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STILL KISSING THEIR POSTERS GOODNIGHT:  
LIFELONG POP MUSIC FANDOM

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## **Abstract**

Narratives about the discovery of one's favourite artist are popular discussion topics among adult pop music fans, as are narratives of rediscovery later in life, suggesting that memory and nostalgia are powerful forces that can repeatedly draw fans back to that affective moment when they first discovered, and perhaps rediscovered, their idols. The impact of cultural influences like pop music during the formative period of adolescence cannot be underestimated. Such early identifications with pop music icons enable some adolescents to then carry those attachments with them their entire lives, forming lifelong fandoms. Through an ethnographic investigation into one such fan community, adult female fans of '80s heart throbs Duran Duran, this research focuses on 'mature' pop fans in an effort to explore an enduring and lifelong fandom that is deeply communal, entrenched in a worldwide network of other fans. Of particular interest is the way in which fans connect via a hybrid of online and offline interactions, as well as how the resulting interaction mix generates complex dynamics and hierarchies.

While this research focuses on Duran fan culture, fans of other teen idols were surveyed for comparative purposes, in particular bands that also experienced a resurgence of success after announcing a 'reunion', including Take That and the Backstreet Boys. Parallels are also drawn to the lifelong loyalty expressed by fandoms of other artists who were not teen-pop pinups, such as David Bowie (Stevenson 2009) and R.E.M. (Bennett 2010), whose now 'post-popular' music (Hills 2010) has seen continued popularity among cult audiences for almost four decades.

## Table of Contents

Chapter 1: <i>Her Name is Rio</i> – An Introduction to Duran Duran Fandom .....	4
Chapter 2: <i>Please, Please Tell Me Now</i> – Methodology .....	40
Chapter 3: <i>Be My Icon</i> – Lifelong Fandom and Identity .....	60
Chapter 4: <i>Girl Panic!</i> – Female Fandom and the Politics of Pop Music....	124
Chapter 5: <i>Strange Behaviour</i> – Politics, Competition, and Exclusion .....	182
Chapter 6: <i>I Don't Want Your Love</i> – Reflections on Scholar-Fandom .....	212
Chapter 7: <i>And She Dances On The Sand</i> – Conclusion.....	236
Bibliography .....	252
Appendix: Questionnaire.....	264

**Chapter 1:**  
***Her Name is Rio –***  
**An Introduction to Duran Duran Fandom**



Many young women experience a stage during adolescence when the private world of their imagination is overtaken by a celebrity teen crush, often a pop music idol or band. As early as Elvis and the Beatles, every generation has embraced its own version of the teen pop pin-up. Research has shown that girls historically exercised their fandom within the confines of their bedrooms, employing a 'bedroom culture', listening to music, browsing teen magazines, and hanging posters (McRobbie 1991). But now with the Internet, this practice has changed. Where pop fandom used to be mostly private, fans now conduct these activities online and communally, 'drooling' in unison. This more community-oriented fan experience has dramatically altered the nature of pop fandom.

This research explores the importance of pop music fan culture in feminine identity construction and sexuality. Through an ethnographic investigation into one such fan community, adult female fans of '80s heart throbs Duran Duran, this research focuses on 'mature' pop fans who have been loyal fans since their teen years, in an effort to trace the transformation from relative isolation of pre-Internet teen fandom into what has now become enduring and lifelong adult fandom that is deeply communal, entrenched in a worldwide network of other fans. Of particular interest is the way in which fans connect via a hybrid of online and offline interactions, as well as how the resulting interaction mix generates complex dynamics and hierarchies. This thesis strives to generate a more complete rendition of female fandom than has been offered before, driving forward discourses in feminism, popular

music, fan studies, and methodological practice regarding the role and subjectivity of the 'scholar fan'.

### **Who is Duran Duran?**



At this juncture, one might be asking why fans of Duran Duran were chosen as a case study for ethnographic research. Before I share my reasons for making that decision, I must first provide some background about the band. For people who are familiar with Duran Duran, their first thought might be, 'Are they still around?' At the time of this writing, Duran Duran is still touring and making new albums, and while they had a much-hyped 'reunion' in 2003, the band has really never disbanded. For more than three decades, through various line-up changes, the core of Duran Duran has persevered. And it is this very tenacity that has sustained the lifelong loyalty of many fans.

The band was formed in Birmingham, England, in 1978 by a couple of teens who lived around the corner from one another, Nigel Taylor and Nicholas Bates (*Live from London* 2005). Both were avid pop music enthusiasts and concert buddies who, like many teen boys, dreamed of

forming their own band. Neither of them had any musical training (Buskin 2004), but they were convinced this would not be a problem, because they were more concerned with style. They found inspiration for the band's name in the film *Barbarella* (1968) starring Jane Fonda: the character of the evil scientist is called Dr. Durand Durand (*Live from London* 2004). After settling upon a name, the two teens changed their own names to John Taylor and Nick Rhodes (Duerden 1998). Soon after the pair discovered a more serious musician in Roger Taylor, a young drummer from the local music scene, who they convinced to enlist in their cause. The group practised and developed their sound over time, Nick taking to keyboards and John to guitar (*The Ultimate Review* 2006).

When Duran Duran became serious enough to need management, they found it in two brothers, Paul and Michael Barrows, who owned and operated the Rum Runner club (*Live from London* 2004). The band rehearsed upstairs during the day and performed downstairs in the evenings, some of them working for the club in other aspects too like tending bar or DJing on their nights off (Taylor 2008). Over the next couple of years, various band members came and went; the band seemed to have particular difficulty keeping a lead singer, for example (Malins 2005). But in 1980 Duran Duran found a line-up that would see them to worldwide fame, with the addition of Andy Taylor from Newcastle on guitar (John Taylor then switched to bass) and Simon Le Bon from Hertfordshire on vocals. The band was a five-some, with three unrelated members surnamed Taylor (*VH1 Classic Albums: Rio* 2008).





*Early Duran Duran*

The Birmingham music scene was lively during this time, with UB40 rehearsing right next door, and rival band Culture Club performing nearby (*Live from London* 2004). Duran's music was a fusion of punk, disco, and rock, and they performed to a diverse crowd of creative individuals who wore frilly, billowing shirts and an excess of make-up and hair colour, regardless of their gender. Androgyny was king in this new culture, which came to be known as the New Romantic movement, and it particularly appealed to those with alternative sexualities (*The Ultimate Review* 2006). But even then, a growing crowd of young women was beginning to develop around the band, even in their early days they still considered themselves a serious 'art' group (ibid.)

Duran Duran was indeed serious, more serious perhaps than for what lead singer Simon Le Bon had bargained. He was a drama student at the University of Birmingham, but the band ultimately pressured him into quitting university, a decision that proved fruitful within months, when Duran Duran secured their first recording contract with EMI (Taylor 2008). In 1981 they

released their first album, self-titled *Duran Duran*, with hit singles *Planet Earth* and *Girls on Film*. In those days, music video as a medium was still in its infancy. So mainly for publicity purposes, videos were produced as a companion to each single. But to attract even more attention, Duran Duran produced a risqué video for *Girls on Film* (which featured female nudity). The video was quickly banned by the BBC and became in demand at nightclubs (*The Ultimate Review* 2006). While the publicity stunt worked, and these singles proved successful in the pop charts, it was not yet enough to propel Duran Duran to super stardom.



*Duran Duran 1981*

The band continued touring while they wrote a second album called *Rio*, released in 1982. During *Rio*'s final production, the band flew to India and Antigua to film a variety of music videos on location, which this time, were not risqué but cinematic in nature (*The Ultimate Review* 2006). The setting, action, and even the band's attire in *Hungry Like the Wolf* looks remarkably like that in *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (1981), for example. MTV, a fledgling network at the time, recognised the potential of Duran Duran's new

videos and began playing them in high rotation (*VH1 Classic Albums: Rio* 2008).



*The iconic yacht scene in Duran's Rio video, 1982*

This rapid and widespread exposure meant that the faces of Duran Duran were being piped into every television set with a cable connection, because if there was a teenager in the house, that set was tuned to MTV. Thus the adolescent girls of the world took notice. The country of Japan, in particular, recognised the opportunity and chose to do a photo spread in a teen magazine of John Taylor (ibid). Soon other teen magazines worldwide wanted to feature the boys of Duran Duran too.



*Collection of teen magazines, courtesy Lizardking.com*

Overnight Duran found themselves performing to hordes of screaming teen girls, an audience to whom they had never intentionally set out to

appeal (ibid.). It was the image of Duran Duran that won the hearts and minds of the teen audience, rather than its sound alone. Still colourful and androgynous in appearance, the band's style gradually began to morph as their audience changed. In less makeup (with the exception of Nick Rhodes) and slightly more masculine attire, Duran were sought and hunted by teen girls everywhere they went in the early 1980s, much like the Beatles had been in the early 1960s (Taylor 2008).



*Duran Duran 1983*

As a result, isolation, exhaustion and excess in the form of drugs and alcohol began to wear on the band (ibid.). But they forged on, and in 1983 they released their third album, *Seven and the Ragged Tiger*, which today, some of the band members feel was too 'mainstream' (*VH1 Classic Albums: Rio* 2008). Still, they were at the height of their popularity, continuing to top the charts and tour worldwide throughout 1984. Duran even produced a feature-length concert film, *Arena* (1984), which featured the debut of an extravagant extended video for their single *Wild Boys*.





*Duran Duran on the set of the Wild Boys video, 1984*

The band split into two separate groups in 1985. Two band members, John and Andy Taylor, went the way of Power Station with Robert Palmer in New York City, whose music was more along the lines of traditional rock (Taylor 2008). While two other band members, Simon Le Bon and Nick Rhodes, moved to Paris where they formed Arcadia, a more 'artistic' band (*The Ultimate Review* 2006).



*Album covers for Arcadia and The Power Station, Duran's two side projects in 1985*

A fifth band member, and always the diplomat, Roger Taylor, could not decide to which camp he belonged, so he had one foot in each. With these two 'side projects' (as they like to call them today), Duran saw its core

interests (and politics) split right down the middle. After a year of working as two separate groups, the original five members reconvened only twice more in that decade to record the title track for the James Bond film *A View to a Kill* (1985) and to perform together for the televised charity event *Live Aid*, also in 1985 (ibid.).

After that year, the stress proved too much for sensitive drummer Roger Taylor, and he quit the music scene altogether (*VH1 Classic Albums: Rio* 2008). Guitarist Andy Taylor followed suit, but not without entering into a legal dispute with the existing band members, which still plagued them during the writing and promotion of their fourth album, *Notorious*, in 1986 (*Three to Get Ready* 1987). By this stage the band consisted of only three members, founding members John Taylor and Nick Rhodes, and singer Simon Le Bon. Eventually adding another guitarist, Warren Cuccurullo (an American, formerly with the band Missing Persons), Duran struggled, no longer finding success as easy as in their earlier incarnation (Duerden 1998). They produced more albums, the next being *Big Thing* (1988), which had two hits, *I Don't Want Your Love* and *All She Wants Is*. But with individual band members growing increasingly preoccupied with the business of married life and children, professional success was becoming more difficult. Their next album *Liberty* was considered a commercial failure (*The Ultimate Review* 2006). It was not until the release of the fan-titled *Wedding Album* (the album was officially another self-titled *Duran Duran*) in 1993 that Duran Duran saw a resurgence in popularity due to their hit singles *Ordinary World* and *Come Undone* (*Live from London* 2004). The Wedding Album proved to be a blip,

however, and Duran's subsequent albums continued to struggle. Making matters worse, during the development of Duran's ninth album *Medazzaland* in 1997, bassist and co-founding member John Taylor, who had been battling drug addiction, announced he was leaving the band (*The Ultimate Review* 2006). With only two original members, Duran Duran finished that album and managed to produce one more in 1999, *Pop Trash*, but Simon Le Bon claimed to have lost all motivation to continue beyond that point, feeling the band was at its end (Malins 2005).

Because the 'popular' music movement of 1990s had moved onto grunge and alternative rock, some speculate that Duran's music had no place. While the times had changed, their sound did not. This would prove to be a blessing for them, however, once the millennium hit. So in 2000, talks began among various Duran band members, former and active, about reforming (*Live from London* 2004). And in 2003, amidst a wave of other 'nostalgic' band reunions, Duran Duran announced that all five original band members had reunited to write a new album and tour worldwide. With the release of the album *Astronaut* in 2004, the band saw their greatest commercial and critical success since the early 1980s. But only two years later things began to disintegrate, when guitarist Andy Taylor once again quit the band (*VH1 Classic Albums: Rio* 2008). Still, Duran managed to release two more albums with *Red Carpet Massacre* in 2007 and *All You Need Is Now* in 2010.



*Duran Duran today*

Renowned from the start as a great live act, Duran Duran still perform live, but some critics have begun to doubt their staying power with the strain that the touring schedule puts on the voice of Simon Le Bon, now in his 50s, whose vocal ailments caused the whole of the UK and European tours to be cancelled in early 2011. Still, as a band whose posters once covered thousands of teen girls' bedroom walls, present-day Duran Duran has been successful at drawing upon the impression it made on youth culture in the 1980s. With this in mind, I would like to now turn my attention toward my motivation for choosing the fans of Duran Duran as the focus of this research.

### **Personal Motivation**

The focus of this study is close to my heart. I am a fan myself and have been since I was 12 years old. I'll never forget the first time I saw Duran Duran on MTV. Nor will I forget the first time my best friend played one of their albums for me, or what I thought of the poster she had on the back of her bedroom door. Even better was seeing them for the first time in concert when I was 16. Never before had I encountered an audience like that. Girls



were screaming, jumping, and throwing every item of clothing imaginable onto the stage. I was both terrified and fascinated. The crowd's enthusiasm was contagious and it furthered the thrill of seeing my favourite band on stage for the first time. That breathless feeling at the sight of them onstage has never dissipated over the years. And my initial amazement and curiosity about the other fans' behaviour is what planted the seed for me to later pursue audience and fan research.

Like many other fans, upon entering adulthood my interest dulled due to societal pressures that my fannish tendencies were best left in teen hood. But I never fully let go. The posters on my bedroom walls came down but the images still lived on in my head. My fandom was quiet and passive until a few years ago when I attended a concert again. My best friend was with me. She told me later that she had not seen me act that animated since we were teens, dancing, jumping, singing, screaming. These men were my Beatles, and I had rediscovered them. The feeling was overwhelming. I went home and realized I had to have that back in my life again. I found and joined their fan community soon after, an experience that changed my life, taking me to other countries to attend shows and meet fans halfway around the world. Suddenly my life was full of new friends and experiences, more than I could realistically manage.



If that single concert experience affected me so profoundly, I want to understand what happened. Is there some element of reclaimed youth at play? Do other fans have similar experiences? By sharing my story, I hope that I have shed light on my personal interest in conducting and being part of this study. I am aware my own experience will no doubt colour my perception, reception, and analysis, but I also believe that my frame of reference will provide the project with a unique perspective, a look at pop idol fan culture from the inside.

### **Academic Discourses on Fandom**

Now that I have shared my personal stake in this study, it is essential that I provide academic justification for embarking upon this research endeavour. To do so, I will situate my research precisely in relation to the origins and developments of research on fandom, as omission of this debate may result in my research appearing as though in a vacuum. The following is a high level discussion of various debates and trends in fandom studies which relate to my research direction. Such an exercise also sets the groundwork necessary to frame the findings and assumptions revealed in the

chapters that follow. I will engage with each of these subject areas at greater length in subsequent chapters when I discuss my field data.

### **The ‘Scholar Fan’ and Subjectivity**

I approach my research on fandom from an extremely personal place because I am a fan myself. Therefore, when surveying prior studies on fans, I was drawn to work by other scholars who also found themselves in that precarious identification as both scholar and fan. While this ambiguous position might be seen as a privileged role, it is indeed a difficult place in which to be situated when considering the implications of one’s own subjectivity on ethnographic research, and how that research can, in turn, affect us as researchers.

In communicating her experience and identity as a female member of the African American community, Patricia Hills Collins (2000) argues for the use of first-person plural verbiage such as ‘we’ and ‘our’, thereby including herself in the community about which she writes. Rosalind Coward makes a similar statement in *Female Desire* (1984): ‘The pleasures I describe are often my own pleasures... I don’t approach these things as a distant critic but as someone examining myself, examining my own life under a microscope’ (Coward in Storey 1998, p. 263). This tendency to approach the study of popular culture from a subjective perspective is indicative of feminist work in cultural studies (Storey *ibid.*). Likewise, in my discussions of fandom, I have found that there is no more honest way to approach my research than to unashamedly identify my dual location as both scholar and fan, as well as include my own experiences in my case studies and analysis. The difficulty in

doing so is in unravelling my own emotions, which are inextricably entwined with the very fan experiences I investigate and discuss.

The past two decades of ethnographic practice have seen a move from more traditionally objective tactics of dealing with research subjects to more subjective methods. Henry Jenkins is probably the most frequently referenced figure in the literature of fan studies, because he was one of the first academics who admits from the start, that he is also a fan. Indeed, in much of what he writes, he speaks from his own experience. He calls himself an Aca/Fan or scholar fan, a 'hybrid identity' that represents contrasting perspectives in audience studies (Jenkins 2006, p. 4). Jenkins' philosophy emerged out of a combination of influences, such as a shift in ethnographic practice toward more autobiographical approaches as well as new directions in anthropology that recognized the researcher's personal investment in their experiences with subjects. He also cites being influenced by epistemological explorations of culture via research in the areas of gender and sexuality (ibid., p. 4-5).

While Jenkins' position as an Aca/Fan was praised by some because it allowed a more engaged dialogue about fandom, it was criticized by others. Accused of 'going native' and 'slumming it', the general consensus of his critics was that real academics could not be, or perhaps should not be, fans themselves (ibid., p. 5). He claims his decision to 'out' himself as a fan in his book *Textual Poachers* (1992) caused controversy. Some academics apparently feared that Jenkins' hybrid identity was a conflict of interest.

Jenkins notes that he suspects some academics felt threatened by his dual role.

This dual positioning has been discussed by other scholars too, including Alexander Doty and Richard Burt. Matt Hills compares these debates in his attempt to locate his own positioning in the grey haze that we academics who are also fans inhabit (Hills 2002, p. 2). Karen Hellekson and Kristina Busse likewise take the position as scholar fans in their research on fan fiction communities, explaining that their dual identities as academics and fans are inseparable and useful (Hellekson & Busse 2006, p. 24). They contend that their subject positions do not cloud their vision but rather situate them at a vantage point where they can see with greater clarity, so that they may offer a more complete picture of fandom (ibid., p. 25). Nick Stevenson describes a positive reception when he begins ethnographic research by first identifying himself as a fan: 'Generally speaking, it was comparatively easy to get people to talk about their fandom, and important within this was presenting myself as a David Bowie fan. This helped to build up a rapport with the people interviewed' (Stevenson 2009, p. 81). Such subjective approaches have spread to music journalism, where Barry Divola, who conducted extensive research on pop music fandom in the 1990s, employs a similar strategy in his book *Fanclub: It's a Fan's World, Pop Stars Just Live In It* (1998) by beginning with the confession: 'I admit it. I am a fan. I have been obsessive, fanatical and downright sad in my time' (Divola 1998, p. 2). But Divola's choice of pathological terminology suggests that derogatory

meanings are still attached to fandom outside of academia, and I will argue, this is particularly the case with female fandom.

### **Lifelong Fandom**

One of the most common topics that fans wanted to discuss with me during my field work was their teen fandom, including their discovery stories, favourite memories, and nostalgia they experience today when listening to Duran Duran. In the coming chapters, I propose that these elements are a significant factor in the development and sustainability of lifelong fandom. According to Harrington and Bielby (2010):

... what is missing from contemporary fan studies... is explicit consideration of life course perspectives that can help clarify and deepen our understanding of fans' sustained engagement with media objects over time and the transformations of fandom in later life (p. 434).

Indeed, there are few academic accounts of research on lifelong fandom. Nick Stevenson's (2009) study on male fans of Bowie is one example. Stevenson's findings are applicable to my research interests in a number of respects, and I will refer to his research repeatedly throughout this thesis.

Hills (2010) refers to artists like David Bowie and Duran Duran as 'post-popular music', that is, pop music that was once mainstream and topping record sales, but who now have a 'cult' fan following (Hills 2010). Although not academic, a recent book written by a male Duran fan has proved surprisingly relevant in this regard. The autobiography by music journalist Rob Sheffield, *Talking to Girls About Duran Duran* (2010), touches on many of the same themes explored in my research, particularly those that

relate to adolescent identity formation. Sheffield's account effectively highlights the significance and influence of the cultural context of the 1980s, the era in which most Duran fans became fans, emphasizing the inescapable impression that pop culture is capable of making on its youth. In his autobiography, Sheffield shares the confusion of his teen years (particularly with reference to his attempts to understand the opposite sex) and he explains how various instances of pop music helped him navigate the confusion. Much of Sheffield's narrative is amusingly accurate, and as a female fan myself, there are excerpts with which I can closely identify:

An adult woman might have a slightly mocking, slightly ironic relationship to her teenage Duran-loving self, and yet she can still feel that love in a non-ironic way. And when adult women talk about them, they turn into *those girls* again (Sheffield 2010, p. 7)

Sheffield justifiably considers the perspective of males when discussing Duran Duran fandom, confessing, 'Boys do not scream, so we get threatened by all this libidinal energy. As the musical philosopher Lil' Kim has noted, inside every man is a *baaaad* girl. And that girl can scare the bejeezus out of us' (ibid., p. 258). His assertion is consistent with much of the literature regarding males feeling threatened by Beatlemania, which I will discuss within this thesis. As a fan himself though, Sheffield admits a twinge of jealousy while being torn about how to react, 'When I hear Duran, part of me wants to scream for them and part of me wants to be the guy the girls are screaming for' (ibid., p. 259).

But moving beyond Sheffield's tongue-in-cheek delineation of the differences that characterize the female versus male response to Duran

Duran, another noteworthy characteristic about his book is its framework. It is structured in the form of a 'set list' or 'mix tape', with each chapter labelled using a different 1980s song title (and in fact he utilizes the same structure in his previous book, titling it accordingly, *Love is a Mix Tape* (2007). By utilizing such a framework, Sheffield reveals the methodology he used to recall the memory data for his teen memoir, in which he makes an association between music and memory: 'I'm just shaking them [the songs] to see what memories come tumbling out. And of course, a lot of those memories have to do with love, and learning about love through pop music' (Sheffield 2010, p. 11). The correlation Sheffield draws between 'love' and pop music is significant for my research, because so many women became fans of pop when they were adolescents, a time in which they were beginning to explore their sexuality. Therefore the topics of boys, love, and sex were often intermingled, a conglomeration of confusing subjects about which teen girls were tremendously curious and preoccupied. Recalling Frith (1990), it is understandable, given the influence that pop media has on young people, that girls and boys would both listen to pop songs (the content of which is often about love and romance) in an effort to learn more about these subjects and the opposite sex. Returning to the idea of memory recall, Sheffield illustrates music's uncanny ability to induce memories when he describes what it feels like to listen to *Decade*, a compilation of Duran's greatest hits from the '80s: 'Listening to it now is like a personally guided tour through my past. Every song is like a time capsule' (ibid., p. 254). Drawing upon Sheffield's mix-tape structure for inspiration, I applied a similar



approach to the chapter titles in this thesis, with each containing Duran Duran song titles and lyrics.

Sheffield's profound attachment to and lifelong identification with Duran Duran as a guiding 'text' is noteworthy, because it is not so fundamentally dissimilar to the fan attachments that female Duran fans report. Sheffield's experience is also consistent with Angela McRobbie's assertion that the impact of cultural influences like pop music during the formative period of adolescence cannot be underestimated (McRobbie 2010). It is the power of these early formative moments which are so key to identity formation, that enable some adolescents to then carry such attachments with them their entire lives, forming lifelong fandoms. This idea illustrates how nostalgia (a term often used by the women I have interviewed) can be a powerful force, repeatedly drawing fans back to that moment when they first discovered their idols.

### **Nostalgia, Memory, and Affect**

Nostalgia was thought to be a pathological medical condition in the seventeenth century, curable by various treatments including leeches, opium, and a journey to the Swiss Alps (Boym 2001, p. xiv). According to Svetlana Boym, the now-incurable nostalgia 'permeates twentieth century popular culture' (ibid.). Such criticism of nostalgia is not uncommon, making its 'value' difficult to quantify. Here is another example:

[Nostalgia] is frequently treated as a structural and contemporary disease of the present, as a set of ersatz experiences promoted by the culture industry's intent of stealing not just the present, but also the past from consumers (Bull 2009 qtd. in Garde-Hansen 2011, p. 122)

Boym defines nostalgia as 'a sentiment of loss and displacement, but it is also a romance with one's own fantasy' (Boym 2001, p. xiii). Fantasy, much like nostalgia, I would argue, is a concept that receives similar dismissive treatment. But because both are key components to Duran fandom, their inclusion in my analysis is essential. Boym is not necessarily a critic of nostalgia, which is evident when she claims, 'Nostalgia is not always about the past; it can be retrospective but also prospective' (ibid., p. xvi) and then goes on to explain that 'the future of nostalgic longing and progressive thinking are at the center' of her investigation (ibid.) Applicable to my own scholarship is Boym's assertion that 'Nostalgic love can only survive in a long-distance relationship' (ibid.). Distance, referring to *time* in this case, is a characteristic that I will revisit in my analysis of Duran fandom. Additionally, I can relate to the following confession because I struggled with a similar challenge as I worked on this project:

The study of nostalgia inevitably slows us down. There is, after all, something pleasantly outmoded about the very idea of longing... Nostalgic time is that time-out-of-time of daydreaming and longing that jeopardizes one's timetables and work ethic, even when one is working on nostalgia (ibid., p. xix).

While there is not much academic literature from which to draw concerning how nostalgia functions for lifelong pop music fans, there are a handful of audience studies which deal with similar long-term attachments. The following is a brief discussion about how each of these studies casts an additional light on the specificities of pop music fandom, as well as suggesting how processes of memory and nostalgia may function and be gendered.

Joanne Garde-Hansen's *Media and Memory* (2011) documents the history of memory studies and draws connections between history, memory, and media. Of her work, the most relevant to my research is her discussion of diachronic Madonna fandom, in which fan nostalgia pertaining to Madonna's celebrity image is examined (Garde-Hansen 2011, p. 120). According to Garde-Hansen, 'pop music and nostalgia create a powerful marketable mix that evoke youthfulness' (ibid., p. 134), and more research needs to be conducted in this field:

The relationship between popular memory and popular music has had little attention (ibid., p. 121)... therefore longstanding artists like Madonna, who have been celebrated for reinvention and innovation, have been left unanalysed for how they are able to continually rearticulate their pop music archive through fan memory (ibid., p. 122).

Exploring fan memories thus 'provides valuable research data on the bridges that people build between their own lives, their identities, the collectives of shared histories and the culture of popular consumption' (ibid., p. 123).

Annette Kuhn's (1999) research is also relevant to my own in a number of ways, not least that it deals with female fans and ageing – most of her ethnographic participants are over the age of 70. Kuhn's ethno-historical study of film reception explores the processes of memory recall and nostalgia among fans of 1930s film stars. When referring to their fandom, Kuhn uses the term *enduring fandom*: 'loyalty to a star which continues throughout the fan's life, and even beyond the star's death' (Kuhn 1999, p. 135). She describes fans' discovery stories in a manner which is consistent with the accounts of the Duran fans I interviewed:

It appears to be characteristic of the written memory accounts of enduring fans not only that the defining moment of 'falling in love' with the star is vividly recalled, but also that this moment is accorded motivating status in a narrative of lifelong devotion (ibid., p. 137).

A noteworthy aspect of Kuhn's research is her analysis of the way such memories seem to function, specifically how her subjects' memory accounts 'move between past and present as memories of past activities are brought back into the present' (ibid., p. 139). Kuhn suggests that this activity is connected to fantasy construction, a characteristic that is also present in the testimonies of Duran fans.

Rachel Moseley's (2002) audience study on fans of Audrey Hepburn is also important to mention here for its focus on lifelong fandom as well as its attention to ageing and gender. Moseley's is a multi-generational study – she surveyed older fans of Hepburn and their daughters, who were also fans. The two categories had different fan relationships with the film star, but both were based on a nostalgic identification, similar to what Garde-Hansen found with Madonna fans: 'We want the skin, face, and body of Madonna to fight time, to forget to age, to be preserved in a past image and offer us memories of our own younger faces and bodies' (Garde-Hansen 2011, p. 131). For fans of Audrey Hepburn, she also personified a form of uncomplicated femininity from a pre-feminist era, and yet she exhibited a post-feminist sensibility. Hepburn represented a 'hegemonic (and yet 'timelessly modern') feminine style, 'a bygone age', and a time of romance, innocence and clearly defined gender roles' (Moseley 2002, p. 212). In other words, she embodied 'values which society perceives to be in crisis' (ibid). In subsequent chapters

I will consider the appeal of such nostalgic identifications for fans who are approaching midlife.

Often coupled with nostalgia and memory is affect, an association suggested by Garde-Hansen when she describes memory as 'emotive, creative, empathetic, cognitive and sensory' (2011, p. 7). As defined by *Merriam-Webster*, affect is 'the conscious subjective aspect of an emotion considered apart from bodily changes' or 'a set of observable manifestations of a subjectively experienced emotion' (*Merriam-Webster Collegiate Dictionary* 2003). According to Lynn Zubernis & Katherine Larsen (2012), 'affective states are inherent in fandom' (p. 10). In their research with *Supernatural* fans, they explore a number of behaviours that are common across many fandoms, such as fans' 'uninhibited emotional reactions', which they call 'squee' (ibid., p. 7) Hills, too, analyses affective fan expressions in his discussion of 'emotivism' when referring to media representations of Michael Jackson fans in the UK documentary *Wacko About Jacko* (2005) (Hills 2007, p. 459), and elsewhere he encourages such study (Hills 2002, p. 22). As Lawrence Grossberg (1992) points out:

The fan's relation to cultural texts operates in the domain of affect or mood. Affect is perhaps the most difficult plane of our lives to define, not merely because it is even less necessarily tied to meaning than pleasure, but also because it is, in some sense, the most mundane aspect of everyday life. Affect is closely tied to what we often describe as the feeling of life (p. 56)... Affect is what gives 'color', tone' or 'texture' to our experiences (p. 57).

Grossberg goes on to argue that critics 'tend to think of mood as formless and disorganized. But affect is also organized; it operates within and, at the same time, produces maps which direct our investments in and

into the world' (ibid.). With respect to such maps in lifelong fandom, fans create a narrative trajectory that connects their life experiences with their affective fannish memories. I will return to the significance of affect, memory, and nostalgia when I examine the lifelong attachments of Duran fans in Chapter 3.

### **The Politics Surrounding Female Fandom**

'Fans get a bad press. The familiar images of fandom are loaded with negative stereotypes and labels of deviancy ... why is it so maligned and stigmatized?' (Lewis 1992, p. iii) This question was posited in the introduction to *The Adoring Audience*, a book that brought together various discourses by scholars from an array of disciplines including popular music studies, sociology, and feminism. Academia's direction with fan studies has changed since that time, turning away from the attitude that fandom is pathological. But even now, popular criticism still locates many fans as 'isolated' and 'inept' (Moore 2005, p. 82). This perception is changing in some respects, particularly in academia, where 'the battle to place fandom on the cultural studies agenda has long since been won' (Hills 2002, p. 183). But where society at large is concerned, 'condescension and condemnation is but one narrative of many surrounding the phenomenon of fandom' (Andrews & Whorlow 2000, p. 258). This is particularly true in regard to fans of 'women's media'. As this thesis unfolds, I will reveal how female pop music fans are still not treated in the same regard as other types of fans. Additionally, Jenkins suggests that such politics actually incite fans to gravitate toward one another and form community:

Many fans characterize their entry into fandom in terms of a movement from the social and cultural isolation doubly imposed upon them as women within a patriarchal society and as seekers after alternative pleasures within dominant media representations, toward more and more active participation in a 'community' receptive to their cultural productions, a 'community' within which they may feel a sense of 'belonging' (Jenkins 2006, p.41).

But as I will also show, fan communities are not entirely 'safe' spheres free from political conflict. The reasons for such tendencies are complex, and I will discuss more about these issues in the coming chapters.

### **Online Fandom**

One of my primary interests when I began this research was to explore the ways in which the Internet changed Duran fandom, because I know it changed mine. Regarding fandom in general, this question has been posed before by other academics, including Jenkins:

For [Pierre] Levy, the introduction of high-speed networked computing constituted an epistemological turning point in the development of collective intelligence. If fandom was already a knowledge culture well before the internet, then how did transplanting its practices into the new digital environment alter the fan community? (Jenkins 2002, p. 15)

For nearly 30 years, Duran fans have engaged with one another and with their 'text' in a wide array of ways, including private spaces such as the bedroom (and the home in general), and public spaces like concert venues, school, and the workplace. About a decade ago, the Internet became another space where Duran fans practiced their fandom and came in contact with one another. Many even claim that the Internet has not only increased their level of fandom, but made them feel less isolated. Not surprisingly, 100% of the Duran fans I surveyed report that their level of fandom has

changed in some capacity due to the Internet. In terms of the ways in which their fandom has changed, 43% of them report being friends with other fans due to the Internet, including 'hanging out' with them at non-fan related gatherings. Online community is a facet of fandom I cannot ignore in my research because a significant amount of Duran fan activity occurs online. In the following section I will turn my attention to technology by exploring literature that deals with the ways in which fandom's transition onto the Internet has altered the fan experience. In particular I will focus on literature that deals with an aspect of fandom that has perhaps been most enhanced by this new technology, the notion of fan 'community'.

In the preface to their collection *Fan Fiction and Fan Communities in the Age of the Internet: New Essays* (2006 p. 13), Karen Hellekson and Kristina Busse chart fandom's move onto the Internet. While their focus is fan fiction rather than fandom in general, they provide a thorough history of fandom's transition to the online realm. With that ground already covered, there is little need for me to duplicate such a history here. I will focus, rather, on issues relevant to my specific area of research that have been raised by literature on online fandom, one of these being the observation that fandom's shift online has altered its core nature:

Perhaps the most important technological advance, the one with the farthest reaching implications, is the advent of the Internet. The transition of fandom to the Internet occurred during the early 1990s. Before then, fandom was a face-to-face proposition: fan clubs formed, and fans wrote newsletters, zines, and APAs ('amateur press association' add-on circuit newsletters) and got together at conventions. This meant that fandom was transmitted from person to person through enculturation. Fan artifacts were physical, and geographical



boundaries were often an issue. The movement online has changed all of this. (Hellekson & Busse 2006, p. 13)

This statement illustrates Shaun Moores' proposition that 'the 'interaction mix' of social life has changed' (Moores 2005, p. 73), a concept I will discuss further in Chapter 5. This observation is also consistent with my findings, in that a number of activities take place now which did not before the Internet became widespread, and a number of other activities (such as the sharing of information) have become easier and more commonplace due to the immediacy that the Internet enables. Hellekson & Busse also point out that most prior literature on fandom was written before the move online, and this represents a gap in existing research:

Yet despite the proliferation of online fan activity, the movement of fandom from a physical space to a virtual one has not been adequately addressed in the academic literature. Most of the research in fan studies began in the late 1980s and early 1990s, before the movement online, and subsequent research has built on this base. (ibid., p. 16-17)

Hellekson's and Busse's collection of essays focuses solely on online communities that produce fan fiction. This represents yet another gap – their book's narrow focus excludes the type of fans I explore, some of whom may produce fan fiction, but who also engage in a wide array of other fannish activities as well. In fact, most of the prior literature on online fandom relates to the writing of fan fiction. For communities such as the one that I investigate, the pinnacle activity in which pop music fans engage is concert attendance, and not the writing of fan fiction. I argue that this contrast in forms of fan engagement is due to a fundamental difference in the types of media that generate these fandoms. Television and film does not offer the same opportunity for 'live', in-person, mass fan participation that music

performance does. All three forms of media can spawn fan conventions, but the 'concert' has a long history that precedes the invention of the other media mentioned here. Therefore the essence of music fandom is much different from the start, and I argue that it deserves the same level of investigation that fan fiction has received from academia.

Like Hellekson & Busse, Hills also challenges future studies of fandom to explore its online aspects. He describes 'how new media technology has affected cult media and fan cultures, unpicking some of the celebratory rhetoric which has accompanied the migration and movement of fan culture on to the web' (Hills 2002, p. 23). Hills describes what he calls the textualization and serialisation of the fan audience, referring to the way in which fan communication itself has become a serialised event that can be tracked and followed. Each day on an online forum brings new activity. In my research, fans log in because they want to be 'in the know', they do not want to be left behind with respect to fan interactions and gossip. Hills suggests this serialisation provides ripe material for the 'ethnographic lurker', or someone conducting ethnography in cyberspace (ibid., p. 175). In his more recent work, Jenkins (2006), too, challenges researchers to conduct more investigation of this area, claiming that when he presented his initial research in his widely quoted *Textual Poachers* (1992), that the Internet was not yet widespread.

But even when the Internet became more commonplace, *virtuality* was a fervent concern, a fear that the Internet 'might be corrosive to the existing patterns of group, family, and community life' (Kozinets 2010, p. 26):

[T]here is still a widespread impression that online interaction is somehow not 'real'... The social fields we interact in exist quite concretely. The people at the other end of a social networking site or in virtual worlds are no less real than the people who talk to us on the telephone, author the books we read, or write us letters (ibid., p. 130).

In my ethnographic field work I found that the present-day Internet culture of Duran fans has not replaced in-person communications; rather it has become a networking tool that enables more in-person interactions to take place, in which case a new culture has emerged out of bedroom culture, a culture that didn't exist for most Duran fans pre-Internet: a concert and touring culture. And for most Duran fans, the online environment is just as real as their in-person interactions. Online communities like Duran's fan club are therefore valuable for ethnographic study because they are another argument against cyberspace's 'in-authenticity'. And yet, the terms 'virtuality' and 'virtual' are still used in contrast to the somehow more 'real' offline world, even by fans themselves. To counter such beliefs, Kozinets argues that:

Online communities are not virtual. The people that we meet online are not virtual. They are real communities populated with real people, which is why so many end up meeting in the flesh... Online communities are communities; there is no room for debate about this topic anymore. They teach us about real languages, real meanings, real causes, real cultures (Kozinets, p. 15).

Therefore, the Internet 'should be treated as 'part of everyday life' and 'as continuous with... other social spaces'' (Miller & Slater quoted in Moores 2005, p. 65) and virtuality should be treated 'as a social accomplishment rather than an assumed feature of the Internet' (Miller & Slater quoted in Kozinets 2010, p. 171). As evidence of this, '[a]nalyses of national surveys suggest that Internet users are just as likely as those who do not use the

Internet to call their friends on the telephone or to visit them in person, and actually conclude that Internet users have larger social networks than those who are not users' (DiMaggio et al. 2001 quoted in Kozinets 2010, p. 26). And in a study about friendships online, Carter (2005) found that some individuals devote 'as much time and effort in online relationships' as they do with their offline friendships (Kozinets 2010, p. 38). As Carter contends,

Individuals are extending their webs of personal relationships to include cyberspace. In this respect cyberspace is no longer distinct and separate from the real world. It is part of everyday life, as these relationships are becoming embedded in everyday life (Carter 2005 quoted in Kozinets 2010, p. 38).

As a result, 'social relationships... are currently in a state of transformation' (ibid.), a conclusion that echoes Moores (2005, p. 73). For the Duran fans in my ethnographic study, the Internet has been integrated into their everyday lives (and into their fan practices). To the devoted fan, the Internet has not only become integrated into everyday life, it is also essential. Jenkins claims the Internet has altered the landscape of fandom in two ways: its global reach and its enabling the frequency of interaction:

The speed and frequency of communication may intensify the social bonds within the fan community. In the past, fans inhabited a 'week-end only world', see each other in large numbers only a few times a year – at conventions.(20) Now, fans may interact daily, if not hourly, online. Geographically isolated fans can feel much more connected to the fan community and home-ridden fans enjoy a new level of acceptance. (Jenkins 2002 , p. 7)

An aspect of Duran fan community that impressed me when I first discovered it was its global nature. The first Duran fan I befriended as an adult lived half-way around the world. Relatively quickly I made more friends from far-off places, including countries where English was not the primary

language. Ironically it was only after these remote connections were forged, that I began to meet fans from my own locale. I have to assume, that while Duran's appeal had indeed reached these global cultures before the days of the Internet, that the disparate Duran fandoms in these various locations were not connected until the Internet made that possible.

J.B. Thompson (1995) defines globalisation as 'the growing interconnectedness of different parts of the world, a process which gives rise to complex forms of interaction and interdependency' (1995, p. 149). A key term in that definition is *complex*, because globalization is the outcome of 'a broader set of processes which have transformed (and are still transforming) the modern world', a change brought about by media technology's 'reordering of space and time' (ibid.). This point concerning the way in which globalisation has forced us to change how we think about space and place are crucial to the study of Internet communication and online fandom. A number of theorists, including Thompson and Hills, suggest that globalisation is an area where further research is warranted with respect to both communication and fandom.

While my research is not specifically aimed at investigating global aspects of fandom to any great extent, I cannot ignore the fact that participants from my ethnographic study span the globe, a situation which prompts various cultures to interact (and sometimes clash) with one another. Several fans in my research have remarked about friendships and antagonisms made with fans on the other side of the world. Such ideas recall and expand upon Marshall McLuhan's (1974) 'global village' (an almost

prophetic concept considering that it was conceived pre-Internet) which describes media technology's capability to reach people in disparate locations and make them feel part of a collective.

## **Chapter Summary**

Having previewed the major subject areas covered in this thesis, in the following chapters I will locate my research within the context of these various academic discourses. The following is a summary of the content that can be found in each chapter:

*Chapter 2: Please, Please Tell Me Now – Methodology* outlines the various strategies used to conduct my ethnographic field work, analysis, and auto-ethnographic memory work.

*Chapter 3: Be My Icon – Lifelong Fandom and Identity* begins the presentation and consideration of field data in the form of fan testimonials, focusing on the personal and private aspects of female fandom, particularly how memory, nostalgia, and fantasy contribute to long-term fandom as key factors in both identity construction and continued identity affirmation.

*Chapter 4: Girl Panic – Female Fandom and the Politics of Popular Music* evaluates the empowerment and euphoria that adult female fans claim they experience when attending concerts. By exploring concepts such as 'the scream', this chapter considers the pleasures of teen fandom but applies them to adult fandom. This chapter also interrogates the external politics surrounding female fan behaviour, particularly judgment experienced by female fans from outside parties in society, including their spouses, families,

and peers. Fan reaction to these judgments is also explored, including fan shame and ‘closet fandom’.

*Chapter 5: Strange Behaviour – Politics, Competition, and Exclusion* launches into a consideration of the contrasting experiences of Duran Duran fandom. On one end of the spectrum fans celebrate the communal aspect of female pop fandom, focusing on community benefits such as friendships and a ‘support group’ mentality, where fans reveal that they find solace with one another to escape the external judgment discussed in the previous chapter. But another side of Duran fan community reveals that complex internal politics have developed as a result of competition over ‘status’ which is determined by a variety of factors including seniority, perceived ownership, class, and fan etiquette. I discuss a handful of prior studies which deal with hierarchies and competition in fan communities, and I propose that this dynamic is further complicated by the combination of online and offline interactions in which Duran fans engage.

*Chapter 6: I Don’t Want Your Love – Reflections on Scholar-Fandom* considers how I negotiated my dual role as scholar and fan during my field work. I consider how the prevalence of community politics and hierarchies (of which I am a part) directly attributed to the challenges that I faced. I investigate my own subjectivity surrounding these research encounters in depth, in hopes to incite other scholars to ask similarly difficult questions about their own ethnographic research methods.

Finally, *Chapter 7: And She Dances on the Sand – Conclusion* completes this thesis by synthesising all of the concepts and findings

presented in the other chapters. I will review the objectives this thesis has achieved and summarise how it has achieved them.

### **Contributions to Existing Research**

Throughout this thesis I will locate my research within the context of the various academic discourses presented. By identifying areas where there are knowledge gaps and opportunities for more research, I will show how my research has made a significant contribution in filling these gaps and how it furthers continued debates in the associated fields of study. By offering a more complete and honest picture of female fandom, this thesis drives forward discourses in feminism, popular music studies, fandom studies, and methodological practice relating to the role and subjectivity of the 'scholar fan'.



## ***Please, Please Tell Me Now – Methodology***



When I embarked upon this examination of the female experience in pop music fandom, I defined a broad set of research questions that I hoped my research could answer. One of these questions concerned the Internet's influence on fan practice. I wanted to know how fan experience has changed historically with the introduction of online communication. To answer this question, I had to conduct a thorough investigation into fan practice both past and present. Evidence concerning the Internet's impact on fandom was collected through a variety of techniques, including direct queries with fans and indirect observations.

Another of my research questions sought to ascertain the factors that contribute to the initiation and sustainability of lifelong fandom, which required that I delve into issues such as loyalty, memory, and the importance of fantasy in the construction of identity. This aim required a considerable amount of background research into existing literature on related topics and other fan studies that investigate similar concepts. Querying participants on personal and abstract subjects such as identity proved more complicated than I had anticipated, and therefore any conclusions associated with this area result less from the raw data acquired than from analyses performed on field data after the data gathering stage was complete.

And finally, I was interested in the female experience of pop fandom, both individually and communally. Choosing a community that was primarily female, I interrogated fan practice both directly and indirectly via a variety of fan querying techniques and observations. Above all I endeavoured to treat

pop idols and their female fans as worthy of serious academic study in an attempt to understand and validate the pleasures derived from both.

## **Approach**

To meet these research aims, I used a multi-pronged qualitative approach. Here I will provide a high-level summary of this approach, expanding upon each of these methodologies in subsequent sections.

First, an ethnographic study was conducted on a sampling of female pop fans of Duran Duran. Other fan communities were surveyed for comparison purposes, including fans of the Backstreet Boys and Take That. Methods of data collection included observation, questionnaires, polls, interviews, and focus groups. Data was obtained online via email and public message boards and live at events like conventions and concerts. Secondly, the data obtained from the ethnographic study was analyzed using multiple theoretical modes of inquiry from various disciplines including media and cultural studies, fan studies, feminist criticism, gender studies, and sociology. The third prong of my qualitative approach involved the incorporation of auto-ethnographic content. I am a member of one of the fan communities surveyed, so some of the data and my analysis was informed by my own experience and frame of reference.

## **Timeline**

The proposed timeline for this project outlined three stages allocated across three years of research. In reality the tasks associated with each stage overlapped and were continuous throughout all stages. Roughly, stage 1 consisted of reviewing prior literature, gaining ethical approval from the

appropriate institutions, initiating contact with fans and fan community personnel, negotiating and coordinating study participation, and setting up the project website and survey. The remainder of that year saw a continuation of literature review, and the beginning of ethnographic field work in the form of focus groups. Stage 2 marked the second year of the project, and consisted of continued ethnographic field work in the form of interviews (formal and informal) as well as additional focus groups. The drafting of chapters began simultaneous to performing data analyses and synthesis on the growing mountain of field data originating from the project website discussion forum, the survey, interviews, focus group transcripts, and observations. Stage 3, the third year of research, involved the continued drafting of chapters along with reviewing and revising earlier chapters. Conclusions were drawn and where additional data was warranted, follow-up ethnographic interviews were conducted.

### **Data Collection**

The nature of the fan practices that I seek to examine in this research consists of a mixture of online and offline activities. One of my aims in conducting this research, then, is to investigate this very 'intermix' (Kozinets 2010, p. 172) or 'interaction mix' (Moore 2005, p. 73) of fan practice. Kozinets (2010 p. 65) explains that for such a purpose, a 'blended' ethnographic approach is advised:

[O]nline and offline cultural worlds intermingle... this very intermingling is among the most interesting and important areas we must understand. Netnographers who regulate themselves merely to what they can download from postings in forums may miss much of what is interesting and critical about the phenomena they purport to study. Concepts of

dematerialization, spatiality and place, textuality, inside and outside, and the field, need to be interrogated and investigated both ethnographically and netnographically, through savvy combinations of online and off-line fieldwork, marriages of computer-mediated and face-to-face interaction. (ibid., p. 172)

Following this recommendation, I chose to gather the raw data for this project using a 'blended' approach in the form of traditional offline ethnographic strategies as well as online netnography. In the following sections I will outline each of the methodologies that I employed to examine a wide variety of fan practices and performance and the nature of intermix occurring therein.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Ethical permission to conduct a project in which I work with human participants required that I gain approval from my institution's ethics governing body. To meet this end I drafted a proposal outlining the specifics for the type of research I would be conducting, including the verbiage I planned to use on permission forms (which stipulated that only individuals who were age 18 or older could participate) as well as the types of questions I would ask participants at interviews and in the questionnaire. I also provided detailed plans for the structure and content of a website I intended to create to advertise and gather data during the project.

### **Recruitment of Participants**

To encourage participation in this research, I advertised in a variety of ways. At queues outside of concert venues I approached random individuals, asking if they would like to fill out a printed questionnaire or if they would mind being interviewed. Attached to the questionnaire was a postage paid

envelope and a web link to an online version for participants who preferred to complete the survey later. Online I set up a Twitter profile, a Facebook group and a MySpace page advertising the project. I invited individuals I knew through the fan community and mutual friends of friends. Currently the Twitter profile is the most popular, with 450 followers, the Facebook group has 79 members, and the MySpace page has 57. Additionally I posted advertisements in discussion threads on fan forums associated with both Duran Duran and the Backstreet Boys. These efforts attracted a number of individuals with whom I was not already familiar. Additionally I created a website, which was initially intended as an informational source for participants, either potential research subjects or those who were interested in the project's status. The site eventually progressed into becoming its own discussion forum, where fans of multiple fan communities interacted.

### **Online Data Collection Methods**

Data gathering was conducted in a number of capacities, including direct contact with participants as well as observational methods. Direct online contact included email, an online questionnaire, and an online discussion forum.

### **Questionnaire**

A total of 49 questionnaire responses were received from Duran fans, some of these written and some of them online. (See the Appendix for a copy of the questionnaire.) An additional 24 questionnaire responses were received from the other fan communities surveyed. Surveys (both online and printed) were generated using a website called Survey Monkey, a monthly

subscription service that allows the creation of quantitative and qualitative survey questions, housing the resultant participant responses on a remote server. The survey software was useful in that it allowed for filtering and cross-referencing of data based on selected variables. It was, however, limited in some respects, and I experienced technical difficulties in the beginning which resulted in the loss of data and the frustration of some research subjects, a few of whom lost patience and did not return to the study. Because their fan accounts could not be recovered, I was consequently unable to consider them in this research.

### The Project Website: Fan Girls Online



Approximately 100 fans 'officially' joined this study by signing up on the discussion forum on the website that I created at Fangirlsonline.org, which required that they complete an informed consent form and agree to the site's terms and conditions, a procedure instated to ensure that my research meets ethical standards.

Not all members participated in discussions, however. Those who did participate mostly only interacted with me when I would post a question, but often they would respond to previous posts from other fans, because they could see all the prior responses. Monaco (2010) suggests that this form of investigation can be useful because it encourages interaction, feedback, and the availability for continued follow-up (much in the same capacity that a focus group can):

In making the decision to conduct an Internet research project which encourages dialogue and exchange with participants, as opposed to the more 'one-sided' approach that can occur if the researcher decides to 'lurk' only (Lotz and Ross 2004: 507-508), the possibility of developing meaningful relationships with respondents increases (Monaco 2010, p. 110).

On the Fan Girls Online web site today, there exists a marked lack of inter-fan interaction, and this is due to my eventual absence from the site. As the project became more demanding in other areas, I neglected my duties as moderator to both incite and encourage discussions to continue. However, this site's potential to investigate interactions between fans from disparate communities is an area where further research could be conducted in the future.

The online forum generated the greatest technical challenges of all the online aspects of this project. While I was able to set up and modify the structure and graphic design of the website myself, I had to enlist a former colleague to assist me in the more technical programming associated with the interactive discussion forum. After the site was set up, I realized I would need this individual's technical knowledge for continued maintenance. This aspect of labour has tapered since the first year of the project, but there are



issues on occasion which require advanced technical assistance. In hindsight I can see that I spent an inordinate amount of time on website customization. In the end, however, this effort proved invaluable in two respects, because the site successfully served as a professional gateway to both attract participants and inform others about the research, but more significantly it served as a data gathering mechanism that could essentially run itself without my intervention and constant monitoring, allowing me to focus on other areas of research.

### **Netnography**

For any type of ethnography, whether online or offline, Kozinets suggests that strategies of immersion and engagement will provide the most thorough account of a chosen culture:

The combination of participative and observational approaches lies at the centre of the ethnographic initiative. To do an ethnography means to undertake an immersive, prolonged engagement with the members of a culture or community, followed by an attempt to understand and convey their reality through 'thick', detailed, nuanced, historically-curious and culturally-grounded interpretation and deep description of a social world that is familiar to its participants but strange to outsiders (Kozinets 2010, p. 60).

The decision about whether to observe or to immerse oneself and participate is an issue Sarah Thornton (1995) debated before beginning her research on club cultures. She drew upon Bourdieu and Thompson in her consideration of determining the best approach to investigate the culture of clubbers:

This methodological contradiction between participation and observation is best understood within the larger epistemological conflict which Bourdieu discusses in terms of subjectivism and

objectivism. As John Thompson aptly summarizes, subjectivism is an 'intellectual orientation to the social world which seeks to grasp the way the world appears to individuals within it', it explores people's beliefs and ignores the unreliability of their conceptions. Objectivism, by contrast, is an approach to the social world which 'seeks to construct the objective relations which structure practices and representations', it explains life in terms of material conditions and ignores the experience individuals have of it (Thompson 1991: 11). According to Bourdieu, both modes of thought are too one-sided to describe adequately the social world. On their own, neither approach can come to grips with the double nature of social reality. On the one hand, social life is determined by material conditions but, on the other, these conditions affect behaviour through the intercession of beliefs and tastes (Thornton 1995, p. 106).

For my research, therefore, there was no question, participation was a must. I suspected that the nature of much of the fan behaviour and motivation I sought to query would only be visible and accessible to other participants. And as it turns out, a good deal of the less 'savoury' fan behaviours about which fans are afraid to volunteer information, like jealousy and bullying of other community members, are indeed only visible to participants on the 'inside'. It should be noted that both methods of study were well underway before this project officially began; I was a fully active member of the fan community that I use as my primary case study, and so it happened by default that I chose to carry out the remainder of my study using both participatory and observational methods of ethnography and netnography.

Observational and participatory methods of online data gathering consisted of interaction in Duran Duran's official online fan community at [Duranduranmusic.com](http://Duranduranmusic.com), a forum which requires paid membership. Additional online observation and participation was enacted on Facebook, MySpace,

Twitter, and a number of other free unofficial fan-created forums such as the Duran Duran Message board, Durantard.com, and fan sites dedicated to specific band members.

### **Traditional and Offline Data Collection Methods**

In addition to the online methods of ethnographic data gathering, a variety of traditional methods were employed as well. Two focus groups were conducted, one in the U.S. with 6 participants and another in the Netherlands with 8 fans in attendance. Additionally, a number of one-on-one interviews were conducted at fan-related gatherings such as concerts or at fan conventions and parties. And lastly, observational data of participant behaviour and interaction was obtained from indirect contact in a variety of settings such as at concerts, fan parties, and conventions.

For comparison purposes, I also conducted interviews and focus groups on fans outside of the Duran fan community, including approximately 10 recorded interviews at a Take That concert and two intimate focus groups with Back Street Boys fans (5 total in attendance between the two sessions), in addition to more in-depth informal one-on-one interviews with some of the same individuals with whom I have remained in contact.

### **Immersion and Participation**

As mentioned previously, I was a member of the fan community of my primary case study prior to beginning this research. I therefore had a number of offline personal interactions and observations from which I could draw once I began the official project. These instances consisted of fan parties, concert experiences, road trips with other fans, one-on-one meetings like

lunches and outings, and my personal memories going back to adolescence of other interactions with friends who were also fans. Most of the photos you see in this thesis (with the exception of the more obvious publicity photos of Duran and their album covers) come from my personal photo collection, taken at concerts and fan parties. These photos serve a dual purpose, as both an auto-ethnographic exercise and as a visual aid to assist in the telling of the stories of the fans I researched. Each chapter begins with the photo of a page from a scrapbook that I and a handful of other fans assembled and delivered to Duran Duran. We were pleasantly surprised and honoured to learn that the band was impressed enough with the scrapbook that they have kept it in an archive of fan memorabilia which keyboardist Nick Rhodes maintains. In a moment I will describe more about how I used auto-ethnography as an exercise to uncover and interrogate such memories of my Duran fandom.

### **Analysis and Interpretation**

Due to the various approaches used to gather ethnographic data, this project involved managing large amounts of data from a variety of different types of sources. These included fan testimonies collected in the online and print surveys, focus group sessions, online discussion forums, e-mail correspondence, and informal interviews and conversations. Some additional data came from my observations, online and off, which I kept in the form of field notes in a variety of formats (and locations, which became difficult to manage). And finally, my auto-ethnographic data came from personal memories of teen hood fandom and participatory experiences after I became

a member of Duran's official fan community, the data for which came from a variety of sources including journals, private e-mail correspondence, and my posts in online discussion threads with other fans.

Because much of the data, such as the focus group audio, printed questionnaire responses, and journal entries were not already in online form, they had to be transcribed and entered into a master repository online. All data was then manipulated using a variety of qualitative methods. Analytic coding was performed by hand on the initial raw data, and the resultant content was sorted, categorised, and organized online using basic word processing and spreadsheet software. This process was repeated in multiple iterations to filter the data, teasing out patterns and emergent themes. Selections of exceptional and related data were analyzed further using hermeneutic interpretation methods (Kozinets 2010, p. 122), which probed deeper into various attributes, revealing details that were not obvious upon the initial surface analyses. Additionally, some social network analysis was carried out to 'investigate the structures and patterns of relationships' within the fan community (Kozinets 2010 pp. 49), examining characteristics such as connections between members, spheres of influence, and levels of trust (ibid., pp. 52-53).

### **Auto-ethnography**

When Henry Jenkins first began in the field, audience research 'sought to efface the experiences and emotions of researchers themselves' (Jenkins 2006, p. 5). The more recent trend in ethnographic research is toward an increasingly subjective approach, and further, auto-ethnography is

becoming more common. Hills (2002) describes auto-ethnography as a constructive exercise where the researcher's values and feelings are dissected just as much as that of the fans. While it may be constructive, he also calls such an exercise a 'voluntary self-estrangement', depicting auto-ethnography as not only an arduous process but also one 'that can promote an acceptance of the fragility and inadequacy of our claims to be able to 'explain' and 'justify' our own most intensely private or personal moments of fandom and media consumption' (Hills 2002, p. 72). When conducting auto-ethnography, Hills suggests an emphasis on both 'self-reflexive questioning' and an equal treatment of the self and the research subject (other fans) in terms of theoretical analysis (ibid., p. 81). In *Fan Cultures* (2002), Hills provides his own auto-ethnography, in which he charts out all his fandoms graphically against one another, claiming that this exercise can reveal insights when fandoms overlap (pp. 82-83).

Another example of how auto-ethnography can be employed is found in 'Memory Work, Autoethnography and the Construction of a Fan-Ethnography' (2010), an article in which Jeannette Monaco proposes that the process of auto-ethnography is beneficial because it can inform our methodological choices as ethnographers as well as our 'interpretation of research events' (p. 102). She recounts a recent trend in the 'third wave' of fan research toward more subjective approaches, and offers a brief summary of other scholar-fan auto-ethnographies which have been successful, including those by Jenkins and Hills. Monaco describes an additional ethnographic trend to interrogate the power relations between researchers

and subjects (ibid., p. 103). She argues for self-reflexivity in ethnographic writing, a quality which 'demands that we reflect on past events that informed our subjectivities' and suggests that we look 'back critically at the 'past' of the ethnographic or qualitative research encounter' (ibid., 104). She describes her writing approach in this article as being auto-ethnographic, as she 'interweaves' her voice with that of her research subjects (ibid., p. 104). And she urges ethnographers to adhere to Nick Couldry's 'principle of accountability' (Couldry 2000 quoted in Monaco 2010, p. 133) by employing 'the same theoretical frameworks to analyse ourselves as we would when we analyze others' (Monaco 2010, p. 133). In this way, she argues that we can 'challenge and destabilise secure or comfortable accounts of the self, and thus introduce a space for other interpretations, other stories to emerge' (ibid., p. 121).

Given that I am a Duran fan who is conducting ethnography on other Duran fans, I am very close to my subject of research. I therefore chose to employ a partially auto-ethnographic approach to the presentation and analysis of my findings, similar to the methodology utilized by Monaco, in which she weaves her own fan experience into her presentation of field data, to contextualize and frame the results of her study. Within the discussion of my own field work, I include auto-ethnographic examples as I critically engage with a variety of cultural issues that are mirrored in my findings, such as nationality and geography, as well as topics that preoccupy the often-awkward and bewildering period of adolescence, when youth of both sexes find themselves wrestling with concerns of identity formation, gender roles,

and sexual discovery. I also felt it pertinent to detail the origins of my fandom, because such an exercise may expose issues about which I am preoccupied or biased, and in so doing, it should acknowledge awareness that interpretations of various research events and fan experiences may be subjective, affected in some capacity by my personal experience. Therefore, 'self-reflexive questioning' as suggested by Hills (2002, p. 81) is utilised as a form of theoretical analysis, in an effort to ensure that I give equal treatment to my research subjects and myself.

Heewon Chang's (2008) suggestions about how to conduct auto-ethnography were also useful as I set about writing my own account. Chang provides detailed instructions in her book *Autoethnography as Method* (2008), suggesting a number of exercises and methods in which to prepare for the task, including strategies for data management, analysis, and interpretation after data gathering has been completed. But above all Chang's strategies for conducting 'memory work' (Kuhn 1995, p. 4) were what I found most useful.

I began my own auto-ethnography by utilizing a chronological approach, identifying milestones in my fandom that Chang calls 'border crossings', which she describes as 'extraordinary events such as childbirth, new relationships, new jobs/schools, immigration/moves, a death, divorce, and other life crises' (2008, p. 74), an exercise which 'can lead to a new understanding of self and others' (ibid.). Chang recommends that such moments should be explored when writing an auto-ethnography because 'a voluntary or involuntary removal from your cultural familiarities creates a



‘fish-out-water’ sensation, which in turn contributes to self-discovery about what is familiar and strange to you’ (Hall 1973 cited in Chang 2008, p. 74). My auto-ethnographic exercise proved to be cathartic but more challenging than I had anticipated. Chang describes this as being the problematic nature of memory work:

Memory is not always a friend to auto-ethnography; it is sometimes a foe. It often reveals partial truth and is sometimes unreliable and unpredictable. Memory selects, shapes, limits, and distorts the past. Some distant memories remain vivid while other recent memories fade away quickly, blurring the time gap between these memories. In general though, time tends to ‘smooth out details, leaving a kind of schematic landscape outline’ (Chang 2008, p. 72).

These concerns prompted me to consider the role of memory in the construction of testimonies from my research subjects as well, both in their own attempts at constructing a narrative of their fandom as well as my attempt to reconstruct what they conveyed to me. Monaco (2010) suggests that interrogating such memory construction is an essential part of ethnographic research:

Reflexivity about the ways in which both parties make meaning during research thus becomes a necessary part of ethical practice... We must therefore take account of how we remember those exchanges... This observation should not imply that an ethnography is necessarily completely ‘conjure[d] false reality’... It does remind us though that our interpretations of data are accompanied ‘with the imagination of memory’ (Monaco 2010, p. 110).

Regardless of its limitations, memory is a necessary resource in both ethnography and auto-ethnography, and a careful investigation of how memories are constructed can reveal additional insights:

[M]emory work is always contextual and highly performative, a staging of memory that 'is always already a secondary revision'... However, it is through this process of 'revision' that the past and 'the transparency of what is remembered' are thrown into question... memory work places priority not on 'what' is remembered or left out, but on 'how' the 'relics' of the past are used to make sense of the present... The author is left with the challenge of constructing a cohesive account, although not necessarily a linear or unproblematic one, which encompasses a life story that constantly moves back and forth between the tensions of past and present and inner and outer worlds' (Monaco 2010, p. 109).

Hills suggests that auto-ethnography may provide us with a fuller understanding of fan culture (2002, p. 22), 'in which the tastes, values, attachments, and investments of the fan and the academic fan are placed under the microscope of cultural analysis' (ibid., p. 71).

## **Challenges**

In addition to the challenge of writing my own auto-ethnography, I encountered a number of other challenges as well while conducting ethnography on my subjects. Challenges are not unusual in this field of research, as Stevenson's (2009) account with the David Bowie fans suggests. And being new to the field of ethnographic research, I found my way 'blind' at times. Despite guidance from supervisors and having conducted a thorough review of existing research, there was no way I could have prepared myself for some of the challenges that lay ahead. It was only after I encountered substantial roadblocks that I discovered a few existing studies which detailed circumstances similar to those which I experienced, but none of the challenges described were identical to mine, they only bore a resemblance. However, I believe now that even if I had located such a study

prior to conducting my own field work, I might have been too inexperienced to have understood the difficulties described until I experienced them myself.

Other scholars have expressed a similar failure to locate existing literature describing challenges like those they faced. For example, after performing their research on *Lord of the Rings* fans, Egan & Barker (2006) remarked:

We rarely learned what we needed from reading many other people's research reports. At best we hear about methods of data-gathering, about methods of analysis and weighing of the evidence, and about conclusions – all of which are posed in terms that could come from books on methodology. What we don't much learn about is the reasons why the research was undertaken, the struggles to realise it, the mistakes made, and the lessons learnt about the process of research. Yet, in our experience, these are crucial, and complicated (Egan & Barker 2006).

As a fledgling ethnographer, I made a number of mistakes and encountered scenarios which I could not possibly have predicted or controlled. My research challenges included issues associated with fan reaction to my investigation, the effect of my own subjectivity on my ability to research, and the effect of research events on my fan practice. In hindsight, I believe that all the challenges I faced were due to my attempt to negotiate the dual roles of scholar and fan. Because these issues warrant considerable attention and reflection, I will address each of them in detail in *Chapter 6: Reflections on Scholar-Fandom*.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter I disclosed the various strategies employed to conduct my ethnographic field work, analysis, and auto-ethnography. In the next

chapter I will begin the presentation of ethnographic data that reveal personal and private aspects of female pop fandom, particularly how memory, nostalgia, and fantasy contribute to the development and sustainability of lifelong attachments. As an integral component of this discussion, I will also consider pop music fandom's influence on identity construction and continued identity affirmation.

### Chapter 3: *Be My Icon* – Lifelong Fandom and Identity



Many fans are only able to understand the significance of their fandom in retrospect (Kidder 2006, p.86).

Narratives about the adolescent discovery of one's favourite artist are popular discussion topics among adult pop music fans, as are narratives of rediscovery later in life, suggesting that memory and nostalgia are powerful forces that can repeatedly draw fans back to that affective moment when they first discovered, and perhaps rediscovered, their idols. The impact of cultural influences like pop music during the formative period of adolescence should not be underestimated. Such early identifications with pop music icons enables some adolescents to then carry those attachments with them their entire lives, forming lifelong fandoms. It is the passion of these types of fans that this research seeks to investigate.

Most of us listen to music, whether we actively seek it out or not. The radio is a backdrop. It's there in taxis, in shops, in workplaces. But for some that's not enough... These are people who care passionately about an artist. Following a band gives their world order. It gives their life meaning. They feel that these musicians are their friends, their strength, their solace, their saviours (Divola 1998, p. 11).

Matt Hills refers to artists like Duran Duran as 'post-popular music', that is, pop music that was once mainstream and topping record sales, but who now have a 'cult' fan following (Hills 2010). As of yet, there are very few academic accounts of research on lifelong fandom of such post-popular acts. Nick Stevenson's (2009) study on fans of David Bowie is one example. Stevenson suggests that such studies are indeed rare, because they are not consistent with the 'usual way in which celebrity culture is understood' (ibid., p. 83), referring to how celebrity status is often fleeting; a star is in the public's favour one season, out of favour the next. So not only is it less

common for individuals to maintain loyal fandom long-term, it is also not an area to which cultural studies has historically paid much attention as of yet (ibid.). Stevenson's exploration into long-term fandom is therefore of chief importance to my research. And while Stevenson's research primarily focuses on male fans, the findings from our respective studies bear many similarities. For example, Stevenson pays close attention to the influence of fandom on the construction of his subjects' identities. And fans from both studies report 'gap' periods in which they were less interested or involved in their fandom. Additionally, both Duran fans and Bowie fans report turning to the music or their idols' images for comfort during challenging times in their lives. But Stevenson also uncovers some notable gender differences between male and female subjects surveyed. Not all of his findings in this area are consistent with my own, so I will compare these differences for further analysis. Throughout this chapter I will draw upon Stevenson's research on Bowie fans as I examine my own ethnographic field data. In some cases I will also interweave auto-ethnographic information, personal accounts of my own fan experiences, to contextualize the other fan stories that I analyse.

### **Identifying as a Duran Fan**

Sheffield's (2010) account in Chapter 1 demonstrates how memory and gender identification can be significant contributors to the development of lifelong fandom. Sheffield's personal story of 'coming of age' during the pop cultural milieu of the 1980s reinforces the idea that cultural forces can be a significant influence in adolescence. That same moment in the early 1980s

engendered an atmosphere that cultivated and sparked a lifelong passion for Duran Duran in myself and thousands of other women.

The majority of the ethnographic subjects I spoke with consider their Duran fandom a significant part of not only their past identities as teens, but their present adult identities as well. *Duranie* or *Durannie* is the common nomenclature for a Duran fan. No one is sure where the term originated, but it has been in use as long as I have been a fan, since the early 1980s. Most Duran fans respond to this label with a great sense of pride, as seen in these fan testimonials:

*I am proud to have been a fan for as long as I have been.*

*I am a fan of many things. I am a fan of many bands. With Duran Duran I move beyond fan and proudly into the foray of "Duranie." Sing it loud, sing it proud: I AM A DURANIE!*

*I am what I am and that is a Duranie. I wouldn't want it any other way. I may not have been born a Duranie but I will die one.*

*I am proud to be a Duranie, I think it is a cute name. I wouldn't like to be called a Blockhead [fan of New Kids on the Block].*

*I like being called a fan, but prefer Duranie. It is not just something I do (liking the band), it is part of WHO I AM. It is part of my life.*

*I just love the band and their sound. Although they made a few albums in the 90's that were not my favourite I would still buy them because I wanted to support the band. I always wanted them to be seen by 'outside' people for the great band that they are. Even during the slower times, if anyone was ever to ask who my favourite band was, I would always say DD.*

J.B. Thompson's (1995) discourse about mediated communication explores many concerns about media and identity that are pertinent to the issues explored in this thesis, especially questions that pertain to fan identity, such as 'What is the appeal of becoming a fan? Why should anyone want to



become a fan?' (Thompson 1995, p. 223) Thompson suggests that 'the process of becoming a fan can be understood as a strategy of self – that is, as a way of developing the project of the self through reflexive incorporation of the symbolic forms associated with fandom' (ibid.). Shaun Moores (2005) considers the significance of reflexivity as it relates to identity in mediated communication by drawing upon both Giddens' 'narrative of the self', a theory that identity is constructed by the individual, as well as Johnson's 'forms of inner speech and narrative' (Moores 2005, p. 143). He and Thompson both assert that reflexivity is a necessary process for defining the self (Moores 2005, p. 145). With these concepts in mind, consider how the following fan comments illustrate these tendencies:

*As young as 11, I had become an anglophile, I loved anything British, I wanted to be British...*

*I dressed like them, I followed everything they did. As cheesy as it sounds, they shaped who I am today. They emulated a kind of "we are who we are" attitude, and being a Duranie made me not be not afraid to express who I was and am.*

*He's [John Taylor is] an only child, like me. I can understand where he's coming from when he talks about being comfortable with his own company, but then of how it was lonely sometimes as he grew up.*

Throughout this chapter I will continue to draw upon these ideas about reflexivity and self narrative. For example, later I will discuss how these processes are sometimes expressed in a literal fashion, with some fans even tattooing letters and artwork symbolising the band onto their bodies.

### **Memory and Nostalgia**

As I browsed the participant feedback from my field work, I grew increasingly nostalgic. I get a similar feeling when I listen to Duran's music.

'Nostalgia' was the most common answer participants gave me when asked why they have been fans of Duran Duran for so long. Fans claim that Duran's music 'takes them back' to the time when they first discovered them. Most fans I interviewed fondly look back upon their teen years and childhood, recounting a time in their lives that involved less responsibility. It is these 'happier' times that are the surrounding landscape within which they first heard and enjoyed Duran's music, and most everyone I spoke with was enthusiastic about sharing this nostalgia:

*I equate them with my innocence I suppose, I figure that's why their early music is so comforting to me.*

*I think part of it is that every time I hear a song it reminds me of my adolescence and childhood, and those are good memories.*

*Their earlier stuff brings me back to when I was a teenager and it brings back so many memories.*

*Laying around on hot summer days in front of a fan with my best friend, listening to [Duran's] music over and over on LP.*

*Hanging at the mall with friends, having sleep-overs, watching [Duran] videos.*

*Being young and dancing around with my cousin... pretending I was Barbie and Nick [Rhodes] my Ken!*

*Reminds me of happy childhood.*

*It's something fun from my carefree days as a teenager.*

*Their older music represents my innocent childhood to me... no ties to baggage, etc. When I hear it I instantly become happy.*

As suggested previously, fans love to discuss early memories of their fandom, especially their discovery stories. Their reasons for the initial attraction to Duran Duran vary but many fans indicate that it was a friend or an older sister who first exposed them to the band's image and its music. (As I shared in Chapter 1, this was true in my case.) This trend indicates that pop

music fandom for women has never been an entirely isolated practice, even before modern times where fans became more easily connected via the Internet. Consider the following discovery stories as evidence of this shared tendency:

*At a sleepover at my cousin's, we watched MTV and I saw them. That cemented it. I bought my first pin and poster that weekend.*

*I am a huge Duranie and have been since 1984 when a friend in [high school] said, "hey you have to listen to this song I just got."*

*A friend of mine played their [sic] record for me at her birthday party and I just loved the way they sounded.*

*I was 9 years old at the time. My brother's friend was playing it all the time, so that's how I got introduced to them.*

*I fell in love with the boys thanks to my sister who was a huge Duranie back in the day. Being almost 6 years younger than her I wanted to be just like her which included liking everything she liked (well I was only 11 at the time). I suppose you could say I've liked DD since the beginning but I say since 1982 because that's probably the year I started liking them for myself and not just because my sister did...*

*My sister introduced me to Duran Duran when they first came out & I loved them then and still think they are awesome... We still talk about them.*

*I have been a Duran Duran fan since I was about 9/10 years old. I was introduced to them when MTV came out and by my sister.*

Not surprisingly, a number of fans cite their attraction to the band's image as the primary reason for entering into Duran fandom as teenagers. For example, when I asked participants 'Why Duran Duran?', I received responses of this nature:

*Duran Duran... at the time? Their looks... I was 12 and shallow. Now? Definitely their sound which hasn't seemed to change much... and yes, I'm still shallow... their looks.*

*The music and the good looks.*

*John Taylor. ☺*

*SIMON LE BON! As soon as I saw him (those eyes! Those lips! THAT voice!) I was smitten!*

*I was all of 10 years old, and it was love at first sight once I saw John Taylor.*

*I was in love with Simon Le Bon in the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade!*

Notice the affective language in these comments, with references to being 'in love' and 'smitten'. Throughout this thesis I will present similar testimonies as I continue to discuss the affective nature of such fan attachments, but for now I want to consider the ways in which music video was a powerful conveyor of image for bands like Duran Duran. As I shared in Chapter 1, music video was a relatively new concept in the pop music industry when Duran first started out, so Duran's videos were among some of the first to be played in regular rotation in the early days of MTV (*VH1 Classic Albums: Rio* 2008). Perhaps explaining the love affair that fans have had with Duran's image all these years, the following fan statements reflect the impact that this form of media has on individuals at the impressionable age of adolescence:

*I was attracted to the music, but the whole visual aspect was new and appealing [because] we had never experienced that before.*

*It was the perfect combination of music & visual that sucked me in.*

*With Duran Duran, it was a combination of their music and their videos... Videos were such a new concept in the early eighties and Duran took it to an entirely new level.*

It should not be surprising then that among the most popular discovery stories from Duranians are their fond recollections of these first exposures to the band via a music video or televised performance:

*I saw the New Moon on Monday video and was hooked. I fell in love with the song then went and got the Seven and the Ragged Tiger album and that was it.*

*...it was Is There Something I Should Know? [video]... And it was Simon, of course. I was like "GASP... who's that?! Oh God I love him!"*

*I first saw the band on a TV show here in Ireland... Top of the Pops, back in 1981 (which makes me a Duranie of 27 years and counting).*

*I first saw a Duran Duran video on TV when I was like 6, so I put the faces with the couple of songs I recognized from the radio. I thought they were so cute in my little brain...*

*What introduced me to Duran Duran was Friday Night Videos... I was watching New Moon on Monday. And of course we all know now that's really their least favourite video, and it's really very cheesy, but it's still one of my favourites... I sat on the end of my bed going "who the heck are these people?" ...it was Simon at first [who] drew me in. I was like, "He is hotttttt!" And I remember just... watching TV with my mouth hanging open, going, "oh my gosh!" And then the next day I made my parents take me out and we bought Seven and the Ragged Tiger, and that's really how it started for me. And then I went back and got Rio and everything after that.*

*I remember the first time I saw them. I was watching MTV and Hungry Like a Wolf came on and I saw Simon. All I remember was my heart started [sic] pounding and I started to get that warm happy 'in love' [sic] feeling when you get smitten by someone. Then as I was watching... I see John, Nick, Roger and Andy... and that was it!!! I was falling in love. Shortly thereafter I became absolutely obsessed. I refused to listen to anything else other than Duran Duran because to me if I listened to anyone else... it would be unfaithful!*

Again fans express affective language about being 'in love'. In the next chapter I will explore this tendency at length, to investigate how such newly discovered adolescent desires contributed to shaping these fans'

lifelong fandoms. Additionally, it was striking to me how often fans mentioned the video for *New Moon on Monday* in interviews. The song itself was not a critical success, unlike Duran's earlier work, and, in fact, the band admits disappointment that it did not sell as well as they had hoped for their first single on their much-anticipated 3<sup>rd</sup> album (Buskin 2004). But the uplifting lyrics of *New Moon on Monday* and the 'story' presented in the video connote rebellion and revolution, a 'call to arms' in essence, ideas that perhaps spoke to those adolescent females who struggled to define a space for themselves in a world where feminist ideals were at odds with the still dominant conservative gender politics of that time. Additionally, the era in which this song was released was an exciting one for pop music, the core sounds of which were changing rapidly and Duran found themselves at the forefront of this new trend. This new musical direction combined with Duran's exposure level by that point (their best-selling 2<sup>nd</sup> album *Rio* had already made them massively popular worldwide), might have been what enticed so many teen girls to take part in Duranmania at that juncture.

But fans who admit to joining the fandom during this period, which coincided with the release of Duran's 3<sup>rd</sup> album in 1983, *Seven and the Ragged Tiger*, often exhibit guilt for not noticing the band sooner, feeling pressure from other 'die-hard' fans to justify their tardiness:

*I was really a late developer to Duran Duran. I didn't come in until Seven and the Ragged Tiger.*

I came onboard even later; it was not until Duran's 4<sup>th</sup> album in 1986, *Notorious*, that I really took notice. My first-ever record purchase with my

own money was the 45" vinyl for the single *Notorious*, which I still have hanging on my office wall as a reminder of my lifelong dedication.



However, the single *New Moon on Monday* from the earlier album *Seven and the Ragged Tiger* is my favourite Duran song. The first time I heard it was during my first year of junior high, it came on the radio when I was getting ready for school one morning. Compounding my interest was the first time I saw the video for this song at a friend's slumber party. I cannot recall if it was the video premiere or why that event was so special to everyone, but they sat with their noses glued to the TV screen, squealing and drooling. I stood at the back of the room and watched from afar, perplexed by everyone's behaviour. (The truth is I was not comfortable enough in my own skin back then to have expressed how I was feeling openly. I will discuss more about my motivations for feeling this way in the next chapter.) But I loved the song and the visuals, and admittedly was starting to develop a secret crush on the band's lead singer. In retrospect, this moment of conflicted adolescent desires signalled a defining moment, the beginning of my lifelong fandom of Duran Duran.



*Simon Le Bon in New Moon on Monday video, 1983*

## **Dormancy and Re-discovery**

*I was a fan at 12 which tapered off by 14 and then I remained dormant [until] just recently...*

Experiencing a gap in fandom or 'dormancy', as this fan statement suggests, is a trend that most Duran fans have reported. This should not be surprising, considering that most have been fans for three decades. It would be unrealistic to expect any fan to continue performing and participating in their fandom at a consistent level for that many years ongoing. All fans also lead a 'real' life apart from their fan life, so if one remains a fan for any extended period of time, their involvement in fandom will understandably ebb and flow, such as what is described by this fan:

*For me there have been phases... there are times when [Duran Duran] have seemed really really important to me, you know what I mean? Mainly the band but not just the band, being on the board [online fan forum], being around has meant a lot to me but like there's other times where it's not that big a deal. I don't log on every day, I don't care. I really do have an outside life and I do have a family that needs me.*

In this section I will explore the ways which Duran Duran fans like this one have sustained their fandom through various life changes. As mentioned earlier, this tendency is another area of similarity between Stevenson's



research and my own. Stevenson found that gaps in Bowie fandom were 'usually determined by the rhythm of [fans'] lives, and new releases and tours' (2009, p. 83). In my own research, the most common reason given for decreasing one's involvement in fandom was a shift in priorities. These included the discovery of 'real' men (boyfriends and husbands), motherhood, and career, as is evidenced by these fan comments:

*I think I lost track of Duran when I got a boyfriend and got married and had children.*

*Motherhood took over and I left the music world behind. I had to spend money on other things.*

*I lost touch with them really when I got married and started a family...*

*My life became a whirlwind of marriage (not so great in the beginning), education and work. Children came in late 98 and early 2000 – Duran Duran took a backburner.*

*I was a fan during high school... lost touch once University [sic] hit...*

But sometimes the reason for a decline in fan interest had nothing to do with a personal shift in priorities. Sometimes it was due to events internal to the band, such as when one's favourite band member quit:

*I drifted away after John left.*

*I was saddened when Andy, Roger and then John left the band and did not follow them very closely through the 'lean' years.*

*They started to fall apart when I was in high school. So I thought , well, nothing lasts forever. :(*

Many fans claim to feeling a strong identification with a specific band member (a tendency on which I will elaborate momentarily), so when that member quits, it can be not only disappointing, but even traumatic. For many fans, such as those above, it was the 'deal breaker' that caused them to lose

interest in the band. Hills explains this tendency in fandom: 'Fans care intensely about their fan objects, but they also tend to value consistencies and ongoing narratives... Fandom doesn't always deal so well with changes – line-up changes, bands breaking up and so on can all affect the 'authenticity' of the fan object in the fans' eyes (Hills cited in Divola 2010).

With respect to Duran fans, some others claim they 'drifted away' because their tastes changed as they grew older:

*I have to admit, I drifted away from DD for a while, and I'm also a big fan of metal bands (Korn and Metallica in particular).*

*I did wander off them for a while during my teens [sic] and early twenties as I went into the indie and rock scene and then onto dance, but I always come back to them as they improve with age. Their music makes me happy.*

But regardless of their reasons, a few fans expressed guilt for drifting away from Duran Duran, as if their disinterest was an act of abandonment:

*I would say around the early 90s I began to move on, still loving Duran Duran, but not as obsessive. Little by little I guess I kind of strayed from them. Looking back I kind of feel guilty about it, but not having them all together made me lose interest. With that said though, I ALWAYS had a very special place in my heart for them.*

My personal experience with gap periods differs from the other fan testimonies presented here because I did not fully embrace Duran Duran as early as did most other fans. My connection with Duran Duran developed slowly over time, I therefore do not have an epiphany discovery story like so many others presented in this chapter. This was due to a certain amount of 'shame' I felt for liking a band like Duran Duran, an embarrassment that is likely evident in the slumber-party story I shared earlier. As subsequent

chapters unfold, I will elaborate on my hesitation to fully embrace my identity as a Duran fan until I was much older.

I now want to turn my attention toward the topic of reunion. Like band breakups, reunions have an equally significant, yet opposite, emotional impact on fans. Academics have noted this tendency about other bands' reunions. For example, Kristin Kidder (2006) describes a New Kids on the Block fan convention entitled 'NK2K' that she attended during the band's 'reunion' period. The convention slogan was 'Celebrate the KIDS they were and the MEN they've become!' To Kidder, these fans 'shared more than a love for the New Kids. Their fandom, through whatever means they chose to exhibit it, served as an active agent in their ongoing identity construction as young women' (Kidder 2006, p. 85). Kidder's reference to ongoing identity construction reinforces the points about self narrative that were discussed earlier.

It is possible that reunions might even serve to heal the traumas caused from band break-ups. For example, when Robbie Williams reunited with Take That amid much media hype for a widely publicised national tour in 2011, thousands of fans flocked to sold-out concerts in the band's hometown of Manchester and all around the United Kingdom. Take That's reunion and homecoming inspired an academic conference dedicated to investigating the cultural aspects of band reunions (organised by Tim Wise). At this conference, Georgina Gregory presented a paper entitled, 'You Can Make Me Whole Again', which examined tribute bands for artists such as ABBA, to consider the ways that such tributes can serve to fill the void for fans after

their favourite groups permanently disband (Gregory 2011). Additionally Take That's reunion inspired a pre-Internet fan artefacts exhibit (organised by Take That fan Anja Löber), which consisted of fan photos, letters fans had written to one another, and 'friendship books' where fans archived and shared their memories like mini time capsules. Combined, all of these events signalled to me how meaningful reunions can be for lifelong fans.

Duran Duran's reunion was equally significant for Duran fans. Fans who drifted away came back into the fandom due to the reunion. In truth, Duran Duran never really split up, not entirely. So some might argue that Duran Duran may have been attempting to capitalise on the phenomenal 'reunion' hype that was renewing the public's interest in other established acts. However, Duran's reunion can, in fact, be classified as a 'reunion' when we consider these dictionary definitions:

- a reuniting of persons after separation (*Merriam-Webster Collegiate Dictionary* 2003)
- The act or process of being brought together again as a unified whole (*American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language* 2009)

To elaborate, by 2000, only two original band members remained in Duran Duran (Nick Rhodes and Simon Le Bon). Duran's 'reunion' in 2003 was the first time since 1985 that the five original members of Duran Duran came together to write new music and tour together.



*Duran's 'reunion' album Astronaut, 2004*

In 2004 and 2005 Duran took their reunion tour worldwide, receiving media exposure on the scale of their success in the early 1980's. These are the years when most fans (including myself) report returning to the fold. Here is what a number of fans have told me about the significance of Duran's reunion for their fandom:

*[I] found them again in 2005. To see the original 5 back together again was a dream come true.*

*I came back in 2005 so I had to buy [the albums] all at once.*

*I returned to the fold in 2005, when Astronaut was released.*

*I kind of lost them after high school and rediscovered them again with the reunion.*

*I jumped out of my seat and ran to the TV when I heard them announce that Duran Duran in full five line-up was going to perform shortly. I could not believe it. This was a dream come true. They spoke of getting back together and a U.S. tour and all I could do was scream with excitement and stare at the TV.*

*Around 2003 a new fan website started up, Duran Duran Music, along with the news that the original 5 band members were reuniting! Insert SCREAM here!! Of course I joined right up so I wouldn't miss any action.*

*They announced the Reunion tour, and I freaked out... I was like "oh I gotta have more, gotta have more!"*

Another Duran fan's rediscovery experience was made even more special because of the reunion it generated not only with Duran Duran, but also with a long-lost friend:

*In March 2005 [a friend] called me to say "hey, Duran's back together. Let's go to a show." So a group of girls who hadn't seen much of each other since [high school] got together to see the band we had loved so much. It was on that night as Careless Memories rocked my world that I realized that I had become a wife and a mommy and left [myself] somewhere in the shadows. It was that night that I realized I had to find a way to be wife, mommy and ME! After that show, I found DDM [Duran Duran's official online fan forum] and in a few short posts, I found [an old high school friend] again. I will never forget that PM [private message], "Did you happen to graduate from Greenon?" "Yes, yes I did." DDM reacquainted [sic] me with my friend from [high school].*

This fan also suggests that she rediscovered a part of herself which she had long forgotten. I felt this way too at the reunion concert I attended in 2005, an event which represented a pinnacle moment in the chronology of my fandom, a turning point where I not only finally embraced my fan identity but also reclaimed a more youthful and empowered part of myself that I had abandoned long ago.



*My only photo of the pinnacle 'reunion' concert I attended in 2005*

I suspect that other Duran fans might have felt similarly attending those reunion concerts. Some fans have told me they found a renewed

pleasure while attending those gigs – a euphoria that made them feel ‘like a kid’ again. One fan gave this tendency a name:

*You suffer from I.T.S. ... “Inner Teen Syndrome” ... great, isn’t it?! ;)*

Another fan offered another term that I had not heard before, ‘teens with credit’. She explained that being an adult Duran fan today, with both the financial means and the freedom to travel to concerts, makes her feel like a *teen with credit*. Here are some other fan testimonials that illustrate this tendency:

*Now when I see them I can let go for a couple of hours and feel like I am still a teenager.*

*Attending concerts with my friends and singing with the songs and basically acting like a teenager!*

*You can always be assured you’ll dance and sing and have fun with your friends when you go to a Duran show... I always have a great time, I always dance and sing to every song, it always puts me in a good mood, makes me feel like I’m a 16 year old girl again.*

*Definitely a time to be a “kid” again and forget real life.*

*I try to do that every time and live the tour to its fullest – because let’s face it, you never know when it’ll be the last one.*

I believe that these moments in our respective lifelong fandoms represent milestones, points in which we not only renewed our dedication to our favourite band, but also reassessed ourselves and the progress we had made in our lives up to that point. The reclaimed youth that we discovered by taking part in these experiences was life affirming for us in many respects. The final fan comment above, for example, implies an awareness of not only the band’s mortality, but the fan’s own mortality, touching on notions that I

will return to later in this chapter when I consider the concept of social ageing as it relates to this idea of reclaimed youth.

While many fans' rediscovery of Duran Duran involved the band's reunion, for others it was widespread Internet access (in which they discovered a worldwide network of other fans and joined the online fan community):

*2003... I met my current boyfriend and he introduced me to the internet. I don't remember how I happened upon DDM but that's how I found DD again and you can find me there every day.*

*March of last year when I went to look for a biography of someone on biography.com... I saw Duran Duran on the biography.com home page and thought "Wow!!" I just fell right back in.*

My own rediscovery of Duran Duran was due to a combination of both the band's reunion and the Internet. After that reunion concert I attended in 2005, I found myself obsessively searching the Internet for any and all Duran-related information. Initially I was just interested in 'catching up' on all the things I had missed during my dormant period. There was so much, almost too much to digest. Years worth of photos, videos, interviews, news articles, and previous albums I had not yet heard. I even perused a little fan fiction. But it took me several months to discover and actively join the fan community.

Affirming my own rediscovery of Duran Duran (which, incidentally, was around the time of my divorce), Stevenson observed a trend with his research subjects in the rediscovery of Bowie later in life, often connected with periods of 'intense insecurity or emotional vulnerability' (ibid., p. 94). But



a gender difference was noted in this area, in that both sexes ‘formed intense relations with Bowie during times of emotional difficulty’ but that for women, this only occurred during adolescence (ibid.). Although I chose to only survey women, this finding is one of the areas where Stevenson’s conclusions and my own differ. Another item of interest that Stevenson noticed with respect to gender is that ‘men rather than women... seemed to maintain a lifelong connection to Bowie, although the reasons for this are complex’ (ibid., p. 83). Here again is a contrasting finding to that in my research. Stevenson theorised that ‘perhaps many men find it easier to receive emotional support from a relationship based on distance than they do from relationships based on proximity’, speculating that this tendency might ‘be due to the often-commented upon difficulty that men have in forming intimate relationships’ (ibid., p. 94). However, this is certainly not to say that intimate and/or lifelong relationships with distant celebrities are limited to male fans. But Stevenson’s research may indicate that perhaps, in some fandoms, males and females perform their fandom differently. Stevenson suggests that ‘what fans are actually searching for in a relationship with a ‘distant’ celebrity or star’ warrants careful investigation (ibid., p. 81).

Citing results of a study by Christenson and Peterson (1988), Thornton, too, discusses gender difference in her investigation of rave culture:

[W]omen respondents were more likely to say that they used music ‘in the service of secondary gratifications (e.g. to improve mood, feel less alone) and as a general background activity’. They conclude by describing the male use of music as ‘central and personal’ and the female orientation to music as

'instrumental and social' (Christenson and Peterson 1988: 299). (Thornton 1995, p. 104).

While it is beyond the larger scope of my research to explore this topic fully here, these gender differences are still worthy of consideration, particularly when a significant portion of my thesis focuses on gender.

### **Music and Affect**

In this section, I will begin to explore the affective nature of fan attachments, particularly that which is connected with Duran Duran's music. As indicated previously, most Duran fans noticed the band's image before becoming attached to their music. But the following comments reflect my own experience of having developed an attachment to a Duran song before then warming to the band's image:

*Music first. Unlike the stereotypical Duranie, I didn't have MTV, so it wasn't the videos that first attracted me.*

*I heard the music first and just loved it. Then I began to see pictures and fell in love!*

*Liked the music and then saw John Taylor (say no more).*

Even greater than Duran's image, these fans profess that their special connection to the music is what has ensured their enduring loyalty for 30 years.



*Virgin Media store in New York City 'salutes' Duran Duran with a display dedicated to their 3 decades of music*

And for other fans, while it may not have been their reason for an initial attraction to the band, the music is the reason that most fans claim they have remained so devoted to Duran Duran:

*Initially I loved the videos they did and then ultimately it was the music and how I felt listening to the music.*

By connecting their attachment to the way the music makes them *feel*, fans further confirm the affective nature of their fandom. Here are more fan statements that illustrate this tendency:

*The music is rich and has touched my soul.*

*As I grew up and "blossomed" the music had different meanings to me, especially as I was in relationships... Their songs really move me!*

Some fans shared stories with me about their consumption of Duran's music, and for what purpose or gratification. Not surprising was the mention of dance. For decades dance has long been recognised as an empowering practice and social space for young women (McRobbie 1991; Thornton 1995). Although the practice of going out dancing, or 'clubbing' as it came to be known in the 1980s, is not as popular today, when Duran fans were

coming of age, dance clubs were still common (and favoured) social events among teen girls. Going out to dance clubs was one of the highlights of my youth, for example. Today, most Duran fans have transferred the dance club tradition to the concert venue. Even at home or in their cars when they cannot get up and dance, fans claim that Duran's music has the same effect, it puts them in a more positive frame of mind. The following fan statement reflects this notion:

*There are very few Duran songs that don't make you want to get up and dance. Yes, they have a few slower songs, but I think most people can pull meaning from their own lives into the slower ones. As for the others, I can be having a shit day, plug in Astronaut and suddenly there's a little sunshine. The lyrics are inviting, intriguing and sexy (even if you couldn't begin to figure out what the heck some of them mean) and the beat just makes you want to move. Duran have their own distinct sound that is like no other music.*

Another fan describes a road trip she took alone where Duran's music not only kept her 'company' but it also helped her to forget her worries about a difficult situation that had been preoccupying her:

*12 hours of nothing but me and the open road and, of course, DD on the I-pod! With my CD's and remixes and all I have about 17 hours of their music – how unbelievable is that! The whole trip was very therapeutic for me. I just buried myself in the music and could feel work and worries falling off my shoulders with each mile that passed. Same routine on the trip home – 24 hours in total. I honestly believe no other group or choice of music would have had the same effect for me. I don't know how to explain it – or why it has happened – but their music just has a way of reaching deep inside. Their old songs still have that power after all these years, and the new ones quickly find their way there!*

This fan suggests that the music was 'therapeutic'. Obviously this is not a new concept; such mood-boosting effects of music have long been noted, with an entire profession (music therapy) based on this notion. It is,

nevertheless, a common theme among my ethnographic fan testimonies, suggesting that this aspect of Duran's music plays a significant role in the continued dedication of lifelong Duran fandom. Another example of music's therapeutic propensity can be seen in this fan's assertion that Duran's music soothes her by helping her to fall asleep:

*I used to go to sleep listening to my Rio cassette... every night...*

There was a point in time in my life, too, when listening to Duran's music helped me to sleep, and during that time, this practice helped me to get through a challenging two-month period in a new culture. In the weeks immediately preceding my divorce court date, I went on a study-abroad trip to London, it was my first time outside the United States. I was in a 'home-stay' situation, living with a British family. My hosts were wonderful, but the house was crowded. Several other boarders were living there as well, all young students. As an 'older' returning student, the late-night habits of the others kept me awake. Finding myself feeling alone and at odds in my environment, not to mention the steady stream of thoughts going through my head about my impending divorce, I found that putting my headphones on and listening to the whole of any Duran album helped me to more easily tune out all the distractions. In an ironic twist, I associated the familiar sound of Duran's music with my life in America where I had spent so many years listening to them. My favourite album for this purpose was Duran's first album. A particular favourite song on that album that I used to fall asleep was *To the Shore*, because it is gentle, like a lullaby. Today when I hear it, the associated memories cause me to relax to the point that I actually get drowsy

again. And later, when I moved to Northern England, listening to Duran's music again helped me to deal with similar feelings of homesickness. In that instance, however, my consumption of Duran's music was for a different purpose. My walks to and from the public transport links that connected my home with my university were long (by American standards) and the weather was not always the most hospitable. So again I donned my headphones, with Duran's music playing on my MP3 player as I walked. The time I spent commuting seemed to fly such that I did not notice how long I had to spend outdoors in inclement weather. *Hold Back the Rain* became a particular favourite.

Akin to these stories, most Duran fans say they feel a strong connection with particular songs, often associated either with nostalgia or the way they consume the music. And while most fans express a preference for a specific song, some have special relationships with more than one:

*I could never pick just one favourite song. Save A Prayer was my favourite for a long time. Ordinary World helped me through a difficult period in my life. Careless Memories brought me an epiphany back in 2005. Finest Hour speaks to me. She's Too Much reminds me of my little girl... You see, there is no way to pick one favourite.*

The fan statement above lists two Duran songs which appeared most in fan testimonies. The first is *Save a Prayer*, a single off their 2<sup>nd</sup> album *Rio* (1982). Here is what other fans had to say about *Save a Prayer*:

*Save A Prayer is my favourite song. There are so many happy memories of sitting listening to DD with my sister but this is the song I listened to and thought, "WOW, this is the song that turned me into a Duranie in my own right and not because my sister liked them"... I love the lyrics, the music, the video, everything about the song. When I think of Duran Duran this is*

*the song that immediately comes to mind and the memories it evokes.*

*...it was Save A Prayer that did it [initiated my fandom] and it remains my favourite song for purely sentimental reasons to this day.*

*Save a Prayer... we were with about 6 girls and we drove the car to a playground and we opened the doors to the back and the radio went on and we listened to Save a Prayer. And relaxed in the sun. Yeah great time.*



*Save a Prayer video (1982)*

The fact that *Save a Prayer* was so widely embraced by young girls when it was released is curious, considering it contains rather ‘adult’ content (it is about a one-night stand), and I am not alone in noticing this paradox. According to Duran Duran, feminists were critical over the years that many of their songs were metaphors for sex and portray women as objects (*Hungry Like the Wolf*, for example, and *Girls on Film*) (Duerden 1998). However, claiming they never set out to specifically appeal to young women, Duran Duran were just as surprised as their feminist critics when, at the height of their popularity, they walked onstage to discover that their audiences were comprised of teen girls who were screaming so loudly that the band could not hear themselves play (*Live from London* 2004). But most Duran fans either did not take notice, or simply did not care about these incongruities.

Consider this fan's statement, for example, which specifically mentions the appeal of Duran's music for women:

*My love for them will never ever go away. I think they are a unique in that their music is timeless and they invoke so many feelings in people... (especially women).*

This is indeed one of the contradictions I sought to investigate when I set out upon this research endeavour. Surely there is something valid about this fan's statement, otherwise why am I myself such a devoted Duran fan? These feminist concerns and associated gender politics have had me conflicted for many years, and I have been at pains to determine how best to address the issue in this thesis. It was an aspect about Duran Duran's artefacts I noticed when I was still very young. Each time a scantily clad female danced into the frame in their music videos, I found myself cringing. Why did this bother me? Perhaps a better question might be, why shouldn't it bother me? These are issues that continue to confound my feminist sensibilities where Duran is concerned. Perhaps other fans simply overlooked or denied the issues that did not mesh with their own desires; perhaps they saw what they wanted to see, or drew their own conclusions, making their own meanings. This nature of meaning-making recalls Cornel Sandvoss' theory of *neutrosemy*, a situation in which fan texts are 'polysemic to the degree that the endless multiplicity of meaning has collapsed into complete absence of intersubjective meaning' (Sandvoss 2007, p. 30).

But where Duran's lyrics were concerned, meaning might have been more easily misunderstood or obscured to young fans who lacked worldly experience with sex. While fans were passionate about Duran's music as



teens, some (including my best friend) admit to not fully understanding the lyrics back then. In *Save a Prayer*, for example, a pining male voice encourages his potential lover to embark upon a one-night sexual exploit with him, as these lyrics express:

*Some call it a one-night stand, but we can call it paradise.  
Don't say a prayer for me now. Save it till the morning after.*

What I think was so appealing to Duran fans about this song is it embodied our own fantasies. We perhaps put ourselves into the intended audience's shoes, even if we did not fully grasp the entire meaning of the song. We wanted to see ourselves as this woman for whom the singer was expressing such yearning. Our ultimate fantasy (aside from marrying one of the band members) was to find ourselves in this scenario. Or perhaps we put ourselves in the singer's shoes, singing the song to our idols instead. However, I cannot justify this theory because no fan has ever suggested it as a possibility to me. In the testimonies above, none mention a fantasy to 'be' this woman for whom the singer longs (perhaps that is my wishful fantasy!) or to be the singer himself. One fan, however, projected the fantasy onto her own situation with a boy she knew at school:

*Save a Prayer takes me back to 1984 my junior year in high school. I loved my high school years and had a major crush on a guy who was a senior. I would always imagine myself dancing with him to that song.*

Notice her choice of words, the song 'takes' her 'back', again suggestive of nostalgia. But this fan's comment about *Save a Prayer* was unusual, the tendency in all other fan statements regarding this song had nothing whatsoever to do with sexuality. Rather, the most notable

characteristic that emerged in testimonies about *Save a Prayer* was its evocative nature. One of the influences for that trend may be the long-running tradition at Duran concerts for fans to hold up lighters (or today, their mobile phones) during the performance of this song. For me personally, it is one of the most affective moments of a Duran concert, because the audience becomes one animal, swaying in waves of light rolling like an ocean. I suspect the affective association with memories of such a massive and evocative 'communion' with one's idols might be the reason that so many fans love *Save a Prayer* as much as they do.

Interestingly, the other most common favourite Duran song among fans elicits the same response at concerts. Unlike *Save a Prayer*, however, it has no sexual connotations. But it is extremely evocative, and perhaps even more so than *Save a Prayer*, as suggested by these fan commentaries:

*My favourite song is Ordinary World. Not the lyrics, the feel it has. Its sadness. I like that...*

*For me it's Ordinary World. To allow me to cry when friends of mine died. I'm not that good at crying so, when they died, I put on that kind of song.*

*It's really bad when it comes on the radio and you're crying again.*

*Ordinary World. Because I wanted a normal life. No heart ache. Do normal things like work and have fun. The first time I cried [at a concert] was when I saw him [Simon singing the song], front row at the concert. I had to wait 20 years for that.*

While I do not claim *Ordinary World* as a particular personal favourite, I can relate to the sentiment expressed by the last comment above. I struggle to contain my own emotion every time I see Duran Duran's lead singer perform this song live. Simon Le Bon claims to have written *Ordinary World*

as an outlet for his inability to move beyond his best friend's death (which was attributed to a drug overdose). The reasons for my reaction are multiple, but mostly I feel empathy. I remember people I lost, such as my cousin, who also died of a drug overdose at age 15. And I think of my grandmother, with whom I was very close, and how difficult it was to resume normal life again after she died, to find an 'ordinary world', as the song suggests. But I suspect that the performance of this song might bring me to tears regardless, because if I am close enough to the stage to be able to see, Simon occasionally has tears in his eyes as well.



*Duran performing Ordinary World, 2007*

I suspect that the reason for my affective reaction may result from the culmination of the emotion of being at the concert itself, surrounded by so many other fans who seem equally moved, particularly when I did not get to see Duran Duran much as a teen. The experience is so meaningful to me now that on occasion I get a rush of emotion that results in an unavoidable silent tear or two. Although it is difficult to articulate and somewhat embarrassing to admit such feelings, other fans have bravely shared having similar experiences:

*I remember crying after my very first DD concert.*

*Yes, I have cried at a Duran show... once or twice.*

*I've only cried twice – once when I heard Tiger Tiger live for the very first time in Chicago 2005, and then at Hammerstein in New York.*

Another fan shared how seeing a Duran video for the first time likewise moved her to tears:

*I remember when I saw The Reflex (video). I remember being at my friend's house and it came on the TV. The video came on and I started crying. I was like 'OH MY GOD', I was just like sobbing, about a video on the TV, I know it sounds so dumb. But I was, I was crying. And they were looking at me like "What is wrong with you? Why are you crying?"*

And yet another fan admitted to getting emotional in a vicarious manner, merely by reading the other fans' testimonies on the message board that I created for my research:

*I am a bit embarrassed to write this but reading these posts is making me cry – Not really sure why – it seems quite ridiculous!*

These fans suggest they are unable to explain why they responded in the ways that they did. It is indeed difficult to articulate one's self when dealing with this level of affect. When considering fans' deep personal connection to their idols, particularly when those connections come to last a lifetime, this is a tendency that should be explored. In their work with fan fiction communities, Hellekson & Busse (2006, p. 22) observe a trend in fandom research to confront the 'unanalyzable, unexplainable, and often unspeakable' affective aspects of fan experience. Fans often cannot articulate the intensity of their pleasure, as this Duran fan says so articulately:

*I honestly don't know if I can put it into words...*

Harrington & Bielby reveal similar findings in their research with soap opera fans:

We should emphasise from the outset that the pleasure can be so intense that it almost cannot be articulated by those experiencing it. We were struck repeatedly in interviews and informal conversations with fans by the strength of their passion for, devotion to, and sheer love of daytime television, to an extent often beyond their own comprehension (Harrington & Bielby 1995 quoted in Hills 2002, p. 66).

However, Hills cautions us that such intensely subjective qualities of fan attachment 'renders ethnographic methodology problematic... it cannot be assumed (as is so often the case in cultural studies) that fandom acts as a guarantee of a self-presence and transparent self-understanding' (Hills 2002, p. 65). In other words, as researchers we should ask ourselves if we are capable of accurately explaining fan experience when the fans themselves cannot even fully express what it is that they are experiencing or why. For this reason, auto-ethnography and self-reflexive examination of one's own biases is integral to our understanding of the subjects we research. As an example, consider this remarkably vague statement from one of my research subjects:

*I have to find... I have to separate...*

Obviously without knowing the context of her statement, it would be impossible to infer what she is trying to communicate here. But what she was trying to explain to me was how her fandom sometimes helps her to 'separate' or escape from her stressful lifestyle for a while, to 'regroup' and

centre herself. But she struggled to find the right words. I realise as researchers we should never make presumptions about such moments. On an intuitive level and perhaps empathetically, having been in her situation myself, I understood her meaning. Through further communication, I was able to confirm what she really meant when I followed up with her. But I believe that without my auto-ethnographic experience which allowed me to relate to this fan's situation, I might have missed the clues and overlooked this testimony altogether.

### **Intimacy at a Distance**

Thus far I have analysed the testimonies of several Duran fans to explore the origins of their pop fandom, and I have also considered the reason for gaps they experienced, as well as their rediscovery of the band. I have also examined how fans claim they consume Duran's music. I have shared that the affective nature of music can be therapeutic in the way that Duran's music has been used as a source of comfort and familiarity. In this section I continue to develop these ideas as I present more testimonies in which fans draw meaning from Duran's music. But most importantly I will explore fans' personal connection to the idols themselves. Even more so than the previous discussions, here I will consider aspects of fandom that are intensely personal and deeply affective.

It may be evident already from the fan statements presented up to this point that fans tend to form strong identifications with particular band members. This tendency of favouritism is notable in fandom of other bands too, particularly those of the 'boy band' persuasion. (I will go into more detail

about bands of this nature in the next chapter.) Marketing helps this function, whether or not the true personalities behind what is being sold to audiences, are, in fact, the band members' real personae. But that is another issue that I explore further in the next chapter. Where Duran fandom is concerned, it is commonplace (and expected) to identify one's allegiance, to make known one's preference for a favoured band member. When Duran fans meet one another for the first time, either online or in person, they often ask each other about these identifications in the following way, 'Are you a Simon girl? Are you a John girl?' Duran fans take pride, it seems, in declaring their loyalty in this manner, not necessarily to the group that shares a fondness for the same idol, but for the idol himself. While the language used hints of submission (to the idol) and possession (by the idol), the actual practise of using these labels is seen as a declaration of one's identity. To declare one's self a 'Nick girl', for example, might signal to other fans that you like quirky, artsy people and things (like Nick Rhodes), or perhaps are a creative individual yourself. Even the band members have noticed that fans tend to gravitate toward a specific member, as they shared in a 2007 radio interview while promoting their album *Red Carpet Massacre*. They also claim that this tendency presents itself in a reflexive manner. Patterns are evident in the personality traits of various categories of fans that actually reflect the personalities of their favourite band members. For example, John Taylor says he thinks that Simon girls, for example, are usually 'very put together', implying that he believes they are attractive individuals. By contrast, John girls, according to Simon Le Bon, are shy and demure. While Nick girls, according to both John and Simon, tend to have brightly-coloured hair and

wear fishnet stockings. These are stereotypes, obviously, but I have found there is a semblance of truth in these descriptions. And most fans do not seem to mind. Who would not want to be considered warm and sensitive, like we believe John Taylor to be? Or have a reputation of exhibiting the confidence of Simon Le Bon? Fans are usually proud of whomever they identify with, and many attempt to emulate their respective favourite band member in some way, whether it is his political philosophies or sharing the same taste in cuisine. (A number of Nick girls claim to be vegetarians, for example, like the keyboardist himself.) In this way, fan idols function in much the same way as Sandvoss' 'fan texts', which act as 'mirrors' or forms 'of self-reflection, in which the object of fandom functions as an extension of the self' (Sandvoss 2005, p. 10).

Knowing that Duran fans feel this strongly about their respective idol identifications, I found that the best way to get them at ease with me during my ethnographic interviews was to ask them about what appeals to them about their favourite band member, to which fans had plenty to say:

*Oh... loaded question... [John Taylor is] passionate about what [sic] he does, whether it's his music or his blogs. It shines through when you listen to the music, or read about his golf buggy exploits in Singapore's airport. He's not afraid to wear his heart on his sleeve, something you notice when you listen to his solo music. And he's not afraid to admit that he's not perfect.*

*[I] always have been a Simon girl. Always. From the moment I first saw him, he was terribly sexy, incredibly confident, not the best dancer but doesn't care, and his lyrics are crazy, poignant, rocking, silly and entertaining. Oh, and he's sexy and has aged very well. Hard to look at some of the idols from the 80's and see how they've aged but for some reason, the members of DD all seem to have aged like fine wine. Oh, and he's sexy too.*



*I LOVE Simon's voice... he is just so SEXY to me. Always has [been] and always will [be]. His voice, his confidence, his sense of humour and his style. I can go on about him... he's the whole package.*

In Stevenson's research with fans of David Bowie, he noted that 'many male and female fans alike were searching for something 'different' in Bowie's images and music beyond a normatively defined straight masculinity' (Stevenson 2009, p. 80), concluding that 'certain hegemonic features of masculinity' were 'connected to the consumption of so-called 'alternative' texts' like David Bowie (ibid., p. 79). Many Bowie fans consider themselves as outsiders, and they identify with Bowie through this perceived 'outsider' status:

Many of the respondents mentioned how they did not 'fit into the mould' and that Bowie gave them a relatively safe way of exploring the difference. What was evident for many of the [fans] was that Bowie was not only able to represent continuity without change, but also that he was able to represent a society whose rules around identity were beginning to loosen (ibid., p. 92).

Being self-proclaimed fans of David Bowie themselves, Duran Duran reached the height of their popularity in the decade following Bowie's success. Those conservative rules concerning traditional masculinity that had begun to loosen, had relaxed to the extent that wearing make-up and colouring one's hair was not unusual by the time that Duran hit the scene. Although the pendulum concerning such ideas about masculinity has swung back closer to centre for much of western society today, and Duran has followed suit (with Simon Le Bon now sporting the most masculine of facial decorations, a beard), the fact still remains that they still are representative of an 'alternative' masculinity, much like that of Bowie. Additionally, Duran

themselves have admitted that they were marginalised, or 'nerds', when they were teenagers, with Simon and John both admitting they were too shy to speak to girls (Duerden 1998). They have also admitted they are failures when it comes to one of the oldest traditionally masculine acts – defending themselves in a physical fight (Taylor 2008). And when asked what he thinks the fans see in Duran Duran, Nick Rhodes replied, 'fragility.' (*Baileys The Set* 2004). Fandom of such individuals can provide the similarly marginalised fan with a sense of empowering identification:

The idea of the hero as an outsider is very important. After all, young women are having problems adapting to that same alienating society themselves... These boys are the ones your parents definitely wouldn't like – nor, for that matter, would your straight and prissy classmates. They, like you, don't fit in. But they're rebels not rejects, and by liking them, you too become a rebel (Garratt 1990, p. 403).

It is likely that this estimation applies to me and many of the Duran fans I knew growing up. I considered myself an outsider or 'nerd' in school, as did many of the Duranies I knew then. A number of my ethnographic participants have 'confessed' similarly. Before locating such ideas, I had yet to determine exactly what it was about Duran that appealed to me and other Duranies when we were younger, but there may be a connection between their 'fragile' image and our own marginalised status. I will continue exploring this idea further in the next chapter.

Providing a significantly different perspective from most other literature on female pop fandom is Sue Wise's (1990) account where she analyses the meaning of her lifelong Elvis fandom. Her testimony is significant for my research because she indicates that fandom can serve

other purposes for girls besides those that are to do with female sexuality and community. Wise describes a moment from her adulthood after Elvis' death, which prompted her to dig up her old memorabilia:

As I listened to records and delved into clippings, cuttings, and photos they evoked memories and feelings from my youth. And the emotions that were evoked had nothing to do with sex, nothing even to do with romance. The overwhelming feelings and memories were of warmth and affection for a very dear friend (1990, p. 395).

The language is notable here, because again we see an example of the affective power that 'reunions' can hold for fans, even if it is just a reunion with one's own memorabilia and memories. Wise describes the encounter as if she is being reunited with 'a very dear friend', demonstrating an intimacy with her idol. Such intimacy is not 'imagined' or a function of deluded fantasy, the connection she feels is very real. Note also her mention of memory, nostalgia, and affect. She goes on to explain why she developed this intimate relationship, which involved loneliness and feelings of being an outsider:

As an adolescent I had been a very lonely person, never feeling that I fit in anywhere, never 'connecting' with another human being... Elvis filled a yawning gap in my life in many different ways... When I felt lonely or lost in the world, there was always Elvis. He was a private, special friend who was always there, no matter what, and I didn't have to share him with anybody... Some people who feel so alone in an alien world turn to religion or to drink or to football teams to give their lives purpose. I turned to Elvis; and he was always there and he never let me down (ibid.).

Wise's account raises many points about lifelong fandom that are relevant to my research. Her fan relationship with Elvis was a very personal one; he was something that provided meaning in her life. She explains how she also used Elvis' recordings as an escape from her reality, 'He was an

interesting hobby when life was boring and meaningless... In my own private Elvis world I could forget that I was miserable and lonely by listening to his records and going to see his films' (ibid.). Her account is not so different from the testimonies of Duran fans in the way she claims to have used Elvis' music and image to 'escape' and 'forget'. Wise also claims that her fandom was, in a way, rebellious, because 'it simply wasn't fashionable to be an Elvis fan when I was one' (ibid.). Andrews & Whorlow (2000) offer similar opinions about teen girls' choice of bands being counter to popular taste, and that this can be, in a sense, their way of defining themselves against others, an idea that is consistent with the discussion earlier about the image of artists like Duran and Bowie as 'outsiders'.

But above all, Wise's relationship with Elvis, although distant, was very personal for her: 'Most of all it was another human being to whom I could relate and be identified with... He was someone to care about, to be interested in, and to defend against criticism' (ibid.). What Wise describes illustrates Thompson's concept of 'non-reciprocal intimacy at a distance', a concept which he borrows and expands upon using Horton and Wohl's earlier media research from 1956 (Thompson 1995, p. 219). Intimacy at a distance is a form of interaction in which media consumers form remote relationships with distant celebrities (ibid.). The interaction occurs in a one-way fashion; fans react to and consume a celebrity's communication, but this communication is not reciprocated. Stevenson's research also reveals an intimate relationship between fan and idol that suggests this same manner of

intimacy. Elaborating on this type of interaction, Stevenson explains what he believes these fans are accomplishing by fostering such a relationship:

The audience's relation to celebrity is different from relations with people who are co-present. A non-reciprocal relationship of intimacy depends upon the scrutiny of the celebrity by the audience, not the other way around... such relationships may help fans or audiences to construct their own biographies... In an increasingly individualized society the culture of celebrity can offer people reflexive resources as they attempt to sustain a coherent identity (2009, p. 81).

Much like the Duran fans in my research, all of Stevenson's subjects had been fans of Bowie since they were teenagers. Stevenson explains that although this means their fandom is enduring, occupying many years of their lives, 'their relationship with Bowie had developed over time' (2009, p. 83). In terms of their identity, this lifelong fascination with Bowie allowed them to 'construct a sense of themselves across time' (ibid., p. 84) because they considered Bowie himself to be 'a 'survivor' of cultural change', which provided them with 'hope, in the capacity of the self, to be able to adapt to a fast-changing society' (ibid., p. 87). Fans accomplished this via their close study of Bowie's various embodiments over time, along with his music, which provided them with 'a reflexive resource they can call upon in different periods of their lives' (ibid., p. 85). These points evoke the discourses about reflexivity by Moores and Thompson discussed earlier in this chapter. Additionally, remaining consistent with one's 'taste' (in this case, Bowie's music) may be another factor of lifelong fandom that provides fans with a sense of comfort and familiarity (ibid., p. 87). A similar tendency was evident in Duran fandom. Fans consistently pointed to Duran Duran's longevity, claiming that it has helped to strengthen their lifelong loyalty:

*I always think that the boyfriends can come and go... but Duran Duran stayed. They are still there. They were there when I was 13. Maybe it sounds pathetic but... they are still there.*

*That they have stuck with it and stayed together. That no matter what, they've never quit and never totally disappeared.*

*They've stayed true to who [sic] they are. They are still the same band and they keep making music that I enjoy.*

*Duran Duran is about the MUSIC and longevity and how they've managed to be around for 30 years. They're a talented group and has influenced many new bands of today. Their music is awesome and it's all about the music and not so much about the superficial stuff that most people think they're all about.*

*And 2005 was my divorce and I heard the music and I was like [sigh] 'oh god'. They're still there. And you can fall back [on that]. It's comforting.*

*They are still making music!!!! They aren't just an 80s band.*

While I was writing this chapter, I received word that my other favourite band, REM, broke up. REM had been around as long as Duran, and I associate a great deal of my early adulthood with them. It is hard to believe that there will be no more new music, and no more tours. I am grateful I still have Duran, but REM's disbanding is a shock, so I cannot help but think of the implications for my Duran fandom, and that of all lifelong Duran fans, when we get word, too, that our favourite band is done. We will mourn the occasion, like a death. I think back to how my mother's cousins cried after Elvis' death, and the televised images of Beatles fans sobbing when their idols announced their breakup. Fandom is affective and intensely personal, there is no way we can ignore this fact.

Demonstrating this personal connection are testimonies by fans who believe Duran Duran helped them get through the most difficult periods of their lives:

*They supported me thru the rough times in my life.*

*I think having idols is a positive thing. It has definitely helped me through tough times (like junior high).*

*Their music gives me strength in life.*

*When I'm depressed, I just flick the Ipod on.*

*I truly love them. Their music really touches me and they have helped me through many good and bad times. It really comforts me when I listen to them.*

*The newer stuff now inspires me and has helped me cope through difficult times.*

*I turn to their music when I'm grieving, when I'm happy, whenever I want. Their music influences every part of my life.*

Some fans went into greater detail to describe their non-reciprocal intimate 'distance' relationship with Duran Duran. This fan shared these thoughts with me in an email while she was dealing with one of life's 'border crossings':

*My life has been really crazy since August of last year... I have thought so many times that I was losing my mind... Things are beginning to calm down so I'm trying to find some joy in coming to DDM again. I have felt really far away from Simon and the guys so I started going back and looking at old videos and it has helped my perspective on things. That would probably sound crazy to some, but it's not about getting lost in a fantasy, it's more like I just get happy when I am able to see them. Sometimes YouTube just lifts my spirits so. I try to look at a lot of the bands/musicians that I like and it truly helps.*

Remember in *Chapter 2: Methodology*, that border crossings are major life crossroads, and because these moments create a "fish-out-water' sensation' (Chang 2008, p. 74), scrutinising them can provide insight when conducting ethnographic research. The fan who wrote the statements above was dealing with the realities of an unplanned pregnancy, for example, and she specifically mentions how engaging in these fan practices helped her to gain perspective about the things that were happening in her life at that time.

Others fans have shared how their intimate relationship with Duran helped them to mourn the loss of someone close to them:

*Back in '04 my first husband died and I felt like my world was caving in around me. Then when Astronaut came out and the tour started, it brought me joy again.*

*I lost my closest Duranie friend... just 3 weeks ago and so many of my memories involve her. I remember her face when [another friend] told her she won a ['Meet and Greet'] at the Boston show in May, 2008. Standing next to her in Foxwoods last December when we [were] able to get up to the 2<sup>nd</sup> row; getting into a radio acoustic show in Jan; 2008 when we weren't on the guest list. These are all memories I shared with [her]. Until DDM, [she] was the biggest Duranie I knew. She made me a better Duranie and my memories of the band will be forever entwined with memories of her. As you can imagine, losing [her] has been devastating. The first thing I did when I was alone [sic] was listen to Do You Believe in Shame. Ordinary World has never had such a deep connection for me as it does now. Simon's lyrics, as obtuse as they sometimes can be, are also so real. John's solo lyrics aren't obtuse, they're raw and emotional. Both have been a lifeline for me. I haven't stopped listening to the band or John's music since [my friend] died.*

For this fan, continuing to listen to Duran Duran during her mourning was perhaps a way to continue on with her own life with some sense of consistency. Certainly the familiarity of the music and the memories it evoked of the time she spent with her friend provided her with a sense of comfort. For some fans, their non-reciprocal intimate distance relationship with Duran provided this level of solace from the very beginning. Remember in the earlier discussion about the origins of Duran fandom, most fans cited nostalgia for a happy childhood. But for some other fans, their nostalgia for Duran Duran stems from a much different source. Many claim Duran's music helped them to escape their reality during a troubled teen hood. A few have



shared that they were bullied at school or had unstable home lives, as this fan confesses:

*I was such an awkward girl and was always teased and bullied. When I would come home from school, listening to their music was my escape. It always gave me comfort...*

Similarly, the following fan testimony describes a difficult childhood, but in a much different respect. She asserts that Duran Duran became a 'part of' her, in essence, due to her associations between them and a time in which she relied heavily on them for emotional support:

*I think that DD came along in a time of my life where I was really [affected] by music. And connected, especially Seven and the Ragged Tiger. That's like my favourite Duran album but my dad had just joined the Navy and we were in the process of moving. We moved around quite a bit. So that was one thing. I still remember listening to my walkman while driving across country, listening to Seven and the Ragged Tiger. And it just, it's like a piece of me. It was like I connected so much to them during that time. It's like I had no friends, but I had Duran Duran! I think that's why they always been part of my life.*

I relate to what this fan experienced because my family also moved around a great deal. Each time I made new friends, we would move and I would have to start all over again. It got to a point where I stopped trying. And when Duran Duran came into the equation, that same year I lost my grandmother. Her loss was particularly difficult because moving around so much made it nearly impossible to maintain friendships outside the family. So the fact that I feel 'nostalgic' about Duran Duran has always generated a mix of emotions for me. In her psychoanalytic investigation of the ways in which youth use popular culture to navigate difficult 'transitions' or periods of crisis, Tania Zittoun (2007) presents a case study of a young woman named 'Julia' who lost her grandmother during adolescence, after which she became

increasingly drawn to the music of a pop band called the Manic Street Preachers. The grandmother's loss was seen as a 'rupture' for which Julia turned to the band and its music as a 'symbolic resource' for support (Zittoun 2007, p. 202).

It is notable how many of the stories I received from fans involved their turning to Duran Duran for solace during such border crossings. A handful of fans confessed that they suffered growing up in abusive households. Their stories were disturbing, but it is easy to see how teens in their situation might have developed an intimate relationship with a distant idol to help them survive, especially when some claim they considered the most drastic measures to escape. Kidder describes one such fan at the New Kids on the Block fan convention (2006, p. 85). The young woman approached her while she was waiting in the queue for the dinner buffet: 'a woman in her mid-20s turned to me and, completely unsolicited, attempted to explain why her devotion to the New Kids had spanned an entire decade' (ibid., p. 86). This fan had much to say regarding her home life: 'She told me about the difficult home situation growing up, with brothers who were in and out of jail throughout their adolescence' (ibid.). Kidder goes on to describe how this fan considered suicide, and that it was the lyrics to one of the band's songs that kept her from taking her life. Stevenson, too, interviewed a fan for whom Bowie served a paramount function in giving his life meaning and purpose: 'Particularly striking in one interview was a male fan who had encountered many personal, family, and social problems and who gave me

the strong impression that if it were not for Bowie, he would have had little reason to go on' (ibid., p. 89).

More than one Duran fan has expressed a similar sentiment to me. One fan in particular, bravely offered to allow me to share her story here. Having suffered a gang rape as a teenager, she struggled alone with the after-effects of her trauma, and almost took her life. She says she was actually in the process of doing so, when she heard Duran Duran on the radio for the very first time. Her curiosity about them distracted her, halting her suicide attempt just long enough that it moved her beyond her troubled emotional state, and allowed her to think more clearly. She credits Duran Duran with saving her life that day. That an artist or music can have such a profound effect on an individual at this level, suggests fandom has much deeper meanings and associations than many people assume. Confirming this notion, three different fans in my survey each called Duran Duran their 'lifeline' with reference to various life challenges, without an awareness that the others had done so. This demonstrates that in the most profound way, fans turn to their idols in times of crisis.

One of Stevenson's subjects confirms this tendency, 'People tend to go back to it [their fandom] when they're having problems, they deal with it by secluding themselves through Bowie and turning to him for, like a guide, inspiration, whatever, like or just to cope with it (Guy)' (ibid., p. 84). This fan's commentary suggests how Bowie is used as a guiding text of sorts, or as a life philosophy. Stevenson suggests that in this way, Bowie serves as a cultural resource or a 'hypertext with fans reading interviews, listening to

music, looking at images, and searching out new information and inspiration. This information is then reinterpreted and understood in the context of their own, changing lives' (ibid., p. 85). When I read Stevenson's account, I reflected on how I performed all of these activities too following that reunion concert in 2005. I can see now the function that these activities served. They were not just a distraction, they were reflexive measures, I was learning about and redefining myself. Reflexively using an idol as a guiding text in this manner, is, I believe, one of the more powerful forces that aids in sustaining lifelong fandoms. Stevenson contends, for example, that Bowie fans use Bowie's image to 'deal with a number of threats to their identity. Fears of atomization, disintegration and meaninglessness were an ever-present feature in the interviews' (ibid., p. 79). Bowie fandom is therefore perceived as an anchor throughout the fan's changing lives, and as such, Bowie is seen as a 'teacher' or 'mentor', and a 'continual inspiration' (ibid., p. 85). Stevenson refers to Ulrich Beck's (1992) concept of individualization and the way in which people in contemporary society tend to search for meaning in places outside of the traditional resources of church and family (ibid., p. 85).

...it was striking that Bowie was invested in as a source of deep meaning that seemed to go beyond mere enthusiasm or indeed intense liking. The intimate connection between stars of popular music and the existential themes usually associated with religion has been remarked upon by other commentators. In particular dead stars such as Elvis Presley or John Lennon have long been treated like living gods by many of their followers and fans (ibid., p. 89).

Remember that a similar concern with meaning was also expressed in Wise's auto-ethnography. These religious parallels to fandom have been debated by other scholars such as Jenkins and Hills (Jenkins 2006).

Stevenson argues that while 'Bowie fans are not a religion (indeed, this would be an overstatement)... they do use the language of the sacred to describe an intense level of experiential connection to David Bowie' (ibid.).

Duran fans, too, utilise sacred terminology. Fans of John Taylor have, for example, created a virtual space online called 'The Church of the Bass God', where they confess their 'sins' (otherwise known as gossip) and communally express their devotion (otherwise known as lust) for Duran's bassist. Another fan light-heartedly confessed that she had mistakenly 'prayed to Simon' instead of God in a panic when she nearly had a car accident. While these examples are not to be taken as literal 'faith' in the members of Duran Duran as actual 'gods', they are consistent with activities in other fandoms that similarly apply the language of the sacred to fan practice.

The fact that there has been debate over these issues in academia demonstrates how 'cultural studies have long recognized the auratic effect of star-texts' but 'have had little to say why mediated texts become appropriated in terms of the sacred' (ibid.). Drawing upon John Frow's (1998) logic, Stevenson proposes that the fandom association with religion may stem from the following dynamic:

...by identifying with a star, we attempt to defeat death. By connecting with a more-than-human being, we seek to move beyond ordinary human temporality into the mythic and sacred. The view is that by identifying with an image that outlasts the death of any individual (including the real body of the star), we attempt to displace our anxieties in respect of our limited life-spans (ibid.).

Fans want to see their idols as immortal, and perhaps that is human nature, as the Bowie fan from Stevenson's research proclaimed, 'I can't imagine a world without him in it (Lee)' (ibid., p. 88). Stevenson offers his analysis and translation of this fan's commentary: 'if Bowie disappears, my personal 'guide,' who allows me to navigate this difficult, risky and uncertain world, will also be lost... I will lose my way and I will lose my grip on what I might become' (ibid.).

The idea that fandom can somehow 'defeat death' calls to mind Boudieu's (1984) concept of *social ageing* which Sarah Thornton discusses in her book *Club Cultures* (1995): 'that 'slow renunciation or disinvestment' which leads people to 'adjust their aspirations to their objective chances, to espouse their condition, become what they are and make do with what they have' (Bourdieu quoted in Thornton 1995, p. 102). Thornton concludes with a salient observation that, I believe, may lie at the heart of why fans like those of Duran Duran have continued to cling to their idols for so long, particularly when most of us are hitting 'mid-life'— many fans are either approaching or have already hit their 40<sup>th</sup>-year birthday:

This is one reason why youth culture is often attractive to people well beyond their youth. It acts as a buffer against social ageing – not against the dread of getting older, but of resigning oneself to one's position in a highly stratified society (Thornton 1995, p. 102).

This theory perhaps explains the appeal of the euphoria that makes Duran fans feel 'like kids again' at concerts. In this way, the idol may represent a fountain of youth, of sorts, for adult fans who are reaching middle-age. And consider that many of the testimonies in this chapter have

suggested how well Duran Duran have aged. The idea that Duran have successfully preserved their youthfulness is so widely held that even in Duran's Second Life universe (which was created with the help of fans), a virtual (yet secret) 'fountain of youth' exists, for those who are dedicated enough to locate it. But as I will reveal in the coming chapters, the fan behaviours associated with this nature of reclaimed youth are misunderstood, and have even been conflated with mid-life crises. This fact was none the more evident than in a 'tweet' by the British entertainer Jonathan Ross on Twitter about his decision to invite Simon Le Bon over for dinner, to which his daughter proclaimed "Dad, are you having a mid-life crisis?" But all joking aside, because of these connections between immortality and the fandom of such idols, the temptation to meet these celebrities can often prove irresistible for fans.

### **Meeting the Idol**

*I don't think my goal ever really was to meet the band... that was a dream, that was something. It wasn't even idea to me that that could possibly happen.*



*Up close and personal: front row at a Duran concert*

On rare occasion, the distance component of the fan/idol relationship is breached or 'bridged' (Thompson 1995, p. 99). This occurs when the fan meets her idol or comes into close physical proximity. While the prospect of such encounters is exciting and romantic to most fans, the reality is that those moments can often be 'odd and somewhat awkward' (ibid.), leaving fans disappointed and even disillusioned. For most of the general population, such celebrity encounters are indeed rare, but approximately half of the fans I have interviewed have met Duran Duran, and for many of them, the encounter fell short of their expectations. Given the meaning and even somewhat religious importance that many fans attribute to their idols and their music, such a conclusion is perhaps inevitable.



*An uncomfortable first encounter*

I know how these moments feel, I have had more than my fair share of 'botched' encounters with a couple of members of Duran Duran myself (the photo above is the fortunate outcome of one such instance). While I look back on these moments with a dose of humour and a good chuckle at the absurdity of it all, I will not deny that they temporarily ruptured the continuity of my fandom. After each instance I would go home disillusioned and hurt, swear off Duran Duran, only to return for more of the same the next time I



had an opportunity for a similar level of interaction. Part of the issue with these instances is the context in which the encounters took place – in bars, where I was surrounded by other fans, most of whom were drunk and feeling competitive about securing the band's attention and affection. The band was usually drinking too, the combination of which was not the ideal environment to attempt heart-to-heart conversations with one's lifelong idols.

Understandably, fans do not like being disappointed by their heroes in this manner. (Consider the discussion earlier about fans' affective reactions to band breakups, for example.) Cornell Sandvoss claims that such experiences are disruptive to fans because their fandom is one of the 'strands' of their identity; they 'believed the band to be one thing and they turned out differently' (Sandvoss cited in Divola, 2010). Divola elaborates on this disappointment:

The late great American music writer Lester Bangs once wrote: 'It's tough having heroes. It's the hardest thing in the world. It's harder than being a hero.' I know exactly what he meant. Heroes can let you down and fans feel it so keenly because they feel they know their heroes so well... they spend so much time studying them, gathering information about them, obsessing over them and sharing with other fans in online and real-life communities that in many ways they do know them... the love between fan and idol is unrequited and fandom does blur the line between fantasy and reality, but, then again, they say, so does 'real' love between two people. We can be let down by a romantic partner just as easily as we can be let down by a pop star, because we have expectations of them both (Divola 2010).

In a similar capacity, fans who are disappointed after meeting their idols may experience a disruption to their fandom's ongoing narrative, which, for some, can be detrimental to their identities as fans. I know fans who used to feel a special connection with a particular favourite band member of Duran

Duran, but after a disappointing encounter, they realised the image they held in their minds was a function of their own fantasy. Some fans are unable to reconcile this difference to continue on with their fandom at the same level they once did. My best friend is one such fan. She is still a Duran fan, but she claims that when she had occasion to witness Duran Duran acting like typical 'rock stars' offstage, they came down 'off the pedestal' for her. She recollects that moment with a great deal of remorse. Her experience makes me wonder, if fans knew that their expectations are too high, would they still want to meet their idols?



*Fans getting autographs outside a concert venue*

Where Duran fans are concerned, the answer to that question is a resounding 'yes', but not for the reasons one might expect. While 'band chasing' is a risky business due to the factors described above, it is a tradition in Duran fandom, and in my opinion, it is just as much about the fans with whom one does the chasing, as it is about the chase itself. I have come to enjoy the excitement and camaraderie of the other fans during the 'pursuit' as much as I enjoy actually catching up to our idols. Such scenarios are appealing because, in a very literal way, these are instances where the

'sense of intimacy with a star image... is intensified because it is shared' (Stevenson 2009, p. 85). One of my former work supervisors did not understand this tendency at all, and he actually asked me, "What? You actually *chase* them? Like down the street?" The mental image his comment generated gave us both a good laugh, but his confusion signals an attitude that reflects the views of much of society where female pop fans are concerned. I will therefore continue to interrogate such ideas as I discuss more about the appeal of such fan adventures in subsequent chapters.

### **The Fan Collective**

*I loved the videos in the beginning but then it was just the music and the friends I made from being a fan.*



Although I present the majority of discussion on fan community later in this thesis, I must touch on it here because the 'collective identity' of fandom is an issue that relates closely to the other ideas about identification and self narrative presented in this chapter. And as mentioned previously, it is this communal aspect of fandom that many fans cite as the motivating force for remaining active in the fandom for so long.

Part of the appeal is desire for comradeship. With the Rollers at least, many became involved not because they particularly liked the music, but because they did not want to miss out. We were a gang of girls having fun together, able to identify each other by tartan scarves and badges (Garratt, p. 401).

Throughout her personal account of her fandom of the Bay City Rollers, Sheryl Garratt emphasizes the importance of companionship of other fans: 'For us, in 1975, the real excitement had little to do with the Bay City Rollers: it was about ourselves' (1990, p. 409). The same can be said of Duran fans. Not 'missing out' is something that motivates fans to actively participate in fan community. It is hard to resist getting excited, for example, when other fans share online their concert stories and travel experiences. There is a peer pressure, in fact, to take part. For example, it was a real challenge during the most recent world tour to forgo travelling to Duran shows myself, particularly when friends tempted me with promises of a fabulous 'girls' weekend' together, great concert tickets, and the potential to do a little band chasing afterward.



*Anticipation in the air: Eager fans at the airport*

Again, many fans I spoke with claim that having other friends who are also Duran fans helps to keep their fandom active in a similar capacity.

Community, in essence, has helped to sustain fans' lifelong loyalty and participation in the fandom. I often joke that Duran fandom is like the mafia; to quote Michael Corleone: "Just when I thought I was out... they pull me back in." (*The Godfather Part III*, 1990). It has always been the fan community itself that presents me with the incentive to continue, rather than the band or its music. As Divola suggests, 'fan communities can become so strong that fandom becomes more about the fans than the stars (Divola 2010).' I believe this is true of Duran fandom as well, as these fan testimonies illustrate:

*Our friendship has transcended the band and we find that the band is just a backdrop to a long weekend of hanging out.*

*I... have found some [sic] true friends from there and we found other [sic] ways to keep in touch. I'm not that much interested [sic] in what's going on with the band any more.*

*The single most important thing about the fan community to me is being able to keep in touch with my friends on a daily basis. We talk about everything in our lives, not just the band.*



*Fans sharing a meal, beaming after seeing Duran Duran*

Additionally, many Duran fans describe the community atmosphere to be therapeutic, akin to a support group. I found this to be true myself when I first joined. I was initially afraid to share my personal issues with people I did

not know, but was pleasantly surprised at the outpouring of support I received when I did. These fan statements describe similar experiences:

*In general, there are friends to be made and we all talk about our lives and honestly, many have been there to see each other's kids grow up and to lend support through losses in families and in dealing with illnesses, like cancer. It can be incredibly supportive to know any time of day, you can go online and have a friend there. We are often in different time zones, so while it may be the middle of the night here, it is morning in the UK. We are a "community". We have each other's backs and when we need a place to stay, we know we can trust each other enough to share hotel rooms and sometimes stay @ each other's homes.*

*I love being a Duranie. There is something unique about Duranies that I have not witnessed anywhere else. Maybe I haven't been enough of a 'fan' of any other group, and maybe Duranies are special. Whatever the case may be for the most part Duranies are some of the best people you will ever meet. I have met Duranies from all over the world, shared hotel rooms, car trips, and even my home with people I hardly knew. There is nothing quite like meeting a literal stranger in an airport or hotel lobby and hugging them like you've known them your whole life. There are a few 'bad eggs' in every group, but I've been blessed with some of the best.*

Hills sees fandom as an “energising passion”, where the love can be shared with other fans, as they build communities of like-minded people’ (Divola 2010). And Thompson connects the concepts of identity and community as such:

To associate with other fans is to discover that the choices made in constructing one's life project are not entirely idiosyncratic. It is to discover that one's chosen life trajectory overlaps significantly with the trajectories of others, in such a way that certain aspects of the self – including, in some cases, one's innermost feelings and desires – can be shared unashamedly with others (ibid., p. 224).



*A Hawaiian-themed fan party*

Empirical research confirms Thompson's statement. As we saw earlier in this chapter, 'Proud to be a Duranie' is a common rallying cry amongst Duran fans. Most importantly, it is the comfort in knowing that one will be understood (one hopes) within a fan community of likeminded people. Because fandom is still considered a 'stigmatized activity' by much of society and 'an unworthy pursuit' (assessments that I will investigate further in the next chapter), fans experience relief when they find themselves 'in the company of fellow-travelers' (ibid., p. 224). And further, Thompson proposes that 'being a fan is an integral part of a project of self-formation' (ibid., p. 224). Take the following fan testimonies as illustrations of each of these concepts:

*There are thousands of people [sic] like me @ my disposal!*

*We share that instant bond... we share a common past. Even if we didn't know each other as teens, we still have 25 years of shared history. Duranies get Duranies the way no one else can.*

*Duranies 'get' each other in a way that non fans don't understand.*

Like Thompson, Moores connects the concepts of identity and community in his discourse about the self and collective identities, explaining that 'there is no neat dividing line between the individual and the collective,



as senses of 'belonging' are often a significant element of selfhood and personal feeling' (ibid., p. 163-164). In light of these statements, consider the following fan comments, noting the themes of friendship, family, and a shared passion:

*I've met so many people, and experienced many new things all because of my love for this band.*

*My original goal was I wanted to meet other people that shared my passion.*

*[I] Will never forget the people that I have met over the years and the friendships that have been formed!*

*They're my dearest friends. I love them!*

*I like it because you feel part of a group.*

*I feel part of a group, I don't feel alone.*

*I think it's nice in a way, because you feel more of a bond with other close fans.*

Much of the appeal of fan community is its reflexive affirmation associated with belonging to and identifying with a group. As one illustration of this connection, consider the following story. In 2007 a group of Duranies from my home locale descended upon a tattoo parlour together, myself included. We all got 'inked', forever after branded as Duranies. The following photographs document the evening, telling a story in themselves. All involved were well aware that permanently inscribing one's body in this manner was no small sacrifice (we all questioned our sanity a little), not to mention the pain endured.





*Duran fans getting 'inked'*

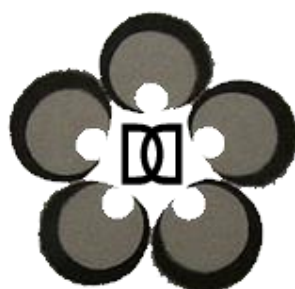
Before I continue, I am aware that this is likely where my readers stop reading and conclude that I and this group of fans are 'obsessives' (if they have not already done so after my admission to engaging in band chasing). Indeed, becoming a walking billboard for one's favourite band may sound like a sign of obsession. However, there are other factors to consider before one condemns me to life in a padded cell. For example, the tattoo parlour was one of the first bonding experiences I had with a group of Duran fans as an adult, so it felt like a rite of passage, an 'initiation' into an exclusive club.



*The 'DD Tat girls' and a night we will never forget*

The tattoos we now brandish not only connect us, but hold additional personal significance. Most of us got the same tattoo, Duran's reunion logo, a five-petal flower representing each of the five band members. Considering

the impact that the band's reunion had on my own fandom and its subsequent influence on my career and choice of research direction, the tattoo represents much more than my devotion to Duran Duran, for me it symbolises reclaimed youth and a renewed passion for life.



*Duran Duran's reunion flower logo*

If ever there is any doubt that fan communities are mini societies with their own tightly knit cultures, this story should eradicate those doubts. Additionally, pathological terminology with reference to fandom, such as my use of the term 'obsession' here and similar language in the fan testimonies presented in this chapter, not to mention media representations of fans such as those discussed by Hills (2007), are all evidence that the pathological treatment of fandom is still an issue. And while academia has moved away from use of such terms, society in general, has not. I will therefore return to these considerations for a more in-depth discussion in the next chapter.

Returning to the concept of fan community, earlier I mentioned that Stevenson noted gender differences in the fan practices that he observed. In this regard, I, too, found a difference between the tendencies of Stevenson's male subjects, who appear preoccupied with celebrity, and the female fans I interviewed, who often (but not always) preoccupy themselves more so with the community of fellow fans. In my own observation of male fans, Duran

fans specifically, they generally appear more preoccupied with the actual 'text' itself—such as the music or news about an upcoming concert or tour, than in socializing and forming emotional connections with other fans (or in publically professing their affective admiration for their idols, for that matter). This preoccupation with factual concerns rather than emotional connection brings to mind the gender differences noted in writing styles as documented by Frith & Goodwin (1990, p. 370). But this is also not to say that male fans do not form community. Half of Stevenson's subjects were members of Bowie's online fan network, Bowie.net, and he mentions how most claimed to have formed friendships and even sexual relationships with other fans through this website. Even then, however, Stevenson argues that it was the 'shared passion for Bowie that held the community together' (2009, p. 85).

In summary, the concepts of fan community and fan identity are tightly intertwined, perhaps explaining why active participation in such communities aids in the sustainability of lifelong fandom. Because it is so integral to Duran fandom, and most any fandom for that matter, the concept of community will reappear in various discourses throughout the remaining chapters of this thesis.

## **Conclusion**

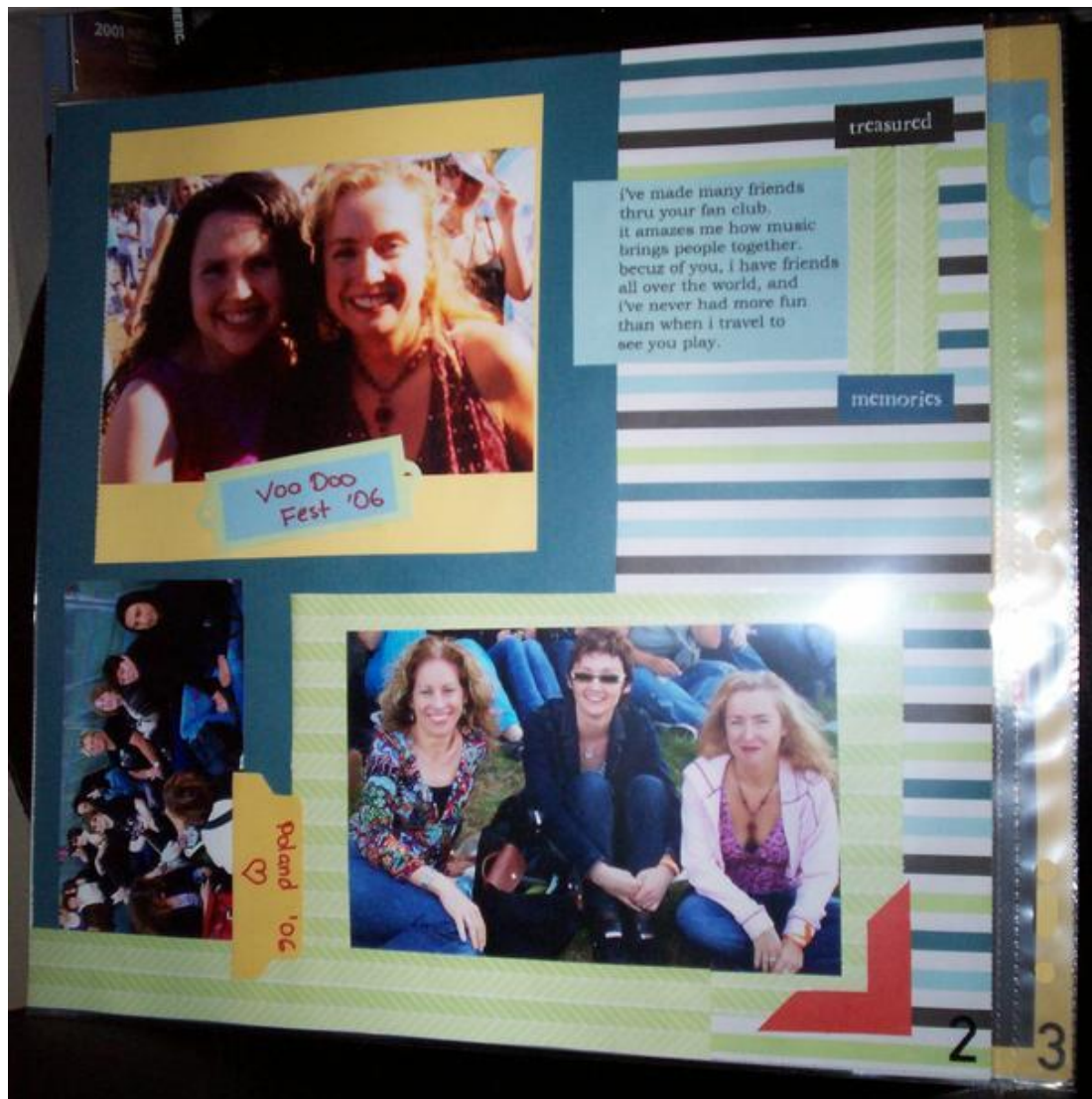
As we have seen in this chapter, memory and nostalgia are powerful forces that evoke intense emotional associations and identifications formed early in life, repeatedly drawing fans back to that affective moment when they first discovered, and rediscovered, their idols. Duran fan identity reflexively draws upon not only the image of the idol but also upon a nostalgia for

associated memories of discovering those idols in adolescence, an indication of the impact that cultural influences, like pop music, can have during this formative period. These early identifications have enabled some adolescents to form lifelong attachments to their pop culture icons.

This chapter also explored pop music fandom's influence on identity by investigating what binds Duran fans to their idols through years of life changes, and what sustains their loyalty today. In support of this analysis a variety of factors and concepts were discussed, including affect, reflexivity, self narrative, the idol as 'guiding text', 'intimacy at a distance', reclaimed youth, the longevity of the band itself, and fan community. As these factors appear to constitute the foundation for lifelong fandom and contribute to its longevity, I will build upon these ideas as I develop my arguments in subsequent chapters.

In the next chapter, I will examine a variety of political issues that concern women in pop music fandom. By exploring concepts such as 'bedroom culture' and 'the scream', I will consider the ways in which adult fans still experience many of the same fan pleasures that they did when they were teens. I will then interrogate the external politics surrounding such female fan behaviour, particularly judgments from spouses, families, peers, and the media. Lastly I will discuss how fan shame and the resultant 'closet fandom' can be attributed to these judgments.

## Chapter 4: *Girl Panic!* Female Fandom and the Politics of Pop Music



Sheryl Garratt's (1990) auto-ethnographical account of her experience as a Bay City Rollers fan highlights the importance of certain activities in teen pop fandom: scrapbooking, posters, watching televised performances, and fantasizing. Today and for the past three decades, videos have been used in a similar fashion, as they are 'are typically consumed privately, in living rooms and bedrooms' and this 'complements this fantasy of ownership and makes possible distinct varieties of fan practice and pleasure not encouraged by recorded sounds alone' (Wald 2002). As we shall see in a moment, other private or semi-private fan activities have historically included consumption of magazines (which are being replaced by websites on the Internet, but the purpose and practice of consumption for both is the same—and in fact, is now enhanced— regardless of medium).

### **Bedroom Culture**

97% of the Duran fans I surveyed reported having a poster of their idols on their walls at some point. And most claim to have practiced their fan activities in private or with one or two close friends when they were teens. The locale where most fans had the opportunity to do so was the home, and more specifically, the bedroom – a girl's most private space within the context of the home and family. Going to concerts was a rare treat, because most did not have the financial means or the transportation nor their parents' permission to attend very many shows. To attend multiple shows, or to make a regular practice of concert-going, usually required travel to other cities. Most adolescents did not (and still do not) have these luxuries. McRobbie & Simon Frith explain that girls 'are usually confined to the locality of their homes; they have less money than boys, less free time, less independence

of parental control' (1991, p. 148). Frith explains how this is related to girls' tendency to locate their consumption of pop music to the private spaces such as their bedrooms: 'The rock 'n' roll discourse constructs its listeners in sexually differentiated terms—boys as public performers, girls as private consumers' (1996, p. 228). But he goes further, claiming that teen girl culture in general, begins and ends 'in the bedroom' (ibid.), because whereas boys 'are on the streets', 'girls meet at home to listen to music and teach each other make-up skills, practice their dancing, compare sexual notes, criticize each other's clothes, and gossip' (ibid., p. 226). Frith also suggests that girls' relationship with the bedroom (and the home) continues into maturity (ibid.), a statement that I will consider when I explore present-day Duran fan practices.

The significance of gossip or 'talk' for teen girl culture has been noted by McRobbie, who suggests girls use magazines and 'talk' as mechanisms for the construction of fantasies, both collective and private, and that such fantasies serve a powerful role in identity formation (1991, p. 168). McRobbie's conclusions are important because I will later consider them in my research on adult female fans' private usage of the Internet today, which I suspect serves much the same function. For this I plan to draw heavily upon what McRobbie calls 'bedroom culture', a situation that occurs primarily in the bedroom, where girls might play music while they do other tasks such as 'wash their hair, practise make-up, and day-dream'(McRobbie & Frith 1991, p. 149).

At the outset, many fans I interviewed were bashful about admitting to having fantasies or a sexual attraction toward their favourite band. It's almost as if they felt there was something to be ashamed of in admitting an attraction, now or in their teens. I found that I had to confess my own personal attraction to get participants comfortable enough to share their feelings with me. Once fans opened up on this issue, however, I could not get them to stop. Many fans claimed that their teen infatuations with Duran Duran were their first sexual attractions toward anyone. This early connection could be a possible reason why their fandom has lasted so long, as this fan's confession about Duran's bassist John Taylor suggests:

*It was... the first time I felt real attraction someone (JT) nothing dodgy, but [I] just was infatuated with them (and him).*

In her discussions about bedroom culture, McRobbie suggests that adolescent girls' consumption of posters of male pop idols is related to their emerging sexuality:

The pictures which adorn bedroom walls invite these girls to look, even stare at length, at male images (many of which emphasise the whole masculine physique, especially the crotch). These pin-ups offer one of the few opportunities to stare at boys and to get to know what they look like. While boys can quite legitimately look at girls on the street and in school, it is not acceptable for girls to do the same back. Hence the attraction of the long uninterrupted gaze at the life-size 'Donny Osmond Special' (1991 p. 23).

McRobbie ties this practice to the concept and importance of fantasy construction, when she describes this and other aspects of teen girl culture as 'buying time... from the real world of sexual encounters while at the same time imagining these encounters, with the help of the images and commodities supplied by the commercial mainstream' (ibid., p. 24-25).



Garratt offers a similar explanation drawn from her own experience: 'Falling in love with posters can be a way of excluding real males and of hanging on to that ideal of 'true love' for just a little longer' (1990, p. 401). And Lisa Lewis explains that for young girls, a remote 'relationship with a band' is appealing because it 'avoids many of the traumas of teenage sexuality' (Lewis 1992 qtd. in Andrews & Whorlow 2000, p. 261). Andrews & Whorlow present yet another empowering feminist perspective. They argue that in the case of fandom, as opposed to real-life relationships with boys, 'it is the girls who do the chucking. When they move on to other bands they disregard the no-longer-fashionable males, in a reversal of the more familiar representation of women as disposable consumer items' (Andrews & Whorlow 2000, p. 261).

This vicarious relationship to celebrity, via a poster, as a safe method of objectifying the male body, might be thought of as one application of 'non-reciprocal intimacy at a distance' (Thompson 1995, p. 219). With respect to pop music fandom, this type of interaction may be appealing to adolescent girls because it offers them the 'opportunity to explore interpersonal relations' with the opposite sex 'in a vicarious way, without entering into a web of reciprocal commitments' (ibid.).

When I brought up the subject of magazines at a focus group I conducted in America, the topic generated many enthusiastic responses. Fans could still remember the names of the magazines they collected, including *Bop*, *Sixteen*, and *Tiger Beat*.



*American focus group, 2008*

Another fan sent me an email sharing a similar enthusiasm about her memories of teen magazines:

*I can't imagine how much money I made my mom spend on all the teen magazines at the time, every issue featuring the face of John Taylor just had to go home with me!*

Hearing about these memories prompted memories of my own from 1984 when my best friend came to visit for the summer. We would spend hours sitting on the floor of the magazine aisle at my local grocery store, magazines strewn about all around us, as we carefully searched each for the best photos of our favourite band members. We often had no intention of buying them because we didn't have much of our own money. But the ones I did buy, I pulled pages from and taped to my bedroom wall in lieu of having actual full-sized posters. I remember my two favourites were photos of Duran's keyboardist Nick Rhodes and lead singer Simon Le Bon, both were stills taken from The Reflex video which featured live concert footage. Because I could not attend concerts myself (my mother strictly forbade it, a fact I will analyse later in this chapter), I felt this was the next best thing.



*The Reflex video, 1983*

Another Duran fan shared a similar relationship with her consumable memorabilia:

*We had shrines to our favorite member in our lockers, wrote stories about them during study hall and passed them in the hall, we begged our parents to take us to the import record stores to get every album, 45, 12 inch mix or anything else we could get our hands on. We collected pins, magazines, t-shirts and all things Duran. Most weekends we were camped out in my living room (I was one of the few who could get MTV) watching videos or listening to music. We had posters covering the walls and ceilings of our bedrooms. None of got to see Duran until 1987 when 4 of us were able to get to a show on the Strange Behaviour tour. Five of us got together in 1994 for the Wedding Album tour.*

Memory and nostalgia are themes which appeared repeatedly throughout my ethnographic field work, as discussed in *Chapter 3: Lifelong Fandom and Identity*.

## Concerts and Female Agency



When I conducted my ethnography, I conducted a series of online polls on my message board that coincided with the online survey and focus groups. The statistics resulting from these polls indicate that Duran fans take concert-going seriously. For example, an overwhelming 97% of the fans surveyed report having attended at least one Duran concert in their lifetime. And 44% claim they attend at least one Duran concert per year in the present day, while 29% say they have been to more than 20 Duran concerts in total. Additionally, exactly half of these fans say they have waited in line for hours outside a venue (some even camped overnight) to get a good seat at a concert.

Like myself and the fan mentioned in the previous section, most of us were not allowed to attend Duran concerts as young girls. This may be why our concert-going practices are of such importance to us today. Concert attendance was uncommon for us as teens not only due to lack of parental permission but also the financial means and transportation necessary.

McRobbie observes the following about teen girls' comparative lack of freedom (as opposed to that of boys):

It is not so much that girls do too much too young; rather, they have the opportunity of doing too little too late. To the extent that all-girl subcultures, where the commitment to the gang comes first, might forestall these processes and provide their members with a collective confidence which could transcend the need for 'boys', signal[ing] an important progression in the politics of youth culture (1991, p. 42).

The pop concert is considered by many to be 'one of adolescence's most exciting rites of passage' (Kidder 2006, p. 83). McRobbie & Frith make a case for the significance of concerts to teen girls, 'A live pop concert is... a landmark among their leisure activities,' a chance to 'express a collective identity, to go out en masse, to take part in activities unacceptable in other spheres' (1991, p. 148). If that is the case, combined with the other pleasures that teen girls get from their experiences in pop fandom, such opportunities might well be viewed as life altering, enabling fans to learn 'about the subtleties involved in negotiating identity within the confines of commercialization' (Kidder 2006, p. 83).



As compared with the more private topic of sexuality, it was a great deal easier for me to get feedback from fans regarding concert attendance, perhaps because it is a less personal expression of fandom. Fans loved to reminisce about their first concert. Ask any Duran fan about their first concert event (which most attended in their late teens), and not only will their eyes light up, but you will get an earful. Concert stories like the following were so plentiful that I was at pains to decide which to include here:

*I first saw them in 1984. It was the Seven and the Ragged Tiger tour and my best friend and I had floor seats, first row of the second section. The excitement was palpable and by the time they came on I thought my heart would burst.*

*I first saw them in 1984... Looking back I remember the intense emotions, how overwhelming it all was.*

Notice these fans' references to affect; both express a strong recollection of their affective response to the atmosphere. Other fan testimonies focused on the context in which they saw their first concert:

*My first concert was in 1987 at the Apollo Theatre in Manchester and we were 6 rows from the front, there was some trouble with my ticket because my dad threw it away by accident and I didn't speak to him for about a week after I had found out, eventually they let me in. I can remember waving at John and [was] sure he waved back at me, but I guess I will never know for sure.*

*I [first] saw Duran Duran when I was 24 in 1984... I remember getting there and someone was in our seats. I was furious. The venue apologized and gave us front row tickets... I remember two girls rushing the stage ... They were carried out by security. One girl in the front row collapsed. Medical personnel came and got her.*

The last few thoughts shared in the comment above recall my own first Duran concert, which, as I suggested in Chapter 1, was nothing short of total mayhem. No one stayed in their seats. Girls climbed light poles to get a better view. Others rushed the stage and security did nothing about it. I saw

all manner of items thrown at the band (undergarments, mostly, but the occasional shoe was also hurled onstage). I also was shocked to see fries (with ketchup!) chunked at the lead singer. (I remember he was wearing white pants, and I was worried the ketchup would stain.) Media reports at the time described scenes like these as hysteria, and I distinctly remember being fearful for my own safety. It led me to question whether these acts by people in the crowd were enacted by fans or non-fans. I have since met one of the women who threw her shoe at that same concert, and she explained she did so because she put her phone number in it! (She was aiming for bassist John Taylor.)

Here is another fan commentary that addresses a number of points that recall my personal experience with Duran concerts:

*My first Duran Duran show was the summer of 1987, Strange Behaviour tour. I was 16. There were 4 of us from high school [sic] going to the show... Somewhere I have some grainy pictures I tried to take with an old disk camera (you remember the ones with the little circular film thing). I remember the security guy took one of my films (yeah, like anyone was getting good pictures back then). I don't remember much else from the show. After we were all starving and tried to go to Pizza Hut, but they were closing so we had to order take-out and head back to the hotel. Too excited to sleep after seeing our favorite band, finally, we stayed up talking half the night and drove home very tired and happy the next day.*

First, I understand what she meant when she said she could not remember the show. My first Duran concert was that way too; I remember the chaos caused by the fans more than anything else. Second, this fan mentioned driving home ‘very tired and happy’. Most of my Duran gigs as an adult have not been in my home town, and thus travel has been required. To save money, most of those journeys are long-distance car trips in which I

carpool with a handful of other Duran fans. While the return home is always exhausting (usually we sleep very little), everyone always has smiles on their faces. Often we are silent as well, lost in daydreams about our memories of the previous evening. Third, the fan comment above also mentions photography. I've found that each fan has their favourite 'thing', a ritual activity or interest when attending Duran shows. Some are passionate about taking and sharing their photographs. Some take video. Others are most interested in getting autographs. And still others make banners, the goal being to get acknowledgment from the band in some capacity during the concert. Whatever one's interest, a significant amount of time (and pride) is usually spent on achieving the desired results, be it the perfect banner, photo, video, or autographed item (which, ideally, should have all band members' signatures on it.)

Another point in the fan comment above that recalls my own experience is 1987's *Strange Behaviour* tour was also my first Duran concert. I snuck in because my mother still forbade me, even at age 16, from attending. To this day, she claims she cannot remember why I was not allowed to go, when she had allowed me to see other artists like Michael Jackson and Lionel Richie as early as age 12. This begs the question, what was it that she and other fans' parents were so afraid we might experience at a Duran concert as opposed to these other artists? She and I have discussed the topic at length, and the only thing that she thinks might have been an issue were the news reports about the behaviour of other fans at Duran concerts at that time. Akin to the dynamics of Beatlemania, Duran



concert audiences were massive in 1984, with stadiums full of frenetic and screaming adolescents, a potentially dangerous cocktail as the sheer volume of excited young girls in one place meant that many were getting crushed. Perhaps an interesting parallel, but also likely related, my mother herself played a part in Beatlemania twenty years earlier when she attended a concert of this same magnitude in 1964. (This obviously has been a tense topic between us both for years, but of course at the time my mother had no idea how much Duran Duran meant to me or that I would still be a Duran fan 25 years later.) Regardless, I believe that such fears regarding female pop fan behaviour stem from more than just a protective parental concern that I might get 'crushed' by the mob, but a historically deep-seated patriarchal bias within our culture that condemns such female fan behaviour because of what motivates it, women's sexuality. This idea will be interrogated throughout this chapter.

### **The 'Scream'**

*Once I saw them in person at my first concert, that was it for me. I was hooked. It was my first concert experience EVER and what a fantastic show to have as my first. I absolutely had a blast and could not speak for days after. I had just turned 16 and saw them twice in Philly, a week apart at the Spectrum.*



83% of the fans I surveyed report that they have screamed at concerts. And considering the previous discussion, it should be evident that young female pop fans can have intensely affective responses to their idols. In the next few sections, I will explore the features and functions of this particular form of female pop fan affect.

'What are you going to do when you see them'? Annie was asked. 'Scream,' she replied, 'louder than anyone else' (Andrews & Whorlow 2000, p. 262).

The louder you screamed, the less likely anyone would forget the power of the fans. When the screams drowned out the music, as they invariably did, then it was the fans, and not the band, who were the show (Ehrenreich et. al. 1992, pp. 103-104).

And screaming is not the only affective response female pop fans can have to their idols. 32% of the fans I surveyed report crying at concerts. The reasons for this tendency draw upon the arguments concerning the affective nature of music discussed in the previous chapter. Recall my own admission, for example, of my affective response to hearing *Ordinary World* performed live, which makes me included in the 32%, in addition to similar testimonies by other fans. And as also revealed in the previous chapter, many fans cry at concerts due to not only the affective nature of the music but also the often overwhelming atmosphere of shared adoration that can be felt from a unified mass of fans.

Another affective reaction that has become indicative of, and possibly even defines, the earliest female pop fan stereotype is fainting. But regarding this particular fan behaviour, it is important to consider that going back in history prior to the earliest accounts, fainting was often associated with the feminine, and it often had nothing to do with emotion or 'hysterics', but

everything to do with women's fashion (tight corsets). As I will share below, fainting was a female pop fan behaviour that was artificially introduced, perhaps because that is what society expected from 'hysterical' young females. The irony is, however, that female fans *do* often faint at pop concerts. The reasons they faint have little to do with emotion, however. I myself have been crushed by the crowd at a concert to the point that I cannot breathe and am at risk of passing out, and I have seen multiple women go down beside me. Regardless, it is a behaviour I will investigate in this section, along with screaming and crying, because all of these have become closely associated with the female pop fan experience. So when did these behaviours begin? In the following section I will outline a brief history of these phenomena in the world of female pop fandom.

### **Bobbysoxers**

By most accounts, the origins of the stereotypical image of the screaming teen fan dates back to 1943 with the perceived hysterics of Frank Sinatra fans, a concept which was initially manufactured to attract publicity (Kidder 2006). This manner of fan behaviour was apparently encouraged by a few 'planted' fans in the audience who were paid to scream, cry, and faint at key moments during Sinatra's performance. One could argue that this suggests teens' propensity for imitation, especially considering that out of the 30 fans who behaved in this manner, only 12 were planted. But I will provide a feminist perspective in a moment which counters this idea. Regardless of the real reasons behind the crowd's behaviour, publicity following the event focused on Sinatra's hysterical screaming fans, who got more press than did

he. Those initial photographs and press coverage of Sinatra's fans 'normalized the behaviour, ensuring it would be repeated not only at the next concert, but also for generations to come' (ibid., p. 84). Beatles fans in America likewise responded to publicity about fan behaviour abroad, having previously seen images on TV of British fans acting similarly for their idols. They 'knew what to do' by the time the Fab Four landed in America (ibid.).

Countering the suggestion above that teen girls might only have been imitating one another, such moments were actually monumental for the feminist movement because they signified a shift in the practice of popular music fandom:

Young women began to assert their sexuality through the consumption of popular music, a practice that for years had been largely the domain of their brothers. Before, the fandom of adolescent girls was regarded primarily as an innocent admiration of pinup idols because no one thought these girls would dare act on their lustful concert cries, their actions were more or less ignored (ibid., p. 83).

Therein, I would argue, lies what is at the heart of contemporary society's treatment of the female music fan. This shift in behaviour was seen as threatening to a society where the dominant philosophy was, and still is, very much rooted in patriarchal ideologies. Female music fandom has never lived down its initial reputation as being associated with behaviour that is perceived as 'decidedly unladylike' such as 'public loitering and displays of shrieking, crying, and carrying on' (ibid.). Although these 'hysterics' may have been initially manufactured and encouraged by the media, why *do* girls get such pleasure from behaving in this manner? Kidder argues that teen pop fans' screams at concerts are 'public displays of solidarity' (ibid., p.86).

She contends that it gives them free license to objectify men (ibid., p. 84). Describing this as an 'inversion of a cultural stereotype', her explanation recalls Laura Mulvey's concept of the 'male gaze':

Men look and women are looked at. In pop music, male performers reverse this traditional code of masculinity. Pop stars ... have been groomed specifically for female consumption, presenting cuddly, nonthreatening lyrics alongside an often androgynous, or at least unthreateningly adolescent, beauty (ibid., p. 83-84).

Young women enact this inversion of gender roles, not only by being those who do the looking, but also through dramatic public expressions of adoration (ibid., p. 84). But whether or not such behaviour should be considered an expression of feminist agency is still the topic of many heated debates. Some scholars have other perspectives:

Writing about pop demands that women also be honest with themselves about the fantasies we've absorbed, the one's we've let men paint on our bodies and our souls. It means admitting that we didn't totally control that world we made in our bedrooms, and that when we bring it out in the open it doesn't always serve us well (Powers 1995 qtd. in Kidder 2006, p. 86).

But the fact that feminists cannot agree whether or not such expression serves women well, does not negate the fact that the behaviour continues and that young women seem to derive pleasure from it. Hence one of my aims when I first set out to conduct this ethnography, to see if I can determine and explain the motivations that drive female pop fans, including myself, to behave in ways that are so often misunderstood.

### **Elvis 'The Pelvis'**

When Elvis came onto the scene with his trademark hip thrusts that left an indelible mark on the 'Rock 'n' Roll' generation, his fans followed in

the swooning Bobbysoxer's footsteps. Sue Wise describes the media's response to the spectacle they created:

The media found it disturbing on one level, but they also loved it and fuelled it and fostered it. Since this kind of mass crowd expression of power of women and girls was supposedly both unprecedented and unthinkable, explanations for it were sought. What better way to explain the frightening spectacle of hordes of uncontrollable females than by 'discovering' that they were only responding to being sexually stimulated and manipulated by a man—literally man-*ipulated*... How suitable! How unthreatening! And how ego stroking for the men who looked on approvingly. By turning Elvis from what in effect he was— an *object* of his fans— into a *subject*, the girls' behaviour was de-threatened and controlled... Yet it seems paradoxical to me that feminists, myself included, have taken over these male ideas about rock music without ever bothering to ask how women experience this phenomenon (1990, p. 396-397).

The final comment is a challenge for academics and feminists to probe this area further. Wise brings up an important point – the commonly accepted belief that the male pop idol onstage was seen to act on the female fan on the ground; female fans were seen as passive, being acted upon by the active male star. Not only that, but her words also suggest that 'the domination of rock writing by men has led to a version of pop history that is both ideologically and empirically suspect' (Frith & Goodwin 1990, p. 370). McRobbie also challenges the stereotype of the passive female fan, arguing instead that her behaviour is an assertion of female agency:

Girls who define themselves actively with these teenybopper subcultures are indeed being active, even though the familiar iconography seems to reproduce traditional gender stereotypes with the girls as the passive fan, and the star as the active male. These girls are making statements about themselves as consumers of music (1991, p. 24).

## Beatlemania

In subsequent decades, teen pop fans found more idols to scream about. The media continued reporting fan behaviour as spectacle, as this review of a Beatles concert reveals:

Screaming like an animal and wearing almost as much leather as one, the young girl writhed and shook in some private ecstasy... there were hundreds like her and so much oblivious of their partners' presence that they stood at right angles to the boy they were 'with', shaking, screaming, supremely happy (The Daily Mail 1963 in Andrews & Whorlow 2000, p. 256).

Andrews & Whorlow point out the patronizing tone of this review – the reporter's concern is that the 'boyfriend's' masculinity is threatened by the mere presence of the Beatles and of his girlfriend's enjoyment of their performance (ibid.). The review is a textbook example of the media's portrayal of Beatles fans at the time. And worse, many reports focused on the 'disease' theme suggested previously. Even the fans themselves internalized this message, albeit in a tongue-in-cheek fashion. 'If there was a shortcut to recovery, it certainly wasn't easy. A group of Los Angeles girls organized a detox effort called 'Beatlesaniacs, Ltd,' offering 'group therapy' (Ehrenreich et. al. 1992, p. 87). But disease was not the only conclusion, as the media desperately struggled to come up with an explanation, comparing the behaviour to racial rioting that was common at the time (ibid., p. 88). In that sense, some media seemed to acknowledge, perhaps unwittingly, that something remarkable was taking place with respect to social change.

Ehrenreich, Hess, & Jacobs have explored Beatles fan behaviour in retrospect, claiming it was revolutionary for the women's movement (ibid., p.

90). They suggest that the real reason behind the screaming was a subject that no adults wanted to touch. It concerned female sexuality, a taboo subject for 1960s Western culture. And not just female sexuality, but adolescent sexuality, because:

...despite everything Freud had to say about childhood sexuality, most Americans did not like to believe that 12-year old girls had any sexual feelings to repress. And no normal girl – or full grown woman, for that matter – was supposed to have the libidinal voltage required for 3 hours of screaming, sobbing, incontinent, acute-phase Beatlemania (ibid.).

As proof, the most common response by teen fans at the time when asked why they loved the Beatles was, 'because they're sexy' (ibid.). This statement was defiant and rebellious because 'the Beatles were the objects; the girls were their pursuers... To assert an active, powerful sexuality by the tens of thousands and to do so in a way calculated to attract maximum attention was more than rebellious. It was, in its own unformulated, dizzy way, revolutionary' (ibid.). In this way Ehrenreich, Hess, & Jacobs suggest that Beatles fans actually reversed the power dynamic that dominant culture at large (and the media) had assumed was taking place with fans of Elvis Presley and Frank Sinatra. The fans were not being acted upon by the males on the stage, the female fans were not the objects, it was indeed the other way around. The female fans were not out of control either, they were celebrating their newfound discovery of a pastime that would be shared with subsequent generations of teen female fans, the objectification of the male pop star. And what better way to express that feeling than a squeal of delight that 'signifies romantic fantasy while it tests out some newly active hormonal responses' (Wald 2002). While such behaviour most likely has sexual



origins, some fans find pleasure not in objectification but instead in identification with their idols. In both cases it appears to enable a sense of empowerment, as this Beatles fan recalls:

I think I identified with them, rather than as an object of them. I mean I liked their independence and sexuality and wanted those things for myself. Girls didn't get to be that way when I was a teenager – we got to be the limp, passive object of some guy's fleeting sexual interest. We were so stifled, and they made us meek, giggly creatures [who] think, oh, if only I could act that way, and be strong, sexy, and doing what you want (Beatles fan quoted in Ehrenreich et. al. 1992, p. 102).

This fan's testimony suggests the importance of her identification with the Beatles, recalling the ideas presented earlier which suggest fandom plays a significant role in identity construction. I will return to this concept again later in this chapter.

### **Rollermania**

The screams and 'mania' did not end with the Beatles, nor did the media's ridicule of both the fans and pop bands, as this review in *The Daily Mail* indicates:

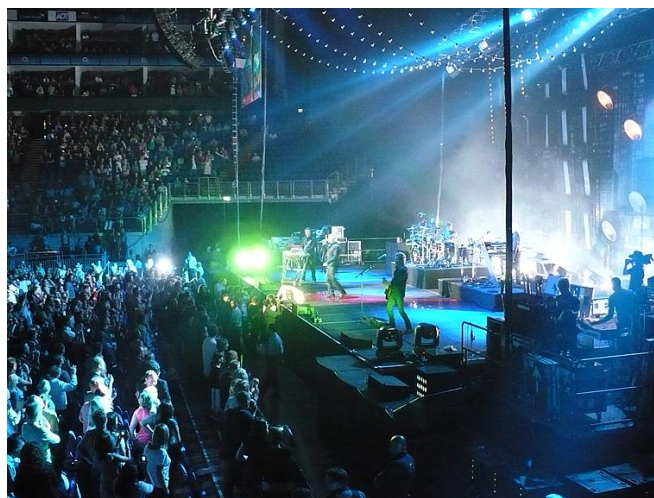
[The Bay City Rollers are] the most expertly packaged group in pop history, gift wrapped for young girls to love. As musicians they are so limited that they only recently attained the dizzying heights of playing all the music on their own hit records... They were discovered, manufactured and sold to an uncritical audience by former palais-de-danse bandleader and frustrated pop star Tim Paton... the movement burned across the [Scottish] border like a fever. And with it came Rollermania (The Daily Mail 1975 in Andrews & Whorlow 2000, p. 257).

The 1970s saw an increase in 'manufactured' pop idols like the Bay City Rollers, as well as others like David Cassidy (from *The Partridge Family*) and Donny Osmond (Andrews & Whorlow 2000, pp. 256-257). Garratt's

auto-ethnographic account of being a young Bay City Rollers fan ascribes a rite of passage to her own screaming behaviour, in retrospect:

...from my mother to my younger cousin, most women go through 'that phase.' It is a safe focus for all that newly discovered sexual energy, and a scream can often be its only release. It is the sound of young women, not 'hysterical schoolgirls' as one reporter would have it—a scream of defiance, celebration, and excitement (Garratt 1990, pp. 400-401).

### **Concert Audiences as 'Imagined Community'**



The screams did not stop with the Bay City Rollers or with other teeny acts of the 1970s. Some bands, while not intended for teeny consumption from the outset, such as Duran Duran in the early 1980s, soon found that their market niche was also, in fact, these same screaming adolescent girls. In their research with fans of the Irish boy band Boyzone, Andrews & Whorlow (2000) found that girls were aware of the 'manufactured' nature of their idols and their performance, but that this was irrelevant. They found that fans actually gained pleasure from this very attribute and in some respects, felt empowered by it:

The girls we spoke to were aware and knowledgeable about the commercial aspects and origins of their favoured bands; the

term 'manufactured' was mentioned often in relation to both *Boyzone* and *Take That* (a band some of them had previously been enthusiastic about), although their usage and understanding of the concept varied. That the Boyzone concert was 'manufactured' was pleasing to the girls. The choreography of the performance emphasized the interrelationship between producer and consumer: control, it was implied, was fluid and not in the hands of the group (ibid., p. 259).

Andrews & Whorlow's study also uncovered a curious gender bond across generational gaps at the 1996 concert they attended, a 'shared consumption of masculine performance' (ibid., p. 263). Most fans were adolescent, so many parents attended the performance as chaperones. Surprisingly, and perhaps contrary to the prior claim that no one besides teen girls likes boy bands, mothers screamed and stood on chairs alongside their daughters, revelling 'together in a shared female consumer space where they could behave in ways oppositional to the social constructions of ideal womanhood' (ibid., p. 262). In contrast Andrews & Whorlow note how uncomfortable and marginalised the fathers appeared at their bearing witness to 'so much unleashed female sexuality' (ibid., p. 263).

Evoking that which Garratt suggests in her auto-ethnography, the most striking thing about Andrews & Whorlow's study is the intensity generated by the mass gathering of female fans at the concert. Their observations also comment on what they perceived as 'community', and not an 'imagined' one, as they explain here:

Certainly, when standing, looking around the audience at the Wembley concert, the impression is of the irrelevance of those on stage compared to the size of the audience, and their sense of themselves, their presence and momentarily fixed identities. The 'imagined community' of Boyzone fans gets a sense of 'reality' when the lights go down and they scream and shout

and wave their loomy-gloomies. It was very much a female community of consumers, and the status of having been part of this 'real community' of concert attendees had the potential to last way beyond the evening (ibid., p. 262).

As I shared in the previous chapter, I know first-hand that having such an experience is indeed awe-inspiring; it evokes a sense of belonging, particularly in sharing an event with many others who love the same thing. It is one of the reasons that I became passionate about concert-going myself, and it is my motivation for exploring its dynamics. I can only assume this is the type of uniquely feminine rite of passage that Kidder and Garratt describe: 'in the brief time when the majority of girls are actively involved as fans, the fun and the thrills are unlike anything most men will ever experience' (Garratt 1990, p. 409). Garratt offers this nostalgic recollection in her auto-ethnography:

Looking back now, I hardly remember the gigs themselves, the songs or even what the Rollers looked like. What I do remember are the bus rides, running home from school together to get to someone's house in time to watch Shang-a-lang on TV, dancing in lines at the school disco and sitting in each other's bedrooms discussing our fantasies and compiling our scrapbooks. Our obsession was with ourselves; in the end the actual men behind the posters had very little to with it at all. (ibid., p. 402).

Recall earlier in this chapter McRobbie referred to an all-girl subculture or community (1991, p. 42). When applying this concept to teen pop fandom, such subcultures allow young women to create a 'shared identity by defining themselves against others, both in their peer groups, as well as against other adults and parents, and a group's [band's] unpopularity may consequently be irrelevant', in agreement with Garratt's theory (Andrews & Whorlow 2000, p. 258). This shared 'adoration' brought teen

girls together, creating a community of sorts in public spaces (such as concerts) and in private spaces (such as bedrooms) where fans can 'swap memorabilia, and create an alternative cultural economy' (ibid., p. 258). As McRobbie suggests, girl cultures or communities can be heavily influential in identity formation. In this way, teen girls become 'knowing, aware consumers in a post-modern sense, who use consumption to construct and reconstruct their own identities' (Andrews & Whorlow, p. 253).

### **Fan Shame**

Thus far in this chapter I have focused on the empowering aspects of female pop music fandom. At this point I will turn my attention toward aspects that are less empowering, particularly fan reaction to perceptions about female pop fandom from those who are non-fans.

When I conducted my ethnographic interviews and surveys, I began by asking research subjects some very basic questions. I first asked them to define the term 'fan' for me, and many of them responded with a distinctly defensive tone. While most fans did not have a problem with the term themselves, they felt the need to justify their logic:

*The simple term 'fan' doesn't have any derogatory connotation [to] it... it's simply a word to describe someone who really likes something.*

*Yes, I consider myself a fan of Duran Duran. I don't think the term fan itself is derogatory in any way.*

*I don't associate it with stalker or follower. Only as someone with appreciation for a group.*

*I know it's short for 'fanatic'. I really don't take it in a negative way. I am a fan of Duran Duran.*

*I really don't care either way. It doesn't bother me at all to be called a "fan" and I really don't "like" it, either.*

*I am a fan so I don't [sic] have an issue with the term.*

*It's the word "groupie" that bothers me. Fan doesn't.*

*My opinion of a fan is positive so it doesn't bother me for someone to call me a fan.*

*I think that the word "fan" has both negative and positive connotations and it's up to each individual fan to determine where they fit in that equation. No, I don't like it when I see fans that are acting like complete idiots – but since I'm not one of those fans – I don't identify myself with them, and so it doesn't really matter. Labels only matter to the people who don't have enough self-confidence or self-awareness to realize that they themselves determine who they are, not words.*

Such testimonies led me to suspect that the 'shame' or embarrassment about fandom that academia has sought to neutralise by validating the practice and study of fandom in the past 20 years, may still exist in society at large and has been internalised by fans like these. Hills confirms this assessment:

Even in cultural sites where the claiming of a fan identity may seem to be unproblematically secure – within fan cultures, at a fan convention, say, or on a fan newsgroup – a sense of cultural defensiveness remains, along with a felt need to justify fan attachments (Hills 2002, p. xii).

I can understand the motivation behind fan defensiveness because, admittedly, I have been guilty of passing judgment on other fans myself. For example, the intensity of fan devotion to Duran Duran is something that has fascinated me from the beginning of my own fandom, not only the behaviour I witnessed at that first concert (as described in Chapter 1) but also from observing other fans at school. Their lockers, adorned with Duran posters, were extensions of their bedrooms. And their public behaviour echoed the affective concert behaviour I described earlier in this chapter, voices filling

the hallways with shrieking and squealing over new photos of their favourite band members. I found it all very strange at the time and noticed how other kids (non-fans) reacted with eye rolls and whispering. I was therefore embarrassed, being a typically self-conscious teenager, so I avoided public association with other Duran fans. This hiding of my fandom from non-fans was the beginning of a 'closet' fandom that continued for most of my life. The shame of being a fan of Duran Duran began earlier for me than most of the fans I have interviewed, but many others claim experiencing a similar phase at some point in their fandom.

So what caused the shame? I suspect that this is rooted in origins that are similar to the parental fears and limitations I shared earlier. For the remainder of this chapter, I will explore the issues surrounding the fan shame which has resulted from society's perception of female pop fandom.

### **Denigration of Women's Media**

It should be evident from the literature discussed in this chapter, prejudicial views exist concerning female pop fans. To begin unravelling this preconception, I will consider literature by feminists who have offered an alternative version to pop history. Before I share some of these perspectives, some vocabulary and a background of the historical degradation of women's media will be useful.

Most of the existing literature on teen pop fandom refers to someone called a 'teenybopper'. To me this term engenders images of a bouncy teenage girl with a ponytail and petticoat, annoyingly popping her chewing

gum and stepping out of a 1950's *Life* magazine. But I have found the term used in even the most recent research. Due to its negative connotations, which I will discuss in a moment, the term appears to be just as derogatory now as it always has been. Kidder calls attention to this perception by sharing a few popular definitions of 'teenybopper' from UrbanDictionary.com:

- A fanatical [sic] teenager, often a girl at the cusp of puberty, who squanders vast amounts of hard earned money on useless items of clothes, music, and fashion products. Frowned upon by the more educated sector of our society [sic], considered [sic] the epitome of ignorance of the teen age life.
- Someone who likes a band purely for their looks as opposed to the music.
- Idiots who don't know what music is (UrbanDictionary.com quoted in Kidder 2006, p. 83).

These definitions suggest that the teenyboppers' minimization might have to do with the music to which they listen. And as such, 'pop is arguably one of music's most maligned genres, and criticisms of it as shallow, manufactured, and inane are ultimately transposed onto its fans' (Kidder 2006, p. 85). But Garratt suggests that this process actually works in reverse, that pop is so maligned because of who its audience is:

...no matter how bad the music, what the press or any of the self appointed analysts of 'popular culture' fail to reflect is that the whole pop structure rests on the backs of these 'silly, screaming girls' (1990, p. 400).

Garratt goes further by pointing out pop's reluctance to embrace its fans:

Even the artists making money out of girls' fantasies are usually embarrassed and at pains to point out that they have male fans, too; to get out of the teeny trap and aim their music at a more 'mature' or serious audience seems to be their general ambition...



As part of this same bias, 'teenybop' music is either ignored or made into a joke (ibid.).

In many respects, teen pop has indeed been made into a joke. This may be related to contemporary culture's dismissal and denigration of women's media in general, as evidenced by a number of previous studies by feminist scholars such as Dorothy Hobson (1982), Ann Gray (1992), Ien Ang (1988), and Charlotte Brunsdon (1997), whose research suggests that women's pleasures are regarded as trivial, and worse, they are often perceived to be a 'problem', like an addiction. (Recall the fan comments about joining a Beatles support group.) The Duran fans I surveyed are no different, they are aware of how their fandom is perceived by the rest of society, so many of them make jokes about having an addiction, as reflected in these statements:

*I crave that "fix". I saw them [Duran Duran] last month and I can't wait to go again.*

*I also think that part of it is that I never got to truly "finish" my experience with the band – I was young at the time they were popular and didn't go to a show with the original 5 until I was an adult, and I never had the chance to go to record signings or follow them to the hotel at night (LOL) until I was grown as well. At this point, I've done most of those things, and I find myself continuing to go to shows and follow them because I'm always chasing after that proverbial carrot – in this case the carrot being that after-show sighting "high"...*

*The fact that they still give me the tingly feeling that I had when I was a teenager is probably what keeps me coming back.*

*The music. It's my drug and escape.*

While the addiction theme is used lightly in these testimonies, for many women the 'addiction' message gets internalized; they feel guilty for gleaming enjoyment from such media yet they also feel compelled to justify and defend themselves. But this research also suggests that women's media

might be a site of a hegemonic struggle as women attempt to carve out their own space, forming an active resistance against the 'mainstream'. Jenkins offers a similar explanation:

Fandom is a vehicle for marginalized subcultural groups (women, the young, gays, and so on) to pry open space for their cultural concerns within dominant representations (Jenkins 2006, p. 40).

Such ideas recall conclusions drawn by Janice Radway (1987), in which she observed women's reading of romance novels as a 'declaration of independence' or a temporary 'escape' from their roles as wives and mothers (Radway 1994, p. 301). Radway compares her research to that of both McRobbie and Hobson, citing similarities in how all three 'studies use traditionally female forms to resist their situation as women by enabling them to cope with the features of the situation[s] that oppress them' (Radway 1987, p. 301). Sarah Thornton's (1995) research on club culture reveals a similar dynamic:

*I tell my [boyfriend] that this is my private – among two thousand people – freak out session... I do not want him to come with me when I go out dancing... this is one place that is my place... I love to wander around the club and feel unthreatened by being female (Anonymous quoted in Thornton 1995, p. 111).*

Some Duran fans went into detail about their fandom within the context of their lives as wives and mothers. They suggest that they engage in their fan practices as a way of defining a space for themselves free from domestic constraints and potential male ridicule. But at the same time, their statements imply that a strong sense of duty or responsibility in the home comes first:

*My hubby thinks it is all silly but nonetheless he is supportive. Ours is a great relationship and we each have our own likes and interests, so while he will roll his eyes and call me silly, he knows that it's something that I truly love and is always okay with me taking off for Duran weekends or concerts, provided it's in the budget. I am responsible enough to see that we've got kid coverage, so it's not like I leave him high and dry on his own. He also understands my need to get away from responsibilities, work, motherhood and just cut loose and enjoy myself. Otherwise, if Momma ain't happy, ain't nobody happy.*

*My hubby was extremely worried when I found Duran again. I'm not sure if he was jealous of the band or jealous of the friends that I made because of them or maybe just the fact that I had something that I loved that didn't really include him. He has since learned that I am a happier person to be around when I get a little 'me' time now and then and has become pretty supportive of my Duran addiction. He likes their music [and] has even gone to a show, but he realizes that this is my thing and it's best to let me do it with the girls.*

While these fans may be carving out a space for themselves through their participation in Duran fandom, they also express how this must be done in the context of their relationships with their male partners. Consider how different these testimonies might be if they were given by men who were going on a weekend camping/fishing trip or perhaps travelling to see their favourite sports team play at the finals. Would men be as concerned about these activities in the context of their relationships with their wives? Would they be concerned about securing child care, for example? Although Radway's conclusions regarding 'patriarchal marriage' were made two decades ago, these fan comments suggest that marital relationships and expectations about women's familial role may not have changed that much. Throughout the remainder of this chapter, I will continue to scrutinise such issues as they relate to fan shame.

## **Issues of 'Taste'**

In light of the evidence that women's media is often disparaged, it can be seen that both pop music and female fans receive similar treatment by critics and society when it comes to taste. Sheila Whiteley (2000) confirms this point in her observation that young women's taste has been largely ignored in pop history, even though pop music is clearly a force to which young women can relate. Perhaps this is because 'discourses concerned with 'teenyboppers' (young girls aged 8-15) construct them in terms of their naiveté, as immature and undiscerning consumers or cultural dupes entering into fandom as a time filler between adolescence and adulthood' (Andrews & Whorlow 2009, pp. 255-256).

At this point I must return to the subject of pop history and nomenclature to provide background for the literature that will follow. Therefore in the following section I will discuss a brief history of the emergence of the phenomenon that has come to be known as the 'boy band'. The reason for my discussion of this genre of pop in this thesis is due to the similarities observed in the audience response engendered by these types of bands to that of the previous pop artists mentioned (Sinatra, Elvis, The Beatles, and Duran Duran) as well as similarities in terms of image and musical output ('dance music' being a common thread amongst them all).

In the late 1980s, a new breed of teen dream hit the pop music world. Drawing upon hip-hop for their influence, ethnically diverse bands like New Edition and Menudo became popular. Following in the wake of their success was New Kids on the Block, a white version of this more urban-inspired boy

group. All these new bands emulated vocal styles and dance moves of Motown-era bands in the 1960s such as The Four Tops and later, the Jackson Five, who were arguably one of the first 'boy bands' long before the label was being used to define such groups (Andrews & Whorlow 2000, p. 262). Determining exactly when the term 'boy band' became coined is debatable, but it was undoubtedly in use by the time Take That was formed in the UK in the early 1990s. The Backstreet Boys followed in the U.S., and shortly thereafter a surge of other boy bands emerged in multiple countries throughout the 1990s. The explosion of new boy bands slowed by the millennium, but their popularity among not only 'teenies' but also their original die-hard older fans continued.

I present a university lecture on boy bands, and I begin the lecture in a fashion similar to that used by Kidder when she defines teenybopper, by pulling humorous (though derogatory) definitions of 'boy band' from Urban Dictionary. Many of the definitions are disturbingly inappropriate, with hints of homophobia and accusations of paedophilia. Even the tamer definitions (a few of which I have included below) exhibit a distinctly hostile nature. Here are the Urban Dictionary definitions for 'boy band':

- A group (usually 4 or 5) sissy boys who do NOT play instruments, sing crappy pop music [and] stupid gay love songs that they didn't even write themselves. Only pre-teens and teeny boppers [sic] like them.
- A worrying bunch of men in their mid 20's who make a living by turning on 6-14 year-old girls and old women. Do you think they score with their groupies? Send for the social workers!

- A group of 'musicians' who rarely play their own instruments, consisting purely of reasonably attractive males who appeal to girls ages 10-14.
- Any group of five homosexual paedophile [sic] men who sing manufactured pop songs about love, romance, why women keep dumping them, and other overrated bullshit targeted towards pre-adolescent or teenybopper girls. Normally, these genetic defects should have had careers in flipping McDonalds burgers, since they can't even play a musical instrument or even read a music sheet if their lives depended on it.

(UrbanDictionary.com 2010)

Issues of 'taste' and what constitutes real 'talent' are common themes here. But what stands out even more so is the profound lack of respect for the fans of these types of bands: young women. In truth, defining the modern boy band is not as simple as these authors presume. While the definition is debatable, what appears to define a boy band seems to have something to do with both the band and the music itself being 'manufactured', and with the members appearing 'pretty' or effeminate. Indeed, most of the time band members enact innocent 'boy next door' personae, but this is performed with a deliberate playfulness and an unabashed display of extreme (and often homo-erotic) masculinity. Their emphasis on synchronised dance leads to what is suggested by the Urban Dictionary definitions, the assumption that boy bands cannot play instruments or write their own music. But along with these 'qualities' also comes a sense of humour and even self-deprecation, as the artists often express a knowledge that they are 'eye candy' and perceived as talentless by everyone except teen girls. Image is therefore of paramount importance to boy bands.



*Duran Duran 1982*

Once again, I have launched into this discussion of boy bands and society's reaction to them because the audience response they receive is so typical to other 'teen dreams' in pop music history. While the fans I investigate as my primary case study in this research (Duran Duran) are not fans of a proper 'boy band', their audience response is too similar to ignore, so existing literature regarding audiences of such groups is applicable to this research. In addition, consider some of the discussion above about the importance of spectacle and image. The overwhelming male response to Duran Duran's effeminate 'pretty boy' image as well as their video spectacles, places them in a similar position to that of the modern-day boy band: they are dismissed by 'serious' rock critics and much of the listening public. If one doubts this perception, consider how Duran Duran could easily have been mistaken for a 'boy band' in the 1980s from images like the photo above (which was a popular poster of choice for many young fans). Even today, Duran cannot seem to escape this misnomer. But they play along, and even participate in themed concert events like the one shown in the photo below:



*Fans applaud Duran Duran at the Eye Candy Christmas concert, sponsored by a local radio station in 2007*

As mentioned, authenticity is an issue often raised with bands like these, and Duran Duran has had similar difficulty with respect to their credibility: 'They were the first popular band to get dismissed as a video band, an MTV scam that gullible girls got brainwashed into liking' (Sheffield 2010, p. 260). Sheffield makes a number of points in his assessment of Duran Duran and their female fans, which I will analyse here as further evidence of the negativity that exists toward bands of this type and the female audience. For example, consider the following statement in light of the definitions from UrbanDictionary.com for the term 'boy band':

'Boys around the world were arguing with their girlfriends, trying to explain why Duran Duran were a fraud, a smoke-and-mirrors show, an imperialist plot, a joke. They probably didn't write their own songs or play their own instruments; they were a soulless corporate product' (ibid., p. 261).

And further confirming the association between the oft-accused in-authenticity of teen dreams and Duran Duran, Sheffield quips, 'When I first met Duran Duran, they were called Shaun Cassidy' (ibid.). Duran Duran has expressed annoyance at being at being lumped into the 'boy band' category,



but they are well aware of the blatant absence of male attention, as Sheffield explains:

'Boys hated them, and there's no way the band didn't know it. They simply didn't care (ibid., p. 9)... Duran Duran are famous because girls liked them... we are fans they do not care about. They don't need us. They have the girls... Oh those fiendish Durannies, with their bat-shit pretensions and their preening pretty-boy bitch faces. Duran Duran, with their ridiculous feverish poetry about the mysterious Cleopatras who seduced and defanged them every few minutes. They made a lot of enemies as well as lifelong fans. Every time they come back and do a reunion tour, the adult women in my life turn into bobby-soxer battalions (ibid., p. 256).

Although Sheffield is himself a Duran fan, once again we can see in these comments a consistent masculine disdain regarding the 'effect' that bands like Duran Duran have on the female audience. If this is the perception of Duran's male fans, it is not surprising that female fans experience pressure and judgment from the wider context of society. There is another reason for this disdain too, and that is the way in which the band's effeminate image has been conflated with homosexuality.

One thing is for certain, bands of this nature have few supporters outside of the fan culture (Garratt 1990). And this has historically been the case, long before boy bands and Duran Duran emerged. Garratt argues that in her experience, fans are aware of this perception and they endure ridicule, but they continue in their fandom because while it may not be considered 'cool' to drool over a boy group, the act of doing so is rebellious:

Even with the sickeningly wholesome Osmonds or the Rollers... the feelings of going against normal society, of rebellion, persisted. One of the most important points about most teeny groups is that almost everyone else hates them. With the Rollers, everyone but the fans continually made fun of us,

insisting that the band was stupid and couldn't play. They were right, of course, but that wasn't the point (Garratt 1990, p. 403).

Other fan testimonies suggest a similar awareness of the commercial nature of these types of groups, even the Beatles, a band which eventually overcame its initial 'teeny' image. Consider this commentary by a Beatles fan:

Looking back, it seems so commercial to me, and so degrading that millions of us would just scream on cue for these four guys the media dangled out in front of us. But at the time it was something intensely personal for me and, I guess, a million other girls. The Beatles seemed to be speaking directly to us and, in a funny way, for us (Beatles fan quoted in Wald 2002).

### **Pathologisation of the Female Fan**

A good deal of fan pathologising has taken place as a result of these issues surrounding taste and women's media, a concern that warrants further consideration. In light of this concern, consider the following opinion offered by Garratt:

On the whole, the word 'fans', when applied to women, is derogatory. It is always assumed that they are attracted to a person for the 'wrong' reasons, that they are uncritical and stupid. As an audience, they are usually treated with contempt by both bands and record companies. The 'real' audience is assumed to be male (Garratt 1990, p. 409).

Garratt also suggests that women know their behaviour is denigrated, and therefore they attempt to hide it:

Most of us scream ourselves silly at least once, although many refuse to admit it later, because like a lot of female experience, our teen infatuations have been trivialized, dismissed, and so silenced. Wetting your knickers over a pop group just isn't a hip thing to have done (1990, p. 400).

Hiding one's fandom in this way is the 'closet fandom' to which I referred earlier. And who can blame female pop fans for resorting to closet

fandom, when their behaviour has historically been pathologised due, in part, to 'scare' tactics employed by what has sometimes been sensationalist media? Consider this perspective offered by Andrews & Whorlow:

...young girls reach the age for 'fandom' at an age when they are considered to be at their most vulnerable, and hence corruptible. Media discourse, in particular, has tended to focus attention on what was constructed as the 'infectious nature' of the hysterical behaviour of pop-star obsessed young girls. Often lurid headlines employed a metaphor of contagion, with young female fans being at risk 'of catching' perceived irrational and insane behaviour. For example, in the 1960s and 1970s the fan phenomenon was labelled 'Beatlemania' or 'Osmonditis' or 'Trexstasy'. Labels such as these serve to locate the female fan simultaneously as a social concern and in need of moral protection and understanding (Andrews & Whorlow 2000, p. 256).

Hills (2007) points out that certain types of fandom are more likely than others to be linked to 'negative stereotypes and associated processes of cultural devaluation, pathologisation, and stigmatisation' (p. 475) and that despite all of the 'celebratory rhetoric' surrounding fandom in recent years:

'...it therefore may not be time, quite yet, for media and cultural studies scholars to stop challenging and critiquing media representations of fandom. To do so may well be to overstate the "mainstreaming" or "normalisation" of such identities within contemporary culture (Hills 2007, p. 475).

Where female pop fans are concerned, much of the 'medical' pathologising has historical roots. As I mentioned previously, the word 'hysteria' has long been associated with women's behaviour, and in contemporary culture it has become 'a metaphor for anything considered unmanageable in the female sex' (ibid.). The poor teenybopper. She fights a losing battle from all sides. She is young, and therefore assumed to be naive, undiscerning, and vulnerable. She is female, and by extension she is shamed for tastes that are associated with being a woman. And because that

includes women's media (including pop – already a historically maligned genre whether or not it has anything to do with the gender or age of its audience), she is of course condemned for her 'bad' musical preferences. Finally, she is criticized for her 'hysterical' behaviour at concerts.

Perhaps we should consider that her screams might be the result of her frustration, a release and an outlet, an escape from the various forces that seek to hold her back. It is in this very activity that a number of feminists concur that the teen's screams may well signify a powerful assertion of female agency. And if we then apply this theory to adult pop fandom, it is possible to comprehend why the act of concert going is paramount for adult female fans like those of Duran Duran, especially when one considers that a nostalgic longing for the 'teen self' is an impetus for lifelong fandom of such artists, as discussed in the previous chapter.

### **Fantasy's Role**

The nature of the concerns presented throughout this chapter are perhaps related to the fact that many fans claim they were not allowed to attend Duran concerts when they were adolescent (myself included). Recall my earlier thoughts on that issue alone, which led me to ponder whether or not there are forces at these concerts from which society feels it needs to protect female fans. To what, exactly, are female fans at risk? In light of these questions, consider the following comments by Duran fans:

*I went to my first concert only in 2005 because I was not allowed to go when I was a teenager.*

*My first concert was in 1984. I have an old brother so, he [went] with me. So my parents allowed it.*

*My mom wouldn't let me go to see them when I was 16... I didn't get the opportunity until '87-Stange Behaviour.*

*Sept, 1984: My 2nd day of high school, I'm waiting for Italian class to begin. The girl behind me comes in and sits down in her seat. She's wearing a tour shirt for the Seven And The Ragged Tiger tour. The grey shirt with the pic from the album cover on it. I whirl around and start asking her about the show. I hadn't been allowed to go, a sore point, even to this day.*

*When you say 'bedroom culture', I know exactly what that meant... The mags, music, posters, prints, articles, pictures, folders, cards, quips, videos, TV appearances, everything and anything I could get with my pocket money. No way I would've been allowed to a concert though.*

*And we did all sorts of crazy things but we weren't allowed to go to the concerts either because we lived too far away.*

*My parents were pretty protective. I wanted to go see [Duran Duran] so bad and they wouldn't let me. I was so mad at them for months.*

In this section I will explore the underlying motivations for such overprotection. Thus far in this chapter we have considered the denigration of women's media and the condemnation of fan practices associated with the feminine, such as screaming or crying at concerts. Fantasy construction (also associated with the feminine) likewise has been pathologised. Other research on lifelong female fans of pop music is almost non-existent, particularly any literature concerning the role of fantasy. Andrews & Whorlow touched on the topic of adult female fandom briefly with their description of fans' mothers attending a Boyzone concert as chaperones. Cheryl Cline also provided a thought-provoking essay where described the difficulties she faced as an adult female fan of former Van Halen lead singer David Lee Roth. I will consider many of Cline's statements in conjunction with an analysis of related Duran fan testimonials, all of which I will use to examine

the issues surrounding the apparent fear that female fantasy presents a threat to traditional masculinity. In doing so I will attempt to untangle a complex web of inter-related dynamics. These are fantasy's function in adult female fandom, culture's reaction to its existence, and female fans' response to these judgements.

Fans in my ethnographic study have expressed concerns about how they are perceived by society, especially people who are closest to them, such as their colleagues, friends, and family. I received so much feedback on this issue that I am unable to include all the pertaining fan testimonies here. Consider the volume of comments offered below, which is only a sampling of all the statements received:

*They think we're all crazy and we did not really grow up.*

*This makes me frustrated. If I try to explain, I just get poked fun at even more.*

*They think I'm obsessed.*

*I think most of my family and friends consider joining a fan board "fanatical"/unacceptable and would be concerned. Seriously.*

*[My] parents think I'm nuts. My sister says that too spend money on a band (that she once worshipped herself). [This] is stupid, I think she is just jealous. Friends that are non-Duranies just sigh and shake their heads.*

*Nuts!*

*They think I'm a groupie and I'm obsessed, but I don't think any of them understand.*

*They probably think we are a bunch of girls who lust after an 80s band.*

*[They say] 'Aren't you people out of that?'*

*They ask me 'Still? They [Duran] still exist?'*

*Well you've got two different kinds of people [who] tease or look at you weird, right? Like [they ask] 'Where are you going?' 'I'm going to Chicago, to see Duran Duran.' ...[Then] you've got people who see how happy you are, coming back with a big smile on your face, because you're all excited and everything. And they just say "Ok have a great time. Can't wait to hear the stories!" ...Maybe [the prior] people have a little more resentment because we're getting a little bit older and still having loads of fun with this band. So, what's the problem?*

Notice the repetition of words like 'crazy', 'nuts', and 'obsessive' in these commentaries. My own experience echoes these concerns. Consider, for example, my personal choice to create two distinct profiles on social networking sites. I have one profile that I use to communicate with other fans, and another to share information with people outside the fan community. Despite the 'pride' I feel at being a Duranie, shame is my motivation for having to keep the fan aspect of my life separate, or hidden, from others. I want to avoid any judgments associated with my fan enthusiasm and perceived 'obsession', particularly from individuals that might be associated with my professional life. Cline provides a humorous but telling explanation for why we feel we must hide our adult fandom from non-fans:

A lot of junk has been written about the teenage crush, and almost as much junk on the middle-aged matron-crush, but between these two periods of hormonal lunacy (adolescence and menopause), women are supposed to give up their crushes on famous people – especially rock stars. It's a sign of maturity to pack up the posters, photos, magazines, scrapbooks, and unauthorized biographies you so lovingly collected and shove them in the back of the closet... until you reach the age when everybody thinks you're crazy anyway (1992, p. 70-71).

Both Cline's sentiment and the comments made by Duran fans about adult women being perceived as crazy for continuing their fandom are

confirmations of what McRobbie describes as teen girl culture being 'too little too late' (McRobbie 1991, p. 42). Society sends a message to women that such behaviours are immature and best left behind in their teen hoods. Yet men are not expected to do likewise. This double standard, most likely, is due to teen idols being regarded as a threat to 'real' males' masculinity, as suggested by Sheffield in his assessment of Duran's perceived power over women and during Ehrenreich, Hess, & Jacobs' analyses of Beatles press reviews. Cline's difficulty in admitting her fandom to the opposite sex is yet another example of this double standard:

If you want to test the theory that men and women are brought up differently, just mention to a few male friends that you have a crush on a rock star. Any rock star will do... Just do it and in less time than it takes to say 'Bay City Rollers', you'll feel like giving those friends of yours a good poke in the snoot... But for an adult woman to admit, in mixed company, to a crush on a rock star is to overstep the bounds of proper feminine behaviour, akin to your Victorian grandmother slipping and saying 'legs' when she meant to say 'limbs'. To so much as mention Bruce Springsteen's biceps is to leave yourself open to charges of immaturity, bad taste, politically incorrect thinking and general much-mindedness (ibid., p. 70).

Confirming Cline's assessment, many fans I interviewed claim that the judgements they receive are most often from men, further evidence to substantiate the theory that such fandoms threaten or destabilise traditional masculinity:

*My brother gave me a hard time. My brother still gives me a hard time.*

*I was friends with a lot of guys in Junior High and High School and I did get a hard time from the guys that I liked Duran Duran.*



By far, the strongest scorn reported by fans I surveyed has come from those who are in relationships with male partners. The following is just a sample taken from the volume of responses received on this issue:

*He doesn't understand my connection to other fans, or the "obsession" with the band. [I'm] pretty sure he is jealous of my crush on the same man for 26 years.*

*At one point, it was a huge issue...but since then I think things have mellowed out both because the band isn't touring right now... it used to really bother me, partly because I think I knew he was right.*

*I wish he would allow me to travel more when there is a tour, but he seems to think it is silly and may be jealous that he is not going.*

*My husband says nothing makes my eyes sparkle more than "that Duran band", hahaha!*

*My husband is o.k. with it. He has no interest in going with me and that's fine because this is my thing and I really don't want to share it with him.*

*He's reluctantly supportive. Yes, money and time are an issue, but he knew it was part of who I was when we met and he knows it is not going to change, so he grudgingly helps me out by saving money for me to go to shows and such.*

*My husband doesn't get it at all - none of it. He thinks it's a total waste of time & money. No matter how I explain it all (Duran Duran or New Kids On The Block) he just doesn't get it. He doesn't get mad or anything - he just rolls his eyes.*

*My hubby would never, ever go [sic] to their concerts... That's fine - it's a girl thang anyways!*

*My husband is very supportive, but sometimes I think he gets a little jealous.*

*I believe I've seen them 16 times now. A LOT less than I'd like, but when you're a parent and you have a husband who is a little less than completely agreeable...you do what you can do!*

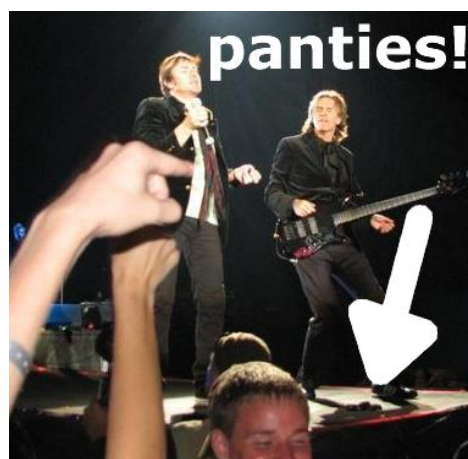
This male bias is not unique to Duran Duran fans. The following testimonial is from a Take That fan discussing her male partner's reaction to her fandom:

*Do you know what mine said? Why can't you love me the way you love Howard?*

Echoing the dynamic reflected in these comments, Cline shares her own challenge of maintaining fandom while in a relationship with a male partner:

If you're under 13, you're supposed to have crushes on rock stars, it's normal, so it might be a good idea to babble on about Duran Duran, even if personally, you think diurnal Lepidoptera are much more interesting. But after you hit, say, 18, it's best not to say out loud, 'Gee, don't you think the way Tom Petty smiles kind of crooked is real cute?' Especially don't say this to a man you are living with. It's much easier for a man to be indulgent about the crushes of teenage girls than it is for him to be fair-minded about the sexual fantasies of the woman he loves when they're about someone else (ibid. p. 71).

It seems being tolerant of such fantasies is indeed too much to ask a partner, and in her final statement above, Cline makes a salient point. There may very well be a certain level of jealousy involved, again suggesting a perceived threat to masculinity. I believe the key word in Cline's statement is *fantasy*, particularly sexual fantasy, and where female fandom is concerned fantasy is an area that continues to be trivialised and misunderstood.



*Panty tosses still occur at Duran concerts*

A connection can be drawn between these repressed fantasies and 'closet fandom'. Becoming a closet fan is easier than facing the ridicule from society: 'Not wanting to be on the wrong end of the pointing finger of scorn, we keep our lips buttoned and lust in silence' (ibid. 71). This is a theme which I found recurring in interviews with my own research subjects, as these testimonies reveal:

*People will turn it to a negative so I don't tell them all the stuff.*

*It's like telling someone that you like cross-stitch embroidery or something.*

*You don't tell anybody.*

*Very few people know.*

*You don't talk about Duran Duran... no, you don't.*

*It was my secret, but I won a trip to London so I had to tell them [my employers] because had to get free in the next days and head off to London... so I had to tell them. Since then they know.*

*[About admitting one's fandom:] You've come out.*

*I got a new boyfriend and I was afraid to tell him. And then I told him. And then I showed him their picture, and he thought I had gone mad... I still have the boyfriend. I told him, I confessed everything. Oh my god!*

Zubernis and Larsen (2012) found similar instances of shame during their investigation of *Supernatural* fandom, claiming that 'Fandom, for many female fans, is compelling for its invitation to self-expression, including sexual expression. At the same time, the negative connotations of "fangirl" persist' (p. 11). They suggest that this nature of shame is often associated with 'the pursuit of pleasure ...whether it's the evolutionary pleasure of sex or the pleasure sought in "frivolous amusement", the definition of which shifts

with cultural exigency (attendance at theatrical productions and reading novels were both formerly discouraged after all)' (ibid.).

When I asked Duran fans if they have ever day dreamt or fantasised about Duran Duran or its individual members, many were hesitant to respond in a group situation or left the question blank on surveys, probably fearing the implication of their answers being pathologised in some way. However, a large number of participants did respond affirmatively, and the content of their answers ranged widely. Not all fantasies had sexual connotations, for example. And many fans claimed they fantasised only when they were younger:

*Almost every day. That stopped when I went to college.*

*I used [sic] to when I was younger, but now it's more just about the music.*

Other fans went into more (and often humorous) detail about the types of fantasies and day dreams they had when they were adolescent:

*Of course, coming of age in the height of their popularity, certain band members were at the forefront of my imaginative fantasy world!!!*

*My cousin and I used to pretend pillows were band members! We would serve them champagne (Sprite) in my aunt's crystal champagne flutes and get into so much trouble for it! We practiced French kissing the pillows... oh Lord! Let's just say... pillow 'Simon' got A LOT of action! LOL!*

But whether or not Duran fans fantasised specifically about acting out their sexual desires, most justified those fantasies in the context of having a romantic relationship with a favourite band member:

*When I was a teenager I dreamed that I would marry John.*

*When I was younger as a teenager I fantasized that he'd [Simon] be my boyfriend... these days as an adult, I'd love to know him as a person and would love to have many conversations with him.*

*Oh God all the time! As a child I wanted to marry John, even wanted to lose my virginity to him. Now, I would settle for a snog with any of them!*

*Of course. I've been daydreaming and fantasizing about Duran Duran ever since I first saw them in 16 magazine. When I was a girl I wanted to marry John Taylor and be their back-up singer - with my best friend beside me of course :) - and have ten beautiful babies with him! :) Now my dream is to work for them and hang out with them and travel the world with them, watching them perform and partying with them afterwards. :)*

Of particular interest is how the previous testimony moves from romance to a professional relationship. This is a trend I noticed in many fan comments about fantasy; now that they are older, if fans admit to fantasising at all, it is usually less about sex than it was when they were teens. Many other fan fantasies had no hint of romance, but instead platonic friendships with Duran Duran. Compared with the previous fantasies, many of these fans claim that they still fantasise about such things in the present day:

*I have day dreamed that my favourite person would walk up to me and know who I am without me having to approach him.*

*I dream of meeting Simon and having a quality talk with him.*

*Almost every day, at home, at work. To meet them, to speak with them.*

*I daydream that I'm their best friend and when they come to town they always call me up and ask me to lunch.*

*My "fantasies" are not "juicy", I'd say! I am more apt to fantasize about becoming friends with the band in some situation. Um, when I worked in the ICU I often daydreamed about Simon ending up a patient there, and I became his primary nurse and became such good friends that I travelled with them on tour, etc. I have a hard time, even in fantasies, separated from the fact that I am happily married, I rarely if ever have any thoughts about other men...*

The final thought above is striking; I suspect that this fan's inhibitions may be connected to issues I discussed earlier in this chapter about Duran fans' partners being unsupportive of their fandom, the reason for which may be that those partners feel threatened by the libidinal interest associated with their wives' or girlfriends' fandom of Duran Duran. In the comment above, it appears this fan, too, may have conflated her own fandom with simply having 'thoughts about other men'. Likewise, her assertion that she is 'happily married' implies that perhaps she feels a certain level of guilt for her interest in Duran Duran.

The following fan fantasy continues the 'friendship' theme, only this time, her reference to time and responsibility recalls the reasons that fandom often goes 'dormant' during adulthood, as discussed in the previous chapter:

*When I was younger, I'd dream about being friends with the band and doing regular everyday things with them, which was weird. Nowadays though, I rarely even think about them because there's so much going on in my regular everyday life!*

And lastly, the following two fan comments about fantasy refer to the writing of fan fiction. As mentioned in Chapter 1, the majority of literature in fan studies has been dedicated to fan fiction or fan 'artefacts', items they produce as a by-product of their fandom. While the photographs, video, and banners I discussed earlier might fall into this category, most of the cultural production of Duran fans falls into the fan fiction category as well. But this is not to say that most Duran fans write, or even read, fan fiction. Quite the contrary, the fan fiction subculture within Duran fandom is proportionally quite small. These women are, however, remarkably close and have formed tighter bonds within their group than any other Duran fans I have met. Here

are two comments from fan fiction writers regarding their fantasies. As one might guess, they were quick to share their thoughts on this subject and went into much greater detail than did the previous fans:

*I always have and always will dream and fantasize about the lead singer. Some are naughty, some are innocent. They're too numerous to even touch on!*

*Well, frankly they got famous as many of us were hitting puberty. So yeah! Over the years, I have had many dreams of a romantic or sexual nature about several members of the band, often times at once. I have also had non-sexual dreams of things like working for them or with them in some sort of capacity... I also like to read and write fanfic and slash fic based on the band members. It's all part of the fantasy.*

*Well yes. I have written stories involving John Taylor for years. He is one of the sources of my inspiration for writing Erotica. When I was younger, I fantasized about marrying him and having his kids or just meeting him and having a one night stand with him.*

Again, these fan comments come from fan fiction writers, and this level of openness regarding the topic of sex and fantasy were atypical responses in my ethnographic fieldwork, which I suspect could be attributed, in part, to potential embarrassment stemming from a fear of being pathologised. However, one of my informal observations both online and at fan gatherings is that fans love to playfully banter about the band members in a sexual manner (but only in the company of 'friends'; I will discuss more about this issue in a moment). The dialogue at a European focus group I conducted offers an excellent illustration of such an exchange:

*TA: What sorts of things do you do online together?*

*Everyone: Chat. A lot.*

*TA: Do you look at pictures?*

*Fan 1: Exchanging pictures, very important.*

*Fan 2: Youtube.*

*Fan 3: We'll go online chatting, message boards, Facebook.*

*TA: So keeping in touch with people more so than drooling at pictures? Drooling at video?*

*Fan 4: No! We don't do that. We don't exchange pictures of Simon in his Speedos.*

*Fan 5: Those were horrible!*

Everyone then began discussing the paparazzi photos of Simon Le Bon in a Speedo which appeared in a tabloid circa 2008. The conversation became even more lively:

*Fan 6: Which one, the one where he's checking for his boys? Or...*

*Fan 5: That's wrong on so many levels. Oh...*

*Fan 4: And we don't drool!*

*Fan 3: But you watch it. You watch it.*

*Fan 5: It was hard to go around it. It was everywhere.*

*Fan 4: No we don't drool. No.*

*Fan 7: No drooling. [Laughter]*

*Fan 6: And what about that picture of Roger naked? Oh my god.*

*Everyone: Ohhhhh!*

*Fan 3: He must've sniffed something because you KNOW who's outside [fans and paparazzi].*

*Fan 8: Oh you know they knew because Simon had to wear his bathrobe and his flip flops...*

*Fan 4: He wanted us to take a picture of that. [Laughter]*





*European focus group, 2009*

A similar dialogue occurred at the American focus group I conducted. Such dialogue is typical when Duran fans get together. When I first ‘came out’ as an adult Duran fan, I met a number of fans in my local area (the ‘DD Tat Girls’ I mentioned earlier) who arranged monthly parties to watch Duran videos, visit, drink, and basically just be silly and escape real life and responsibilities for a few hours.



*Fans from my ‘home’ fan group at one of their monthly parties*

On those occasions, sexual banter was always on the menu. In fact I have never attended any Duran fan-related gathering anywhere, of two fans or more, even if it is just a luncheon, where playfully referring to the band members in a sexual way has not been at the forefront of activities. Such

sharing of fantasies is, in essence, a trust-building activity and a form of bonding. It is a practice that might be akin to male 'locker room' behaviour, providing female pop fans with yet another avenue to demarcate a space for themselves free from male criticism. Therefore, just as fantasy is instrumental in teen identity construction (McRobbie, 1991; Andrews & Whorlow 2000), I propose that fantasy plays an equally important role in the ongoing performance and affirmation of adult female fan identity.

Regarding society's reaction to such fantasies, let us return to Thompson. While his concept of intimacy at a distance is integral to examining the process of identity formation, at times he pathologises the function of fantasy in fandom in the same way that society and many academic discourses before him have done (Moore 2005, p. 81). One of the fan accounts that Thompson analyses is borrowed from an earlier source, Fred and Judy Vermorel's book *Starlust* (1985), portions of which have been reproduced in a number of other collections including Frith's *On Record* (1990). Thompson offers this excerpt to prove fandom's risk of becoming obsessive:

*When I make love to my husband I imagine it's Barry Manilow. All the time.... And after that, when my husband and I have made love and I realize it's not him, I cry to myself. ... It's usually dark when the tears flow and somehow I manage to conceal them... It happens to an awful lot of people, too. I didn't realize how many until I got involved with Barry fans. A lot of them are married and around my age and they feel the same way and they do the same thing. It's comforting to know I'm not the only one... I suppose it's the same kind of thing people get out of religion... they obviously get something from God to help them through their lives. And Barry is—maybe I shouldn't say it but it's the way I feel—he's the same sort of thing. He helps me through my life... He's my lover in my fantasies. He's my friend when I'm depressed. He's there and he seems to serve as*

*something I need to get through my life (Joanne qtd. in Frith & Goodwin 1990, p. 481-482).*

Academic criticism of this and similar fan accounts in *Starlust* have acknowledged the book's significance for fan studies, in that it 'was the first publication of its kind—a study that offered a theory of the music industry through the words of the fans themselves' (Frith & Goodwin 1990, p. 479). But at the same time, these 'secret fantasies of fans' were labelled 'obsessive, devotional voices' by the same critics (ibid., p. 422). Thompson adopts a similar perspective, deeming Joanne's fan account above to be 'disconcerting' and suggesting that she is leading a 'double life' (1995, p. 221).

But Joanne's commentary provides a wealth of dynamics to explore apart from pathologisation. Barry Manilow might be thought of as Joanne's 'media friend' (Meyrowitz 1985, p. 119), and while Joanne acknowledges the importance of Manilow as a fantasy figure for her, she expresses this habit as something that has engendered guilt because of its unconventionality, indicating that she has not confused fantasy with reality, as Thompson and former critics seem to imply.

However, Thompson does acknowledge the importance of fantasy with respect to the concept of self and identity formation, particularly noting that new options for fantasy construction have been made possible by the media. 'The growing availability of mediated experience ... creates new opportunities, new options, new arenas for self-experimentation. An individual who reads a novel or watches a soap opera is not simply consuming a fantasy; he or she is exploring possibilities, imagining

alternatives, experimenting with the project of the self' (Thompson 1995, p. 233). Additionally, Thompson's characterization of Joanne maintaining a double life need not be entirely interpreted as negative, regardless of whether that was his intent. A number of fans I have interviewed have reported feeling the same way, but for them the idea of a double life is something that begets pride, as if they are part of an elite secret society, recalling Garratt's assertion that women may feel they are being rebellious by being a fan of something the rest of society disregards.

Drawing inspiration from Joli Jensen (1992), Shaun Moores (2005) suggests that by portraying fandom as pathological, academics are in effect, distancing themselves from their subjects. The way in which academics privilege their own position is problematic, when they assume their perspective is more authentic than that of the fan (Moores 2005, p. 82). This perspective recalls Hills' (2002) critique of academic 'moral dualism' in ethnographic research, which I discuss in greater detail in *Chapter 6: Reflections on Scholar-Fandom*. Media (or more specifically, Joanne's fandom) should not be targeted as the source of pathology, considering that secret and obsessive relationships are not limited to mediated situations; in other words, the same scenario could be possible with Joanne's next door neighbour (Moores 2005, p. 83). Indeed Joanne's testimony hints that she may be lonely in her marriage, and this sentiment is something I have heard repeatedly, but informally, from many Duran fans. The desire for emotional connection with other individuals who have something in common is therefore highly appealing. Joanne's account points to the significance of fan

community; she finds comfort in knowing there are others who do and feel the same as she. Her experience with other Manilow fans makes her feel part of a collective and that it provides her with a sense of belonging (ibid. 1995, p. 222).

## **Conclusion**

This chapter interrogated the politics surrounding female pop fan behaviour. Drawing upon prior work from a variety of feminist scholars, it began by exploring the euphoric pleasures and empowerment teen girls experience from participation in pop fandom. These concepts were then applied to adult fandom to consider the ways in which Duran fans still engage in similar practices today. This chapter then moved on to discuss non-empowering aspects of female pop fandom, particularly judgments received from parties external to the fandom regarding fan practice and participation, including the media and fans' spouses, families and peers. It explored the way female pop fan concert behaviour historically has been seen as 'spectacle' and more generally, it scrutinised the historical denigration of women's media. Ethnographic field data revealed that these preconceptions about female pop fandom still exist, and the fan shame that has resulted from these external pressures has resulted in a number of women resorting to closet fandom. But their continued fandom suggests that such dynamics may be the site of a hegemonic struggle, a form of resistance to those same political pressures, whereby fans continue to engage in fan practices despite discouragement from outside forces, in an attempt to establish a space for themselves.

In the next chapter, I will transition from this discussion of external politics to those that are internal to the fan community itself. Although many Duran fans celebrate the communal aspects of female pop fandom as discussed here and in Chapter 3, the Duran fan community also harbours complex internal politics resulting from competition over fan 'status'. I will examine prior studies that deal with similar issues, and I will consider whether this dynamic might be further complicated by the mixed modes of communication in which fans engage.

## Chapter 5: *Strange Behaviour –* Politics, Competition, and Exclusion



Duran Duran's fan community might be analogous to a 'sorority', both in the positive and negative sense of the term, and many of its members confirm this assessment. Before I continue, I should explain my logic for making this comparison, because the way in which 'sorority' is understood is culturally-specific. For example, in the United States, the concept of sorority carries with it certain connotations. By definition, a sorority is 'a club of women' or more specifically, 'a women's student organization formed chiefly for social purposes and having a name consisting of Greek letters' (*Merriam-Webster Collegiate Dictionary* 2003). Its Latin origin, *sororitas*, translates to 'sisterhood' (ibid). Sororities are common institutions at American universities, as are fraternities, the male version of such clubs. But the concept of sorority is often perceived with some derision from external parties, and this is due to the exclusive nature of what is known as the 'Greek System'. Sororities and fraternities are not open clubs, one must be specifically invited to join by existing members. One's success in being accepted often depends upon a number of factors including social and economic status. And once inside, members must abide by any number of rules and respect their superiors, or risk being ejected. By its very nature, the Greek System in American universities is competitive and wrought with politics; sororities and fraternities are not always the cohesive clubs that their labels imply. And sorority 'sisters' have a worse reputation than their male counterparts. I will not analyse this difference here, but one can surmise that it might be related to some of the issues already explored within this thesis, those concerning the denigration of anything associated with the feminine.



Likening a primarily female fan community to a sorority is a tendency found in other fandoms too. In *Fans, Bloggers, and Gamers* (2006) Jenkins notes that, “female fans often talk about fandom as a sorority if they’re talking in a predominantly female space” (2006, p. 22). In Duran fandom, at one end of the spectrum fans celebrate the communal aspect of fandom, focusing on benefits such as friendships and belonging, where fans reveal that they find solace with one another to escape judgments they receive from society at large. This more positive representation of fan community is consistent with the feminist studies of pleasures in such cultures as presented in the previous chapters (McRobbie 1991, Garratt 1990), where fans claim their community is one of mutual support and empowerment. But at the other end of the spectrum are internal politics that have developed as a result of competition over ‘status’, determined by a variety of factors including seniority, perceived ownership, class, and fan etiquette concerning ‘acceptable’ fan practice. This range of differing experiences within a single fan community suggests that Duran Duran fandom, and by extension, any similar fandom, may be more complicated than previous research might have supposed.

In this chapter I will explore the complex dynamics of the Duran fan community, which I propose are further complicated by the combination of online and offline interactions in which fans engage. To support this discussion, related literature on mediated communication by Thompson, Moores, Kozinets, and Carter will be considered. Then I will address the issues of fan hierarchy and competition by presenting fan testimonials from

my ethnographic field study, complemented by an examination of findings from a handful of related studies by Williamson, Johnson, and MacDonald. Lastly, I will apply the concepts of cultural capital and social capital to my analysis by drawing upon previous work by Sarah Thornton and Pierre Bourdieu.

### **The Internet's Role**

As I shared in Chapter 1, Duran fans are incredibly active online. But not everyone embraced the concept of online community in the beginning, myself included. This fan describes her initial hesitation and discomfort when she first began interacting with other fans online:

*I belonged to the fan club and I bought my tickets thru the fan club but wasn't posting on the forums and stuff, and I didn't know anybody. Until after that concert in February , the very next day, cuz I was coming down from such the concert high and all that, that I got on the forums and I was like 'Ok let me just check out...' I don't think I'd ever been on any forums before or posted. Someone [sic] had posted that she had pictures that she had taken at that show, and I private messaged [sic] her and I was like 'YES I wanna see them!' And she ended up sending me the link... and I saw her pictures, and so I posted once or twice in that thread. And from there I just kept posting more and more, but it took me a little while to get comfortable posting in there. Cuz it was such a strange... to me they're strangers and you always heard scary things about the Internet.*

Thompson observed the nature of mediated communications' complexity before the Internet was widespread by asking, 'How did the development of communication media affect traditional patterns of social interaction?'(1995, p. 81). This question can also be asked of the mixed communications in which Duran fans engage, interactional circumstances

that often involve a lack of physical proximity in terms of distance or remoteness. As Thompson observes,

[T]he development of communication media creates *new* forms of action and interactions and *new* kinds of social relationships – forums which are quite different from the kind of face-to-face interaction which has prevailed for most of human history. It also brings about a complex reordering of patterns of human interaction across space and time. (ibid, p. 82).

According to Thompson, there are three forms of communication: 'face-to-face interaction', 'mediated interaction', and 'mediated-quasi interaction' (ibid, p. 82-91), all of which involve some aspect of human communication with or without the assistance of various media technologies. Shaun Moores combines these into a complex 'interaction mix' (2005, p. 70), the effect of which, he argues, has altered the nature of social interaction:

...the historical rise of technologically mediated communication has not simply led to the decline of co-present interaction in physical settings, a state of affairs that is implied in a common-sense expression like 'television has killed the art of conversation.' Instead, it would be far better for us to say that, in conditions of modernity, 'the 'interaction mix' of social life has changed'. (ibid., p. 73)

Such a statement leads one to consider the magnitude of the impact that new technologies have made on the core nature of human communications, and warrants that we consider how the most recent new technology, the Internet, can be factored into this discussion of space, place, and interaction. Robert Kozinets refers to a similar concept which he calls 'intermix' (2010, p. 171), urging researchers to take into consideration the 'interconnection of various modes of social interaction – online and off – in culture members' daily lived experiences' when conducting ethnography. Therefore, 'the internet will likely creep into ethnographies, as

anthropologists follow their subjects, and are more or less forced to follow them online' (Beaulieu quoted in Kozinets 2010, p. 171). This was certainly true in my research. The online interactions of Duran fans were impossible to ignore, and in fact as it turns out, the bulk of my research stems from online observation and participation, many instances of which I will explore in more detail throughout this chapter.

I suspect that the mixed modes of communication in which the Duran fan community engages contributes to its complex dynamic. This is not to blame the Internet for all of the fan community's issues, it is merely to point out that the fan community's hybrid online/offline communications may complicate tensions in an environment that already tends toward the political. The disembodied nature of cyberspace can lend itself not only to misunderstandings in the absence of context like body language and verbal intonation, but also to a disregard of the feelings of others, as Kelly Valen suggests:

You can sound cool or clever with a few careless whispers on a Facebook wall or any other venue that welcomes comments. Or, in a mere couple of clicks, you can diss someone subtly through photo tags, postings, cuttings, pastings, forwarded matter, and pokes, scoring direct, amplified hits on rivals with dronelike precision, all without having to see or deal with actual, real-time, real-life consequences. Anonymously or not, your choice. To those lacking a solid moral compass, it just one more gamelike option in the arsenal (Valen 2010, p. 43).

As I conducted my research, I witnessed similar circumstances numerous times, and on occasion such attacks were directed at me. The reason tensions escalate, particularly online, is fans are so emotionally

invested in their fandom that their community (and their place in it) is of great value to them, and, in fact, they often rely on it for their own validation.

Recall the observations by Thompson and Moores that new forms of communication have created new forms of interaction and social relationships. I propose that Duran fans are still in the process of learning, as is much of the modern world, to 'get along' in a hybrid communications environment. In the remainder of this chapter, as I discuss the political nature of the Duran fan community, I will present several examples of hybrid communication scenarios that illustrate this claim.

### **The Dark Side of Fandom**

In Chapter 4 I discussed the personal politics that many Duran fans believe they face from individuals outside the fan community, including their spouses, family, colleagues, and the media. And while fans can turn to each other for comfort in light of such judgments, many claim they are faced with a whole new set of problems inside their own fan community, which is apparently no less political:

*It's like going back to high school again.*

*There's an awful lot of drama and gossip.*

*I've never seen a more 'elitist' fan base in my life. You don't get this shit with Korn or Metallica.*

*I wish DD fans -- most of whom are 40-ish -- wouldn't be competitive and ugly with each other. I've been out of middle school since ... um ... 1982. I outgrew this sort of behavior a long time ago. And look, aren't we all in this together? Aren't we all DD fans -- like family in a way? We should treat each other as such and be supportive instead of destroying people who've done nothing to deserve it.*

*I try not to worry about the puerile individuals who post their hostility and negativity at others. For the most part the people there are as "grown" chronologically speaking as me and I feel should really be better behaved in their comments and opinions toward others, but that's just me; I didn't raise them and their mamas should've raised 'em better.*

These fan testimonials suggest that it is best not to be too romantic about ideals of coherent community when contemplating fandom. Like any other type of community, fan cultures are mini-societies complete with their own politics and hierarchies. In addition to the fan comments above, many other Duran fans I interviewed also indicated that their community is a hierarchical environment that fosters fierce competition and exclusion. Such findings counter conclusions of early research on fandom such as that by Henry Jenkins (1992), in which fandom was thought to be an atmosphere of inclusion and acceptance. Indeed, these findings reveal internal power struggles similar to those observed by Milly Williamson (2005), Matt Hills (2002), and Sarah Thornton (1995), who suggests:

Contemporary cultures – high and low – are riddled with dynamics of distinction... explored as means by which people jockey for social power, as discriminations by which players are both assigned social statuses and strive for a sense of self-worth. (Thornton 1995, p. 163).

Much of the recent academic research on community dynamics within fandom deals with the online realm, perhaps because the Internet provides one of the easiest access points to the study of fandom. And until now, with the exception of a handful of studies, the majority of that literature paints a somewhat utopian picture. But if I were to apply Benedict Anderson's (1991) concept of 'imagined community' to the Duran fan community, it might be re-interpreted as a nation divided rather than united. Indeed, as a fan myself,

the rendition of fandom in *Textual Poachers* (Jenkins 1992) is a virtual paradise that bears little resemblance to my own experience as both fan and scholar. From my perspective as a fan, Thompson's description of fan community seems more accurate:

[a] complex and highly structured social world with its own conventions, its own rules of interaction and forms of expertise, its own hierarchies of power and prestige, its own practices of canonization, its own divisions between the cognoscente and the amateur, the fan and the non-fan, and so on' (Thompson 1995, p. 223).

One study that bears some similarity to my research explores the characteristics of 'anti-fandom' and 'fan-tagonism' (Johnson 2007, p. 285) among viewers of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997-2003). The oppositions that Johnson describes, however, stem from fans' differing interpretations of a 'text' and do not compare with the contentious atmosphere of the Duran fan community, where fans not only come into regular close physical proximity to one another at concerts, but they also compete for the attentions and affections of their object of fandom, the idols themselves.

More closely resembling the dynamics found in Duran fandom are those observed in Williamson's research on vampire fans, a case study that reveals power struggles between inner and outer circles of fans in the Ann Rice fan club (Williamson 2005, p. 119). Combinations of online and offline interactions take place, with some fans having direct access to the object of fandom, Ann Rice herself. Appropriating the ideas of Pierre Bourdieu (1984), Williamson alleges that prior scholars, such as Jenkins and John Fiske (1992), have focused on empowerment (ibid., p. 100) but neglected to examine power structures and hierarchies within fandom (ibid., p. 108). In

Williamson's study, those in the 'inner circle' are proud of their connections to Rice, and share a code of etiquette about how to act around Rice herself. The inner circle is, in turn, dismissive of fans in the outer circles who express excitement in Rice's presence; they are deemed 'obsessive' by the others. A similar dynamic occurs in Duran fandom, where fans are ridiculed for excessive zeal and failure to follow unspoken fan etiquette rules, either at concerts or around the band members. In a moment I will discuss the 'policing' of Duran fan etiquette and the condescension associated with breaking the 'rules'.

A similar non-celebratory portrayal of fan community has also been noted in science fiction fandom through the research of Andrea MacDonald (1998) on fans of *Quantum Leap* (Williamson, 2007, p. 140). MacDonald observes fandom as a series of struggles between a variety of subgroups of fans, including generations (such as 'newbies' versus established members of a community) and genders (Jenkins 2006, p. 143). Disagreements occur over any number of issues, including distance to producers and the policing of fan fiction. These conflicts are attributed to 'unequal experiences, levels of expertise, access to performers and community resources, control over community institutions, and degrees of investment in fan traditions and norms' (ibid., pp. 7-8).

Many of these dynamics are also evident in Duran fandom, particularly conflicts associated with unequal access to performers and heated debates about fan fiction, especially RPS (Real-Person Slash), a controversial issue that is often hotly contested between its proponents and



critics in any fandom. For the reader who is not familiar with slash, I defer to these amusing definitions provided to me by a fan who supports slash fiction:

*Slash – Fan fic featuring homosexuality. Yes, that’s right. 25 years ago you got detention for fighting when someone called the band gay and now you’re reading/writing about them doing each other.*

*JoSi – John and Simon [slash].*

*JoSi sandwich – what all JoSi girls wish to be in the middle of.*

In the following discussion, I will further explore the conflicts that slash and ‘mature’ fan fiction have provoked in the Duran fan community, among an array of other issues.

### **Conflict and Contentious Behaviour**

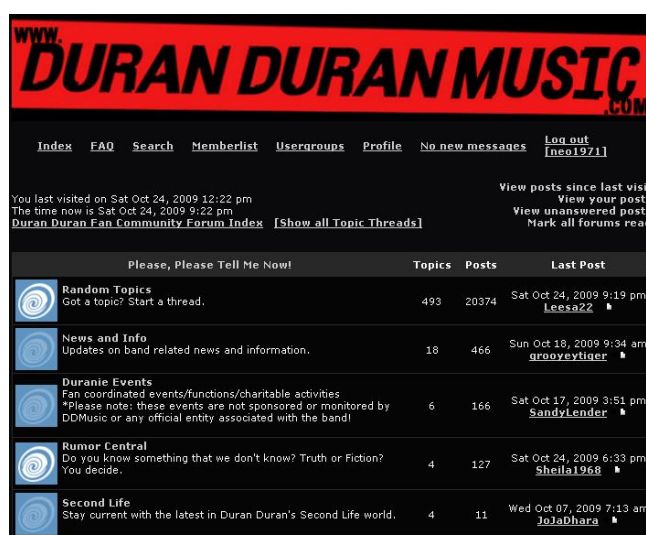
While Duran fandom may appear to outsiders as a small ‘cult’ fan following, Duran fans are incredibly active online. Duran’s fan network has seen scores of online forums over the years, many of which are still active. As of 10 years ago Duran fans had dedicated more than 300 websites and 349,000 web pages to the object of their affection (York 2001). A more recent estimate has not been attempted, that I am aware, but one would expect that those numbers have increased exponentially following the hype generated during the band’s reunion period in 2003 and its more recent entrée into social networking.

But as indicated previously, all this online activity does not mean Duran fans necessarily get along in cyberspace. The first official Duran fan forum was shut down in 2006, amidst much speculation. Rumours spread that the forum had become too antagonistic, and that band members

themselves (in particular keyboardist Nick Rhodes) were not pleased with what they saw taking place there. One of my focus groups discussed this topic at length, confirming the animosity that had been prevalent in the old forum. One fan offered the following thoughts:

*I don't see as much drama as there was before Fullere, when they closed the site down back in 2004, 2003. There was SO much drama, it was stupid. All of that was really exploding, it got really ugly.*

At present the new official Duran forum, DuranDuranMusic.com (commonly known among fans as DDM), is a 'pay' site that requires an annual membership fee. Regardless of the band's real reason for shutting down the former site and charging membership at the new one (which no doubt was a business decision motivated by profit), it was hoped by many fans that only the most dedicated members of the community would be willing to pay, hence discouraging any troublemakers.



Dedication does not translate to a drama-free environment, however, and the dynamic on the newer website proves this point. As one disgruntled fan proclaimed on Twitter, 'DDM is batshit insane'. According to most fans

I've surveyed, the quality of communication on the new official fan forum has disintegrated to reach the same depths of antagonism as the old forum. Fans claim that the same agitators ('trolls' in Internet-speak) from the old forum have now taken up residence in the new location as well. As a result, many fans removed themselves from the official fan forum to escape the ridicule and conflict that prevailed there. One fan shared her thoughts on the issue:

*...there are 8 or so fans who continually need to cause problems and attack people. It's a shame that such a small number could "kill" a message board that once had several hundred active posters, that's exactly what they are doing... I actually thought about those people on DDM the other night during a performance of the Lion King. I couldn't help but compare them to the hyenas and Scar, the evil brother. I really don't want to think about them at all, they don't deserve my thoughts.*

Another fan compared the troublesome Duranies to the character of Gollum/Smeagol in *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy in that they are 'two-faced' and unpredictable. But not everyone agrees. Consider this fan's opinion regarding the recent inactivity on DDM:

*The active members on any given day are what determine the personality of the community in general, and that seems to change - it's a very fluid situation - and I have always found that certain situations create the most stress: when the band has released a new album, when the band is touring and there are sell-out shows and there are less tickets available than demand, and when the band is in a lull. (Although right now the band is in an extended period of lull - and so a HUGE amount of fans have simply just gone away and become inactive at this point.)*

But regardless of one's point of view, the fact remains that DDM has indeed become a ghost town. However, many Duran fans have reconvened elsewhere establishing new mini-forums containing only their friends. My initial 'home' group of Duran fans created a mini-forum based on geography.

There are scores of other forums, each specific to either a certain geography or language, or a common interest (like a favourite band member). An administrator of one of these private mini-forums expressed her logic for opening such a forum, which has limited access to outside parties:

*I don't want people I don't know knowing everything about me. I'm pretty open. I mean I'll tell anything to you, I don't care, I'm very open. But people I don't know, it's like I don't need you judging me because you don't know me and you don't know who I am. I know y'all know who I am and I can say something stupid and y'all know I'm joking, I don't really mean that. Am I really going to jump on Simon Le Bon? No. But someone else who doesn't know me might go "Oh my God, she's serious!"*

The latest trend is the use of Facebook groups for this purpose. Challenging Jenkins' idea of fandom's 'collective identity', Williamson observed a similar shift with Ann Rice fans:

...when confronted with a fan club which is operating hierarchically, the unofficial fans did not fight, but withdrew, bitterly disappointed, and attempted to re-establish a sense of common purpose and community elsewhere (Williamson 2005, p. 121).

But simply moving to other platforms did not eradicate the contention that seems to be inherent in Duran fandom, as one fan reveals about another popular Duran fan forum: "[Name] and I were in Lizard King, that board got nasty too." Many scuffles occurred online since the mass exodus from the official fan forum, extending to other social networking realms like Facebook, Twitter, and Second Life.

Competition among fans is most evident when an actual 'competition' is involved. Every instance I can recall of Duran fans winning a contest has generated conflict. For example, a number of friendships have been broken

as a result of one fan winning a competition of some sort, and then not taking a friend who expects to be taken. This has happened to me personally, I will discuss it further in the following chapter. Consider this fan's account of the pressure she felt standing outside a concert venue as a contest winner:

*All the winners stood outside the building in line eyeballing one another... A group of non-ticket winners (from DDM) had somehow managed to get in there as well and were giving us the evil eye.*

Competition was perhaps most fierce recently during a radio contest to attend a 'second chance prom' in 2011, a private event where tickets were allocated by invitation only. The competition involved public voting for the fan who looked best in a 'little black dress' (a scenario which was certain to become a popularity contest). Voting commenced for a period of days where fans and the public could see the results. When one fan in particular began accumulating far more votes than everyone else, some fans cried 'scandal'. This resulted in personal attacks and accusations from all sides, on Twitter, Facebook, and the official fan forum. A couple of fans became targets, suspected as instigators. Feeling unjustly accused, they professed their innocence and sorrow at being implicated. And Duran fans never forget. The suspects' reputations are still damaged by the doubt that arose during that time.

In another instance, an administrative decision was made on the part of the management company that runs DDM (a team associated with Duran Duran) to remove all fan fiction. Some band members have grimaced at the topic of RPS in the past (York 2001), so one can only assume this decision may have come from the 'top'. However, by more recent accounts the same

band members expressed a frivolous curiosity about the same RPS (Price 2011). But whatever the reason for the fan fiction's removal, heated debates ensued between its supporters and its critics. During the month from the time the announcement was made to the time when the fan fiction was removed, the debates grew so emotionally intense that fans again launched personal attacks at each other while the rest of the community watched in disbelief.

A similar level of conflict surfaced this year when Duran cancelled its tour of the United Kingdom and Europe for health-related reasons. Fans took sides, either supporting the band in the decision, or criticizing management's handling of the situation. Emotions ran high and fans again turned on each other in their frustration over having so little control in the matter.

It might be surmised that Duran fans can find any and every reason to disagree. But because fandom is inherently such an affective practice, particularly where teen idols are concerned, the mixed modes of communication or 'interaction mix' (Moore 2005, Thompson 1995) in which Duran fans engage perhaps exacerbates a situation where passionate emotions already exist. Zubernis and Larsen (2012) suggest that 'the intense emotional investment and therapeutic potential of fandom... creates a strong need to maintain its integrity, and to attack threats from both the outside and from within' (p. 13). Fans 'police' other fans via a process known as 'wank' to enforce norms within the fan culture (ibid.)

When direct or remote contact with their idols is introduced into the mix, Duran fandom becomes even tense and competitive. Such behaviour is

perhaps heightened by the contagious, frenetic excitement generated at the concerts themselves. A number of fans have commented on this dynamic:

*... people are pushing and knocking you down to get to the front and I'm like, if I can't see that's one thing. But I'm not gonna be knocking people down trying to get to the front. It's a concert. Come on.*

*The Italian fans... I refuse to go to a show there cuz they will kill you to get to the front.*

*I won't go unless I'm front row.*

*We all know how to get to the front row if we need to.*

*Kill, kill!*

*[Fans are] friendly but when the stage doors open, competitive.*

One fan told me about her experience waiting in line at a concert, in which she described “girls sizing up girls before the show. Who was their competition?” The same fan described the after-show vibe of fans “plotting on where the band might be. Secrets, backstabbing and rumours abound!” Another fan shared her experience at a concert in which she was repeatedly punched in the back by another fan who wanted her spot in the front row. The incident continued online afterward, with a ‘flaming’ that took place on Twitter and Facebook that spanned 6 hours. I have witnessed fist fights during concerts myself, one of which occurred right beside my head. In that instance the reason for the scuffle was a debate as trivial as ‘who is the bigger fan’. Alcohol consumption does not help in environments such as these, and in my estimation, alcohol is usually involved when the atmosphere turns physical at Duran gigs.

Contact with the idol makes the environment even more tense. In previous years most of the Duran fan/idol contact has taken place in person,

at concerts or after parties, or a lucky fan may have received a personal reply back from fan mail. When the internet became widespread, bands began using it as a tool for one-way, or to utilize Thompson's terminology, 'one-to-many', communication (Thompson 1995). But more recently, Duran's individual band members have begun communicating directly with their fan base using online social networking tools like Twitter and Facebook.

This development offered me the potential for ethnographic observational research into Duran fan interaction both with their idols and also with other fans who observed those fan/idol interactions. However, adding direct idol contact to an already competitive dynamic has led to greater incidences of cyber bullying than existed in prior online fan interactions, and unfortunately I have first-hand experience with such incidences. Because I was online while conducting my observations, I sometimes found myself caught up in the midst of the activity. Try as I may to remain objectively 'above' the surface, I got sucked into the excitement and drama just like everyone else on more than one occasion. For a short while Duran's lead singer Simon Le Bon followed me and a handful of my friends on Twitter, engaging with us on a daily basis. (Needless to say, as someone who has idolized the man since adolescence, I was so overwhelmed that I was unable to write a word during that time.) But Le Bon eventually unfollowed us, and while we were understandably disappointed, we were relieved because we had been incessantly pestered, criticized, and bullied by other fans, actions that one can only assume were motivated by envy. And while it is unknown if it was indeed related, even my research website was



hacked during this period, an occasion which has not happened before. One fan offered her thoughts on the events:

*If John wants to follow a fan on Twitter, but currently feels he can't because things would get too competitive, that's just sad. I know Simon follows a few (which I happen to think is fab ... GOOD FOR THEM!) But I also know that the ones he does follow get shit for it, and that's not right. Be happy for other fans instead of tearing them down!*

### **The Duran Fan Hierarchy**

Although the online aspect of subcultures is absent in Thornton's research because the Internet was not publically accessible and therefore not yet a factor, the power struggles within Duran fandom bear a marked resemblance to those observed by Thornton in her ethnography of clubbers (rave culture), and they possibly originate from similar motivations. Thornton's was the first study which observed elitist distinctions within subcultures (Williamson 1997, p. 111), and Thornton's theories build upon Bourdieu's (1984) concept of *cultural capital*, 'knowledge that is accumulated through upbringing and education which confers social status' (Thornton 1995, p. 10). Applying this concept to club culture, Thornton suggested clubber status was determined by the accumulation of cultural capital in the form of elitist distinction. At the top of the hierarchy were the 'hip', sophisticated male clubbers while at the bottom were individuals nicknamed by the others as 'Sharons and Tracys', an unimaginative crowd who 'danced around their handbags' (Thornton 1995 quoted in Brunsdon 1997, p. 112):

This crowd was considered unhip and unsophisticated. They were denigrated for having indiscriminate music tastes, lacking individuality and being amateurs in the art of clubbing. Who else would turn up with that uncool feminine appendage, that

burdensome adult baggage – the handbag? ‘Sharon and Tracy’ were put down for being part of a homogeneous herd overwhelmingly interested in the sexual and social rather than musical aspects of clubs (Thornton 1995, p. 99).

Such an application of the concept of cultural capital can be extended to pop fan culture. The Duran fan community, for example, is not without its version of ‘Sharon’ and ‘Tracy’. These individuals can take many forms, and are seen by the others in the fan community to be ‘dorks’ or ‘freaks’, and they are deemed as such by breaking any number of unspoken rules of fan etiquette. Perhaps the most denigrated of all Duran fans is the ‘Durantard’. No one wants to be labelled a Durantard. These are ‘uber’ fans who live and breathe Duran Duran. At the bottom of the social strata, they break the unspoken rules of conduct including screaming or ‘freaking out’ in the presence of band members, asking for photographs and autographs when the band is ‘off duty’, and chasing or grabbing at band members when they are in close proximity. While the subject of actual ‘stalking’ is greatly ridiculed, most Duran fans I have spoken with have attempted it at one point, whether that is staying at the same hotel as the band when they are touring, or just ‘happening’ to show up where they know one of the band members will be, if for nothing else than a glimpse or ‘star sighting’. Another behaviour that is frowned upon is wearing a Duran Duran T-shirt around the band members (a rule I have never understood), throwing undergarments at concerts, and admitting to engaging in any manner with fan fiction, either writing or reading it. Before it was removed, the RPS writers dubbed their section of the official website ‘Offenderland’ because fans were instructed by the administrator to go there when they had offended someone in other

areas of the site by posting either foul language or 'dirty' suggestive content. Such instances were seen as, in essence, 'time outs', with Offenderland as the 'naughty corner'.

Some Duran fans have taken such pleasure in ridiculing those who, in their eyes, fall into the obsessive fan category, that they have an entire website dedicated to their cause, [www.durantard.com](http://www.durantard.com), a forum whose sole purpose is to denigrate the fans who they perceive to be 'beneath' them in the social ranks. In their need to be accepted and belong to a group, some members choose to accomplish their sense of community by tearing down someone else: 'One function of a disparaged *other*... is to contribute to the feeling of community and sense of shared identity' (Thornton 1995, p. 111). But it is important to recognize that such distinctions are not a reflection of the way the 'subordinates' in the hierarchy actually operate. Thornton argues that such distinctions 'do not relate to the way... crowds are objectively organized as much as to the means by which many youth cultures imagine their social world, measure their cultural worth and claim their subcultural capital' (ibid, p. 96). So whether these labels and assumptions 'reflect empirical social groups or not, they exhibit the burlesque exaggerations of an imagined other... to quote Bourdieu again, 'nothing classifies somebody more than the way he or she classifies' (Bourdieu 1990: 132)" (Thornton 1995, p. 101). In other words, the actual behaviour and motivation of the disparaged Duran fan at the bottom of the hierarchy is constructed by those who imagine themselves as being further up the social ladder. The term 'construct' is quite literal in this instance, because so much of the gossip and

rumours in which fans engage, is exactly that, rumour, constructed for the purposes of belittling someone else to gain 'supporters' and hence elevate one's own position. In the Duran fan community, there is power in numbers; the more friends one has, the less likely they are to be attacked by other fans, and even when they are attacked, they will have an army of supporters defending them. I will discuss more about this aspect of the Duran fan community in *Chapter 6: Reflections on Scholar-Fandom*.

Lucy Bennett's (2010) research with R.E.M. fans places 'droolers' (fans who express sexual attraction toward a band member) at the bottom of the fan community hierarchy. Because the 'thinking fan' is the respected norm within the R.E.M. fan community, droolers are seen as 'a pollutant... due to their non-compliance with normative discourse and the accepted musical meanings' (Bennett 2010). R.E.M. droolers are an interesting case for contrast and comparison, then, because their 'extreme levels of adoration and desire' may be akin to the excessive fervour of 'Durantards' in Duran fandom. However, there is one significant difference – based on Bennett's definition, almost every female fan in Duran fandom could easily be classified as a drooler, because most admit to having a sexual attraction toward one or more band members, a tendency which undoubtedly has a historical basis; as I shared in the previous chapter, Duran Duran were known for being 'eye-candy' and poster pin-ups in the 1980s. It is possible that fans of R.E.M. have used the object of their fandom for a much different purpose from the start, than did the teen girl fans of Duran Duran with their posters, teen magazines, and fantasies. However, the two fandoms may not be so

different in this respect, because in adult fandom of Duran Duran, while drooling seems to be a given (all Duran fans know that every other Duran fan drools!), it is considered 'uncool' to admit publically that one drools. According to this strange code of etiquette, drooling, or admitting to engaging in it, is only acceptable in semi-private situations where a fan is amongst their friend group, where a mutual trust has been established. Drooling publically is a stigmatized activity, so if it occurs in front of fans who are non-friends, doing so can be detrimental to one's status within the fan hierarchy.

Like Thornton's elite clubbers and Williamson's inner circle Ann Rice fans at the top of their cultural hierarchy, the Duran fan community is not without its own version of the 'cool' insider. So what determines who is at the top, or who perceives themselves to be at the top? To utilize another of Bourdieu's concepts, the key appears to be *social capital*, which 'stems not so much from what you know as who you know (and who knows you)' (Thornton 1995, p. 10). The cultural elite of Duran fandom have met the band many times and pride themselves on this social capital. Many have developed relationships with individuals peripheral to the band, such as management, crew, or security, and this 'connection' is their social capital, wielded as power and status within the community. Most of these fans consider themselves senior members in the fan community and some have a habit of policing those who they perceive as being of a lower status than themselves in the fan hierarchy. As a result, turf wars erupt between some of these individuals and others in the larger community, associated with perceived possession and ownership of the band itself.

Such fans must already occupy a certain 'elite' economic status to be able to achieve this level in the Duran fan hierarchy. They must have the disposable income to engage in 'touring' activities in the first place, and they must have the freedom from familial responsibilities to be able to travel. Before they find themselves in the elite, they will have attended many concerts and purchased expensive tickets in order to get into situations to meet the 'right' people, either at pre-show VIP parties where they might network with elite fans, or if they are really lucky, winning Meet and Greet opportunities with the actual band members. Consider this fan's story as an example of this dynamic at work. She paid \$1,000 for a special VIP concert ticket which included one-on-one sit-down opportunities with each band member for five minutes in a night club. Here is her description of the concert, after having met and spoken with each band member the previous evening:

*We were let in first so we got front row. I was right in front of Simon. The show was great and the guys gave us VIPers extra attention, I guess they remembered us from the party. After Save a Prayer, Simon gave me his guitar pick! It turned out to be an experience that was well worth the money!*

Such instances culminate over time with repeated exposures. Fans become 'popular' with other fans, and with the cultural elite, when it's clear that band members are familiar with them – but not too familiar, a situation that can generate enough jealousy that it effectively can get a fan exiled from the community at large. Consider, for example, my experience being followed on Twitter by Simon Le Bon. Members of the cultural elite of Duran fandom are secretive and protective of any inside information that they possess. They also are protective of the size of their inner circle, taking care

not to allow their elite network to get too large, because greater numbers will mean increased competition for the band's attention.

But it is within the middle ground of the Duran fan hierarchy that competition is most intense, as fans struggle to maintain their status or rise above others on the social scale. These struggles again appear to be correlated to access to the band, as some of my survey respondents have noted:

*I've read and hear of the lengths some people will go to see them or meet them. I think in general priorities are [sic] an issue.*

*It's become a situation where you do what you have to do to meet the band and screw everyone else.*

*I never [thought] there were be this much competition.*

Within the middle ground of the Duran fan hierarchy there a number of mini-factions that have formed, as suggested during the discussion about the formation of mini-forums online. The general tendency is for these cliques to be somewhat exclusive, secretive and suspicious of fans outside of the group. Most Duran fans are well aware of the cliques and hierarchy, as some of my survey and focus group respondents commented:

*There are too many cliques. Many also leave out other fans who aren't their ages.*

*It is cliquey, however, I try not to let it bother me... but it does bother me when it involves people that I know.*

One fan sent me an entire critique that she drafted for circulation among her fan friends. Called the *DDM Guide*, this document is a tongue-in-cheek and self-deprecating encapsulation of lifelong Duranie wisdom, containing tips and pitfalls for interacting with other fans on the official forum.

Complete with a glossary of terms, it includes definitions of 'The Beautiful People' (a subset of cultural elites) as well as 'RanDoom', the Random Topics subsection of the fan forum, which acquired its nickname because it is where fans from all cliques and factions come together to interact, so the end result is usually conflict. Random Topics is also a favourite hangout for The Beautiful People, who love Durama, a "special type of drama only Duranies can create". For a flavour of the humour contained in this document, here is an excerpt, the DDM Guide's opening paragraphs:

*Welcome! You've spent your hard earned \$35.00 and bought yourself a membership in the official Duran Duran Fan Community.*

*"This is great!" you think, "It's just like in 1983 when I joined the Duran Duran International Club except now it's even better because I can interact with other fans on the message boards. Since they must pay to belong to the site, these must be true fans, no trolls, just fans, most of whom are now middle aged adults, all getting along with each other."*

*Yes, well, that can be true, you can meet great people and make lifelong friendships but there's a few rules you need to know before diving into the world of DDM. Just like in the ocean, there are sharks, big mean sharks. These DDM members like to create drama or as it's called in the Duran world, Durama. So to help the innocent, here is a handy guide to surviving DDM. You see, Duranies can be nice to each other.*

This sarcastic acceptance of the contentious nature of the Duran fan community is a common attitude among Duran fans. When I conducted my European focus group, for example, its participants joked about the dynamic:

*TA: So do you have many friends that are also fans?*

*Everyone: No, no, no.*

*TA: Really? No? I figured it's the other way around. Many of you are friends with each other?*



*Fan 1: But nobody in real life.*

*[Laughter]*

*Fan 2: Yeah we hate each other.*

While these comments were made in jest, this love/hate for other fans has been confirmed by a number of my research participants. Consider these comments made during my American focus group, which consisted of a fairly tight-knit group of fan friends:

*I have mixed feelings, because if it wasn't for the DD fan community I wouldn't have met all of you. And I feel like I have a very special bond with all of you. But there are some people out there that have not been nice to me. And they are not nice to a lot of other people...*

*I'm crazy in my own way. I don't need anybody crazier than me.*

The following is an excerpt from a road journal written by a Duran fan. It is, in essence, a 'thank you' note a fan posted to the online fan community as a whole in 2007, after a weekend of concerts with friends:

*Ok, so I'm sitting in a hotel room by myself thinking about what an awesome weekend this has been and all the people that made it happen. I want to say something, and this is the only place I can think to say it.*

*Some of you will look at this and say WTF?... Still others of you, I hope, will know I am speaking to you and that I love you. And sadly, many others will never see this at all, and never know what they mean to me.*

*So the following post will be a sappy, heartfelt thank you. If you don't wish to read such a thing, please stop here. Humor me, I'm tired. I'm happy and I love you all even if I've never met you, I love you for being you and for helping to make this place what it is, bitchy moments and all... THANK YOU! Two words that seem so small, yet can hold so much meaning. It hardly seems enough, yet it is all that I can think to say.*

## Conclusion

This chapter examined the political milieu of Duran Duran's fan community, a hierarchically stratified society that tends to promote competition and exclusion based on factors like seniority and fan etiquette. The fan politics described here may generate a negative impression of this particular fandom, but my intent in examining its dynamics is not to evaluate this fan culture as wholly positive or wholly negative, nor should we as academics do so with any fandom.

Despite the number of negative accounts of fan community seen in this chapter, it was a challenge persuading fans to discuss the issue of conflict. I suspect that most feared retaliation should other fans discover they 'talked'. One fan in particular shared her experience of once having reported a couple of obnoxious fans at a concert to security, and as a result being "absolutely tormented by those jerks". Everyone hates a 'tattletale'. Two other fans expressed disappointment and disgust that I would venture to explore and discuss contentious fan behaviour at all. Some fans told me that they effectively 'turn a blind eye' toward intra-community conflict if the drama does not involve them; they do their best to ignore it to stay out of trouble, as these fans confirm:

*I often see drama [sic] but stay out of it.*

*I've seen the drama, so I've kind of learned who to steer clear of.*

*I know some people have had problems... I just stay out of it.*

Conflict may be counter to fans' motivation for joining a community in the first place, which is to bond with other fans. Recall earlier in this chapter,

that many respondents claimed their adult friendships with other Duran fans are very important to them. As previously stated, many Duran fans feel their community is one of mutual support and empowerment, and if not for these pleasures, they would have no incentive to remain. This mix of pleasure and politics suggests that fan cultures are infinitely more complicated than previous research may have assumed.

It is also important to recognize that the political tone of the Duran fan community is not unique. As one Duran fan (who is also active in other pop music fan communities like New Kids on the Block and the Goo Goo Dolls) put it, “I’ve been in fan communities for like 10 years now and it’s pretty much same shit different group”. Another fan who is active in a men’s college basketball online forum described a similar dynamic there: ‘they were horrible, just as cruel as DDM’. Oddly, when I surveyed the Take That and Backstreet Boys fan communities for comparison purposes, no one (save one fan) admitted to such a dynamic being present. Perhaps I did not go ‘deep’ enough into those communities to gain access to the individuals who would be most aware of its dynamics, or perhaps I had not gained sufficient trust for fans to provide me with such sensitive information. But one of these was a ‘cross-over fan’ of both the Backstreet Boys and the Take That fan communities, who claimed her involvement with Take That fans was minimal because she has found them to be incredibly contentious. Some of the stories she told me were on par with what has been disclosed in this chapter. Like any other type of community, pop music fan cultures are hegemonies where power struggles take place. The events and testimonies presented in

this chapter offer evidence of such politics, an area where there is undoubtedly a wealth of opportunity for further investigation in other fandoms.

In the next chapter, I will continue evaluating the nature of Duran fan community politics when I consider the challenges that I faced during my field work. I will reflect upon the ways in which these challenges inhibited my ability to successfully negotiate the dual role as a scholar-fan. By scrutinising my own subjectivity surrounding my research encounters, I hope to contribute new insight to existing discourses about ethnographic research methods for scholars who are also fans of the communities that they investigate.

**Chapter 6:**  
***I Don't Want Your Love –***  
**Reflections on Scholar-Fandom**



The previous chapter explored the internal dynamics of Duran Duran's fan community, a hierarchically stratified culture that promotes competition and exclusion. Further confirming these dynamics was fan reception to my own presence as an academic. Community reaction ranged from support to opposition, the reasons for which, I will argue, substantiate its hierarchical and political disposition. I am an active member of this community myself and have been deeply invested in its culture for some time. I am therefore acutely aware of my own political standing and I suspect that my 'insider' status and subjectivity are responsible for the challenges I faced during my investigation. But while this may imply that my status and subjectivity were a hindrance, they allowed me to delve deeper into Duran fan culture than an 'objective' outsider would have been able to do. Additionally, the research obstacles incited by my insider positioning proved beneficial, because they demanded reflection and analysis on a level that I would not likely venture if I were further removed from my object of study.

My subjectivity is still a constant concern when evaluating the dynamics of the Duran fan community. Community politics is a sensitive topic, so bearing this in mind, I am careful about how I approach the issues discussed in this chapter. It has been difficult to avoid an academic 'moral dualism' (Hills 2002, p. 182), for example, an 'us vs. them' mentality (ibid, p. 71), a tendency to conclude that we as researchers inhabit a more privileged and knowledgeable position than that of the 'deficient' fan (ibid.). Instead I have adopted Hills' 'suspensionist' approach to fan research, 'a more sensitive approach to fandom... to tease out the many ways in which fan

attachments, affects, and passions permeate 'academic' work, institutions and the embodied, rather than imagined, subjectivities of academia' (ibid.).

Some Duran fans were clearly threatened by my intentions, so I am indebted to those who courageously and generously contributed their time and energy to my investigation. It was a continuous struggle reassuring some fans that my decision to conduct a critical inquiry into their community's dynamics was not an effort to denigrate them, but rather an opportunity to unveil a rich culture characterized by deep-felt personal attachments and friendships, as well as a community stratified by hierarchies where a variety of power struggles take place. Thornton emphasizes the importance of conducting such research:

... little attention... has been paid to the hierarchies within popular culture... The analysis of these cultural pursuits as forms of power brokering is essential to our understanding not only of youth and music cultures in particular but of the dynamics of popular culture in general (Thornton 1995, p. 7).

In Chapter 2 I briefly outlined the challenges I faced while conducting this research. By far, the most significant impediment to my progress was my own emotion – my personal feelings regarding those challenges. I believe now the emotive nature of certain research events prevented me from initially seeing their value. Here I will share my experience, following each account with reflections and considerations of other studies that have resembling characteristics. I hope that my experience will provide new and useful insights into the role of the scholar fan.

## Distance from Research Subjects

In a discussion of ethnographic methodology, McRobbie encourages scholars to rethink their own subjectivity. She points to the unconventional methods utilized by Ann Oakley (1981) in her research on women in childbirth, in which she developed close personal relationships with each subject (McRobbie 1991, p. 134). Citing the importance of 'talk' in women's relations, McRobbie stresses that Oakley's study might not have been successful had she not been able to foster an open dialogue with her subjects. In somewhat of a role reversal Oakley not only entertained questions by her subjects, but she formed lasting bonds with them outside of the research realm, socializing with them and developing what would become long-term friendships (ibid., p. 135).

This approach contrasts with more traditional forms of ethnography such as that employed by scholar Janice Radway in *Reading the Romance* (1984), an ethnography of romance fiction readers. Due to the direction in both feminism and fan studies to move in a more subjective direction, Radway has since been criticised for her distance from her subjects, because she was not a romance reader herself (Ang 1988). Radway and her subjects had conflicting philosophies about the significance of their reading practices, and as a result Radway made a superior assumption that these woman should convert to feminism. Assuming she knew more about their fandom than they did, Radway adopted a 'decisionist' academic approach of the type that is criticised by Hills (2002), a concept I will return to in a moment.



For my own case, being already deeply involved in the fan community which I would study, I did not have much choice regarding distance from my subjects. And I thought this would not only make my field work easier, but also allow me, like Oakley, to delve deeper with my subjects. However, while there is some truth to this assumption, community politics actually prevented me from gaining access to some individuals. Indeed, community dynamics were the primary factors in the production of challenges faced conducting this research, and I believe that if I had not been negotiating the dual role of scholar and fan who found myself caught up in those dynamics, I may have avoided a few mishaps. However, unexpectedly these challenges became vital to my research, because they revealed a complexity to fan culture that most former studies have failed to explore. They also draw attention to the importance of taking the researcher's subjectivity into account during analysis. I will discuss each of these issues in turn. But first I want to explore other literature regarding scholar-fan reaction to research events, in particular Stevenson's (2009) research.

### **Subjectivity**

As mentioned previously, Hills is critical of academic 'moral dualism' or 'decisionist' approaches to fan studies because they disregard the supposed negative aspects of fandom ('religiosity, irrationality, and pre-reflexivity') by replacing the 'imagined subjectivity of fandom (self-absence) with an academic imagined subjectivity' (Hills 2002, p. 182-183). Thornton also cautions against academic 'moral dualism', claiming that academics have become 'inadvertently ensnared in the problem' (Thornton 1995, p. 92).

She contends that this is one of the reasons that cultural worth and hierarchy have been neglected areas when researching popular culture:

When investigating social structures, it is impossible to avoid entanglement in a web of ideologies and value judgements. Nevertheless, it is important to maintain analytical distance between: empirical social groups, representations of these people and estimations of their cultural worth. Academic writers on youth culture and subculture have tended to underestimate these problems. They have relied heavily on binary oppositions typically generated by us-versus-them social maps (ibid).

In my own research, I could not have foreseen how problematic my own subjectivity would be in both my ethnographic practice on subjects as well as my academic writing about fandom in general. Stevenson describes experiencing a similar issue in his account of his own confrontation with emotion after speaking with fans of David Bowie:

At first I found this hard to understand as I could not really understand the place where these feelings were located... The power of these feelings initially took me by surprise, and rather than work on papers in respect of the Bowie project, I would find myself writing about other topics that were not emotionally charged in the same way... After only a period of a few years since the interviews took place, I can recognize that these intense feelings of depression were connected to the deep feelings of loneliness that many of the interviews engendered within me (2009, p. 95).

After processing his feelings about his encounters with the Bowie fans in retrospect, Stevenson recommends that as researchers, we should not disregard our emotions in our analyses, as more traditional sociology practice might advise, but rather we should 'interrogate more carefully our own sense of interconnection with the people with whom we are exploring the lived dimensions of contemporary culture' (ibid., p. 96). Sue Wise concurs: 'It is in the examination of personal experience that the disjuncture

between subjective and objective realities is most clearly seen' (1990, p. 398).

Aspects of what Stevenson experienced might be akin to the challenges that Camille Bacon-Smith encountered when researching *Star Trek* fan culture. She claims that when she got too close to 'the heart of the fan community', she was sidetracked by the fans so that they did not expose too much (Hills 2002, p. 69). Her testimony about having struggled 'through the 'fog'' mirrors both Stevenson's and my own difficulties in lacking the clarity and motivation to continue the pursuit of our research goals (ibid.).

Up until recently, the issue of articulation within fan studies was only mentioned with respect to fans themselves. But this difficulty with articulation can also effect the researcher. It was true in Stevenson's interviews with Bowie fans, in the way that Stevenson's feelings did not result necessarily from words that the subjects were saying, but rather from the general mood of the interviews, something that was difficult for him (and his subjects) to articulate, feelings that were 'mostly unconsciously communicated' (Stevenson 2009, p. 95). In confronting his inability to decipher exactly what was troubling him about the encounters, Stevenson acknowledges an issue which has not yet been explained by academic theory. He calls on the advice of Elspeth Probyn (1993) who cautions researchers not to limit their exploration of popular culture to topics which can be explained or articulated, because 'there are always aspects of the lived that resist being communicated in our theories and research' (Stevenson 2009, p. 96).

Stevenson theorises that his response to the interviews may be due to the process of projection:

Here a broader more psycho-analytic language concerned with issues related to projection and projective identification would seem to be appropriate (Chodorow, 1999). This is where we take into ourselves or put into others feelings through a process of mutual interaction (ibid., p. 95).

Hills (2002, p. 91) too suggests that a psychoanalytical approach to fan studies might be appropriate as long as it is 'respectful of fans' everyday creativities and 'little madnesses' (ibid. p. 22). He argues that due to the intensely affective nature of fan attachments, it is 'impossible to take fandom seriously without taking fan psychology seriously' (ibid.). But of course fandom studies has moved away from psychoanalytical discourse, and this was due to the historical tendency of this approach to pathologise fans. Hills and Stevenson both appear to suggest that we should not completely disregard psychoanalytic methods, particularly with respect to our own subjectivity as scholar fans.

What Stevenson experienced during his ethnography with Bowie fans may qualify as the type of event that Willis calls 'surprise' (Willis 1980 quoted in McRobbie 1991, p. 132). Angela McRobbie explains that occasions such as these are significant because their 'meaning cannot be captured accurately in the language of the 'social sciences'' (ibid.). She argues that such instances 'force the researcher into a fresh humility, into an awareness of the limitations of one form of intellectual activity and its absolute dependence on these 'others' [the research subjects]' (ibid., p. 133). For similar reasons, Wise expressed her difficulty in articulating and

understanding her childhood connection to Elvis until his death, because in her adult identity as a feminist, Elvis stood for everything she rejected about dominant patriarchal culture (Wise 1990, p. 394). Her inability to articulate why this connection disturbed and confused her signals the rift between a scholar's own subjective and affective experience and the more rational perspectives that cultural studies and sociology typically have sought to advise us to adopt.

### **Reaction to My Research Presence**

As I shared in the previous chapter on fan politics, it was a challenge getting fans to discuss the issue of conflict because most feared retaliation from other fans. But again, the Duran fan community can neither be classified as an all-inclusive sisterhood nor an entirely competitive, exclusive sorority, it lies somewhere between these two extremes. In this section I will provide further evidence of this complexity by sharing my own auto-ethnographic experience, as well as scrutinizing the nature of my research encounters in this community as a scholar fan.

I could not have foreseen how problematic fan community politics would become for both my ethnographic practice with subjects as well as my academic writing about fandom in general. Kozinets (2010, p. 169) has suggested that 'some of the most interesting occurrences in the world of netnography are occurring in the tension between the researcher and culture members, as online communities and cultures *actively resist being studied*' [emphasis added]. The final sentiment here is an understatement with respect to some of the fans I encountered during my research.

I received a mixed reaction from fans when I announced I would be conducting this project. Again, I am a member of the Duran community myself and am situated somewhere along its hierarchical spectrum. Each fan's reaction to my research was noticeably correlated to her existing relationship with me. Therefore, I suspect that my affiliations with various sub-groups of fans and my status within the larger culture effected the reception and employment of my research.

As mentioned earlier, community reaction to my ethnographic attempts ranged from support to opposition, and along that scale I identified four levels of cooperation, the first of which came from my existing fan friends, most of whom were more than happy to contribute. They were enthusiastic and participated in every capacity they could. Because I had these fans' trust as both a fellow fan and as their personal friend, I was given access to the more clandestine spaces of their culture that would not have been available to other scholars.

The second type of reception I received from fans is similar to that just described. In a manner akin to Oakley's, I developed close ties with new fans as a result of my dialogic research approach, which was less due to a set intention than it was to my lack of experience and confidence at conducting ethnography. Of interest, then, was the contrast in the dynamics between myself and these participants versus the ones from my original friendship circle. Among these two categories of fans, both were supportive of my research, but those who already knew me were more difficult to moderate in the focus group setting. Pre-existing group dynamics were already in place

because the others met in years prior to my joining, so they had tighter-knit bonds with each other than they did with me. While these fans were eager to participate, I lost control of them in the focus group environment, whereas the fans I met for the first time in the research setting took my academic intentions more seriously. However, losing control worked to my advantage, because the topics that fans wanted to discuss (despite my failed attempts to steer them back on track) had a significant impact on my subsequent research direction.

And that was not the only time fans redirected the course of my research. Other instances caused this project to take on a life of its own, such as the unexpected fan reaction I received from a third category of fans: indifference, or more specifically, silence. These were fans outside my friendship circle who may have exchanged pleasantries with me in the past, either online or in person, and who showed no particular aversion to me before, but who withdrew once I began this research. Silence was the reaction I received from the majority of fans. These individuals simply ignored my requests regarding research participation. However, this silence became so great that eventually, it carried over into other types of interactions I had with fans outside of the research. I should consider the underlying cause for these fan silences because there is value in attending to the 'unspoken' aspects of experience, for which Jeanette Monaco concurs:

[A]ttending to absences in texts is as important in discourse analysis as in the identification of textual presences... Absences are often created in interpretive communities, including the ones that comprise the academic canon, when sensitive or difficult subject matter arise (Monaco 2010, p. 127).

It is also beneficial to consider my own reaction to such an absence, as Monaco did when a similar instance took place in the research she conducted on her own fan community:

[A] sense of a loss of visibility or fan status within the group emerged [and] began to overlap with feelings of loss of control over the research situation as an academic... [W]hen my fan status as well as my research choices were undermined or failed to live up to my own expectations, I felt unclear how to proceed... I was at risk of positioning myself as an 'outsider' who may have been perceived as 'trying too hard' (Monaco 2010, p.129).

Such a position, in which researchers make obvious 'their many efforts to be accepted within the group' (ibid.), has the potential to be 'more damaging to levels of trust and cooperation than approaching participants upfront as an 'outsider'' (Hodkinson 2005 quoted in Monaco 2010, p.129). And perhaps this is what transpired in my research too, but I have yet to query the fan community to find out if that is the motivation behind the silence, much less do I expect to gain an answer by doing so.

While the indifference was disappointing, it had little effect on my motivation to continue research, because I felt I had more than enough willing participants. A fourth type of fan reaction, however, disturbed me to the extent that it left my confidence so deflated that I was unable to continue research for quite some time. A handful of other academic accounts describe similar tension, politics, and resistance from research subjects, but I have been unable to locate any existing literature describing a reaction on the level of the resistance that I received from this fourth group of fans. Punch (1986) reported issues such as 'problems with entree and exiting the field; the political issues encountered on the site and the role played the study;



and the conflicts, ambiguities, and shady side of the understanding gained during the fieldwork' (Kozinets 2010, p. 169). Seiter (1990) describes her discomfort with a subject with whom she could not relate due to a variety of differences including age, gender, and class, and believes that their differing value systems diminished any rapport they could hope to have (Seiter 1990, p. 395). As a result, her subject exhibited bitterness and 'flashes of anger' by which Seiter admits she could not help but be vicariously effected (ibid., p.392). And Barker (1997) admits to struggling with personal judgments about the political orientation of a fascist fan, an experience which prompted him to observe the following contradiction about subjective trends in audience studies:

A central tenet seems to be that the researcher must acknowledge the social relations that s/he has with her/his objects of study. That is surely right. But that has been taken to mean that we are in the business of empowering audiences, that we ought even to like them. What do you do if, among the people you are studying, there is someone whom you heartily, and with good reason, dislike? (Barker 1997, p. 15).

In the case of my research, the greatest fan resistance I encountered was in the presence of one such fan, with whom I had prior differences or 'history'. As such, I was torn between performing my 'fan' identity and my 'academic' identity. The research event in question was a fan contest to appear onstage with Duran Duran for a televised program called *Songbook*. I entered the contest and was one of the winners. As was my habit at the time, I took every opportunity to conduct research. So I chatted with fans and passed out questionnaires while waiting in line at the venue.



*Fans on set at Songbook*  
(Photo courtesy Kenneth Ley Milling)

What I did not expect was aggression from the fan mentioned previously, who did everything she could to intimidate, including yelling and threatening legal action. It is my belief that her aim was to provoke and elicit a reaction from me that would be witnessed by other fans; she was trying to damage my reputation, which she knew would hurt my research. Still not satisfied once we were inside the venue, she enlisted security to watch me, even though I had discontinued handing out questionnaires or interviewing anyone once we went indoors. The event caught me off guard and left me thoroughly humiliated as both a fan and a researcher. That individual made her point clear that evening; I was being punished, I had crossed a line. She claimed it was about a personal matter and not about my research – specifically, the fact I did not bring one of our mutual friends as my guest. But her animosity was out of proportion; it could not have been that alone. Was it our personality difference? Was it to do with turf? Was it to do with the fan hierarchy? Was it really to do with my research after all? Was it a combination of all of these?

What was perhaps more damaging to my credibility in the fan community was that this individual went online both before and after the event, and, along with her friends, ‘flamed’ me to the point that anyone who witnessed the online drama either withdrew from my research or refused to participate in the focus group I planned in conjunction with the televised event. After the incident, whether or not other fans still respected or trusted me, many were afraid to associate with me for fear they would be targeted and bullied by those same individuals. I have observed this same scenario played out numerous times with varying parties over the years.

### **My Position in the Community Hierarchy**

Following the advice of Hills (2002) I spent months self-reflexively questioning the televised event. I suspect that the underlying cause for the friction I experienced was fan politics, which led me to consider the status and affiliations within the community of the individuals in question. They are members who see themselves as being part of the cultural elite.

However, this is not to say that all of the cultural elites in Duran fandom behave in the same manner. Further adding to the complexity of my encounter at the televised event, three individuals who are in the inner circle of Duran fans approached me apologizing for the behaviour of their counterpart, and invited me to cross the ‘invisible line’ on the floor and come stand with them. Additionally since that time, I have met more fans who fall in this category who have shattered my preconception that all fans in the cultural elite are condescending and arrogant. After observing and interacting with this group of individuals for more than three years, it appears to be only

a subset of their elite circle who routinely incite conflict with other fans, the reasons for which, I will now consider.

With respect to the events surrounding the televised performance, I suspect that some inner circle Duran fans may have been irritated by my presence on several levels. (It should come as no surprise that I have very little inner-circle participation in my research.) This likewise may have been the motivation for the silence I encountered from some fans. Both types of fan resistance are indicative of the fact that ‘academic knowledge may be devalued in some fandoms’, perhaps due to the collective affective purpose of online fan forums’ (Monaco 2010), p. 134). This may very well be the case in Duran fandom, as Monaco explains about her own *Sopranos* fandom: ‘[M]y role as a ‘researcher’ may not have fulfilled the same potential for the members I approached, for reflexive identity affirmation as the willing audience of others in the ‘community of imagination’” (Monaco 2010, p. 134). Such logic also recalls a point made by Thornton, who describes the incongruity between her goals and the environment that she attempted to study:

I was *working* in a cultural space in which everyone else ... was at their *leisure*. Not only did I have intents and purposes that were alien to the rest of the crowd, but also for the most part I tried to maintain an analytical frame of mind that is truly anathema to the ‘lose yourself and ‘let the rhythm take control’ ethos (Thornton 1995, p. 2).

Applying a similar reasoning to my research encounters, and recalling one of my conclusions drawn in the previous chapter, perhaps my academic and analytical agenda was at odds with the affective nature of fandom, proving particularly irritating to parties who might resist being studied,

resulting in the fan reactions of hostility and silence that my research attempts received. Another concern for the inner circle fans may have been trust – perhaps a fear that I would expose insider information. And finally there was my academic research ‘authority’, which may have been perceived as competition that threatened their status at the top of the hierarchy. Similarly, Seiter cites Bourdieu in an effort to understand the power struggle that played out during the course of her ‘troubling’ ethnographic encounter. The quote that she selected applies equally to my research events:

[E]xplicit aesthetic choices are in fact often constituted in opposition to the choices of the groups closest in social space, with whom the competition is most direct and most immediate, and more precisely, no doubt, in relation to those choices most clearly marked by the intention of marking distinction vis-a-vis lower groups. (Bourdieu 1984 quoted in Seiter 1990, p. 396).

In other words, I suspect that the primary reason I received such a harsh response from some inner circle fans is that they may have perceived my research endeavour as a method of elevating myself to a position in the hierarchical structure of the fan community that could potentially pose a threat to their power.

Confirming this assessment, I can refer to two other instances in which this same group of ‘cultural elite’ Duran fans have attacked other fans for becoming ‘popular’ or elevated and known by most everyone else within the community. One of these fans is a ‘star’ of a fan documentary on Duran fans called *Something You Should Know* (2010). The other fan runs a widely-read news column online about Duran Duran. In my estimation, it is the elevated status and visibility of both of these fans that has made them a target. They both received similar treatment, and ongoing treatment, I might

add, from the same subset of cultural elites I referenced above. The circumstances surrounding one of these fans' altercations with the cultural elite have been so severe that the fan in question is considering legal action, alleging physical assault and defamation of character.

My emotions are still so raw concerning my own dispute with the said individuals, that each time I learn of similar instances to those described above, painful memories resurface to which I seem to have little control. It has therefore been a considerable challenge gaining the critical distance necessary to continue with this research project. In unravelling my conflicted feelings following the *Songbook* incident, Monaco's account of a comparable (though much less severe) research event proved useful:

As a researcher I justified my frustration of what I perceived was a form of strategic sidelining on [another fan's] part, as I may have posed a threat to his position as moderator... My rationalization, however, did not manage to dissolve completely the feelings of vulnerability I experienced as a fan/insider and researcher/outsider (Monaco 2010 p. 129).

Monaco suggests that fans and researchers alike can be equally anxious and defensive. In hindsight I can see where my own behaviour was such, because I felt that my identities as academic and fan were both under threat. The varying fan reactions to my research likely resulted from any number of factors, for which there can be no one simple explanation. But the moments of 'surprise' (Willis 1980 quoted in McRobbie 1991, p. 132) that I have shared here forced me to step back and consider not only the unexpected responses I received from fans, but also my own reaction to those responses. The fans were telling me something significant, either through their passive silence or their articulated antipathy. My feelings had to

be removed from the equation in order to appreciate what these occasions indicated about the dynamics of the Duran fan culture.

### **Inhibited by my Subjectivity**

Like Stevenson (2009), it took me considerable time before I had the motivation or the ability to understand what had happened in the aforementioned research event. Early on I was unable to process what had taken place, and I could not articulate what was bothering me. These instances stifled my ability to continue research because I assumed they were the result of my failure as a scholar.

Around the time that I began to emerge from my haze of self-doubt, my father suggested a book to me that he had seen promoted on television. While it is not academic, the content within its pages struck a nerve with me nevertheless, in consideration of the *Songbook* research encounter and my need for motivation to get back to work. In her book *The Twisted Sisterhood* (2010), Kelly Valen recounts an event that incited her to conduct her research on difficult female relationships. It was the negative response she received after she published an article in the *New York Times* about her experience being ousted by her sorority sisters after reporting being raped by a member of an affiliated fraternity. The outcry she received from *New York Times* readers not only shocked her but also had a lasting effect, causing her to doubt the decision to share her experience:

My observation that women are at once friends and foe and at times seem to swim in shark-infested waters of our own design sparked heated debate in [online] forums... Some dealt vicious blows... A few showered me with F bombs, presuming wrongly

that I was some 'rich bitch' whiner stuck in trauma victim mode. [One] writer said she plain 'hated' me, and , in the online spectacle that followed, women began bickering back and forth... As it turns out, my skin isn't all that thick – even for a litigator. I wanted nothing but to crawl back to my cave of hausfrau anonymity and forget the whole thing. For months, I operated on dazed auto-pilot (Valen 2010, p. xiv).

While it could be argued that similar aggressions occur in primarily male fan cultures, I could not help but draw a parallel between my own experience with Duran fan culture and Valen's account above. Valen's observations are also worthy of consideration here because of the effect that these hostile reactions had on her ability to continue her work. Luckily for Valen, she recognized that her story 'struck a nerve' and after the initial shock had worn off, she enlisted the help of a specialist to help her conduct the survey that resulted in her book publication. In my case, I too operated on 'dazed autopilot', for months following the *Songbook* incident. It is evident that my subjectivity hampered my ability to research. Try as I may, I could not avoid judging my accuser's reaction as being inherently 'bad'. I had to remind myself that positive subjective and empathetic identification with research subjects is not always possible or desirable, as Jenkins cautions, 'Fandom... cannot be easily bifurcated into good and bad' (Jenkins 2006, p. 10). And I considered Barker's encounter with the fascist Judge Dredd fan and Seiter's 'troubling interview' with the older retired male whose philosophies made her uncomfortable because they were offensive to her identity as an educated feminist. Throughout her description of this encounter, Seiter's choice of language reveals her frustration with her subject, such as when she confesses that '[his] story about research unsanctioned by the academy, convinced me that Mr. H was a crackpot'



(Seiter 1990, p. 391). Following my research encounter, it was difficult not to construct my own narrative in which this other fan was in the 'wrong' and I was in the 'right'; indeed my hurt ego wanted to use Seiter's language and conclude that this other fan was also a 'crackpot'. I found myself firmly ensnared in the predicament suggested by Thornton: "When investigating social structures, it is impossible to avoid entanglement in a web of ideologies and value judgements" (Thornton 1995, p. 92).

What is perhaps worse, due to my embarrassment, I initially felt compelled to conceal the event altogether from academic colleagues in order to protect my academic reputation, and hence silence that fan by constructing my own 'safe' narrative. In both instances, I am keenly aware that I have the power as a researcher to 'suppress respondents' stories, reminding us that the research narrative is never neutral but constructed' (Holloway and Jefferson 2000 quoted in Monaco 2010).

### **Affective Encounters**

The affective nature of fandom continued to pose problems as I continued with my ethnographic study. The *Songbook* research event was not the only time I struggled with the issue of subjectivity. There was another event which had quite a different outcome, but is also worthy of analysis here, and it occurred when I attended a fan convention in Amsterdam where I conducted my European focus group. I was relaxing 'off duty' at the bar when a stream of fans came and sat with me one-by-one, pouring out their hearts sharing extremely personal accounts. I regret that I did not have a recording tool ready to take down their stories. Before I knew it, I became

overwhelmed, cracking under the pressure of so much affective information. I soon found myself hiding in the ladies' restroom in tears. This event took place less than two months after *Songbook*, and these fans' genuine interest in my research, as well as their generosity, took me by surprise. It was a contrast to that which I experienced in London, proving again the contrast in dynamics that can be found in a single fan community.

Since then, after time and distance have given me clarity, I believe that what transpired in Amsterdam is related to what Stevenson (2009) encountered with David Bowie fans. I had been vicariously affected by the fans who were approaching me at the bar. Their accounts affected me in ways that I did not expect or understand at the time; I found their experiences extremely evocative because I could relate so intimately to the things they said, and I was absorbing their feelings as my own. It felt rather like I imagine a clinical psychologist must feel at the end of the day. Perhaps we should, as researchers, reconsider the application of psychoanalysis within fan studies, as suggested by Hills (2002) and Stevenson (2009). Additionally, because this event occurred only weeks after the *Songbook* event, I believe that I was still carrying insecurity with me into this next fan encounter. I had become suspicious of other fans, and yet these fans in the Netherlands were so open and generous. The contrast was striking and it left me with a number of conflicting emotions about the fan community in general. I believe now that my sadness that evening was the result of mourning, in effect, of the former and almost nostalgic perception I held of the Duran fan community as a whole, that of a friendly, all-inclusive

sisterhood, much like the fandoms that Jenkins describes. Instead the *Songbook* experience proved there were two realities to Duran fandom, one of them not so different from a sorority, rife with antagonism, competition, and hierarchy.

I have come to understand the significance of both research events, but at the time I desperately needed a more constructive way of dealing with them, and none of the research I consulted offered a solution. In the case of the fan convention, Stevenson's (2009) account offered some rationalisation, and this was enormously beneficial in terms of the motivating effect it had on me to continue with research.

## **Conclusion**

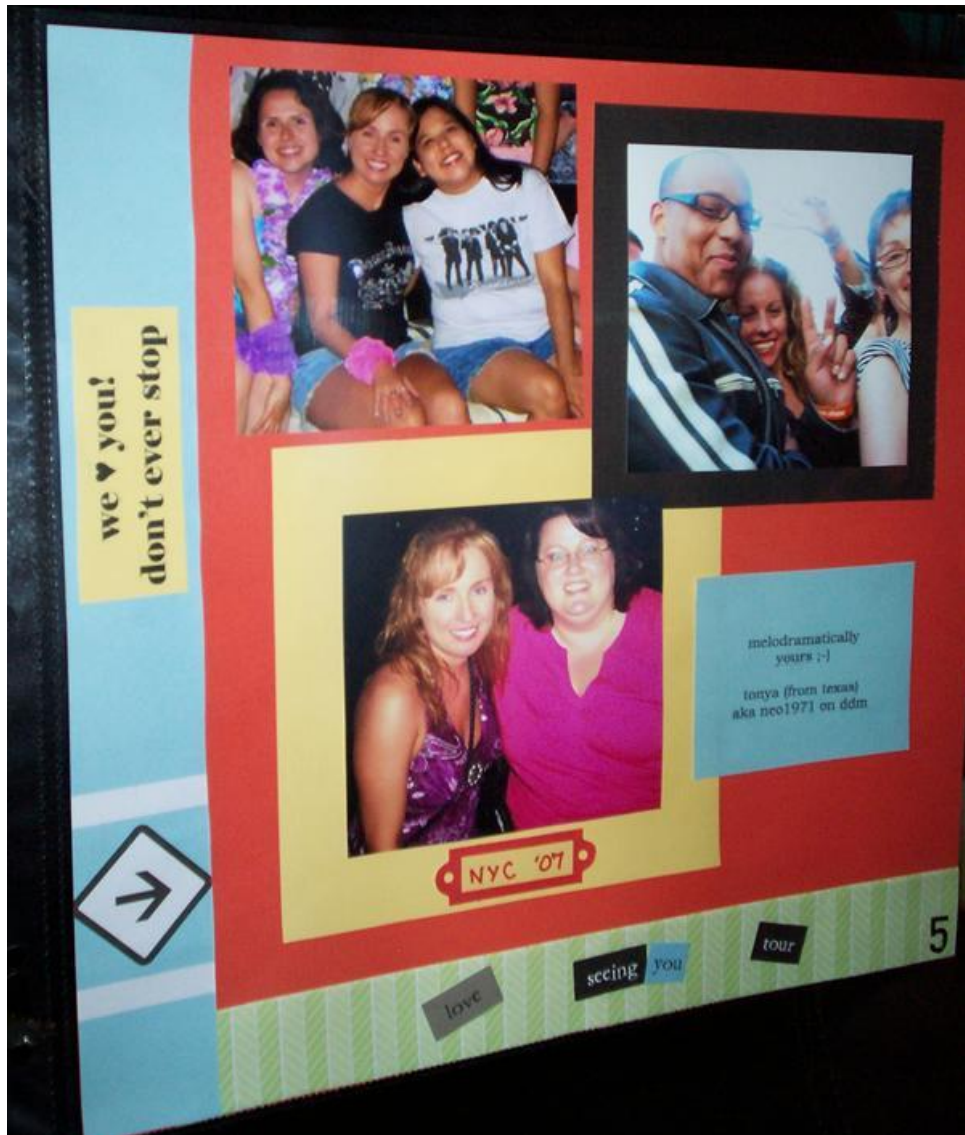
I continued to struggle throughout this project to navigate my dual role as academic and fan. Tom Phillips, a scholar fan who is conducting an ethnographic investigation into Kevin Smith fandom, describes his concerns about this dilemma: 'In my attempt to tread the line between scholar and fan, I feel I run the risk of alienating myself from both groups' (Phillips 2010). As a by-product of conducting this research, I had to withdraw to a large extent from the Duran fan community, which was attributed to my need to gain critical distance to evaluate the events I have just described. In which case, Hills' (2002) concept of a 'voluntary self-estrangement', a process of distancing the self for the purpose of auto-ethnographic research, became applicable to my involvement within the fan community; I had to separate myself from it, and considering how deeply invested my identity and social life had been in the community up to that point, doing so was not an easy

task. But due to the nature of the events described, this was perhaps the only choice I had. Like Stevenson's (2009, p. 95) avoidance of activities that he felt were 'emotionally charged', I now find myself unable to practice my fandom with the same abandon that I once could. I no longer experience the same pleasures from my former fan practices because the personal and private connection I felt to my idols has changed. The object of my fandom is now too closely entangled with emotions concerning the previously mentioned research events. But my scholarly identity takes precedence at the moment, so my fan identity will have to wait until I detangle those associations such that I can again enjoy being a fan.

As I mentioned at the start in this chapter, it is with great sensitivity that I approach the fan community politics discussed here. And I am fully aware that my analysis and conclusions are unavoidably influenced by my own subjective positioning. The barriers I have described, associated with both my situatedness inside the community and my academic 'imagined' subjectivity, should provoke further discourse about how we as researchers approach and assess ethnographic encounters in similarly political settings.

In the next and final chapter, I will synthesise these thoughts with the concepts and findings that I have presented throughout this thesis. Drawing attention to the unique contributions presented by this research and the ways in which it advances existing discourses in the studies of fandom, feminism, and popular music, I hope to offer a more complete understanding of female pop fandom than has been provided before.

## Chapter 7: *And She Dances On The Sand –* Conclusion



At the time of this writing, Duran Duran is still touring and making new albums, the latest is *All You Need is Now*, which was released via iTunes late in 2010, securing the top spot as best-selling album worldwide for the month in which it was released. Garnering rave reviews from critics and fans alike, the latest album is steeped in nostalgia, thanks to the guidance of producer Mark Ronson, a self-proclaimed Duran fan himself.



*The two remaining Taylors*

On the back of this success, Duran Duran toured various countries throughout 2011, including the United States where they played the popular South by Southwest music festival, along with the highly publicised Super Bowl pre-game show, and Madison Square Garden, among many other venues. In December 2011 they launched their much-anticipated UK arena tour, which had to be rescheduled from earlier in the year due to Simon Le Bon's vocal problems. Amidst speculation and fears that Duran was finished, Duran's devoted fan base stood by their idols during the hiatus, an agonising four months of uncertainty.



*Almost full: A packed house at the O2 in London*

This thesis has presented a variety of complex issues about the nature of female pop fandom and its study. Throughout this thesis I located my research within the context of the existing academic discourses, so in this final chapter I will summarise how my research drives forward those discourses and addresses knowledge gaps in each area. I will also reflect upon my initial goals and consider those in light of the resulting findings. Lastly, I will make conclusions regarding what this research suggests about fandom and the future of its academic study.

As indicated previously, I have suggested a number of complexities about Duran fandom, and after reading the previous three chapters, one might wonder why any fan would want to participate in a fandom that seems rife with such internal and external tension. This contradiction is one of the reasons I chose to pursue this project, and it came to be of increasing importance as this research continued. To answer this question, the following fan comment offers us a clue:

*No matter what is going on among the fans, once the show starts I always forget that part and just revert back to my 13 year old self screaming at John Taylor!*

To further explain the contradiction, we must return to the motivations presented in *Chapter 3: Lifelong Fandom and Identity*, which reveal the affective attachments that fans often hold for their idols, and how those attachments are part of their identities as adults. Recall that Hills (2002) suggests that affect is an area of fan studies where further research is needed. My examination of the deeply personal and private aspects of Duran fandom serves to fill this gap, where I found that Duran fan identity reflexively draws upon, not only the image of the idol, but also a nostalgia for associated memories of discovering those idols in adolescence. The conclusion I drew from this line of enquiry was that the impact of cultural influences, like pop music, during the formative period of adolescence cannot be underestimated. Indeed, such early identifications with pop culture icons has enabled some adolescents to then carry those attachments with them their entire lives, forming lifelong fandoms.

That conclusion led me to investigate what has bound these women to their idols through years of life changes, and what sustains their loyalty today. I theorised that a variety of factors contribute to this loyalty, and one of those is the affective power of music. Fans claim it is the way the music makes them *feel* that causes them to reach for Duran's music time and again, and the number of fans who mentioned affect with reference to their consumption of the song *Ordinary World* illustrates this tendency. It should be no surprise, then, that most Duran fans find Duran's music therapeutic, soothing, and comforting. But the reason for this propensity is not always affect, the music is also 'familiar' to them. This idea is connected to my



arguments about memory and nostalgia and is also consistent with Stevenson's (2009) findings about the idol providing consistency as an ongoing narrative.

I also theorised that a contributing factor to lifelong fandom is the concept of 'reclaimed youth', and this is an area where my research offers an original contribution to discourses surrounding our understanding of fandom and ageing. An example I provided to illustrate this concept was the testimony of the fan who claimed she rediscovered a part of herself that she had long forgotten after attending a reunion concert. Other fans cited a similar, renewed pleasure from concert attendance, an exhilaration that makes them feel 'like a kid' again or a 'teen with credit'. Recall that Thornton connected such tendencies to Bourdieu's (1984) discourse about ageing, where cultures such as Duran fandom might act 'as a buffer against social ageing' (Thornton 1995, p. 102). In this way, the idol may symbolise a fountain of youth for adult fans who are reaching middle-age. Further, Stevenson's (2009) research on fans of David Bowie connects the fandom of pop idols with fans' awareness of their own mortality, proposing that through idol fandom, fans may be attempting 'to defeat death' on a figurative level by following an idol who has been consistent over time but who also exhibits a profound adaptability in the face of change. In Chapter 3 I explored the connections between Thornton's and Stevenson's theories in the context of fan comments from my field data. And while conducting that analysis, another contributing factor to lifelong Duran fandom that I identified is the longevity of the band itself. A number of Duran fans commented that the

band, and their associated fandom, has outlasted their relationships with 'real' men. The fact that Duran Duran is still active making new music and touring is of great significance to fans. Consistent with Stevenson's findings with Bowie fans, fans may be using their idol as a reflexive resource, a 'hypertext' reinterpreted in context of their own lives, an ongoing narrative or 'guiding text'. Evidence of this trend is seen in my finding that Duran fans turn to their idols in times of crisis, which is consistent with both the prior findings of Stevenson as well as Kidder (2006). My exploration of this tendency involved the examination of 'border crossings' in fan testimonies, an approach that was similar to that which Chang suggests for auto-ethnography. I found that it is important to recognise the significant role that border crossings play in fans' attachments to their idols, because border crossings are the most affective moments in life, and it is notable that these moments also directly contributed to the affective attachments that resulted in the lifelong loyalty of many of the fans I interviewed. My discovery that fans' 'border crossing' life moments can play a significant role in the inception of a lifelong fan attachment is another of the original contributions offered by this research.

Also contributing to fans' lifelong loyalty is fan community, which I found to be key in both the initiation and sustainability of long-term fandom. And as my ethnographic data revealed, most fans claim that a friend or sibling introduced them to Duran Duran in the beginning, a finding that indicates membership in this fandom has never been an entirely isolated practice. Remember that today, many fans claim their continued involvement

in the fandom is due to their friendships with other fans. So to more fully understand the lifelong loyalty of Duran fans, I evaluated the types of activities in which they engage in groups, such as concert attendance, social gatherings, and online communications, which became a full investigation of their social culture, past and present. For this I went 'back in time' to examine the importance of McRobbie's 'bedroom culture' concept and the significance of the concert 'scream' for teen girls. Drawing upon prior work from a variety of feminist scholars, I considered the euphoric empowerment teen girls experience in pop fandom. Then utilising data from my ethnographic field work, I applied those same concepts to adult Duran fandom. I found that Duran fans still engage in bedroom culture, for example, only today, they do so on their computers. Where the bedroom culture of pop fandom used to be a mostly private activity, perhaps shared intimately with only one or two close friends, on the Internet, fans now conduct these activities online, generating a more community-oriented fan experience, and dramatically altering the nature of female pop fandom.

But the present-day Internet culture of Duran fans has not replaced in-person communications, rather it has enabled more in-person interactions to take place, and as a result, a new type of culture has emerged out of the more isolated bedroom culture, a culture that didn't exist for most Duran fans pre-Internet: a concert and touring culture. This finding was significant, because this shift meant the nature of Duran's existing fan culture became 'global', almost overnight, and alongside the recent band reunion phenomena, it brought many former fans back into fandoms that they gave

up upon entering adulthood. By reigniting interest and providing community, online fan forums provided a safe space for these women to engage with others who shared the same passions and fantasies about their pop idols. Finding that an entire global community of fans existed, many fans came to realize how similar their stories were to those of others. This finding is consistent with that of Kidder (2006) in her research on fans of New Kids on the Block during their reunion period.

I also considered how McRobbie's theories about bedroom culture factor into the propensity toward lifelong fandom, because many women claim that Duran Duran stirred their first sexual desires. This notion of a first crush relates to my arguments about how impressionable moments during adolescence can initiate the formation of a lifelong attachment. To explore this tendency further, I utilised Thompson's (1995) discourse about 'intimacy at a distance' with respect to women's consumption of Duran posters and videos. But I found that while many fans came into the fandom because of an initial sexual attraction, many of their attachments today have little to do with sex and more to do with memory and a nostalgic identification with their 'teen self' who first discovered Duran Duran. These are aspects that are attractive to women of all ages, not just adolescents, making my research distinctive in its investigation of adult women's consumption of these media as part of their lifelong fandom practice.

In my analyses of Duran fan concert attendance, I proposed that the collective identity of the concert audience as an 'imagined community' (Andrews & Whorlow 2000) is, for many fans, like a mass communion,

intensifying the affect of the concert experience because of the volume of fans in which it is shared. McRobbie (1991) and Garratt (1990) both contend that concert going, in itself, is an assertion of female agency, and many women in my study confirmed this assessment. Recall in her discussion about the media coverage of Elvis and Beatles fan behaviour at concerts, Wise (1990) suggests that the female fans were never asked how they felt about those encounters. As stated in Chapter 1, one of my primary objectives in conducting this research was to generate a more complete picture of female pop fandom. So I undertook Wise's challenge above by specifically asking fans about their behaviour at concerts during my ethnographic investigation, with questions tailored for this purpose in my interviews, questionnaire, and online forum discussions. The fan comments and associated analysis I shared in Chapter 4 are the direct result of this inquiry, so this is another aspect of my research that serves to fill a knowledge gap in the study of female pop fandom.

But again, and as revealed in the preceding three chapters of this thesis, the experience within Duran fandom for many fans is not entirely empowering. And it is within these non-empowering aspects that I believe my research offers the greatest contribution to the studies of fandom, popular music, and feminism. Although fan studies within academia has moved beyond the pathologisation of fandom in recent years, there are still instances of it in society at large, such as the continued conflation of fandom with obsession and even addiction. In *Chapter 4: Female Fandom and the Politics of Popular Music* I interrogated the politics surrounding female pop

fan behaviour and the associated fan shame resulting from those politics, particularly judgments received from parties external to the fan community, including the media and fans' spouses, families and peers. To understand this tendency, I explored the way female pop fan concert behaviour historically has been seen as 'spectacle' and more generally, I scrutinised the historical denigration of women's media. A strong indication that these preconceptions about female pop fandom still exist can be found in my ethnographic field data, and I believe this finding is one of the most substantial contributions to come out of this research. The harshest scorn my subjects claim to have encountered regarding their fandom has come from men, and moreover, it has come from their male partners. I theorised that these women's interest (which is sometimes sexual) in Duran Duran perhaps poses a threat to their partner's relative position and importance in the lives of these women. These men's concern recalls a similar anxiety expressed by partners of female romance novel readers as noted by Radway (1984), and it is notable that such concerns are still an issue 30 years later.

The fan shame that has resulted from these external pressures has resulted in a number of women resorting to closet fandom. As Cline suggests, adult female pop fandom is 'trivialized, dismissed, and so silenced' (1992), a statement that is confirmed by my fan testimonies. But this discovery also suggests that such dynamics may be indicative of a hegemonic struggle taking place, where women attempt to carve out a space for themselves free from male influence and derision. I offered the Duran fan

'locker room' banter as an example of such a space, an inversion of a what is usually a male cultural stereotype.

Further non-empowering for many of the fans I interviewed were the inner workings of Duran fan community. I investigated a variety of issues in *Chapter 5: Politics, Competition, and Exclusion* concerning fan interaction, and determined the community to be a micro-society complete with its own politics. Supported by fan testimonials and a selection of associated studies by other academics, I assessed the Internet's influence on fan communication and the complexity of the mixed modes of communication in which fans engage. I concluded that pop fandom is inherently an affective practice, particularly where teen idols are concerned, so these mixed modes of communication or 'interaction mix' (Moore 2005, Thompson 1995) in which Duran fans engage might exacerbate a situation where passionate emotions already prevail. I also proposed that when direct or remote contact with idols is introduced into the mix, the resulting atmosphere can become even more tense and competitive. My conclusions, echoing that of Williamson and her research on Ann Rice fans, challenge Jenkins' notion of fandom as 'collective identity' and instead align with Thornton's (1995) theories about subcultural politics.

I also found that the same pathological treatment that fans endure from external sources, like their spouses and the media as discussed in Chapter 4, are often used within the fan community to enforce status within the fan hierarchy. Excessive displays of fan affection and adoration are frowned upon, for example, because fans have internalised the political

judgements they have received concerning historically denigrated fan behaviours that are typically associated with female pop fandom. The struggle for status matters so much to fans because they seek approval from the community, and the opinion of the community matters so much because their self-worth is tied up in their fan identities, further confirming Thornton's conclusions about the political nature of subcultures. But we must remember that the political tone of the Duran fan community is not unique. Like any other type of community, Duran fan culture is a hegemony where power struggles take place. The events and testimonies presented in *Chapter 5: Politics, Competition, and Exclusion* and *Chapter 6: Reflections on Scholar-Fandom* offer evidence of such politics, proving this is an area where there is a wealth of opportunity for further investigation.

In *Chapter 6: Reflections on Scholar-Fandom* I evaluated my negotiation of the dual role as scholar and fan during this project. I considered how the prevalence of community politics and hierarchies (of which I am a part) directly attributed to the challenges that I faced during my field work. As I suggested, my experience should raise questions about how academics approach such instances, when fans actively resist being studied, as well as how we write about them. But I believe that my insider status and subjectivity also provided this research with a number of benefits, the sum of which outweighs any negative impact. Firstly, my membership in the fan community allowed me to delve deeper into Duran fan culture than an 'objective' outsider would have been able to do. Secondly, the research obstacles incited by my dual positioning demanded reflection and analysis on



a level that I would not have ventured if I were further removed from my object of study. For example, fan silences alerted me that perhaps my analytical academic agenda was at odds with the affective nature of their fandom. And my own initial reaction to the *Songbook* encounter, to hide the fact at first from supervisors due to my embarrassment at what I perceived as a failure on my part as a researcher, alerted me that the encounter had threatened my identity as an academic. And in some instances, because fans were familiar with me, they were comfortable enough to behave in ways that ultimately redirected the course of my research (such as what transpired at the American focus group where I thought I had 'lost control'). The direction change prompted in this instance was significant, and I believe that the event which incited it, as well as the *Songbook* incident, would likely not have taken place if I had been perceived by the fans as a stranger from the 'outside'. Additionally, the array of varying fan reactions to my insider status suggests that the fan community may have been behaving hierarchically, each level responding differently to my own status and individual relationship with them.

With respect to the challenges that my subjectivity presented during the course of this research, I drew upon Stevenson's (2009) account concerning his own affective response to fan interviews. Following *Songbook* when I found myself struggling to proceed with research, Stevenson's self-reflexive analysis of his articulation difficulty was invaluable. Such lessons learned should be shared with the research community, and I do hope that

by divulging my own experience in this respect, I can offer a similar contribution to subsequent research endeavours.

### **Future Research**

This research is gender-specific, a point I have emphasised throughout this thesis. I did not interview male Duran fans, because doing so would have been outside my scope, which was to specifically investigate how women experience pop fandom. Informing this decision was my observation, through personal experience in Duran fandom for 30 years, that the demographic of fans is remarkably and primarily female. In itself, this was an aspect of Duran fandom that I sought to understand. However, as an avenue for future study, investigating the minority of male Duran fans may yield additional insight and would provide a fascinating counterpoint to this research.

Additionally, as a follow-up to this ethnographic study, I would like to interview the band members concerning my findings. While I do not feel their input is necessary for the success of this project, their perspectives may provide insight that I could consider alongside my own conclusions.

I am also interested in the ways in which celebrity culture meets fan culture, so another direction for future research is an exploration of the dynamics of fan/idol direct contact. While I was working on this project, I was struck by the dynamics between fan and idol when the idol was present in some way, either in person or in an online environment like Twitter. Such instances offer academia a new direction for fan study, where the 'intimacy' of communication is no longer 'distant' and one-way, but direct and mutual.

## **Final Thoughts**

The more utopian impressions of fan community like those presented in Jenkins' early work on fandom were not inaccurate, they were merely too simplistic, a fact that Jenkins later acknowledges (2006, p. 5). That research was justified at the time, because it countered elitist views of fandom in an effort to validate what was perceived as a 'low' form of popular culture such that it could be taken seriously within and outside of academia. But now it is clear that there is more to fan culture than agency and collective identity, and within this thesis I investigated a number of issues that reveal fan cultures as turbulent arenas characterised by hierarchical stratification and hegemonic struggle, but whose foundations are also often based on deep-felt lifelong affective attachments. This mix of pleasure and politics contained within a single culture suggests that fandom is infinitely more complicated than previous research may have assumed, indicating there is a multitude of issues still to be explored, as Thornton suggests:

Rather than de-politicizing popular cultures, a shift away from the search for 'resistance' actually gives fuller representation to the complex and rarely straightforward politics of contemporary culture (Thornton 1995, p. 168).

As shared at the beginning of this thesis, other studies in this exact area have not yet been conducted, representing a gap in existing research. And while some critical inquiry has been performed on individual elements in this thesis, none has brought together these elements to specifically examine women's experience of pop music fandom. While prior scholastic accounts have found female pop fandom to be empowering, for example, that research focused on teens and was only in the context of the concert

environment. Moreover, this thesis is unique in its focus on long-term loyalty and the importance of fandom in the construction of memories and identities. I considered the very personal, affective elements of fandom addressed by former scholars and applied them to adult female pop fandom in a different way than has been done before. In so doing I have addressed the knowledge gap identified by Harrington and Bielby, that 'adult fans remain under-theorized and under-studied by media scholars' (2010, p. 444). And finally, much has been written that marginalizes both pop idols and their female fans, so endeavouring to treat these subjects as worthy of serious academic study has been paramount. This thesis has strived to generate a comprehensive rendition of female pop fandom, driving forward discourses in feminism, popular music, fan studies, and methodological practice regarding the role and subjectivity of the scholar fan. To conclude, I offer these final fan comments, which exemplify the various points I have made about the functions of memory, nostalgia, identity, community, and affect in lifelong fandom:

*What I really must do is say THANK YOU Duran Duran for bringing me together with some of the most amazing people ever. Because of you, I have made lifelong friends and added many, many memorable experiences to my life. The music is what you started out to provide, but without knowing you have provided so much more!*

*Over the years we have shared, we have fought, we have made up, grown apart, moved apart, had men in our lives (and lost a few), we've had families, jobs and all the trials and tribulations that come with life. However, one thing still binds us, a love we shared of a band called Duran Duran.*

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## **Appendix: Questionnaire**