

There are a number of experiences that can unite any given generation. Everyone knows where they were on Pearl Harbor, 9/11, or when Zayn Malik left One Direction. On March 25, 2015, I was sitting in my junior high school cafeteria. This is the same room that my friends and I sat, leaving our lunches neglected, to read the newest update of the dark Harry Styles fanfiction sensation “After” on Wattpad off of a cracked iPod touch. I think this is one of those days that shaped how a lot of people my age interacted with pop culture for a long time. I think junior high is a traumatizing time for everyone, especially when social media is the new avenue for tormenting each other. The heyday of Ask.FM and Kik messenger enabled people to hide and find solace outside of school. It also meant when Zayn decided 1D wasn’t for him, it hit a room full of 12 to 14-year-olds like a ton of bricks. I remember two key groups, those who were upset, crying, and lost, and those who made fun of the others. It was not cool to be a fangirl, even though it was a full-time job. You have to know every single word to every song or you were not a big enough fan. Pictures in your locker, music on your parents' iTunes account, and above all, “Future Mrs. Niall Horan” or the equivalent in your Instagram bio.

I was in junior high from 2013 to 2015, Shake It Off by Taylor Swift played at every school dance and everyone was crying over The Fault in Our Stars. Of all of the things I learned in my two years at SEJH, the most important ones came from my time as a fangirl. I was a classic One Direction stan who discovered Five Seconds of Summer when they began touring together. This led me to the 1975, Good Charlotte, Hey Violet, and all of the important pop-punk groups at the time. There was no way to win with interests that were associated with teen girls. If you were just a casual fan and didn’t know who Ketchup the Dog was to the 5sos fandom, you would get torn to shreds by hardcore fans. If you DID know who Ketchup The Dog was, good luck being accepted by the mainstream crowd. There is no way to like anything as a young

teenage girl. You also can't be a "real" fan of things like Marvel, Star Wars, or "real" music, whatever that means. You once again either did not know enough according to the boys, or you were only watching these movies or listening to that music to impress the boys, according to the girls. This is very binary, but so is much of junior high. You either have or you haven't, you get it or you don't, there is very little middle ground when you are thirteen.

Hardly any day in my memory captured this better than the day Zayn left One Direction. There were people crying hysterically, who could not comprehend anything else the whole day. These people also frequently called out others who were also sad, stating that they "didn't get it" and that they were "faking it" because they were not "real One Direction fans". There was yet another group, one that made fun of anyone having any sort of reaction because we "didn't know him". Again, you really could not be correct. I was a huge One Direction fan, bought their albums with my allowance, had a life-size poster of Niall Horan in my room, and shamefully read fanfiction during SSR in Language Arts class, stating my "book was on my phone". I also did not cry in front of all of my peers, but I comforted some of my best friends as they sobbed harder than they did when their grandparents died. This is not an original thought, that any artist or media created and consumed mostly by young girls and women is not taken seriously, but this was the first time I felt it personally. I was so frustrated at both ends of the spectrum of reactions. Did all these girls really have to cry and go on silent strikes, giving all the mean boys so much ammunition to tease us? Did all of the mean boys really have to make it so much worse by making fun of people's feelings? I sat there, listening to the Take Me Home album, consoling people and telling others to fuck right off.

We were in 8th grade when this happened and until we graduated high school, people remembered which side of this historical day they, and others, were on. One of my closest

friends in high school had been one of those girls who openly bawled her eyes out in our school cafeteria and people brought it up to her semi-regularly until we left our hometown.

This showed me not just how stressful it is to be obsessed with a musical group, but also how none of my interests would be taken seriously at first. I would never escape the label of “Fangirl”. It is one I am proud of now, but there were times I just wanted to be a person who could turn on z102.9, our local pop radio station, and not talk about how Style was about Harry Styles and cite evidence. The idea of a fangirl is entirely based on dismissing young women. I’ve learned this lesson over and over again, most recently I met up with some friends from high school I had not seen since we graduated and we started talking about Marvel. One of them made a comment along the lines of “Wow, I can’t believe you know all this stuff about Captain America, I remember when you were obsessed with One Direction.” But here’s the thing, my obsession with Steve Rogers manifests itself the same way my obsession with Calum Hood of 5 Seconds of Summer does. This interest is just acceptable for men, so it is shocking that I, a woman who loves boy bands and Taylor Swift, could be knowledgeable about it. It is not the fan behavior that is dismissed, but rather the actual media. Some things are taken seriously, and other things are just for teen girls to cry over. Captain America was about action scenes and superpowers, not loyal male friendships that last decades, but we can’t get into the “til the end of the line” of it all. It was acceptable for men to wear a shirt with the Shield and wish they could take the serum, but I couldn’t wear one with four Australian boys on it because they “weren’t a real band.” Being a fangirl meant you had to demonstrate your love for any interest and accept you won’t be taken seriously. This was not just a divide down the gender line, there were many times I hid my inner fangirl from other girls, or tried to play it off like I wasn’t an extremely over-the-top one. It was shameful to have Wattpad downloaded and know every band member's

full legal name. A lot of the community for fangirls of all topics was found online, not in person. It was scary to admit this to your “real” friends. Luckily, I had a great group of fangirl friends by my side through it all. While not everyone was nice about it, my friends and I would just turn back to the poorly photoshopped pictures of our favorite band members covered in tattoos and piercings while tuning out others’ opinions, but under our cool exterior, we were all hurt by it. It sucked to have everything you enjoyed dismissed. The media didn’t matter because it just fascinated young girls, which makes you think young girls (like yourself) don’t matter either. I would not trade my residency as a fangirl for anything, except maybe to become Y/N in a real-life fanfiction.