

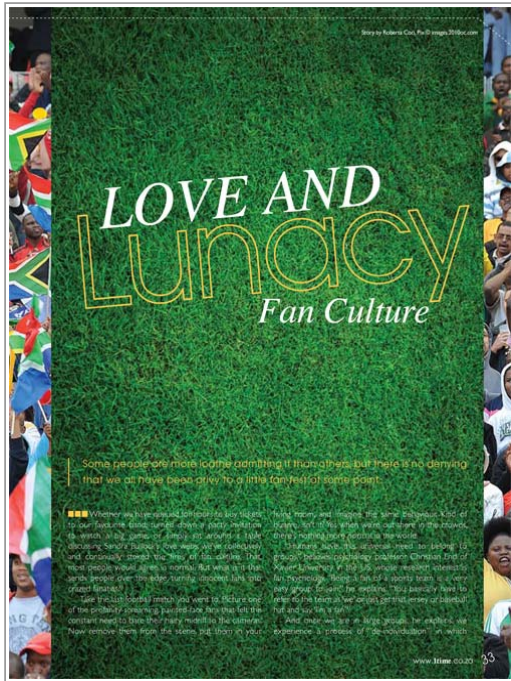


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Love and Lunacy

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Some people are more loathe admitting it than others, but there is no denying that we all have been privy to a little fan-fest at some point.

Whether we have queued for hours to buy tickets to our favourite band; turned down a party invitation to watch a big game; or simply sat around a table discussing Sandra Bullock's love webs, we've collectively and continually stoked the fires of fan culture. That, most people would agree, is normal. But what is it that sends people over the edge, turning innocent fans into crazed fanatics?

Take the last football match you went to. Picture one of the profanity-screaming, painted-face fans that felt the constant need to bare their hairy midriff to the cameras. Now remove them from the scene, put them in your living room, and imagine the same behaviour. Kind of bizarre, isn't it? Yet when we're out there in the crowds, there's nothing more normal in the world.

"Humans have this universal need to belong to groups," believes psychology professor Christian End of Xavier University in the US, whose research interest is fan psychology. "Being a fan of a sports team is a

very easy group to join," he explains. "You basically have to refer to the team as 'we' or just get that jersey or baseball hat and say, 'I'm a fan'."

And once we are in large groups, he explains, we experience a process of "de-individuation", in which individual accountability diminishes. "When we are less accountable we tend to behave in ways we usually wouldn't," he says. "If I am among thousands of celebrating people and I was to throw a beer bottle against a brick wall, you would have a hard time picking me out."

Advances in technology have given us the double-edged sword of being able to belong to a group while sitting alone in our bedroom – a fact that has played no small part in fuelling fan culture. Just think of all the *Avatar* forums. Recently they have become flooded by threads of youngsters battling suicidal thoughts at the idea of never being able to experience the magic of Pandora. Seriously? Unfortunately so.

But at least they keep their woes within cyberspace. Lately, "real-time" celeb stalkers have risen to such a degree that scientists have come up with a name for the phenomenon – Celebrity Worship Syndrome (CWS). UK scientists have said that an unbelievable one in three Britons is affected by this condition, which can range from a totally harmless interest to crazy levels of obsession.

"CWS is homing in on one celebrity to the point where that interest affects your daily life. People who suffer from CWS believe that they have got a special bond with their hero," says Dr John Maltby of Leicester University, who conducted the study with colleagues from a university in Florida.



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The research showed terrifying results. Apparently 16% of Brits are so obsessed by a celebrity that it has an impact on their life, one in 10 has "intense" feelings for a star, and a scary 1 % are "borderline pathological".

"When we asked if they would do something illegal for their celebrity, they said they would – and they were also prepared to die for them," explained Maltby.

Which might (or might not!) explain the thinking behind Jodie Foster's crazed stalker, John Hinckley, who became obsessed with the star after watching her play a child prostitute in *Taxi Driver*. When moving in near to her home and slipping love letters under her door didn't grab her attention, he decided to step things up a bit. And what's the best way to catch your loved one's eye? Why, try to assassinate a president of course. First off, Hinckley tried to get at Jimmy Carter, but that only landed him in prison. In 1981, he got a little closer, firing six shots at the newly elected Ronald Reagan, hitting him with one that ricocheted off the limo, and seriously injuring three other people. Hinckley's explanation? "It was the greatest love offering in the history of the world" and he couldn't understand why Jodi didn't reciprocate his feelings.

That said, while there are countless stories of freaky stalkers, soccer hooligans and musicians' groupies, there is no denying that a little fan-dom can do you good. Psychologists believe that fan identification, both with sports teams and celebs, is psychologically important for many people, especially in our increasingly insular society.

Professor Grieve of Western Kentucky University says: "Identification with a team gives you a kind of social support network that provides a buffer from things like anxiety, loneliness and depression." Shira Gabriel, a psychologist at the University of Buffalo, is convinced that celeb worship can do wonders for a person's self-esteem. "Because people form bonds in their mind with their favourite celebrities, they are able to assimilate the celebrity's characteristics in themselves and feel better about themselves when they think about that celebrity," she says.

She goes on to explain that many people have self-esteem issues and are not able to get what they want out of a real relationship because of a fear of rejection. Which is why, she believes, they can feel a connection with a celebrity and get something positive out of that.

So there you have it – no more hiding your crush on Ange or Becks. Hold your tabloids up high, deck the halls with memorabilia and shout it out loud: "I'm a fan and I'm proud!"

1time FC

1time FC you may ask? What is that? Is it a Football Club? No, it's our Fan Club. 1time FC. We are sports mad here at 1time and everybody knows that South Africans are too. Doesn't matter whether it's football, rugby, cricket or whether you're just being a good sport by being a fan of bonsais, rock bands, stamp collecting or 1time. 1time FC is for you. Think about it – wouldn't it be nice if you could get your plane ticket and your game ticket all wrapped up in one special offer during the sporting season? You and your mates will score every time by getting all the specials before anyone else. Watch this space...

Story by Roberta Coci

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