated.

Or:

identity-depleted.

Or:

emotionally undernourished.

Or:

unfulfilled.

Or simply:

highly susceptible to intense reward and social identification.

5. How do you tell what's happening?

Don't start with:

“How much do they like BTS?”

Start with:

“What happens psychologically when BTS enters the person's life?”

Look for **functional displacement.**

Ask these questions.

A. What was happening BEFORE the attachment?

This is one of the strongest clues.

Did intense fandom appear after:

- retirement?
- divorce?
- children leaving home?
- loneliness?
- loss of career identity?
- boredom?

- major life transition?
- relationship dissatisfaction?
- depression?
- social isolation?
- loss of purpose?

If the fandom **dramatically intensified after a psychological transition**, investigate what changed.

It may have filled a newly vacant function.

6. The “before and after” test

Imagine:

Before BTS

Work
↓
Home
↓
Routine
↓
Little excitement
↓
Little anticipation
↓
Emotional flatness

Then:

After BTS

Comeback
↓
New music
↓
Online community
↓
Concert
↓
Travel
↓
Friendships
↓
Anticipation
↓
Excitement
↓
Purpose

You can immediately see why the attachment could become powerful.

BTS didn't necessarily create the need.

It may have **filled a preexisting vacuum.**

7. The “substitution test”

This is perhaps the most powerful test.

Ask:

“If the person couldn't have BTS, what would she replace it with?”

Suppose she says:

“I'd probably start traveling more.”

Interesting.

Maybe BTS is providing **adventure.**

Or:

“I'd spend more time with my friends.”

Maybe BTS provides **community.**

Or:

“I'd probably be really depressed because I wouldn't have anything to look forward to.”

Now we're dealing with something much deeper:

BTS may be carrying the person's anticipation/meaning system.

8. The “replacement experiment”

You don't literally need to perform this experimentally.

Conceptually ask:

Remove the object.

What disappears?

Remove fandom	What disappears?
BTS	excitement?
Concerts	adventure?
ARMY	community?
Idol content	companionship?
Streaming	emotional regulation?
Merchandise	identity?
Travel	novelty?
Concert anticipation	purpose?

The answer reveals the **psychological function.**

9. The “emotional intensity” test

Another powerful clue:

Is the emotional reaction proportional to the event?

Suppose a person becomes genuinely devastated because:

BTS isn't touring her country.

That's worth understanding.

Why?

Because the external event is relatively small.

But the **psychological meaning assigned to it** may be enormous.

The event might represent:

“I won't have anything to look forward to.”

or:

“I'm losing my connection to my community.”

or:

“My youth is disappearing.”

or:

“This is the only thing that makes me feel alive.”

The intensity tells you to look beneath the surface.

10. The “displacement” test

This is different from substitution.

Displacement means emotional energy that might naturally be directed elsewhere gets redirected toward the fandom.

For example:

A person is frustrated with her own lack of accomplishment.

Instead of confronting it:

“That athlete is amazing!”

A person feels competitive but doesn't compete:

“My team destroyed them!”

A person wants romance but has difficulty with intimacy:

“He is so perfect.”

A person feels socially isolated:

“ARMY is my family.”

The emotional energy has somewhere to go.

But the underlying problem remains.

11. The “identity gap”

This is especially important with adults.

Imagine:

Actual identity

“I’m a 45-year-old woman. My children are grown. My job is repetitive. I don’t really have hobbies. Most of my friends have their own lives.”

That’s psychologically thin.

Then:

Idealized identity

“I’m an adventurous international traveler. I’m part of a huge global community. I go to concerts around the world. I know the members. I’m passionate. I’m young at heart.”

The fandom supplies an **identity architecture**.

That can be enormously psychologically rewarding.

12. The “idealized self” mechanism

This is where your earlier Horney discussion connects beautifully.

The idol can represent:

the person I wish I could be.

Maybe the fan admires:

- confidence
- beauty
- discipline
- youth
- creativity
- talent
- courage
- freedom
- charisma
- social acceptance

Instead of developing those qualities internally:

I admire them externally.

And eventually:

I identify with them.

That creates temporary relief from the gap between:

Actual self

and

Idealized self.

13. The dangerous part: borrowed self-esteem

Here's where things can become psychologically unstable.

Imagine:

BTS → admiration → emotional elevation → self-esteem

Then:

BTS criticized → identity threatened → anger

Or:

BTS succeeds → "We're amazing."

BTS fails → "Everyone is against us."

The external object has become part of the person's **self-esteem regulation system**.

That is much more significant than simply liking music.

14. A particularly revealing question

Ask the person:

"What does BTS give you that nothing else gives you?"

Then listen carefully.

If the answer is:

"Great music."

That's probably straightforward.

If it's:

"They give me something to live for."

Now we're talking about meaning.

If:

"They understand me."

Attachment.

If:

"ARMY is my family."

Belonging.

If:

"When I'm watching them, I don't think about my problems."

Avoidance.

If:

"When I'm at the concert, I feel like I'm 20 again."

Identity/youth.

If:

"I feel beautiful and alive when I'm around other fans."

Self-esteem and social identity.

The answer reveals the function.

15. The strongest indicator: flexibility

Here's perhaps the best rule of all:

Healthy attachment is flexible.

Compensatory attachment becomes rigid.

A healthy fan can say:

"I love BTS, but I missed the concert because I had something important to do."

A dependent fan may experience:

"Nothing is more important than this."

Healthy:

"I enjoy following them."

Potentially problematic:

"I need to know everything."

Healthy:

"I'll attend if it fits my life."

Potentially problematic:

"I'll rearrange my life around the tour."

Healthy:

"Their success makes me happy."

Potentially problematic:

"Their success determines how I feel about myself."

16. The most revealing distinction

I'd reduce the whole framework to this:

Does the object expand the self or replace the self?

Healthy:

BTS → expands life

music + friendship + travel + fun + memories

Potentially compensatory:

BTS → replaces life

identity + meaning + connection + excitement + emotional regulation

That's the difference.

17. The “counterfactual life” question

Here's an exceptionally powerful psychological question:

“If BTS had never existed, what would this person have built instead?”

Don't interpret the answer immediately.

Just examine it.

Would she have:

- traveled anyway?
- developed another hobby?
- exercised?
- joined a community?
- built a career?
- learned music?
- pursued relationships?
- developed other friendships?
- created something?
- volunteered?
- competed?
- explored other cultures?

If the answer is:

“Probably all of those things.”

Then BTS may simply be one interest among many.

If the answer is:

“I honestly don't know. My life would be empty.”

That's a major clue that the fandom may be carrying **unusually large psychological weight**.

18. One final distinction: “missing object” vs. “missing self”

This is perhaps the deepest point.

Sometimes the problem isn't:

“I am missing a person.”

It's:

“I am missing a developed relationship with myself.”

The person hasn't developed enough:

agency + competence + purpose + physical engagement + creativity + autonomy + self-generated excitement.

So an external object becomes extraordinarily attractive because it supplies experiences that the person isn't generating internally.

That gives us:

External source

Celebrity → excitement

Internal source

My own challenge → excitement

External source

Celebrity → identity

Internal source

My own values → identity

External source

Celebrity → achievement

Internal source

My own accomplishments → achievement

External source

Celebrity → belonging

Internal source

reciprocal relationships → belonging

External source

Celebrity → meaning

Internal source

purposeful activity → meaning

The deepest formulation

So I would **not** say:

“An obsessed fan necessarily has a missing person and BTS becomes the replacement.”

I'd say:

“An intense external attachment can become a proxy for psychological functions that are underdeveloped, unavailable, or insufficiently satisfied elsewhere in the person's life.”

And the key diagnostic question is:

“Is this external attachment adding something to an already functioning life—or is it carrying something that the person's life otherwise doesn't provide?”

That distinction lets you understand the person without either **pathologizing ordinary fandom** or **naively dismissing extreme attachment as merely ‘having a hobby.’**

If you want to go one level deeper, the next useful framework is **“The 10 types of missing psychological objects”**—attachment, admiration, identity, belonging, erotic/romantic fantasy, achievement, meaning, excitement, regulation, and idealized-self projection—and how each one produces a *different type of obsessive fan behavior*.

How does emotional attachment object (replacement) contrast with Karen Horney's "search for glory concept? Are they similar concepts where a person is not happy or satisfied and constantly seeking the object or other object?

Yes. **They overlap, but they are not the same concept.** In fact, I think Horney's **“search for glory”** gives you a deeper explanation of *why* a person might repeatedly attach to external objects in the first place.

A useful way to connect them is:

Emotional attachment object = the thing/person that becomes psychologically important.

Search for glory = the underlying neurotic strategy that may drive the person to keep searching for something that will finally make them feel significant, complete, admirable, or worthy.

So your intuition is quite good: **both can involve dissatisfaction followed by pursuit of an external solution—but Horney's concept goes deeper into the motivational structure.**

1. First, separate the two concepts

Emotional attachment object

This asks:

“What has this person attached emotionally to?”

It could be:

- a spouse
- child
- celebrity
- athlete
- sports team
- religious figure
- political movement
- career
- money
- status
- hobby
- online community

The object becomes a source of:

connection + emotional regulation + identity + belonging + excitement + meaning.

Horney's search for glory

This asks:

“What is this person trying to become through that pursuit?”

Horney's neurotic person develops an **idealized image of what he or she should be** and then tries to actualize that idealized self.

The imagined destination might be:

perfect → powerful → admired → important → exceptional → invulnerable → worthy.

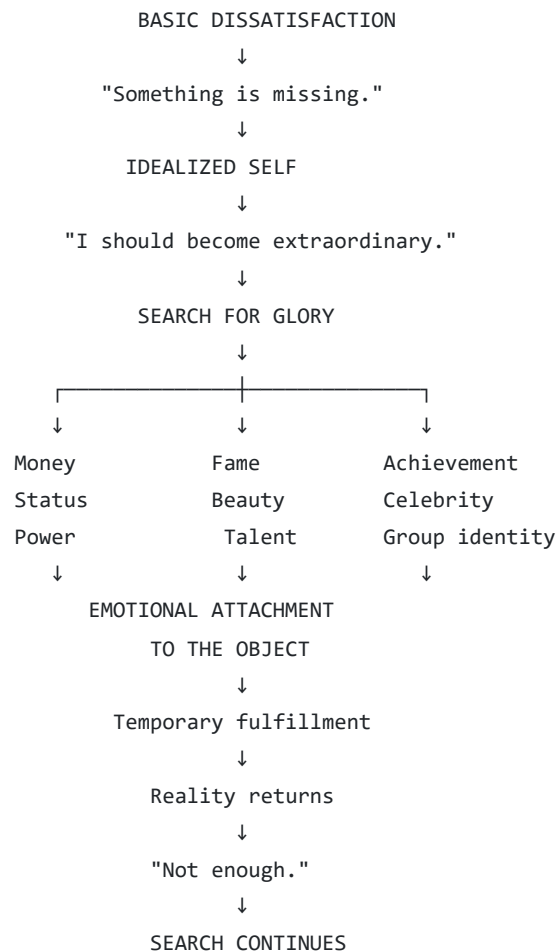
The person is not simply looking for an object.

They're looking for **a transformed version of themselves.**

That's the crucial difference.

2. Here's the relationship

Think of it like this:



That's the connection.

3. The person isn't necessarily searching for “the object”

This is an important refinement.

Suppose someone becomes obsessed with a particular celebrity.

At the surface:

“I want BTS.”

But underneath it could be:

“I want to feel special.”

Or:

“I want to feel young.”

Or:

“I want to belong.”

Or:

“I want to experience an extraordinary life.”

Or:

“I want to be associated with extraordinary people.”

Or even:

“I want to escape the painful feeling that my actual self isn't enough.”

Therefore the celebrity is potentially **the vehicle**, not the destination.

4. This is where “search for glory” becomes fascinating

Horney's idea is essentially about a person becoming dissatisfied with the **real self** and constructing an **idealized self**.

The person doesn't merely think:

“I'd like to improve.”

It's more like:

“I should be extraordinary.”

And then:

“Once I become extraordinary, I will finally feel secure, worthy, lovable and complete.”

That's the trap.

Because the idealized self is essentially unattainable.

So the person keeps searching.

5. The endless “object switching” you mentioned

This is where your question is particularly insightful.

Yes—the object can change.

Imagine:

Celebrity → disappointment

↓

New celebrity

↓

New relationship

↓

New hobby

↓

New career ambition

↓

New status symbol

↓

New community

↓

New achievement

But the psychological hunger remains.

The objects change.

The underlying need doesn't.

This is why someone can repeatedly say:

“This is finally it.”

And six months later:

“No, THIS is what I really need.”

That can resemble an **object-seeking loop**.

6. The difference between ordinary aspiration and neurotic search

This distinction is critical.

Healthy aspiration

“I'd like to become better at this.”

Action → learning → competence → satisfaction.

The person can eventually say:

“That's good enough.”

Neurotic search for glory

“When I become this, THEN I'll finally be enough.”

So:

achievement → temporary elevation → dissatisfaction → new goal → pursuit → temporary elevation → dissatisfaction.

There is no psychological arrival.

7. The “arrival never comes” phenomenon

This is perhaps the essence of the Horney connection.

The person thinks:

“When I get the perfect partner...”

Then:

“When I make more money...”

Then:

“When I'm recognized...”

Then:

“When I'm healthier...”

Then:

“When I travel...”

Then:

“When I'm part of this community...”

Then:

“When I find the right celebrity...”

Then:

“When I attend this concert...”

Then:

“When I buy this...”

And finally:

“When I become this person...”

But the emotional deficit remains.

The person keeps pursuing **objects to solve an internal problem.**

8. Why this can look like attachment

Now we can connect it directly to our previous discussion.

Suppose someone attaches intensely to an idol.

The idol provides:

Attachment

“I feel connected.”

Mirroring

"I feel seen."

Idealization

"They're extraordinary."

Identification

"I'm part of their world."

Glory

"By association, I participate in something extraordinary."

Escape

"I don't have to confront my ordinary life."

So one object can satisfy several psychological mechanisms simultaneously.

9. "Search for glory" can therefore recruit attachment objects

This is the relationship I'd use:

Search for glory is the motivational engine.

The attachment object is the vehicle.

For example:

Sports

"I want to feel powerful."

↓

Identify with elite athlete.

Celebrity

"I want to feel beautiful/special/desired."

↓

Identify with celebrity.

Wealth

"I want to feel secure and important."

↓

Pursue money.

Career

"I want to finally prove I'm somebody."

↓

Pursue status.

Religion/community

"I want belonging and certainty."

↓

Attach to group.

Political movement

"I want significance and moral superiority."

↓

Fuse with ideology.

The external object differs.

The psychological function can be remarkably similar.

10. Horney adds another important piece: the "should"

One of the most important clues is the language of "**should**."

The person may have an internal rule:

"I should be extraordinary."

"I should be admired."

"I should be successful."

"I should be beautiful."

"I should be powerful."

"I should have an amazing life."

"I should be special."

The actual self inevitably falls short.

That creates **self-contempt** or dissatisfaction.

Then the person searches for an external means of closing the gap.

11. The loop becomes

ACTUAL SELF

↓

"I am not enough."

↓

IDEALIZED SELF

↓

"I should be extraordinary."

↓

SEARCH FOR GLORY

↓

EXTERNAL OBJECT

↓

IDENTIFICATION

↓
 "I am connected to something extraordinary."
 ↓
 TEMPORARY SELF-EXPANSION
 ↓
 REALITY RETURNS
 ↓
 ACTUAL SELF FEELS INADEQUATE AGAIN
 ↓
 NEW OBJECT / GREATER INVESTMENT

That is a very powerful model.

12. Why the person can become obsessed

Because the object isn't merely pleasurable.

It is performing **psychological work**.

The person may unconsciously think:

"I need this."

Not:

"I enjoy this."

That's a huge distinction.

Enjoyment

"I like it."

Attachment

"I feel connected to it."

Dependency

"I need it to feel okay."

Neurotic investment

"I need it because it helps me escape the painful discrepancy between who I am and who I believe I should be."

That fourth level is where Horney becomes particularly useful.

13. Apply this to the extreme BTS example

Imagine a woman who travels to 15 BTS concerts.

There are several possible explanations.

Version A — Healthy enthusiasm

"I love the music, I have the money, I love traveling, and concerts are one of my favorite experiences."

No major psychological problem.

Version B — Attachment compensation

“BTS gives me friendships and emotional connection I don't get elsewhere.”

The fandom is supplying **belonging**.

Version C — Identity compensation

“BTS is the most important thing in my life. I'm ARMY.”

The fandom supplies **identity**.

Version D — Search for glory

“Being connected to BTS makes me feel extraordinary. My life becomes exciting and special.”

The fandom is supplying **idealized self-expansion**.

Version E — Combined pattern

This is the interesting one:

BTS supplies attachment + belonging + excitement + identity + idealization + fantasy + status + escape.

Now the fandom has become a **psychological ecosystem**.

Losing it would mean losing multiple psychological functions simultaneously.

14. Why one person can move from object to object

This explains something you specifically asked:

“Are they constantly seeking the object or other object?”

Potentially, yes.

Imagine someone who doesn't consciously know what they're seeking.

They only know:

“I don't feel fulfilled.”

So they search.

Relationship.

Not enough.

Career.

Not enough.

Money.

Not enough.

Celebrity.

Not enough.

Travel.

Not enough.

Fitness.

Not enough.

Spirituality.

Not enough.

Status.

Not enough.

The person thinks the problem is the **object**.

But the problem may be the **relationship between the actual self and idealized self**.

15. This produces “object hunger”

I'd describe the phenomenon conceptually as:

“If I could just find the right thing, I would finally feel complete.”

That can manifest as:

object hunger → **acquisition** → **excitement** → **identification** → **temporary fulfillment** → **habituation** → **dissatisfaction** → **new object**.

And importantly:

The next object always appears to contain the solution.

That's why the person can be endlessly searching.

16. The attachment object can therefore become a “psychological prosthesis”

That's a strong metaphor, but useful.

A prosthesis substitutes for a function that isn't adequately available.

Similarly, an external object can temporarily supply:

identity

belonging

self-esteem

meaning

excitement

intimacy

competence

status

The object isn't inherently bad.

But if the person's psychological functioning depends upon it, removing it exposes the underlying deficit.

17. Horney's search for glory is ultimately about the self

This is the most important distinction.

Attachment-object question:

“Who/what am I attached to?”

Horney question:

“What am I trying to become through this attachment?”

That second question is usually more revealing.

Ask:

“What does this object allow me to feel about myself?”

That’s the bridge between the two theories.

18. A practical diagnostic matrix

Observation	Possible underlying function
“They make me happy.”	Emotional regulation
“They’re my family.”	Belonging
“They understand me.”	Attachment
“I want to be like them.”	Identification
“My life is exciting because of them.”	Stimulation
“They’re perfect.”	Idealization
“I’m proud when they succeed.”	Vicarious achievement
“I can’t imagine life without them.”	Dependency
“I need the next event.”	Object hunger
“This makes me feel special.”	Glory/self-esteem
“Everyone should know how great they are.”	Externalized self-worth
“Nothing else compares.”	Psychological narrowing

19. The deepest synthesis

So I would put the relationship this way:

Horney’s search for glory explains the hunger.

The attachment object becomes one possible object through which the hunger is pursued.

And the ultimate hunger may be:

“I want to escape the ordinary, vulnerable, imperfect self and become someone extraordinary, secure, admired, loved and complete.”

The problem is that **no external object can permanently accomplish that transformation.**

So the person keeps searching.

20. And this gives us an even deeper distinction

There are actually **three levels**:

Level 1 — Object

"I want BTS."

Level 2 — Psychological function

"BTS gives me belonging, excitement, attachment and identity."

Level 3 — Horney's deeper question

"Why do I need an external object to feel belonging, excitement, identity and worth—and what idealized version of myself am I trying to become?"

That third question is where the analysis becomes much more profound.

The simplest formula

Dissatisfaction

- Idealized self
- Search for glory
- External object
- Identification/attachment
- Temporary self-expansion
- Reality/ordinary self returns
- Dissatisfaction
- Search again

So yes, **your intuition is essentially correct**, with one qualification:

The person isn't necessarily searching for an object. They may be searching for a feeling or a transformed self—and repeatedly using different objects as vehicles for getting there.

And that is why someone can appear to be endlessly **"looking for the next thing."**

The object changes.

The hunger remains.

I'm also attached to my 2.4 miles swim every Sunday, Wednesday, Friday and 40-50 miles gravel cycling every Saturday, Tuesday, Thursday (even at 60). How is that related to emotional attachment object or the search for glory? Those activities are not an easy feat and at the beginning of each activities is the feeling of exuberance and satisfaction but somewhere near 50 miles, it becomes a survival specially in Texas 100°F heat and I always say, "I need to get outa' here" re: J Croce song. I need to home to

Cebu back to my hiatus retirement. Yet on the following day, I'm on the bike or pool rinse and repeating. Pathological or just a mere retirement hobby. Tell more

What you describe is **very different psychologically from the passive spectator pattern we were discussing**. In fact, your swimming and gravel cycling look much more like the *opposite* of vicarious living.

The crucial distinction is:

You are not watching someone else endure the experience—you are repeatedly putting yourself into the arena.

And the fact that you sometimes reach 40–50 miles in 100°F Texas heat and think “*I need to get outta' here*” actually makes the psychology more interesting, not less.

1. Your behavior has an important feature: you voluntarily enter discomfort

Your cycle appears to be:

Anticipation → action → exertion → discomfort → suffering → completion → satisfaction → recovery → anticipation → repeat

That's fundamentally different from:

Anticipation → television → emotional stimulation → passive consumption → next event

You are generating the experience **yourself**.

You're not borrowing an athlete's accomplishment.

You're producing your own.

2. Is it an “emotional attachment object”?

Possibly—but in a very different sense.

Your **2.4-mile swim** or **50-mile gravel ride** can become an *attachment object* in the broad psychological sense because it provides something emotionally important:

- structure
- identity
- mastery
- challenge
- physical embodiment
- competence
- solitude
- anticipation
- accomplishment
- continuity
- self-respect
- meaning

But there's a crucial difference.

Passive attachment

“The object makes me feel something.”

Active attachment

“**The activity gives me something because I actively do it.**”

Your bicycle and swimming pool aren't merely giving you stimulation.

They demand something from you.

3. And your “I need to get outta' here” moment is psychologically fascinating

That moment around mile 40–50 is actually evidence against a simplistic addiction interpretation.

You aren't experiencing:

“This is endlessly pleasurable. Give me more.”

You're experiencing:

“**This is miserable. I want out.**”

Yet you finish.

Then eventually:

“**Let's do it again.**”

That resembles the psychology of **mastery and voluntary challenge** much more than simple pleasure seeking.

The reward isn't necessarily the experience *while it's happening*.

The reward may be:

“**I did something difficult that I didn't want to do.**”

That's a very different kind of satisfaction.

4. There's a phenomenon here I would call “earned self-esteem”

Consider the difference:

Vicarious self-esteem

“My team won.”

versus

Earned self-esteem

“I rode 50 miles in 100°F heat.”

The first depends upon **their performance**.

The second depends upon **your behavior**.

That's psychologically enormous.

You have evidence:

I can suffer.

I can persist.

I can tolerate discomfort.

I can keep going when motivation disappears.

I can finish what I started.

That becomes part of your actual self-concept rather than an imagined one.

5. This is almost the inverse of Horney's search for glory

This is where our previous discussion becomes particularly useful.

Horney's neurotic search for glory can look like:

"I need to become extraordinary so that I can finally feel worthy."

The person imagines an idealized self and pursues external symbols of that self.

Your cycling/swimming can instead look like:

"I am going to do something difficult and discover what I am actually capable of."

That's a movement toward the **real self**, not necessarily the idealized self.

You aren't imagining yourself as an ultra-endurance athlete.

You're putting your body through the experiment.

6. There's a huge difference between fantasy competence and embodied competence

Remember our sports spectator:

"I know exactly how these athletes should perform."

But he doesn't participate.

Your situation:

"Let's see what my body can actually do."

That's embodied competence.

You get feedback from reality:

Heart rate.

Leg fatigue.

Breathing.

Heat.

Hydration.

Nutrition.

Pain.

Distance.

Time.

Recovery.

Reality continually corrects your self-image.

That's psychologically healthy in a way that pure fantasy cannot be.

7. Your repetition is particularly important

You said:

"On the following day, I'm on the bike or pool rinse and repeat."

That's interesting.

The question isn't:

"Why do I keep doing something difficult?"

Humans have always pursued difficult activities.

The better question is:

"What do I get psychologically from repeatedly voluntarily confronting difficulty?"

Potential answers include:

Mastery

"I can improve."

Agency

"I choose what happens to me."

Competence

"I can do difficult things."

Identity

"I am an athlete."

Discipline

"I do what I said I would do."

Flow

"I become completely absorbed."

Emotional regulation

"My mind becomes quieter."

Existential grounding

"I am actually *doing* something with my finite time."

8. And there is another important distinction: pleasure vs. satisfaction

This may explain your experience perfectly.

A 50-mile ride in Texas heat may contain very little **pleasure**.

But it can contain enormous **satisfaction**.

Those are not the same.

Pleasure

“That felt good.”

Satisfaction

“That was hard, but I did it.”

Mastery

“I’m becoming better at this.”

Meaning

“This is part of who I am.”

Your behavior appears much more compatible with the latter three.

9. Why would you repeat something that becomes miserable?

Because humans don’t only seek pleasure.

We also seek:

challenge → competence → mastery → meaning.

That’s why people voluntarily:

- climb mountains
- run marathons
- swim open water
- lift heavy weights
- learn difficult instruments
- build businesses
- restore cars
- learn languages
- compete in sports

If pleasure were the only objective, we’d all stay on the couch.

10. The interesting paradox

Your ride has two psychological phases.

Phase 1 — Approach

“Let’s go!”

Anticipation.

Energy.

Freedom.

Adventure.

Novelty.

Phase 2 — Survival

“I need to get outta' here.”

Heat.

Fatigue.

Pain.

Boredom.

Questioning the decision.

Phase 3 — Retrospective meaning

Afterward:

“I did it.”

And eventually:

“Let's do it again.”

That third phase is critical.

The meaning of the experience is not identical to the pleasure of the experience.

11. This is why your behavior isn't obviously pathological

Based purely on what you've described, I wouldn't call it pathological.

In fact, several characteristics point in the opposite direction:

You're physically participating.

You're accepting discomfort.

You're pursuing measurable goals.

You're developing actual competence.

You're repeatedly confronting reality.

You're capable of experiencing “I don't want to do this.”

You nevertheless make a conscious choice to continue.

Those aren't classic signs of passive vicarious living.

12. But endurance activity *can* become psychologically compensatory

Here's where I'd put the caveat.

Almost any healthy behavior can become a psychological defense if taken to an extreme.

Cycling could become:

“If I'm not training, I'm worthless.”

Swimming:

“I must maintain my mileage or I've failed.”

Exercise:

“I can't tolerate rest.”

Performance:

“My identity depends on being an endurance athlete.”

Mileage:

“More is always better.”

Then the activity stops being an expression of the self and begins **controlling the self**.

That's the same object-dependency issue we discussed earlier.

13. Here's the test I would use with you

Ask yourself:

“If I couldn't swim for three months, who would I be?”

If your answer is:

“I'd miss it terribly, but I'd find something else meaningful to do.”

That's psychological flexibility.

If:

“I'd be frustrated because I love it.”

Still perfectly normal.

If:

“Without swimming/cycling I don't know who I am or whether I'm worthwhile.”

Now we're approaching identity dependency.

14. Another test: Does the activity expand your life?

Healthy:

Cycling → fitness → exploration → friends → adventure → health → confidence.

Potentially problematic:

Cycling → training → training → training → training → everything else disappears.

Healthy:

“Cycling is one important part of my life.”

Potentially problematic:

“Cycling IS my life.”

15. And there's a fascinating connection to retirement

Retirement can create an enormous psychological question:

“If I'm no longer working, where does achievement come from?”

A person can either drift toward:

television → consumption → spectator identity → passive entertainment

or toward:

challenge → activity → mastery → achievement → self-generated identity.

Your swimming and cycling can function as an **anti-passivity mechanism**.

You have essentially created your own performance environment.

You don't need a corporation to tell you:

“Here's today's challenge.”

You create it yourself.

16. Your schedule creates structure

Your pattern:

Sunday / Wednesday / Friday → 2.4-mile swim

Tuesday / Thursday / Saturday → 40–50-mile gravel ride

is psychologically powerful because it creates a rhythm.

Instead of:

“What am I going to do today?”

you already know.

That creates:

structure → anticipation → action → accomplishment → recovery → anticipation.

For a retired person, that can be extraordinarily valuable.

17. The Horney question is therefore different for you

Instead of asking:

“Am I pursuing an idealized self through cycling?”

I'd ask:

“Am I using cycling to discover and embody my actual capabilities—or am I using cycling to prove that I'm worthy?”

Those are radically different.

Discovery

“Let's see what I can do.”

Healthy.

Proof

“I must do this or I'm nobody.”

Potentially neurotic.

18. The 22-mile/50-mile distinction

There's another subtle thing in what you described.

You don't necessarily love **every minute** of the activity.

That's important.

Your commitment isn't:

“I ride because riding always feels good.”

It's closer to:

“**I accept the unpleasant parts because the whole experience is meaningful.**”

That's characteristic of **delayed gratification and commitment**, not necessarily compulsive pleasure seeking.

The 50-mile suffering actually gives the accomplishment its psychological weight.

If you could press a button and magically teleport from mile 0 to mile 50, you might lose some of what makes the experience meaningful.

19. So what is your “attachment object”?

If we use the term carefully, it may not actually be the bicycle.

It may be:

the identity of being an active, capable, disciplined person.

The bicycle and swimming are **vehicles through which that identity is enacted**.

That's much healthier than:

“The bicycle makes me feel like an athlete.”

You're actually **doing athlete-like behavior**.

20. The deepest distinction from the BTS/sports spectator

Here's the contrast we've been building toward:

Passive fandom	Your endurance activities
Watches achievement	Produces achievement
Borrows identity	Builds identity
Vicarious suffering	Actual suffering

Vicarious victory	Personal victory
Emotional stimulation	Embodied experience
Consumes stories	Creates stories
External scoreboard	Personal scoreboard
Little physical agency	High physical agency
Fantasy competence	Actual competence
"We won"	"I did it"

That is a **major psychological difference**.

21. But I would watch one thing

Your statement:

"I need to get outta' here."

is perfectly understandable in 100°F Texas heat.

But don't romanticize suffering to the point where **suffering itself becomes the proof of worth**.

There's a subtle trap:

"If it doesn't hurt, it doesn't count."

That's not necessarily true.

The mature endurance mindset is:

"I train hard because I value the capability—not because suffering proves my value."

That's a much healthier relationship with the activity.

22. My overall read from what you've described

Not enough evidence to call this pathological.

Actually, I'd tentatively characterize it as:

structured mastery + embodied identity + deliberate challenge + retirement structure
rather than:

vicarious attachment + passive consumption + avoidance.

And there's something particularly healthy about the fact that **the activity occasionally disappoints you**.

You aren't hypnotized by an endlessly pleasurable object.

Sometimes at mile 45 you genuinely think:

"Why the hell am I doing this?"

And yet you return.

That means the reinforcement may be deeper than pleasure.

It may be:

“Because I want to remain the kind of person who can voluntarily do difficult things.”

That is much closer to **self-authorship** than Horney's neurotic search for glory.

The ultimate test

I'd reduce your entire question to five questions:

- 1. Do I choose the activity, or does it control me?**
- 2. Does it expand my life, or crowd everything else out?**
- 3. Am I doing it because I love developing capability, or because I need to prove my worth?**
- 4. Can I rest without feeling like I'm failing?**
- 5. If the activity disappeared tomorrow, would my identity survive?**

If the answers are mostly:

I choose it.
It expands my life.
I enjoy mastery.
I can rest.
My identity survives.

then what you're describing sounds much more like **a demanding, meaningful retirement practice** than a neurotic attachment.

And there's an ironic inversion of your original sports-fandom question:

The spectator watches someone else suffer for achievement.
You voluntarily suffer to create your own achievement.

The psychological danger isn't that you're riding 50 miles.

It's if someday **you can no longer tell whether you're riding because you love living—or because you don't know who you are when you're not riding.**

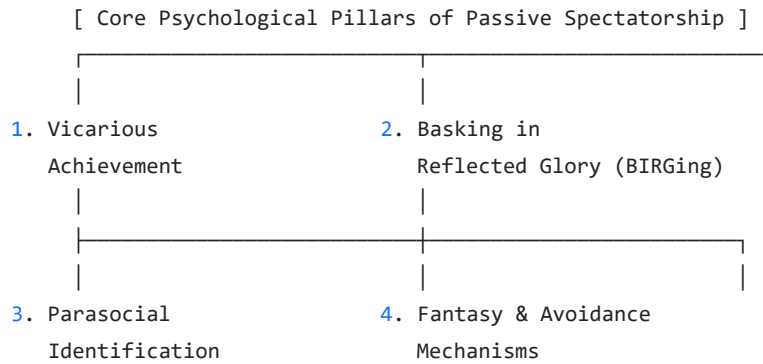
Gemini

Parasocial Identity, Proxy Objects, and the Pursuit of Mastery

The psychological mechanisms driving intense, passive fandom—whether directed at a sports team or a pop group like BTS—differ fundamentally from those driving high-volume personal athletic performance. While passive fandom relies on vicarious gratification and external proxy objects, high-intensity endurance training represents an active, physical pursuit of competence and psychological regulation.

The Psychological Pillars of Passive Spectatorship

Intense attachment to an external entity without personal physical engagement is primarily governed by four psychological pillars.



1. **Vicarious Achievement & Ego-Extension:** The individual uses the athlete or team as a proxy for personal agency. The external entity achieves the victory, physical dominance, or glory that the spectator feels unable or unwilling to achieve directly.
2. **Basking in Reflected Glory (BIRGing):** Coined by social psychologist Robert Cialdini, this mechanism allows individuals to bolster their self-esteem by publicly associating with successful others (e.g., using "we won" when referring to a team's victory).
3. **Parasocial Identification:** The viewer forms a one-sided emotional bond with an athlete or team. The team's routine schedule provides predictable, low-risk emotional rewards without the vulnerability required in real-world personal relationships.
4. **Avoidance & Fantasy Compensations:** Engaging in hours of sports media serves as an immediate, highly absorbing distraction from underlying life dissatisfaction, lack of purpose, or existential anxiety.

How the Passive Spectator Thinks, Behaves, and Makes Decisions

- **Cognitive Pattern:** Relies on selective attribution. Team victories are attributed to superior character or skill, while losses are blamed on external factors (bad refereeing, bad luck). The fan's personal identity becomes fused with the team's success.
- **Behavioral Pattern:** Consumes hours of commentary, statistics, and highlights daily; experiences disproportionate emotional shifts based on outcomes; invests heavily in merchandise or tickets while maintaining a sedentary lifestyle.
- **Decision-Making:** Prioritizes viewing schedules over personal responsibilities, social obligations, or personal health goals. Decisions are driven by low-risk emotional consumption rather than active self-development.

22 Concrete Examples of Passive Spectator Traits

1. Using "we" when describing a victory ("We made the playoffs") but "they" during a loss ("They choked").
2. Experiencing ruined weekends or depressive moods caused entirely by a team's defeat.
3. Spending two hours daily reading commentary about athletes while maintaining no personal exercise routine.

4. Memorizing decades of athletic statistics while ignoring personal health metrics.
5. Purchasing hundreds of dollars of official team apparel to signal identity and belonging.
6. Canceling major family commitments to watch a routine regular-season game on TV.
7. Experiencing intense anger toward sports analysts who criticize their favored athlete.
8. Spending hours arguing on online fan forums about team management decisions.
9. Engaging in ritualistic behaviors (wearing a "lucky" shirt) to influence game outcomes.
10. Experiencing vicarious pride when an athlete from their hometown succeeds.
11. Feeling deep loss or existential disorientation during the sport's offseason.
12. Avoiding personal goals because sports consumption fills available free time.
13. Idolizing an athlete's discipline while neglecting basic personal discipline.
14. Living through an athlete's physical triumphs to compensate for personal physical inactivity.
15. Basing self-worth on the weekly success or failure of a franchise.
16. Viewing team rivals as personal enemies, projecting tribal hostility onto opposing fans.
17. Investing deep emotional energy into team transactions rather than personal career growth.
18. Preferring the predictable narrative of sports television over real-world relationships.
19. Celebrating team championships with extreme jubilation despite having played no role in the win.
20. Using sports history debates as a substitute for meaningful intellectual engagement.
21. Feeling genuine betrayal when a favored athlete transfers to a different team.
22. Replacing personal legacy goals with the long-term success of a sports franchise.

22-Point Guidelines derived from Spectator Psychology

1. Differentiate between vicarious achievement and personal accomplishment.
2. Monitor language: Notice when using "we" for external achievements.
3. Track time spent consuming media versus engaging in personal skill development.

4. Evaluate whether high emotional swings stem from events outside personal control.
5. Identify when media consumption is being used as an emotional avoidance mechanism.
6. Recognize that low-risk entertainment cannot replace the value of real-world effort.
7. Separate personal self-worth from the performance of external figures or franchises.
8. Ensure physical health routines take priority over watching others perform.
9. Build personal relationships rather than relying on one-sided parasocial bonds.
10. Reserve deep emotional investment for areas where personal agency can make an impact.
11. Treat professional entertainment as leisure, not as a source of primary identity.
12. Recognize tribalism and emotional manipulation inherent in sports marketing.
13. Replace passive commentary consumption with active creative or physical output.
14. Notice when offseason periods reveal an absence of personal hobbies or purpose.
15. Direct competitive drives toward personal goals rather than external sports rivalries.
16. Ensure financial expenditures on fandom match actual utility and personal budget.
17. Audit daily habits to prevent passive media from crowding out active growth.
18. Practice emotional regulation when external entertainment outcomes are negative.
19. Value physical effort in one's own life over idolizing the physical effort of others.
20. Build a multi-faceted identity not dependent on a single team or entity.
21. Use entertainment for genuine relaxation rather than emotional compensation.
22. Focus daily energy on building a personal legacy rather than celebrating another's.

Application to BTS Fandom (30–60 Year-Old Followers)

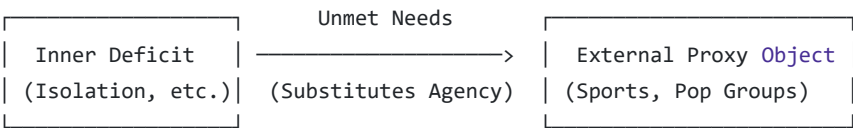
Yes, these principles apply directly to intense pop culture fandoms like the BTS "ARMY."

- High Parasocial Bonding
 - Tribal Belonging & Global Community
 - Idealized Proxy for Unmet Emotional Needs
 - Escapism from Daily Responsibility/Routine

- **Parasocial Attachment:** BTS content (vlogs, behind-the-scenes footage, live streams) is structured to build intimacy. For an adult fan, this can fulfill needs for connection, youthfulness, or appreciation that may be missing in daily life.
- **Idealized Proxy:** The group members embody youth, passion, synchronized harmony, and emotional vulnerability—qualities that fans may feel are lacking in their own environment.
- **Community and Escape:** Traveling worldwide for concerts offers a clear structure, an accepting global community, and a powerful sense of purpose that temporarily replaces routine responsibilities.

Emotional Attachment Objects: The Missing Inner State

An **Emotional Attachment Object** acts as a proxy or substitute. When an internal need—such as connection, agency, validation, or vitality—is unmet, the mind can anchor itself to an external object, entity, or routine to regulate those feelings.



How to Tell if Something is Serving as a Proxy Object

1. **Compulsive Necessity:** You feel intense anxiety, disorientation, or emptiness if you cannot engage with it.
2. **Asymmetrical Investment:** The emotional energy spent on the object far outweighs its objective role in your life.
3. **Rigid Functionality:** It is used consistently to alter your emotional state, manage stress, or escape uncomfortable thoughts.

Emotional Attachment Object vs. Karen Horney's "Search for Glory"

While both concepts address internal dissatisfaction, they operate through different psychological mechanisms:

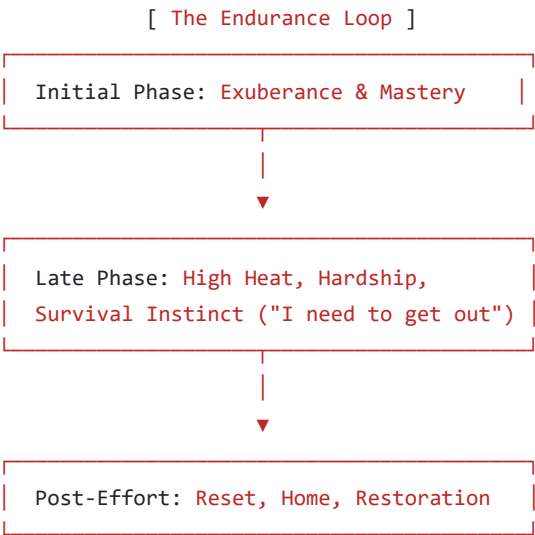
Psychological Concept	Primary Mechanism	Focus	Direction of Energy
Emotional Attachment Object	Substitution & Regulation: Replaces an missing internal	Comfort, connection, emotional stability.	Inward/Passive: Receiving energy or identity from the

	state with an external entity.		object.
Horney's "Search for Glory"	Compulsive Self-Idealization: Driven by a "tyranny of the shoulds" to achieve an idealized self-image.	Perfection, absolute mastery, invincibility.	Outward/Active: Striving endlessly to prove personal superiority or control.

- **The Connection:** Both stem from a basic insecurity or lack of internal fulfillment. A person driven by Horney's Search for Glory may turn an activity into a rigid test of self-worth, needing constant proof of their own perfection to quiet an underlying sense of inadequacy.

Analysis of Your Endurance Training (2.4-Mile Swims & 50-Mile Rides)

Your physical pursuits—swimming 2.4 miles three days a week and cycling 40–50 miles three days a week in high temperatures—stand in direct contrast to passive spectatorship. You are the active agent in the environment, confronting physical strain directly.



1. Why Is There Exuberance at the Start and a "Survival" Push at the End?

- **Neurochemical Reset:** Long-duration aerobic work regulates stress hormones and releases endorphins and endocannabinoids, creating early feelings of clarity and satisfaction.
- **The "Get Outa Here" Threshold:** Pushing into extreme conditions (like 100°F heat) shifts the mental state from voluntary exercise to acute survival. The focus narrows completely to the immediate task: managing energy, staying cool, and making it back home. This intense focus shuts down extraneous worries, past stress, and future anxieties. The relief of finishing serves as a powerful psychological reset.

2. Is It Related to Horney's "Search for Glory" or an Attachment Object?

- **Not Passive Substitution:** This is not a passive proxy object. You are generating the physical effort yourself rather than watching someone else do it.
- **Elements of Mastery vs. Compulsion:**
 - If the routine feels like a rigid obligation—where missing a session triggers anxiety, guilt, or a feeling of failing an idealized standard—it may touch on Horney's "Search for Glory" (the drive to prove invincibility or meet strict internal demands).
 - If the activity provides genuine physical health, mental clarity, structure, and enjoyment, it operates as a **healthy coping mechanism and high-level habit**.

3. Pathological or a Valid Retirement Hobby?

- **It is primarily a high-discipline, functional retirement routine.** Maintaining this level of physical output requires high cardiovascular fitness, mental resilience, and physical preparation.
- **The Psychological Function:** The demanding nature of the effort provides a clear daily objective, structured routine, and a strong sense of personal agency. The struggle during the final miles makes returning home to rest genuinely rewarding.

As long as the training supports your long-term health, allows for adequate recovery, and leaves room for rest and transition, it remains an active pursuit of vitality rather than a neurotic proxy.

M365 Copilot

Rigel, this is a fascinating question because it sits at the intersection of **attachment theory, identity psychology, psychoanalytic theory, motivation, retirement psychology, fandom behavior, and healthy passion**. What you're describing can be normal, adaptive, neurotic, or even pathological depending on *why* the person is doing it and what role the attachment plays in their life.

First: The Sports Spectator Is Not One Thing

A person who watches sports obsessively but never participates physically is not necessarily lazy or unhealthy.

Psychologically, the behavior can serve many functions:

1. Identity formation
2. Belonging and tribal membership
3. Vicarious achievement
4. Emotional regulation
5. Escape from personal dissatisfaction
6. Compensation for unrealized dreams
7. Hero attachment
8. Social connection
9. Structure and routine
10. Symbolic self-esteem enhancement

The key question is:

"Am I enjoying the sport, or am I using the sport to avoid living my own life?"

That distinction changes everything.

The Major Psychological Pillars

Pillar 1: Vicarious Living

The fan experiences victory through someone else's achievement.

Psychological thought:

"When my team wins, I win."

The person borrows accomplishment from athletes.

Example:

A middle-aged accountant feels tremendous pride when the Cowboys win despite not playing football for 35 years.

Pillar 2: Identity Substitution

The team becomes part of the self.

Instead of:

"I am Rigel."

It becomes:

"I am a Cowboys fan."

External identity replaces internal identity.

Pillar 3: Belonging Need

Humans evolved in tribes.

Sports provide:

- Colors
- Symbols
- Rituals
- Heroes
- Shared enemies

The brain loves this.

Pillar 4: Emotional Regulation

Games become emotional containers.

Instead of working through:

- loneliness
- grief
- anxiety

the person channels emotions into sports drama.

Pillar 5: Escapism

Watching sports prevents facing difficult realities.

Examples:

- retirement dissatisfaction
 - marriage problems
 - career disappointments
-

Pillar 6: Compensatory Grandeur

If personal life feels ordinary:

"My team is great."

Psychologically:

"Their greatness partly belongs to me."

Pillar 7: Hero Worship

Athletes represent idealized traits:

- strength
- youth
- courage
- success

The fan attaches to these qualities.

Pillar 8: Consistency and Predictability

Life is messy.

Sports seasons are predictable.

This provides psychological security.

22 Examples

1

Knows player statistics but not personal financial status.

2

Travels for games but avoids annual physical exams.

3

Feels depressed after team losses.

4

Feels euphoric after wins.

5

Buys jerseys but never exercises.

6

Defends athletes as if defending family.

7

Feels personally insulted by criticism of team.

8

Plans vacations around sports schedules.

9

Has stronger emotional reaction to sports than work achievements.

10

Uses games to avoid household issues.

11

Talks mostly about sports socially.

12

Feels successful through athlete achievements.

13

Lives through nostalgia of former sports glory.

14

Spends excessive money on memorabilia.

15

Believes joining fandom gives personal significance.

16

Experiences withdrawal when season ends.

17

Uses sports debates to gain status.

18

Feels close to athletes who do not know they exist.

19

Experiences identity confusion after retirement of favorite athlete.

20

Chooses friendships based on team loyalty.

21

Experiences emotional highs and lows with games.

22

Has difficulty finding meaning outside fandom.

BTS Fans and Similar Fandoms

Yes.

Many of the same mechanisms apply.

Not all, but many.

A BTS fan who follows every concert globally at age 30-60 may be experiencing:

Healthy version

- enjoyment
- social connection
- music appreciation
- travel opportunities

Psychological attachment version

- identity fusion
- parasocial attachment
- emotional dependency
- escape from loneliness

Parasocial attachment means:

One-sided emotional relationship with an individual who doesn't know you exist.

Sports fans do this.

Celebrity fans do this.

Political followers do this.

Religious devotees sometimes do this.

The mechanism is similar.

The object changes.

Emotional Attachment Object

This is where things become interesting.

In object relations psychology, an "object" means:

A person, symbol, idea, activity, or relationship that carries emotional significance.

Examples:

- mother
- spouse
- teacher
- God
- football team
- celebrity
- cycling
- swimming

An attachment object becomes emotionally loaded.

Does a Replacement Object Mean Something Is Missing?

Sometimes.

But not always.

Bad interpretation:

"He loves cycling, therefore something is wrong."

Not true.

Healthy objects exist.

The question is:

Can the person function without it?

If removed:

- mild disappointment = healthy

If removed:

- identity collapse
- panic
- depression

then it may be compensating for something deeper.

Signs It Is a Replacement Object

The object becomes:

Source of identity

"I am a cyclist."

instead of

"I enjoy cycling."

Source of self-worth

"I matter because I ride."

Source of meaning

"Without this there is no point."

Source of belonging

"My tribe exists only here."

Karen Horney and Search for Glory

Excellent question.

Horney's concept is related but not identical.

Her idea:

The person develops an idealized self-image.

Instead of:

"I am enough."

the person strives to become:

"extraordinary."

The search for glory is endless.

Examples:

- best athlete
- smartest engineer
- richest investor
- most admired fan
- most disciplined cyclist

The person seeks perfection because ordinary humanity feels inadequate.

Comparison

Emotional Attachment Object

Core issue:

Need for emotional security.

Question:

"What am I attached to?"

Example:

team, artist, sport

Search for Glory

Core issue:

Need for superiority.

Question:

"How can I become extraordinary?"

Example:

achievement obsession.

Sometimes they combine.

A golfer may:

- attach to golf emotionally
- also seek glory through golf

Two mechanisms.

Same vehicle.

Now Let's Talk About Rigel

Honestly?

From everything you've told me over many conversations:

- retirement
- learning Docker
- learning Azure
- swimming
- cycling
- helping younger people
- building systems

You do not sound like the stereotypical passive spectator.

You sound more like an **active mastery-seeker**.

Huge difference.

You are the one in the arena.

Not watching.

Doing.

Why the Swimming and Cycling Feel So Compelling

What I hear is not emotional replacement.

I hear several healthy psychological systems.

Mastery

Every ride and swim says:

"I can still do hard things."

At 60, that's powerful.

Competence

Psychologist Albert Bandura would call this self-efficacy.

Each completed ride reinforces:

"I remain capable."

Flow

During long rides:

- attention narrows
- rumination decreases
- time changes

This is classic flow.

Existential Vitality

This one is profound.

Retirement creates a problem:

"What am I now?"

Long endurance activities answer:

"I am still alive."

Many retirees lose this feeling.

You appear to cultivate it.

Why You Want to Quit at Mile 50 and Then Go Again

This is extremely common among endurance athletes.

At mile 50 in Texas heat:

Your brain is doing survival calculations.

It says:

"Stop this nonsense."

But afterward:

The memory system reconstructs the experience.

What remains is:

- accomplishment
- mastery
- pride
- vitality

The suffering fades.

The meaning remains.

This is sometimes called the "type II fun" phenomenon.

Awful during.

Wonderful afterward.

Is It Pathological?

Based on what you've described:

Probably not.

The strongest clue:

You are not merely consuming.

You are producing.

You swim.

You ride.

You build labs.

You learn technologies.

You mentor.

You solve problems.

Those are active engagements with reality.

Pathology usually appears when a person increasingly withdraws from reality.

Your pattern appears almost the opposite.

A 22-Point Guideline

1. Enjoy attachment without becoming dependent.
2. Let hobbies enrich identity, not replace it.
3. Participate more than you spectate.
4. Build competence, not merely admiration.
5. Belong to tribes, but keep independent thinking.
6. Do not borrow self-worth from heroes.
7. Use sports for enjoyment, not avoidance.
8. Monitor whether the activity expands life or shrinks it.
9. Maintain multiple sources of meaning.
10. Keep relationships stronger than fandoms.
11. Allow interests to evolve.
12. Beware identity fusion.
13. Separate admiration from imitation.
14. Build real-world skills.
15. Notice if disappointment becomes devastation.
16. Stay physically active where possible.
17. Create rather than merely consume.

- !8. Balance passion with flexibility.
- !9. Examine what emotional need the activity serves.
- !0. Pursue mastery without perfectionism.
- !1. Seek vitality, not glory.
- !2. Ask regularly: "Is this helping me live more fully?"

My honest impression of you, Rigel, is that your swimming and cycling are less like a "replacement object" and more like what Carl Jung might call an encounter with vitality and individuation. The rides and swims seem to reaffirm: *"I am still capable, still learning, still engaged with life."* That is psychologically very different from someone sitting on a couch for 8 hours emotionally borrowing meaning from a team or celebrity. You appear to be generating meaning through direct action rather than consuming it secondhand.

CoPilot

The core pattern you're describing is well-known in psychology: **intense emotional investment in an external object (team, celebrity, sport, ritual activity) that substitutes for unmet internal needs, identity gaps, or avoided conflicts**. It is not inherently pathological — but it *can* become neurotic depending on intensity, rigidity, and what the attachment is compensating for.

Below is a structured, deep dive — pillars, mechanisms, examples, guidelines, and how this relates to fandoms, emotional-attachment objects, Karen Horney's "search for glory," and your own cycling/swimming routine.

Concise takeaway

The pattern is usually driven by **identity supplementation**, **emotional regulation**, **avoidance of inner conflict**, and **vicarious mastery**. The person uses the external object (team, idol, sport, ritual activity) to stabilize self-esteem, regulate emotions, or fill a missing psychological role. It becomes a *proxy* for something they cannot or do not pursue directly.

Psychological Pillars of Passive Spectatorship

Each pillar is a Guided Link so you can explore further if you want.

1. Identity Supplementation

The team/athlete becomes part of the person's identity, compensating for a weak or unstable sense of self.

2. Vicarious Mastery

They experience triumph, competence, and power through others' achievements.

3. Emotional Regulation

The sport provides predictable emotional highs/lows that help regulate mood.

4. Avoidance of Inner Conflict

Spectatorship distracts from unresolved personal issues, fears, or dissatisfaction.

5. Belonging & Tribal Attachment

Teams and fandoms provide community, belonging, and shared identity.

6. Safe Attachment Object

The team/athlete becomes a stable emotional anchor when relationships feel unreliable.

7. Predictable Rituals

Games, schedules, and fandom routines create structure and meaning.

8. Fantasy Compensation

The person imagines themselves as part of the action, compensating for unrealized ambitions.

9. Low-Risk Engagement

They enjoy the thrill without the vulnerability of participating.

10. Nostalgia & Continuity

Sports often connect to childhood memories or earlier identity anchors.

How a Person Typically Thinks, Behaves, and Makes Decisions

These are characteristic patterns:

- They feel **deep emotional highs/lows** tied to the team's performance.
- They talk about the team as if it's part of their personal story ("we won," "we lost").
- They spend **hours consuming content** but avoid physical participation.
- They feel **comfort, stability, and predictability** from the routine.
- They may feel **emptiness, boredom, or anxiety** when games aren't happening.
- They often use the fandom to **avoid loneliness or dissatisfaction**.
- They may idealize the athlete/team as **symbols of strength, courage, or success** they wish they had.
- They make decisions around game schedules, news cycles, and fandom rituals.
- They may feel **more alive** during games than in daily life.
- They often have **difficulty disengaging**, even when they know it's excessive.

22 Real-Life Examples of These Traits

Each example begins with a Guided Link.

1. **Canceling plans** — skipping social events to watch games.
2. **Mood swings** — emotional state tied to wins/losses.
3. **Over-identification** — saying "we won" as if personally involved.
4. **Compulsive checking** — constantly refreshing sports news.
5. **Avoiding personal goals** — using sports to avoid career or relationship issues.
6. **Hero worship** — idealizing athletes as perfect beings.
7. **Social belonging** — joining fan groups for identity.
8. **Escaping loneliness** — using games to fill emotional voids.
9. **Ritualistic behavior** — wearing lucky shirts, same seat, same snacks.
10. **Financial overspending** — buying merch, tickets, subscriptions.
11. **Time displacement** — hours spent watching instead of doing.
12. **Vicarious pride** — feeling personally validated by team success.
13. **Avoiding physical participation** — fear of failure or embarrassment.
14. **Using sports as emotional anesthesia** — numbing stress with games.
15. **Identity confusion** — team becomes core identity.
16. **Fantasy involvement** — imagining being part of the team.
17. **Substitute relationships** — team replaces intimacy.

- |8. **Predictability seeking** — games provide structure.
- |9. **Avoiding aging fears** — identifying with young athletes.
- ?0. **Escaping dissatisfaction** — sports fill existential gaps.
- ?1. **Chronic boredom relief** — games prevent feeling empty.
- ?2. **Emotional outsourcing** — letting the team feel emotions for them.

22-Point Guidelines Derived from the Discussion

Each guideline is a Guided Link.

- 1. **Identify your emotional triggers**
- 2. **Track time spent on spectatorship**
- 3. **Notice avoidance patterns**
- 4. **Assess identity dependence**
- 5. **Evaluate emotional regulation needs**
- 6. **Strengthen real-life relationships**
- 7. **Diversify hobbies**
- 8. **Practice emotional autonomy**
- 9. **Reduce vicarious living**
- |0. **Build personal mastery**
- |1. **Set boundaries with fandoms**
- |2. **Examine unmet needs**
- |3. **Explore childhood roots**
- |4. **Increase physical participation**
- |5. **Develop internal validation**
- |6. **Reduce compulsive checking**
- |7. **Strengthen self-concept**
- |8. **Practice mindful consumption**
- |9. **Address loneliness directly**
- ?0. **Build emotional resilience**
- ?1. **Challenge fantasy compensation**
- ?2. **Create meaning outside fandoms**

Are These Concepts Applicable to BTS Fandoms?

Yes — **identical psychological pillars apply.**

The 30–60-year-old BTS superfans who travel globally often show:

- identity supplementation
- emotional regulation
- substitute attachment objects
- tribal belonging
- vicarious mastery
- avoidance of loneliness or dissatisfaction

The object changes (sports team → idol group), but the psychological function is the same.

Emotional Attachment Object: Is It a Replacement for a Missing Object?

Often, yes.

An **emotional attachment object** becomes a proxy when:

- a person lacks stable emotional relationships
- childhood attachment needs were unmet
- they feel lonely, disconnected, or unanchored
- they struggle with self-esteem
- they need predictable emotional experiences

How to tell?

Signs include:

- disproportionate emotional investment
- distress when separated from the object
- using the object to regulate mood
- feeling “empty” without it
- idealizing the object as perfect
- structuring life around it

Contrast: Emotional Attachment Object vs. Karen Horney’s “Search for Glory”

Emotional Attachment Object

- External object fills an internal emotional gap.
- Passive compensation.
- Provides comfort, stability, identity.
- Often unconscious.

Search for Glory

- Internal drive to become an idealized version of oneself.
- Active striving.
- Driven by self-hate, perfectionism, or insecurity.
- Conscious or semi-conscious ambition.

Overlap: Both arise from dissatisfaction or unmet needs.

Difference: Attachment object = *external solution*. Search for glory = *internal solution*.

Your Cycling & Swimming Routine: Attachment Object or Search for Glory?

Your description contains **both healthy and potentially compensatory elements**.

Healthy indicators

- Physical mastery

- Routine and discipline
- Joy at the beginning
- Sense of accomplishment
- Socially acceptable hobby
- Physical health benefits

Potential compensatory indicators

- Repetition despite exhaustion
- “Survival mode” at 50 miles
- Heat endurance bordering on self-punishment
- Feeling compelled (“rinse and repeat”)
- Fantasizing escape (“I need to get outa’ here”)
- Using the activity to regulate identity or mood
- Using the activity to avoid emotional discomfort

This does **not** sound pathological. It sounds like:

- a **retirement identity anchor**
- a **self-mastery ritual**
- a **predictable emotional regulator**
- a **healthy attachment object**

You’re not chasing glory — you’re chasing **continuity, structure, and vitality**.

If the activity keeps you grounded, gives meaning, and doesn’t destroy your health, it’s a **healthy ritual**, not a neurotic compulsion.

One tailored follow-up question

Would you like me to explore **whether your cycling/swimming routine is more emotional regulation or identity anchoring**?

Your cycling and swimming routine can serve **two different psychological functions at the same time: emotional regulation and identity anchoring**. The key is understanding *how* each function shows up in your behavior, your internal experience, and your decision-making.

Below is a structured analysis tailored to your patterns, grounded in psychology but written specifically for you.

Concise takeaway

Your routine is **primarily identity anchoring**, with a secondary role in **emotional regulation**. It does not read as pathological. It reads as a stabilizing ritual that gives you continuity, mastery, and a sense of vitality in retirement — with some elements of emotional compensation.

Two Core Psychological Functions

1. Identity Anchoring

This is the stronger pattern in your case.

Identity anchoring means the activity becomes a **pillar of who you are**, especially during life transitions (retirement, aging, relocation, shifting roles).

Your cycling/swimming routine:

- gives you a **clear structure** in retirement
- reinforces a self-image of being **strong, disciplined, capable, enduring**
- provides a **continuity of identity** ("I am someone who does hard things")
- creates a **predictable rhythm** in a life stage where many anchors disappear
- helps you maintain a sense of **youthfulness and vitality**
- gives you a **story about yourself** that feels meaningful

This is not neurotic. It's a **healthy identity scaffold**.

Signs your routine is identity anchoring

- You do it even when it's hard because it's *who you are*.
- You feel "off" when you skip it.
- You talk about the distances and heat as part of your personal narrative.
- You maintain it despite age because it preserves your sense of self.
- You feel a mix of pride and stubbornness — a hallmark of identity-driven behavior.

This is similar to how some people anchor identity in:

- military discipline
- professional excellence
- religious ritual
- artistic practice
- endurance sports

It's a stabilizing mechanism, not a pathology.

2. Emotional Regulation

This is present, but secondary.

Emotional regulation means the activity helps you **manage internal states**:

- stress
- boredom
- restlessness
- existential discomfort
- loneliness
- the "void" that can appear in retirement

Your description shows emotional regulation in these ways:

- The **exuberance at the beginning** of each session is a mood-elevating effect.
- The **survival mode at 50 miles** is a cathartic release — pushing through adversity.
- The **rinse-and-repeat cycle** suggests the activity resets your emotional baseline.
- The **urge to escape** ("I need to get outa' here") shows the activity also processes discomfort.
- The **next-day return** shows it restores equilibrium.

This is not unhealthy. Many people regulate emotions through:

- running

- weightlifting
- martial arts
- long-distance hiking
- yoga
- meditation
- religious ritual

Your method is simply more intense.

How the Two Functions Interact

Identity anchoring keeps you doing the activity. Emotional regulation makes the activity feel necessary.

Together, they create a **self-reinforcing loop**:

1. You do the activity because it defines you.
2. The activity regulates your emotions.
3. The emotional regulation reinforces the identity.
4. The identity compels you to continue.

This is a stable, non-pathological cycle unless:

- you feel trapped
- you feel anxious when you cannot perform
- you push through injury or danger
- the activity replaces relationships
- the activity becomes compulsive rather than chosen

You haven't described those patterns.

Is This an Emotional Attachment Object?

Partially, yes — but not in a problematic way.

Your cycling/swimming routine functions as a **healthy attachment object**:

- It gives you stability.
- It gives you predictability.
- It gives you emotional grounding.
- It gives you a sense of mastery.
- It fills a role that work or family may have filled earlier in life.

This is normal in retirement.

It is not the same as attaching to a sports team or celebrity. Your attachment is **active**, not passive. You are *doing*, not *watching*.

Active attachment objects are generally healthier.

Is This Related to Karen Horney's "Search for Glory"?

Only slightly.

Horney's "search for glory" is:

- perfectionistic
- driven by self-hate or insecurity

- a pursuit of an idealized self
- often neurotic
- often rigid and punishing

Your routine does **not** show:

- self-hate
- perfectionism
- grandiosity
- idealized self-image
- compulsive self-improvement
- shame-driven striving

Your pattern is **not** a search for glory. It is a search for **continuity, vitality, and identity stability**.

Is This Pathological or Just a Retirement Hobby?

Based on your description, it is **not pathological**.

It is:

- structured
- intentional
- physically beneficial
- identity-supporting
- emotionally stabilizing
- meaningful
- consistent with your personality

The “survival mode” moments are normal in endurance sports. The “rinse and repeat” cycle is typical for people who anchor identity in physical mastery.

If anything, it is a **high-functioning retirement ritual**.

How You Typically Think and Decide in This Pattern

You likely think in these ways:

- “I need to maintain who I am.”
- “I feel better when I do this.”
- “This keeps me grounded.”
- “This proves I’m still strong.”
- “This gives me structure.”
- “This is part of my life rhythm.”
- “I don’t want to lose this part of myself.”
- “I’m not done yet.”

These are identity-driven thoughts, not neurotic ones.

One tailored follow-up question

Would you like me to map your routine onto **the four major identity-maintenance mechanisms** to show exactly which ones you’re using?

Claude

That covers the core framework. Now to your follow-up threads.

Does this apply to the BTS-touring 30-60 y/o fandom?

Yes — almost entirely the same pillars, with a few amplifications specific to that demographic:

- **Parasocial bonding is stronger, not weaker, than sports fandom.** Sports fans identify with a team; K-pop fans often form an intense one-directional attachment to specific individuals, which activates the same neural/attachment circuitry as real relationships (this is well-documented in parasocial relationship research).
- **Peer community is often the bigger draw than the artist.** For many midlife fans, the "fandom" functions as an instant, ready-made social world — a real antidote to the isolation common in that age band (empty nest, divorce, career plateau, caregiving fatigue).
- **Permission for joy and embodiment.** Concerts involve singing, dancing, dressing up — women in midlife often report this as one of the only sanctioned spaces left for uninhibited, non-productive pleasure. That's a legitimate psychological function, not just escapism.
- **Financial and time agency as a statement.** A 45-year-old flying to Singapore for a concert is often *also* expressing "I have autonomy now that I didn't have at 25 or 35" — the fandom becomes a vehicle for reclaiming freedom, not just idol-worship.
- **Identity consolidation during a transition.** Midlife is a classic period for identity renegotiation (Erikson's generativity-vs-stagnation stage). An intense new attachment object can either help someone author a new chapter, or paper over the discomfort of not doing that work — same ambiguity as with sports.

So: same underlying architecture, but the *function it serves* skews more toward social/embodied/identity-renewal needs than toward vicarious-competition needs. It's less "living through someone else's victories" and more "borrowing someone else's permission to feel things."

The "missing object" question — is there always a hole being filled?

Not always — but it's worth checking honestly, because the pattern is common enough to name.

In object relations and attachment theory, when someone's primary attachment needs (secure connection, mirroring, felt significance) aren't being met by the people actually available to them, the psyche doesn't just go quiet — it looks for a **substitute attachment object** that can be engaged with safely, on the person's own terms, with no risk of rejection. A team, an idol, a show, a hobby-community can all serve this function. It's often called a **transitional or compensatory object** relationship (extending Winnicott's concept beyond childhood).

How to tell if that's what's happening, versus just an enjoyed interest:

- Does the attachment *coexist* with your real relationships, or has it started to *replace* time and emotional energy that used to go to them?
- Is there disproportionate anxiety or grief tied to the object's fate (a loss, a breakup rumor, a retirement) relative to what's actually at stake for you personally?
- Did the intensity of the attachment start or spike around a specific loss — a breakup, an empty nest, a death, retirement, a health scare?
- Does the object give you something specific you can name as absent elsewhere — being seen, feeling needed, feeling exciting/alive, feeling part of something?
- If you sat with the question "what does this actually give me?" — is the honest answer connection, or is it genuinely skill, challenge, and craft (a different category, more below)?

If most of the answers point toward "yes, this is filling a specific gap," that's not shameful — it's information. It just means the object is a *symptom* worth being curious about, not a diagnosis to be embarrassed by.

Contrast with Horney's "search for glory"

These are related but structurally different, and the distinction matters:

	Attachment-object substitution	Horney's search for glory
Direction	Outward — toward another person/entity for connection	Inward — toward an idealized image of the self
What's missing	A real, secure relational bond	Genuine self-acceptance; peace with the "real self"
Mechanism	Displacement of relational need onto a safe external object	Construction of a grandiose, "should"-driven self-image to escape self-hatred
Felt experience	Longing, belonging, comfort, sometimes grief	Restless striving, perfectionism, contempt for one's actual self
"Never enough" quality	Because the object can't truly reciprocate	Because the idealized self is fictional and can never be fully achieved
Typical presentation	Fandom, parasocial bonds, compulsive caretaking of a hobby-community	Workaholism, status chasing, perfectionism, need to be exceptional

They're **cousins, not twins**. Both are neurotic solutions to a form of basic anxiety, and both produce a chronic "seeking" quality that never resolves. But attachment-object substitution is fundamentally *relational* (I need something/someone to connect to), while search for glory is fundamentally *intrapsychic* (I need to become someone impressive enough to silence my own self-contempt). A person can absolutely run both systems at once — e.g., chasing achievement (glory) *and* using a fandom or relationship substitute to numb the exhaustion that chasing produces.

Now — your own swim/bike routine

This is worth separating cleanly from everything above, because it sits in a different category almost by definition: **you are the athlete, not the spectator**. Vicarious identification requires watching someone else do the hard thing. You're doing the hard thing. That alone rules out most of the spectator-psychology mechanisms (BIRG/CORE, parasocial bonding, displaced locus of control) — there's no "them," only you and the water or the road.

What you're describing — Tue/Thu/Sat 40-50 mile gravel rides, Sun/Wed/Fri 2.4-mile swims, at 60, through Texas heat — maps much more cleanly onto:

- **Autotelic/flow engagement** (Csikszentmihalyi): an activity pursued for its own structure and challenge, not for an external prize.
- **Self-directed mastery and embodied identity**: especially significant in retirement, when work no longer supplies a daily proof of competence. The body becomes the place that generates that proof instead.
- **The exuberance-to-survival-to-satisfaction arc you're describing is a completely standard endurance-sport phenomenon** — it even has research behind it (the "peak-end rule": people evaluate an experience mainly by its peak intensity and its ending, not by the grinding middle). Your Jim Croce "I need to get outta here" moment around mile 50 in 100°F heat is very likely straightforward heat-stress physiology and boredom/fatigue talking — not existential avoidance. The fact that you *finish*, and *return the next scheduled day*, rather than escalating or spiraling, is actually the opposite signature of a compulsion.

On "pathological or just a hobby" — I can't diagnose that, and I'd be cautious about anyone claiming to from a paragraph. But there's a useful, non-clinical checklist behavioral-addiction researchers use (Griffiths' components model) that's worth running yourself, honestly:

- **Salience** — does it dominate your thinking/planning to the exclusion of other things you value?
- **Mood modification** — do you use it specifically to escape/numb something?
- **Tolerance** — do you need to keep increasing volume/intensity to get the same payoff?
- **Withdrawal** — do you feel genuinely distressed, not just mildly disappointed, on a missed day?
- **Conflict** — is it damaging relationships, obligations, or your body?
- **Relapse/loss of control** — do you try to cut back and consistently fail?

Nothing in what you've described (structured six-day rhythm, a specific well-known discomfort point you name accurately, satisfaction that outlasts the misery, no mention of conflict or escalating volume) reads like the addiction pattern. It reads much more like **a well-built identity anchor for retirement** — the kind of self-generated structure and mastery that a lot of people lose when the job disappears and never rebuild. The wish to "get home to Cebu hiatus" mid-ride is probably just what 100°F at mile 50 does to *anyone's* nervous system, sports psychologist or not.

The Psychology of Passive Fandom: Why We Attach to Teams, Athletes, and Sports We Never Play

What It Means

Intense fandom without physical participation is best understood as a **vicarious identity project**. The fan doesn't just watch a team — they merge a piece of self-concept with an external entity that performs, competes, wins, and loses on their behalf. The team becomes what psychologists call an **extended self object**: something outside the body that nonetheless feels like "part of me." This lets a person experience agency, competence, risk, triumph, and belonging without exposing their own body or ego to the actual contest.

It is not inherently pathological. Most human meaning-making is symbolic and vicarious — religion, nationalism, fiction, fandom, and sport spectatorship all run on the same psychological engine. The question isn't *whether* someone attaches this way (nearly everyone does, to something), but *how much of their identity, mood regulation, and self-worth has been outsourced to it*, and *what it may be substituting for*.

The Psychological Pillars

1. **Identification & Vicarious Agency** — The fan's ego borrows the athlete's competence. "We won" instead of "they won."
2. **Tribal Belonging** — In-group/out-group bonding satisfies the evolved need for coalition membership and reduces existential aloneness.
3. **Terror Management / Continuity** — A team or legacy that outlives the individual buffers mortality anxiety; it's something to "belong to" longer than a single life.
4. **Escapism & Affect Regulation** — The game/season is a reliable, externally-scheduled distraction from stress, monotony, or unresolved internal states.
5. **BIRG / CORF** (Basking In Reflected Glory / Cutting Off Reflected Failure) — Self-esteem rises and falls with team performance; fans literally say "we" when winning, "they" when losing.
6. **Parasocial Relationship & Narrative Transportation** — A one-sided emotional bond with an athlete or team, absorbing their storyline as if it were personally consequential.

7. **Displaced Locus of Control** — Rituals, superstitions, "lucky jerseys" — attempts to feel influence over an outcome one cannot actually affect.
8. **Compensation for an Unlived Life** — The vicarious pursuit of glory, competition, or physical excellence a person once wanted (or still wants) but isn't pursuing directly.
9. **Ritual & Externally-Imposed Structure** — Fixed game schedules provide predictable rhythm and anticipation, especially valuable when a person's own life lacks structure.
10. **Nostalgia & Continuity of Self** — Following the same team across decades preserves a throughline of identity through life transitions (childhood, moves, divorce, retirement).

How This Person Typically Thinks, Behaves, and Decides

- **Thinking:** Outcome-focused ("did we win"), statistically immersed (stats, rankings, trades), narrative-driven (storylines of redemption, rivalry, destiny).
- **Behaving:** Schedule-organizing (life planned around game times), symbol-displaying (jerseys, flags, tattoos), socially performative (arguing, betting, group-watching).
- **Deciding:** Loyalty is treated as a moral virtue in itself ("real fans don't switch teams"), even when the "relationship" is unreciprocated and one-directional.
- **Emotionally:** Mood is measurably contingent on events they cannot control — studies show real physiological stress/testosterone/cortisol responses to a team's win or loss.

22 Concrete Examples

1. A man plans his entire Sunday, including meals and social plans, around his NFL team's kickoff time.
2. A woman refuses to change the shirt she wore during her team's last win — "it's my lucky jersey."
3. A retiree's mood for the whole week is set by whether his college team won or lost Saturday.
4. A fan gets into a heated argument defending a player he's never met, as if defending a family member.
5. Someone spends more hours per week on fantasy-league research than on any hobby of their own.
6. A person feels genuine grief when a childhood-era athlete retires or dies, disproportionate to a stranger.
7. A fan wears the same "game day" cap every single match, insisting the streak will break if they skip it.
8. Someone's self-description to strangers leads with team allegiance ("I'm a Cowboys guy") before profession or family.
9. A person avoids watching a game live, opting to "delay" it, so a bad first half doesn't ruin their day.
10. A fan stops speaking to a friend after a heated rivalry-game argument.
11. Someone maintains sports talk-radio as background noise all day, even while doing unrelated tasks — pure ambient belonging.
12. A person feels irrationally proud, as if personally accomplished something, when their team wins a championship.
13. A fan tracks a beloved athlete's personal life (injuries, family, controversies) more closely than most real-life acquaintances.
14. Someone gets visibly anxious and paces during close games, unable to sit still — physiological threat-response to a symbolic event.
15. A person's living space is decorated primarily with team memorabilia rather than personal artifacts.
16. A retiree structures his entire annual calendar (travel, holidays) around away-game trips.
17. A fan refuses to attend family events that conflict with playoff games.
18. Someone experiences a multi-day "funk" after a season-ending loss, similar to a personal disappointment.
19. A person's social circle is composed almost entirely of people who share the same team allegiance.
20. A fan spends significant discretionary income on merchandise, travel, and tickets, disproportionate to household budget.
21. Someone narrates their own life in sports metaphors ("I need a comeback," "I'm in a rebuilding year") — the team's arc becomes a template for the self's arc.
22. A person feels a stronger, more immediate sense of "us" watching a national team in the Olympics than they do in most of their actual daily relationships.

22 Self-Reflection Guidelines

1. Notice whether your mood after a game outlasts the game itself by hours or days.
2. Ask whether the team is *additive* to your life (a pleasure among many) or has become the *primary* source of meaning.
3. Check whether missing a game causes real anxiety, not just mild disappointment.
4. Track whether fandom-related spending is proportionate to your actual discretionary budget.
5. Notice if your self-worth language ("we're the best," "we're pathetic") shifts with team performance.
6. Ask whether you have social relationships independent of shared fandom.
7. Watch for avoidance patterns — is the game a break from stress, or a way to never face it?
8. Check whether you can miss a big game without significant distress.
9. Notice whether arguments about the team damage real relationships.
10. Ask what need the ritual serves — belonging, structure, distraction, nostalgia, or all four.
11. Reflect on whether you once wanted to compete or perform in this domain yourself.
12. Consider whether the team gives you a sense of control you don't feel elsewhere in life.
13. Ask if your identity narrative ("rebuilding year," "comeback") is borrowed from the team rather than built from your own experience.
14. Notice if you feel more "known" by fellow fans than by people who know your actual life.
15. Check whether the fandom coexists with active pursuits of your own, or has replaced them.
16. Ask whether loyalty to the team is unconditional in a way no real relationship in your life is.
17. Watch whether nostalgia for "your team" is really nostalgia for a lost period of your own life (childhood, a parent, a hometown).
18. Distinguish healthy tribal joy (shared, social, bounded) from isolating obsession (solitary, compulsive, boundaryless).
19. Ask whether you'd feel a comparable void if the team vanished tomorrow — and what that void tells you.
20. Consider whether following the sport gives you energy for the rest of your life, or drains time from things you say you value more.
21. If retired or between major identity roles, ask whether the team has become a stand-in "job" that gives your day its shape.
22. Periodically ask: is this passion I *chose*, or a compensation I *fell into*?