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“If I had a penny for everytime I got mocked for liking boy bands, I would be Elon Musk.”



Where fangirls go, misogyny and sexism follow. So why are women still being put down and mocked for their interests in today's society?

When 17 year old Mandy Hayward walked into the living room one Thursday night, she didn't realise that the five teenage boys that were about to sing on her TV screen were going to become such a big part of her life. It was October 1992 and her family had all sat down to watch the weekly episode of Top of the Pops, when presenter Tony Dortie introduced the new and upcoming boyband Take That.

“The flashing lights revealed the silhouettes of these five men dancing around the stage. As the first few seconds of ‘It only takes a minute’ started to play I remember my eyes being glued to the screen, fascinated by the lead singer’s spiky blonde hair and beautiful voice.” says Mandy.

“I remember this wave of excitement rushing through me and I needed to hear more of their music.”

If you're reading this, you may recognise this feeling of fascination when hearing your favourite artist for the first time. The urge to know their names, what their personalities are like or to hear them live. But when did having an interest in our favourite artists become such a mockery?

Fangirls are not 'cool':

When you type 'Why are fangirls so...?', the automatic answers to this question are: 'annoying', 'obsessed', 'loud' and 'weird'. However, when you type 'Why are fanboys so..?', the answers are different and more specific. The suggestions are: 'Why are fanboys so important?', 'Why are apple fanboys so arrogant?', 'Why are Sony fanboys the worst?'. Although most of the results are negative, the answers only seem to reference specific types of fans, whereas 'fangirls' is generalised to all women that are a fan of something. This suggests that it doesn't matter what is being fangirled over, they will be judged regardless.

“I had a lot of friends who loved Take That just as much as me, mostly women, and a lot of people who would laugh at me for liking them. It was the 90s, there were lots of new genres coming out and new bands that were much cooler to like than Take That. A lot of men especially would think it was funny to put me down for my love of them as they thought their taste in music was better. They liked rock music and Nirvana and they were the cool fans who got praised for their music taste.” says Mandy.



Mandy Hayward, right, at the Circus Live tour in Cardiff, 2007

“If I had a penny for everytime I got mocked for liking boy bands, I would be Elon Musk. People would tell me that I only liked them for their looks, as I couldn't like their music because it wasn't any good. I just don't understand why women are not allowed to like a boyband without being told it's only because they fancy them, it is as though their opinion on music is not respected as much as men's.”

Female fanbases:

Fangirls are stereotypically generalised all as 'hysterical' and 'obsessive', whereas not all football fans are viewed as hooligans, they are the exception. Hysterical becomes the identity of fangirls whereas hooliganism is only a mere part of football fan's identity.

Male football fans are just as passionate and knowledgeable about their interest as fangirls, but are not seen as excessive when they shout or cry when their favourite team loses. This raises the question- if a fan base is predominantly 'male-dominated' are they exempt from mockery?

Whether it is a boyband, tv show, book or movie, if their fanbase is predominantly female it is as though they are automatically of less value.

Boy bands such as Take That are not respected for their musical achievements just because of the demographic they appeal to. According to the music streaming app, Spotify, Take That has 3,588,195 monthly listeners and internationally, the band has had 56 number one singles and has sold over 45,000,000 albums worldwide.

Before Take That, before The Beatles, there was Franz Liszt:

You may think that 'Beatlemania' was the first outburst of fangirls but in fact, the followers of 19th Century pianist and composer Franz Liszt was the blueprint for all fandoms.

Lisztomania or Liszt fever was the intense levels of hysteria demonstrated by his female fans who would swoon, cheer and scream, completely captivated by Liszt during his performances. This frenzy first occurred in Berlin in 1841 and the term was later coined by literary critic Heinrich Heine discussing the 1844 Parisian concert season.

Throughout history there has been an expectation of women to uphold some kind of respectable female behaviour and the intense expression of emotions from Liszt's fans broke all those rules.

Sound familiar? Fans still express the same emotional and physical overwhelming excitement nowadays, alongside the same social stigma.

Normalisation of misogyny:

The misogyny and sexism towards young girls and women and their interests has become very normalised in society. Yet a large contributor to this is internalised misogyny, which is loosely defined as when women subconsciously project sexist ideas onto other women and even themselves.

“I had friends who loved certain artists a lot but wouldn’t class themselves as fangirls as they wanted to seem cooler than us ‘crazy’ fans. They were too cool to drool over cute boy bands and only liked edgy bands like the Red Hot Chili Peppers.” says Mandy.

“I think once you get older you realise how much people’s misogyny and sexism around you can really influence your views on things. I think my friends were probably afraid of judgement by others. When your love and passion for something is met with laughter it’s hard sometimes to want to keep vocalising it.”

The power of fangirls:

With all the negative connotations towards fangirls, the power of these communities is sometimes overlooked. In 2020, South Korean Pop group BTS donated \$1 million dollars to the Black Lives Matter organisation. After the news became public, BTS fans assembled on twitter to start the #MatchAMillion project. Within 24 hours, fans had not only matched the band's donation but surpassed it.

The size of these fandoms are unimaginable, as seen with the BTS army. There were 18 million unique authors mentioning BTS online between January 1st 2020 and December 31st 2020. According to Encyclopedia Britannica, an army generally includes between 400,000 and 1,000,000 soldiers. So, if BTS fans were to form a real army, there would be enough people for at least 18 armies.

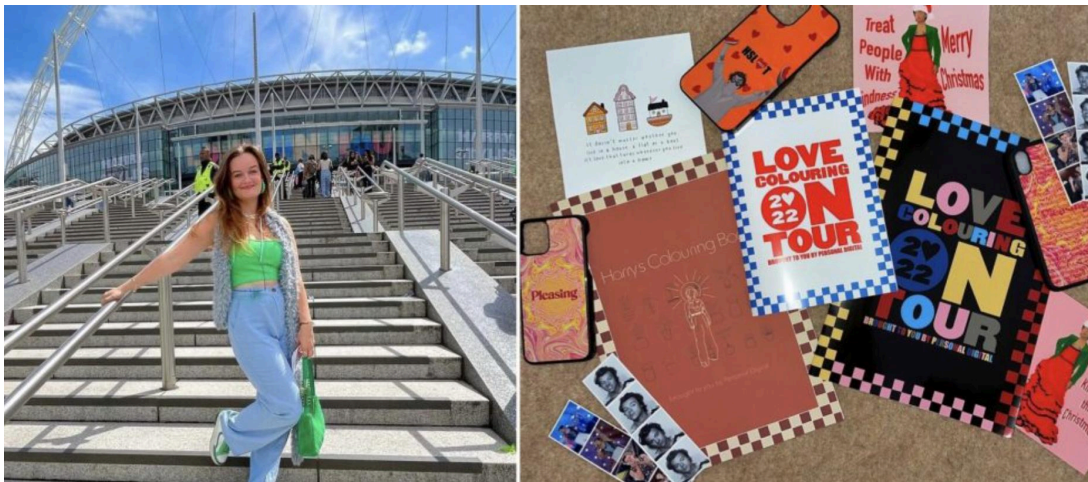
Turning passion into productivity:

When an artist becomes such a huge part of your life, how can you turn this love into something productive, Harriet Bunn believes she found the answer.

When lockdown boredom struck, Harriet decided to turn her 10 year love of One Direction and Harry Styles into a small business.

“During the first lockdown of covid in June 2020, I started doing these digital drawings on my iPad for fun and then my friends were offering to pay for them. They suggested that I make an Etsy shop for it. I wanted to draw and design things I loved so it was only natural to start making Harry Styles merchandise and drawings.”

“I just made something I would like as a fan and started to promote it on Tik Tok and it gained attention, which then grew into this little online community. I just love how creative this fanbase is and how supportive and accepting everyone is, it’s so freeing.” Harriet says.



Harriet Bunn, left, at Harry Styles 'Love on tour' concert in June 2022. 'Personal Digital 2020', Harriet's Etsy shop products, right.

The community of fans:

According to various psychologists, there's even scientific evidence to prove that belonging to a fandom is beneficial for your mental, emotional and social health.

Dr. Laurel Steinberg, a psychotherapist and professor of psychology at Columbia University, stated in a *Teen Vogue* article in July 2017: “Feeling like you are part of a group can help one define his/her identity and give a sense of purpose to what might be an otherwise routine lifestyle.”

She went on to say, “Connecting with people over shared passions and interests is good for mental and emotional health because it helps to create a family-like sense of security.”

With all the positives within belonging to a fandom and the power of today's generation of fangirls, these women should be praised instead of put down.

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Interview list:

- Harriet Bunn- interviewed on 30/11/2022 at 11:10am
- Mandy Hayward- interviewed on 02/12/2022 at 16:00pm
- Alex Liddiard- interviewed on 03/12/2022 at 12:02pm