Fangirl Isn't a Dirty Word: The Cultural Force Behind the Superficial Stigma

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A crowd starts to gather in Leicester Square, London, as 23-year-old Leonardo DiCaprio arrives for the 1998 premiere of "The Man in the Iron Mask." Hordes of young girls flock to the square, holding up "I ♥ Leo" posters, jumping, waving, and chanting "Leo!" over and over again. Police and security staff patrol the shaking barricades, holding back more than 5,000 fans. Some camped out as long as 12 hours just to catch a glimpse of their idol. The news coverage will label them as "hormonally challenged teenage girls." The media will discuss these girls, label them as crazed, and accuse them of "throwing themselves at the actor." These girls will be belittled and mocked in media, their admiration likened to mental health conditions, and their devotion watered down to mere surface-level attraction.

On the morning of Aug. 25, 2014, a 16-year-old girl arrived at the University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center, short of breath but with no chest pain. An X-ray would confirm that her lungs were slightly collapsed. She had no prior history of any lung condition. The doctors were baffled, until she admitted she had been screaming for hours the night before at the Dallas stop of British boyband One Direction's "Where We Are Tour." After she was given oxygen and kept overnight for observation, she was fine. But the incident became an easy headline to poke fun at the fanatical and obsessive teenage girls rallying for the British heart throbs. Doctors were already familiar with the likes of military personnel and weightlifters straining their respiratory tract, but a teenage girl screaming during a pop concert? Once again, her devotion had been watered down to obsession, forever immortalized in medical journals. In 2012, two years before the teenage girl was hospitalized for screaming, The New York Times music critic Jon Caramanica called One Direction's sophomore album, "Take Me Home," a "reliable shriek inducer in girls who have not yet decided that shrieking doesn't become them."

We know what a screaming fangirl looks like, but have we ever stopped to ask, why is she screaming? A quick examination of a screaming fangirl will show devotion that runs deeper than surface level attraction. It shows commitment and excitement. A screaming fangirl shows support and loyalty.

With the evolution of the internet and the growing dominance of social media, fangirl culture is at an all-time high; it may seem like a new phenomenon. But the truth is, fangirls have existed as long as artists themselves have.

Historically speaking, fangirls have been largely, if not wholly, responsible for cementing the status of many cultural icons, such as Frank Sinatra, Elvis, The Beatles, Freddie Mercury, NSYNC, One Direction, and the list goes on. But what most people do not know is that the fangirl phenomenon started in the mid-19th century with classical pianist and composer, Franz Liszt. Women would mob him, and fight over broken piano strings and bits of his clothing and hair. The great German poet Heinrich Heine dubbed this “Lisztomania.” Liszt was able to do what no solo pianist before him could do: hold and captivate an audiences’ attention with his stage presence as much as with his music.

The likes of this can be traced throughout pop culture history. From women screaming at Elvis to Harry Styles, fangirls have been patronized in the press as hysterical, sex-crazed beings. Novelist Linda Grant once said, “Teenage girls are perceived as a mindless horde: one huge, undifferentiated emerging hormone.” But what does it mean to be a fangirl now? How have fangirls evolved throughout time from one mass to individuals partaking in culture?

When we think of young girls and their interests, we think hysteria. Embarrassing. Obsessed. Truth be told, when we think of young girls and their interests, we don’t think much at all. So *why* are they still silly teenage girls? Why is it when a teenage girl loves something it’s

not taken seriously, when they've proven over and over again how much impact they have? Fangirls leverage their passion into political and social power, often times at the forefront of a movement. Fangirls in this day and age of political unrest and turmoil do not simply sit back and blindly support their idols, but they push and encourage them, holding them to higher standards.

They constantly tweet, text, post, talk about their idols, accidentally turning themselves into publicists. No one can promote a song or album better than a teenage girl, sitting on her bedroom floor, streaming on multiple devices, while simultaneously tweeting. Fangirls have completely revolutionized the entertainment industry as we know it, and the careers of those we love. Fangirls aren't just vehicles for culture; they create culture themselves.

With all that in mind, fangirls are still the punchline of the entertainment industry and media. A young girl wearing a band T-shirt, perhaps "Nirvana" or "ACDC" is used to being asked to name three songs, usually by older men, unbelieving in their interest. It's become too easy to belittle and mock young women for their interests on the surface, but when you dig a bit deeper, you'll find individuals full of passion and devotion, who are able to leverage that and can change the fabric of culture as we know it. Singer/songwriter Harry Styles once said in an interview with Rolling Stone in 2017, "How can you say young girls don't get it? They're our future. Our future doctors, lawyers, mothers, presidents, they kind of keep the world going. Teenage-girl fans – they don't lie."

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The first fangirl phenomenon took place surprisingly early in the mid-19th century with classical pianist and composer Franz Liszt. In many ways, he was the world's first rock star. Liszt performed at salons and concert halls all across Europe, where he developed many of the same performance techniques we equate with the likes of modern and notable musical icons.

Before him, no solo pianist could hold an audience's attention, much less captivate them through the performance, in the way Liszt could. Liszt made the decision to face the audience as he played so they could see him fully immersed in the music, whipping his head around, long hair flying. Women would storm the stage, desperately grabbing handfuls of his clothing and hair, fighting over broken piano strings, wishing for a token of their new-found god.

"Liszt was a very dynamic personality," Stephen Hough, world-renowned concert pianist, told NPR in 2011. "He was someone who seduced people – not just in a sexual way, but in a dramatic way. He was someone who, like a great speaker, was able to capture an audience." Dubbed "Lisztomania," Franz Liszt cemented his place at the beginning of fangirl history.

No other artist reached Liszt's level of inspiration in mania until Frank Sinatra began his residency at New York's Paramount Theater in October of 1944. Sinatra's fans, girls and young women in the 1940s, were referred to as "bobby soxers" after the rolled-down hosiery that peeked out above their saddle shoes. Wildly enthusiastic and exploring their tabooed sexuality, their fanatical behavior stumped outsiders. No one understood why they would line up and wait outside the theatre at 3 a.m., defying New York City's juvenile curfew and hours before the box office opened, just for the chance to be enchanted by Sinatra's voice.

Then came the screaming.

Although Sinatra's fans had gotten excited, they had not abandoned all reason and control to scream hysterically. Then came the one and only Elvis. With his melodic voice and thrusting hips, he was a one-man sexual revolution like no other. "Screaming girls" appeared in every newspaper review of Elvis' stage shows, and at almost every stop, the girls screamed so loud that Elvis was merely a voice in the background.

A few years later, across the pond, another band was brewing, ready to add fuel to the fangirl fire. The Beatles gave way to a new mania – "Beatlemania," which stuck with force.

The names got more creative over the years as fandom grew and evolved, from "mania," a word with historical baggage, rooted in the alleged mental health condition female hysteria, to a clinical play on words. Canadian native Justin Bieber sparked a global craze in 2009, with his baby-face and R&B infused record "My World." At only 15 years old, he had teens and preteens around the nation falling sick with "Bieber-fever." Years later, he was competing for the hearts of teenage girls everywhere with the British boyband, One Direction. The band, originally formed on the seventh season of the British TV series "The X Factor," may have lost their season, but they captured the hearts of the nations, and better yet, the nation's youth. Girls around the world fell ill with "One Direction infection."

But fandoms evolved past simple attraction and infatuation with the objects of their affection. Trailblazing female artists like Lady Gaga climbed the charts in the early 2000s with the help of her "little monsters," a fan-base largely composed of gay men. Record breaking artists like Beyoncé and Ariana Grande, with their "Bey Hive" and "Arianators," respectively, developed devoted female-centric fanbases, elevating fandom and breaking the autonomous mold of sexual attraction and desire. Throughout the years, fandom evolved as a community for people to come together not just over shared desire for the love-interest-popstar at the time, but over mutual devotion to a celebrity they connect to on deeper levels.

The BTS ARMY has given way to many fan activism projects, prompting the members to speak up on injustices all over the world. Fans do not just blindly support their idols politics; rather, they form a symbiotic relationship, both groups growing and evolving with each other in terms of morals and activism.

But it would not be modern-times fandom without mentioning the pop princess herself, Taylor Swift. Named TIME magazine's 2023 person of the year, Swift has reached unprecedented heights in her career, likened to The Beatles' cultural impact. "Beatlemania and [Michael Jackson's 'Thriller' have nothing on these shows," said Swift's friend and collaborator, Phoebe Bridgers.

Swift's critically acclaimed "Eras Tour" changed the world. Literally. Cities renamed themselves after her, anticipating her welcome. Santa Clara, California, renamed "Swiftie Clara" and made Swift honorary citizen for her stay. Mayor Lisa Gillmor said in addition to the name change, Swift was named the honorary mayor in a proclamation that said the honor was being bestowed to "celebrate the positive local impact to the Santa Clara community, as well as the impact regionally, of Taylor Swift's music, tours, and extraordinary fanbase."

These same cities saw major booms within their local economies, with the numerous hotel stays, airline tickets, restaurant visits and shopping before the shows. But deeper than the economic and social impacts, Swift made deep and personal connections with her fans through her hauntingly beautiful lyricism and storytelling. Fans flock to her not just for surface level attraction, but for the welcoming sense of community she provides, along with a sense of understanding of the intricacies of being a girl in this world.

From rushing a pianist, to screaming girls, to activism and community, fandom and fangirls have evolved from simply partaking in culture around them to being vessels of culture themselves, creating intimate communities and life-long bonds.

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Taylor Swift once said, "The worst kind of person is someone who makes someone feel bad, dumb, or stupid for being excited about something." This is a sentiment that 20-year-old

Lauren Munar relates to, a lot. Munar is a communications major at Cal State-San Marcos, and she also works for her school doing event planning. As a self-proclaimed people person, Munar was drawn to communications for the social aspect and community environment. She muses that event planning could transform into tour planning because she loves herself a good backstage pass.

Munar is also a huge fangirl.

"I feel like we're taking over the world and that just needs to be known," said Munar. "Not in a scary evil way but as in ... fangirls can do anything. I don't think people understand the seriousness of what fandoms can do."

Munar has been a Taylor Swift fan ever since her brother was playing "Love Story" on Band Hero and forced his sister to sing so he could focus on the guitar. And she has been hooked ever since. In the past 15 years, Munar's followed Taylor Swift all over on tour. From "The Red Tour" (2012-2013) to the record-shattering "Eras Tour" that kicked off in 2023, Munar has been in the crowd, singing her heart out.

She is a loud and proud "Swiftie," regularly posting and sharing song lyrics, concert outfits, album surprise theories and proud posts of Taylor Swift. During the release week for the long-anticipated album "Speak Now (Taylor's Version)" this past July, she lost a noticeable number of followers for her persistent posting of Swift content, including pictures, videos, personal reactions to the album, and reposting Swift's content. "I've always been very much out there," she said. "I never really cared. I'm just like, this is me. If you want to be in my life, this is a part of me."

Like Munar, lots of other fangirls find community and find themselves within the realm of fandom. The word "fangirl" itself has evolved to mean more than what Merriam-Webster

dictionary defines as “a girl or woman who is an extremely or overly enthusiastic fan of someone or something.” Opposed to the version of the word spat with venom and hatred and years’ worth of stigma, to fans everywhere, fangirl means unwavering devotion. It means support. It means community. And it’s also gender inclusive.

Oliver Cashimere, 22, a transgender man from Olean, New York, found the term a bit daunting at first.

“I think at first, I didn’t identify with the term fangirl for a little bit because I was really going through some gender stuff,” he said. “I’ve kind of gotten over that and no one else has put that stigma on me. I’m just like, no, I am a fangirl. Because [fangirl] is a mindset.”

Cashimere’s first fangirl experience was surprisingly The Beatles. After their third-grade music teacher had the class sing “Yellow Submarine” for a chorus concert, Cashimere fell deeply in love with The Beatles, buying the books, the CDs, and watching the interviews and the movies, and listening to their greatest hits albums, courtesy of their dad. Although they did not realize it at the time, it was their first immersion in a life full of fandom. “There [weren’t] a whole lot of people around me that were like that, and it’s not like I was one of the Beatlemania girls of the day, so I didn’t consider what was happening,” he said.

More recently, Cashimere has been present in the “Steddie” fandom online, spurred by the popular and record-breaking Netflix original series “Stranger Things.” Steddie is a popular pairing of characters Steve Harrington, and newcomer Eddie Munson. Although the couple is not canon-complicit, the “shipping,” or desire by fans for characters to enter a romantic relationship, has allied a community of queer and/or neurodivergent fans. This space has been vital for Cashimere in his journey of self-discovery.

"I found a lot of people were talking about things that I didn't even fully acknowledge that I also did," he said. "That was really cool to find for self-discovery, just [to] see people talk about something so passionately where in my day-to-day life, I can't talk about it that much, but talking with them I could."

As someone who is neurodivergent, Cashimere has struggled with how much or how little to talk about their interests. Neurodivergent people experience intense interests in a plethora of subjects, commonly labeled "hyperfixations." Neurodivergent people struggle when expressing their interests to allistic, or non-neurodivergent, people, which is another reason why fandoms have been a welcoming haven for Cashimere.

"As somebody who is neurodivergent trying to fit in any way, that also added a-whole-nother layer of, how much is talking about this before it becomes annoying or somebody's going to be like, what're you doing?" said Cashimere, explaining how isolating it was to not feel confident and comfortable talking about his interests with others. "I think that's another thing, too, that having an online community brings people a safe space where you're not isolated from being passionate."

As Cashimere is recovering from his gender-affirming top surgery he underwent in August of 2023, he has gotten more into art, trying to do fan-art of his own. They even joke that this could be a career path worth pursuing.

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To position something as feminine is to diminish it, much like the word fangirl itself has been used to condescend to young girls and their interest. In a patriarchal society much like our own, to be female/feminine is to be less. The stereotypical man puts the same, if not more, level of enthusiasm into sports.

A young girl screaming and crying at a One Direction concert is labeled “hysterical,” but when Philadelphia police had to disperse a rioting crowd after the Eagles lost the 2023 Super Bowl, the predominantly male fans were just “passionate.” A Taylor Swift fan crying outside the stadium because she could not see her favorite song performed live is trashed and bullied on social media, but when the Vancouver Canucks lost the 2011 Stanley Cup and fans trashed parts of the city, causing millions of dollars of damage, their emotion is justified, even praised, among another fans. “Boys will be boys” is a phrase thrown around when young men punch holes in the walls or smash TVs after the outcome of a sports game or a poor call made by the referee, but teenage girls showing any hint of strong emotion over their passions are labeled as mindless. Obsessive. Why does this double standard still continue to alienate female fans?

Patricia Rind, a lecturer in gender studies at Purchase College, agrees that female fans are not taken seriously in society. “[In] the same way that femaleness isn’t valued and so-called femininity, whatever that is, falls under that,” she said. “If it’s associated with women, it’s less valued. If it’s associated with girls, it’s even less valued.”

Rind received her Ph.D. in human sexuality and health education at New York University after having received her M.A., also at NYU, in English and American literature and her BA at Tufts University in psychology.

She also played sports growing up and, to this day, is a sports fan herself. “I always got so much positive reinforcement for one, playing sports well, and two, being a fan of sports,” she said. “Like that was some admirable quality of mine from men, not women.”

The parallels between a stereotypical sports fan and a “fangirl” are startling: the time and dedication put in, watching every game and performance. The amount of money spent, whether it be specialized jerseys or album vinyl variants. The online presence, following live tweets of a

game and player's personal accounts, or interacting with other fans on platforms such as "stan" Twitter. The emotion, crying over what surprise songs Taylor Swift is going to play that night or screaming at your TV for Josh Allen to make that touchdown. The similarities are endless.

Justin Doskoez, a 22-year-old Purchase College student from Eastport, New York, will be repping his favorite baseball team for life, courtesy of the Mets baseball team tattoo on his leg.

"I got all my tattoos in like a month span and my mom still kind of gets mad at me for it," he jokes. "[She] told me to get some that actually mean something, and I was like 'All right, I'll get the Mets logo,' [so] I got the Mets logo because I actually care about it; it means something to me."

Doskoez recalls his dad introducing him to baseball. They attended the 2015 World Series, the last time the Mets advanced as far. "My dad bought me tickets – I can only imagine how expensive they were, but I was a kid, so I really don't know."

However, that would not be the last time Doskoez spent a pretty penny on his favorite sports team. "I have a like $400 Mets jersey that I bought that's completely not worth it," he said. "I was 16. I thought it was a good idea."

Not only does he participate in the fandom that is sports, but Doskoez is a player as well, pitching for the Purchase College men's baseball team. His love for the sport propelled him into the sport, sharing his love of baseball with his teammates who have become friends.

One teammate in particular, 20-year-old Matt Dragotto, has proudly declared, "I would die for Purchase baseball."

Although he does not get emotional over sports teams he is a fan of, when it comes to the sense of community between his teammates, that matters more. "When you're sitting in a dugout

and some kid on your teams hits a homer, like an absolute bomb, everyone goes nuts. That's more emotional, when we're playing," Dragotto said.

Even though baseball being a huge part of their life right now is temporary, both Doskoez and Dragotto can see themselves continuing on their love and passion for sports into their lives, post-Purchase.

"You get older, you have different priorities," said Dragotto. "I've grown as a sports fan, honestly. I got more into baseball. I used to hate baseball, but now I love it. So, maybe I'll grow even more into loving it."

Doskoez agrees with this sentiment, saying, "Getting older, I'm still a fan. I consider myself a huge fan, but I guess I'll try and stick around it as much as I can. I'd like to stay into it."

Both players come from families with baseball-fan-fathers, Doskoez the Mets and Dragotto the Yankees. They've both watched their fathers grow older and still hold unwavering support for their teams, even when life gets in the way sometimes.

Although sports as a fandom has always been very male dominated, it has seen a lot of changes recently, even in this past year. When pop-princess Taylor Swift started her romcom-esque romance with Kansas City Chief's tight-end Travis Kelce, she started appearing more frequently at the televised games, and her fans started turning in. Among teenage girls, NFL viewership increased by 53%, and among the 18-24 age demographic, viewership increased by 24%.

Ahead of the Chief's win at the Super Bowl, NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell welcomed the surge in young women viewership. "Obviously, it creates a buzz," he said, in his annual Super Bowl week press conferene. "It creates another group of young fans, particularly

young women, that are interested in seeing, 'Why is she going to this game, why is she interested in this game, besides Travis?' She is a football fan."

Although Swift's arrival as princess of the Chief's kingdom was taken in stride by her loyal fans, a lot of male football fans took her frequent camera appearances less gracefully. Swift doubled down and stated she only attends the games to support Kelce. She told TIME Magazine, "I have no awareness of if I'm being shown too much and pissing off a few dads, Brads, and Chads."

Not only was it a big year for young girls in the NFL, but women's college basketball saw an unprecedented rise in viewership. During this year's NCAA basketball championships, for the first time ever, more people tuned into the women's national championship game than the men's. Iowa vs. South Carolina drew in a record-breaking 18.87 million viewers. According to EPSN, the game was the most-watched college basketball game since 2019, and the most-watched women's basketball game on record. Iowa Hawkeyes star Caitlin Clark swept the nation this year.

She is also a huge Swiftie. Fitting, as she has been called the Taylor Swift of women's basketball, in regards to her career-altering accomplishments.

Sports passion is a fandom, just as much as it is for Taylor Swift, or any artist. It creates a sense of community, builds lifelong friendships, and rallies around a common goal. But because we exist within a patriarchal society, the fight continues to even the playing field.

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Modern musical fandom would not be what it was without the inclusion of Korean pop bands, often referred to as "K-Pop," like BTS and BLACKPINK. They have penetrated the walls of Western culture, and have, likewise, attracted a mass of fans in the past decade or so.

The BTS fandom, known as ARMY, are also known for their fan activism.

ARMY users of X (formally Twitter) have flooded white supremacy hashtags with "fan-cams" (fan-made video edits) to block the spread of bigotry. By purposefully baiting those exploring the hateful hashtags, they flushed out words of bigotry, so that anyone exploring those hashtags would be met with videos of BTS and not hateful tweets. The fandom also coordinated online to reserve tickets for Donald Trump's 2020 Tulsa rally, inflating expected attendance numbers and leaving hundreds of seats empty. BTS fans do not only participate in activism themselves, they push and encourage their idols to engage in activism, too. Fans do not just blindly support their favorite artists, but they work together in a symbiotic relationship, each party growing and holding each other accountable.

For BTS fans like Taylor Euston, being more than a great singer is very important. "I think they do really good things, even apart from just their music," she said.

Euston is proud to be a fan of a group that continues to support and donate to important causes. BTS' biggest philanthropic project was a collaboration with UNICEF for the "Love Myself" campaign, to take a stand against bullying, to which they donated all the money made of or merchandise and more.

Despite being from the East, they have a huge presence in Western culture. In June 2020, BTS and their management company, Big Hit Entertainment, donated a generous sum of $1 million to the #BlackLivesMatter movement in the United States, following the height of the George Floyd protests. In a tweet, they wrote "We stand against racial discrimination. We condemn violence."

"That's an important part of being a fangirl too," said Euston, "why you like them besides, 'Oh, I love their music' – I love them for tons of other things."

Euston became a BTS fan in 2017, after listening to their music in the car with a friend, and instantly becoming hooked. For a fan from Olean, New York, the listening experience is a bit tricky, given that the boys sing mostly in Korean. Even though Euston has encountered people who do not understand or belittle her experience, she has people in her love who will support her in her passions. Her mom has always been supportive, watching award shows and listening to their music with her.

Euston describes her experience as a fangirl as life changing. “They’re just great for my mental health,” she said. “I’ve never liked music the way I like their music, [and] I think they made me a more positive person.

Being a member of the ARMY has brought Euston a lot more friends – local, national, and even a pen pal in the Philippines. She has not let the language barrier stop her from being any less of a fan. Many bilingual fans will provide translations for songs, interviews, and appearances for fans who do not speak Korean.

And although her experience in the BTS fandom is different from other fandom experiences, she finds the beauty in the difference.

“Seeing every language under the sun, not even just Korean or English, [but] they have so many worldwide supporters,” she said, “so you really do get to see a little bit of a lot of different cultures, which was really fascinating.”

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For many, the title fangirl becomes a life-long commitment. Sure, interests come and go, pop idols and movie stars fade, but many take this passion and leverage it into something bigger: a career.

Chloe Ament, 20, has amassed over 100,000 followers on TikTok for her music derived from and inspired by fandom. After going viral in 2021 with her original song “Stay Right Here” about Andrew Garfield’s Peter Parker and Emma Stone’s Gwen Stacy from “The Amazing Spider-Man,” Ament steadily began writing and recording music inspired by her interests in popular media. She first started writing music drawing from her own life and personal experiences, but she describes getting bored with writing about herself, finding more interest and complexity in fictional characters.

“At first, I thought nothing of it because it was just so normal to me, but then realizing that all these other people [could] also relate to this and [can] see themselves in this aspect. That kind of gave me a lot of clarity on what I do, because I realized that people don’t like characters because they’re fictional, they like characters because we see parts of ourselves in them,” she said. “I am finding nuance in these characters that I can apply to my own life, and I’m just diving deeper into that connection, and so it really helped me gain clarity on what music and fandoms would look like for me.”

Ament has released countless of songs, from popular book fandoms like “Percy Jackson and The Olympians,” “The Selection,” and “The Hunger Games,” as well as TV shows like “Stranger Things” and “The Summer I Turned Pretty.” In March of 2022, she released a five-song EP titled “Broken Bodies, Broken Hearts,” focusing on the Marauders fandom, a fan-created subset of the “Harry Potter” fandom.

Ament is a junior at York College of Pennsylvania, with a major in writing and a minor in music industry. She is planning to pursue music full-time and is currently in a band and creating music with her brother, a senior at the same college, who is studying music industry recording.

It is no coincidence that many fangirls like Ament enter the entertainment field, whether it be music, journalism, or like 19-year-old Allison Iacuzzo, acting.

"I love fanning over celebrities, so it makes me [think], 'Oh, what if that's me someday? What if I have fans like that? What if I have people who make fan accounts for me?' " she said, dreaming of hypothetical fans discussing her outfits and theorizing about possible hot-shot boyfriends. "Sometimes it's scary, but it's funny, and it's scary at the same time, to think about your life under a microscope like that."

Iacuzzo is a sophomore theater and performance major at Purchase College, and a wildly enthusiastic fangirl. She loves everything from Taylor Swift to "Gilmore Girls." She runs an editing account on Instagram that has surpassed one thousand followers, and regularly posts edits of TV shows like "The Summer I Turned Pretty," movies like "The Hunger Games," and popular Gen Z celebrities like Rachel Sennott and Renee Rapp. What initially started out as a "Glee" fan account, led to an internet best friend from Maryland of almost three years.

"She helped me figure out how to use [Creator Studio] and I made her an edit for her birthday, and I barely knew her." Iacuzzo describes the relationship as growing into a friendship, born out of a Quinn Fabray ["Glee"] edit.

Iacuzzo is not the only fangirl to form close bonds with other fangirls through online communities. When 21-year-old Kimmie Juliano was 14, she attended a 5 Seconds of Summer (popular Australian boyband) meetup at her local mall on Long Island.

"It was so sketch and I absolutely should not have been allowed to go," she joked. Juliano and the rest of the girls quickly became close, and she even attended a couple of their Sweet 16 birthday parties. "At some point I did have to tell my parents that I met up with strangers at the mall, but they took it well. It was fine."

Through her One Direction editing days on Vine and Twitter, Juliano made and maintained a lot of friendships. She has one, that she still speaks with to this day, that she first visited in real life when she was in high school. Her parents were obviously skeptical at first.

"We actually met in the middle because everybody's parents are like, 'You're not meeting a stranger off the internet,'" she said. "We had our moms FaceTime, and I took my brother and he went with me to Washington, D.C.."

Although Juliano's methods may not be approved in the world of today's safety standards, friendship is one of the pillars of fandom. Many fangirls resort to making friends through these online communities. The internet is a great tool for fangirls, not only to reach and interact with their idols, but to build a strong community with others, sometimes states, countries, or continents away.

Some fangirls, like 20-year-old Jamie Boeckel, are lucky enough to find their community in real life. Boeckel, a sophomore liberal studies major at Purchase College, is a huge fan of horror films and comic books. Before Purchase, she felt like she could not open up to others about her interest, for fear of being ridiculed.

"I just mainly haven't been vocal about my interest with a lot of people due to the worry that they might make fun of me, or that it's outside of what they typically like," she said. "Especially back home. I felt like I couldn't open up to a lot of my friends about what I was interested in, because it clashed a lot with their interests."

Boeckel has been a lot more vocal about her interests lately, reminiscing about one friend she made last year after she complimented his Batman necklace. "Once I understand, I can make a mutual connection with someone with similar interests," she said.

Boeckel also joined a comic-book club at Purchase, named “CAPES,” standing for “creative artists producing epic stories.” Boeckel expresses her gratitude for the community that CAPES has provided for her. “I feel like I don’t have to hide who I am,” she said. “You can just relax and let yourself be you.”

Fandom is not only about the who’s hot of pop music right now, or charting music and breaking records, or even screaming at a concert. Fangirls create fandom by rallying a community around a shared interest. Fangirls are the backbone of any industry, propping their idols up and supporting them through thick and thin. And although fangirls take criticism and punch after punch in media, their devotion never wavers. Because being a fangirl is a mindset, and it’s a lifelong commitment.

In the words of Boeckel, “It’s a sanctuary. It just provides me with a bit of comfort, just knowing that there’s other people out there like me in the world. It makes me feel less alone.”

Source List

Chloe Ament, September 19, 2023; college student at York College of Pennsylvania, singer-songwriter and fangirl; chloeamentmusic@gmail.com.

Jamie Boeckel, February 8, 2024; Purchase College student and fangirl; jamie.boeckel@purchase.edu.

Oliver Cashimere, February 8, 2024; transgender man from Olean, New York, "fangirl"; moody.olly.13@gmail.com.

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