

Young audiences and fans of celebrities in Portugal

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While young people are not the exclusive audience of celebrity culture, they certainly take up a special place within this commercial media culture and are often evoked as a justification for media producers pursuing more commercial strategies, some of which involve the use of celebrity material. However, that is precisely what often drives young people away from the media (Buckingham, 2000). We propose to analyse the relationship between young people and celebrity culture in Portugal to throw into the spotlight the interaction between global and local cultures while simultaneously, through reaching out beyond the most visible fans, we seek to assess the complex, ambiguous and varying attitudes young audiences display towards celebrity.

Fans in everyday life

Early fan studies strove to counter the then prevailing stereotype of the fan as feminine or asexual, immature or without a social life (Jenson apud Lewis, 1992), particularly by focusing on the spectacular dimensions of fandom. Notably, in 1992, *Textual Poachers* by Henry Jenkins revealed the productive and creative

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capacities of science fiction fan communities. Jenkins, drawing on Bourdieu, argued that the marginalization of fans is a reaction against the fact that they contest the cultural value assigned to media products and thus affront the dominant cultural hierarchy (Jenkins, 1992: 17). John Fiske (apud Lewis, 1992), on the other hand, argued that fans are the most productive type of audiences, who not only engage in semiotic activities, but also reveal interpretive and textual productivity. The interactions ongoing among fans and their activist capacity to influence production were highlighted by both Jenkins and Fiske. Later studies on online fandom (Baym, 2000; Hellekson & Busse, 2006) continued to focus on subcultures and to adopt an optimistic position, highlighting their community-building and creative capacities, as well as the empowerment processes occurring through fandom: fans are seen as “savvy consumers who are able to use popular culture to fulfil their desires and needs, often explicitly rearticulating that culture in unique and empowering ways” (Pullen, 2000: 53).

The excessive optimism of these fan ethnographies, often conducted by researchers who were themselves fans, has been contested by other lines of research that argue for greater attention to the fan experience in everyday contexts (Harrington & Bielby, 1995; Bailey, 2005; Gray, 2003). More recent studies have moved on from looking merely at subcultures to paying attention to the mainstreaming of fandom (Gray, Sandvoss & Harrington, 2007), which is more diffuse, less structured and visible: fan identities interacting with other factors in their lives. Epistemologically, this raises greater challenges as the researcher has to seek out the role and relevance of fandom embedded in everyday life thus moving on from the convenience of the easy to find, eager to talk and already stereotyped online fan communities (Gray, 2003). “Rather than seeing fandom as a tool of empowerment they suggest that the interpretive communities of fandom (as well as individual acts of fan consumption) are embedded in the existing economic, social, and cultural status quo” (Gray, Sandvoss & Harrington, 2007: 6). Moreover, the agency of fans may best be characterized not only by fan relationships with the media in the context of their daily lives, but also by a political economy perspective, that “provides a larger context for understanding fandom as a social and economic phenomenon” (Meehan, 2000: 72). As Elizabeth S. Bird also recognizes, “even those audiences who are the most clearly active, playful, and creative are necessarily constrained by the political economy of the media industries” (2003: 172).

The “growing literature on long-term fans and the more nascent literature on fandom in later life” (Harrington & Bielby, 2010a: [6.1]) also relates to this attempt to see fandom within the context of everyday audience lives. Harrington

and Bielby reflect on soap-opera fans that engage with the genre and specific products for decades (2010b) and conclude the agenda for studying fans should incorporate the ways fan objects are associated with changes in the personal life of fans or how those very objects change. Rachel Moseley, for instance, analysed the reception of Audrey Hepburn by female audiences from the mid-1950s to the mid-1960s, and again when her fame resurged in the 1990s. Not only did changes in feminine culture impact on the contexts of circulation and recirculation of Audrey Hepburn's image but the object of fandom could not be confined merely to one medium as it flows from cinema to magazines, postcards, etcetera. Hence, Moseley contests theories of cinematic identification, stating that "the relationships between audience members and stars are more diverse and indeed nebulous than existing theories of identification [...] can suggest" (2002: 218). Annette Kuhn's approach of the cultural experiences and memories of cinemagoers in the 1930s as they are older, through an ethno-historical and psychological methodology, also proves one point in Harrington and Bielby's argument. While she found that although "few cinemagoers of the 1930s confess to having been cinephiles or devoted fans of particular stars" (2002: 100), most do express nostalgia about that experience and associate it to their childhood and adolescence, to friendships and romance. However, there are a few that show "a near lifelong devotion to a star who is no longer alive", where memory plays a crucial role in "enduring fandom" (ibidem: 208). Thus, Harrington and Bielby, Moseley, and Kuhn draw attention to the dynamics of fans *and* fan objects in themselves, as well as to the relationships themselves.

Moreover, research that focuses on young fandom or memories of such an experience has to break down the linear association between youth and fandom: "This commonsense notion of fandom as an 'all-consuming' stage in the life course that will later be abandoned, or only nostalgically revisited, finds its stereotypes in the 'hysterical' tweenage or teenage female fan of a pop band or male actor" (Hills, 2005: 804, apud Harrington & Bielby, 2010b: 432). Correspondingly, when analysing young people's relationship with celebrity culture, we need to identify the subtle, complex and dynamic ways in which this cultural experience implicit to young audiences takes place in the context of their everyday lives. This has led us to look beyond any strict group of self-declared fans to find other significant interactions between this audience group and these particular, very complex and widespread, cultural objects.

Celebrities, fans and audiences

Celebrity culture is an ever more pervasive part of contemporary societies. However, despite its global flows and reach, there are different historical, cultural, social and economic contexts in which the celebrity capacity is produced and consumed. Most of the literature on celebrity comes from Anglo-Saxon backgrounds (Turner, 2004; Holmes & Redmond, 2006; Marshall, 1997) and is thus not directly transposable to every context.

Moreover, celebrity and stardom have ranked among the interests of researchers from cultural studies, media studies and sociology (Dyer, 1979; Marshall, 2006). However, textual readings of celebrity, focusing on the narrative and discursive construction of particular personalities (Holmes & Redmond, 2006), have been preferred even while some authors attempt a production-reception analysis (Gamson, 1994; Barbas, 2001). For young people, celebrities, particularly teen stars, seem to provide tools for constructing their identity, especially through consumption, whether of cultural products, of the media themselves or of other commodities, through celebrity marketing endorsement. The impact on young people's public identities is less straightforward: while celebrity advocacy or social/political endorsement has been used to engage young people in public issues, some are sceptical about that capacity (Couldry & Markham, 2007), while still others look at the deeper consequences of celebrity associated individualism (Marshall, 1997), instilling neo-liberal ideology among young people (Duits & Vis, 2010).

The articulation of public and private lives that celebrity and star represent, and its reception by audiences, has mostly been analysed from the perspectives of the identification theories of psychology and psychoanalysis (Stacey [1994] apud Marshall, 2006), cultural studies (Couldry apud Redmond & Holmes, 2006) or fan studies (e.g. Soukup, 2007). In the beginning of fan studies, Ehrenreich, Hess and Jacobs saw in the hysterical young female fans of The Beatles "the first and most dramatic uprising of *women's* sexual revolution" (apud Lewis, 1992: 85), an act of defiance by a disempowered group towards the moral order instituted by adults for the right to adolescent feminine sexuality. Again, fandom was seen as providing a cultural space for empowerment.

However, "celebrity studies that empirically include such audience appropriations are much more rare than textual analyses, and have tended to focus predominantly on fans (Gray, 2003), leaving the meaning of celebrities for the oblique and accidental audience relatively unexplored" (Duits & Vis, 2009: 42). We argue that, particularly in the case of celebrity, a trans- and multimedia category

that flows from cultural industry products to media content, be it entertainment or news, editorial or advertising, to the audiences' talk and textual production (Fiske apud Lewis, 1992), this approach would allow us to grasp a greater understanding of the ways media are consumed by audiences in everyday life. While "fan positions and media texts are never stable or final" (Click apud Gray et al., 2007: 314), in the case of youth and celebrity, change is even more accentuated. Moreover, while fan communities themselves are not consensual (Johnson, *ibidem*), fans do not exist in a vacuum and interrelate with other audience groups.

While there is sustained debate around concepts such as publics and audiences (Livingstone, 2005), and categories of audiences (Abercrombie & Longhurst, 2000), we draw inspiration from Janet Wasko's typology of Disney's audience positions. The 'audience archetypes' – fanatics; fans; enthusiastic, admiring or reluctant consumers; cynics; uninterested; resisters; and antagonists – are based on the intensity of the relationship with the cultural object and are dynamic, as there "are often crossovers or merging of types, as well as variations in intensity within categories" (2001: 196). This typology incorporates the idea that, to a greater or lesser extent, we are all audiences of this object even if not at all similar as consumers. Responses to media or cultural objects "are certainly not automatic and mechanical, or universal and ubiquitous, but complex, somewhat diverse, and often contradictory" (*ibidem*: 217-218).

The antagonist category Wasko refers to would correspond to the anti-fans that Jonathan Gray identifies: he argues for a simpler categorization, between fans, nonfans and anti-fans (2003). This, Gray believes, will put the fan into a context and enable a better understanding of the relationships established with other audience positions: "by turning to the fan, we have only moved to the proton" (Gray, 2003: 69). Anti-fans, meanwhile "strongly dislike a given text or genre, considering it inane, stupid, morally bankrupt and/or aesthetic drivel" (*ibidem*: 70), thus confronting fans. Young people's different perspectives about celebrity culture are thus susceptible to revealing their considerations about what they think "a text should be like, of what is a waste of media time and space, of what morality or aesthetics texts should adopt, and of what [they] would like to see others watch or read" (*ibidem*: 73).

How do young people negotiate and position themselves towards this commercial media culture? For some, celebrity is a media object that is *there*, for others it is something they look for. For some, celebrities may be transient objects of admiration, for others the cult around a specific celebrity may endure throughout their lives, even if in different shapes.

Context and methodology

After almost half a century of dictatorship and censorship, Portugal experienced a late commercialisation of the media sector towards the end of the 1980s (Hallin & Mancini, 2004). It was not until 1992 that the first private television broadcaster, SIC, went on air; with a rival, TVI, launched the following year. Significant changes impacted not only on the television sector, but also on the general media sector: new magazines were also launched with new media personalities gaining public prominence. Very much influenced by the Brazilian *telenovela* soap operas during the 1980s, Portugal began to produce fictional content locally while also increasingly engaging with global contents, especially from the United States and the United Kingdom. This semi-peripheral culture, straddling between the more central circuits of media and culture and the more peripheral, such as the former Portuguese colonies, holds a particular relationship between global and local cultures.

What relationship do young Portuguese people born after 1992 and the advent of private sector broadcasting, maintain with celebrity culture? Looking at young people, we do not assume that they are the only audiences and fans of celebrities, but rather attempt to assess the importance of celebrity culture, as a sign of a growing commercial media sector, to this generation.

This article represents one part of an ongoing PhD research project on “Celebrity culture and young people: from consumption to participation” focusing on young Portuguese people aged from 12 to 17. The age limits were established given how this is a period characterised by the negotiating of autonomy when still not old enough to vote. Between October 2009 and May 2010, we interviewed 46 young people, from five different groups: drawn from a youth centre in a poor neighbourhood, a state school, a rurally-located school, a private school and young fans recruited through blogs. This respondent sample composition purportedly sought to understand a diverse group of young peoples’ relationships with celebrity culture without assuming their status as fans and instead trying to understand their different attitudes towards celebrity culture in accordance with different social origins, age and gender.

We held individual interviews, trying to understand the daily lives of respondents, their general media consumption and broad attitudes towards celebrity and fandom. Reactions to particular celebrities were obtained through group interviews for the four schools groups, and with a continuation of individual interviews with fans from blogs. For the former, we ran groups with different age and gender combinations, where we fostered discussions about eight selected

celebrity cases that arose issues such as race, talent, fame as children, private life, consumption (endorsement, advertising) and participation (political endorsement, advocacy), so as to avoid discussing celebrity culture in abstract terms, which would prove overly difficult for this age group. As for fans, they were only interviewed individually, with an extension of the individual interview focusing on their particular idol.

	Youth Centre		Public school		Rural school		Private school		Fans	
12	Estrelinha	Willy	Micaela		Moranguita		Teresa	Pedro		
13	Boneca			James	Carolina		Tijolo	Gil		
14	La Maluca	Cigatrue Daniel	Magui	Mike		Patinhas	Isabel		Isabella (C) Vanessa (MC)	
15	Pequenina Nina			Cascão	Laila	Fat Tony	Mia	Danan	Ashley (C)	Mikley (MC) Jake (C)
16	Daniela	Bota Júnior		Craig	Ana		Raquel	Surfer	Soh Cullen Jonas (C)	
17		Player		Playboy	Brigitte	Salazar	Maria	Thom	Aline (TH) Lilo (TH)	Humanoid (TH)

Table 1 – Distribution of respondents per group, age and gender (feminine on grey; masculine on white). Alias were chosen by young people

Results

Stars in their eyes

Among those most favourable towards celebrity culture, we may group those perceived as fanatics, fans, enthusiastic and admiring consumers. Fanatics are immersed in and dedicate a lot of their time to this culture; they are fans of or follow several celebrities, consume a lot of celebrity media and often engage with fan communities online and/or in fan meetings. They buy the products put out by their celebrities, from CDs and DVDs to merchandising while also making collages and seeking to generate unique signs of their fandom. Soh Cullen Jonas, who lives on a farm and cannot go out on her own, is an avid consumer of blogs

and teen magazines on her favourite celebrities, the Jonas Brothers and the Twilight actors in addition to other Portuguese male actors. She buys CDs and DVDs, books, now has a Twilight key-holder and wears “sunglasses just like one of the Jonas Brothers” and decorates her notebooks with magazine pages.

However, not all fans buy teen or celebrity magazines. Nevertheless, all these fans are very active online, producing or participating in blogs with some identifying the magazines as a waste of money, outdated or sensationalist. Mikley, a very active Miley Cyrus fan, spends most of his free time arranging the layout and updating the blogs and social media he engages in with other fans. He has tried to pressure producers to bring his idol to Portugal: “over the Easter break I decided ‘I’m gonna be at the producers’ doorstep’, I was there for two days waiting for them to tell me something”. A couple of months later, he put together a fan flash mob and attracted media attention over his efforts to bring Miley Cyrus back to Portugal and counter the cultural periphery his country faces.

Many of the fanatics or fans say their lives changed because they started to follow *that* celebrity: while the celebrities chosen often related to some personality feature young fans had already self-identified, that relationship reinforced those values or self-confidence. Aline says: “people would criticise me a lot for being like this: I was different! When the band [Tokio Hotel] appeared, I identified myself with them [...]. They transmit a message very... very, ‘come on, you can do it’, because everything is possible”. Furthermore, not all fans change their style to match their preferred celebrities. Many of them do build up new friendships around their idols, which reinforce their connection with the celebrity; Vanessa or Ashley would like to meet up but lack the autonomy as their parents refuse to grant authorisation.

Consumption is an integral part of fandom. Many fans say they are compelled to buy the products of their idols to prove their fandom and help them prosper: “if we don’t the band wouldn’t survive and would eventually... end up”, says Humanoid, a 17-year-old Tokio Hotel fan. For many, these celebrity related products are very special and they build ‘shrines’ in their bedrooms, as Soh labels it. Isabel, from the private school, says she now watches every film Twilight actor Robert Pattinson is in. Simultaneously, many activities are not mediated by money and derive from creativity and time: Ashley writes fiction about Twilight, as does Isabella, who also draws and reviews the saga’s books; Vanessa makes digital celebrity collages.

Among respondents from schools, we encountered avid consumers of particular celebrities, although with different degrees of consumption, production, identity and sociable engagement with celebrities than the case with fanatics or

fans. Although more recent research has focused on online fandom, we found that television was decisive in young people's stronger or weaker relationship with celebrity culture in Portugal. Younger children, girls and children from the rural school or the youth centre consumed more television partly because they had less parental mediation or their families valued television more as a cultural form and partly because they experience fewer leisure options. Their engagement with celebrity culture is more distracted and superficial, even if simultaneously wide-ranging as they identified most of the celebrities presented in the group interviews, with some knowing about their careers and private lives, whether from gossip or from magazines present in their household environments, and tending to favour one or two personalities.

Given their limited autonomy, especially economic, they have only a few celebrity related items but engage in a deeper relationship with them even if their knowledge about the celebrity personal lives is limited to what they read in magazines and do not actively search for it. Micaela, a 12-year-old, says she has bought clothes like the character in the youth series she used to watch and now likes the new actress but mostly for the role. Boneca, also 12, watches every soap opera by Rita Pereira, enjoys "her music and the things she shows on television, also for the hair". For Micaela, the role is played by the actress; for Boneca, the celebrity's visibility is a continuum from content to advertising.

Some of the respondents return a different type of relationship: they admire a celebrity "for aesthetic or creative reasons" (Wasko, 2001: 207), for physical attraction or identification with the persona (a construction made up of the artistic/public performance and the personality traits, Dyer 1979), while not seeking out details on their personal lives. Boys tend to admire action or comedy actors, as well as musicians (Pasquier 1994), but also to like female actresses for their beauty. Mike, from the public school, is fond of Will Smith "because many movies I like, from superheroes [...] to... true cases a bit... dramatic", but says, laughing, "I don't really like to" find out more about him. Girls may appreciate male and female stars for their beauty. Brigitte, 17, likes Jennifer Lopez "since she was a little girl": "if I happen to hear something about her, ok, if not, I pass". 'Their' celebrity is often not a 'sensation celebrity' and that is precisely why they like him/her: the individual is someone they have been following discretely, but for a long time and on their own and hence do not link this to a more sensationalist media culture.

Growing up, growing in or out of celebrity

Some of the young people we interviewed had a more tangential contact with celebrity: some were subject to peer pressures while others had been fans of celebrities when younger but were now more distanced.

Laila, 15, likes photography and reading and often cares for her younger sister and, by choice, watches mostly news, documentaries and movies on television. Nevertheless, she is reluctantly drawn into celebrity culture, specifically celebrity television programs, “because of her circle of friends, because otherwise I would run out of subjects to talk with them and so it’s better... I don’t really care much but I watch them”. James also says he watches the leading youth series in which most young Portuguese celebrities begin their careers, “just to try to keep up with what they [his friends] say”. These respondents thus display conformism to the general culture among peers or the school environment (Pasquier, 2005). Gossip about celebrities among peers effectively works as pressure to follow celebrity culture even if integration may happen through family culture: Magui explains how she takes a look at television programs and the celebrity magazines her mother usually buys “when she has nothing else to do”. In part, these might also be defenses against what they regard as a devalued culture but these respondents also express a general anti-celebrity attitude and adhere to it for the sake of another aim.

Other respondents, especially girls, seem to have grown out of celebrity culture. They used to be fans of a particular celebrity or to consume celebrity media, like teen magazines, when around 12 to 14 years old but now experience it as repetitive and have become critical about it. Pequenina, now 15, was a Tokio Hotel fan for three years: “I still follow them, but it is not as much as it was before, ‘oh, a magazine, wait, I have to buy it t’ crop’ and that!”. She now thinks her obsession with celebrity media conditioned her taste for clothes and has tried to fight against it; she still consumes celebrity but is critical about its authenticity. This is different to Ana, from the rural school, who may have grown out of her admiration for Zac Efron, a Disney teen star, but actually only moved on from teen to television magazines and television celebrity shows.

A complication of Wasko’s typology is posed by Teresa, 12, whose case represents the opposite of Pequenina’s: she has an interest in teen magazines, “because they give us information about our stars, that we like and also sometimes some info that... well, as my mother says, ‘it’s a nonsense magazine’”. Teresa’s mother, a school librarian, opposes her interest in celebrity media, demonstrating how her (young) audience relationship with celebrity is nevertheless still negotiated with others.

They're famous, so what?

A group more contrary to celebrity culture expressed disinterest, contestation and resistance. Although there were hints of criticism about celebrity culture even among fans, especially regarding issues of privacy, here we encountered much more distance and negativity towards celebrity culture, mostly from boys, and particularly from either older respondents or those from the private school.

Surfer, a 16 year-old boy, spends most of his time surfing, out with friends or with his brother and hence barely watches television and the ongoing celebrity culture is foreign to him. He is critical about the visibility of celebrity stories in the news: "I don't think it makes much sense to talk so much, cause there are lots of people dying in car crashes everyday and there's no news about them!" In addition, Nina, a 15 year-old girl from the youth centre, was very assertive in contesting the celebrity stories that brought public issues into the media's glare. She said she and her friends had talked about the assault of Rihanna in early 2009, but concluded: "I think it's normal, people only think it's different cause she's famous and so is he, but there are a lot of women suffering from violence and are not as talked about as she was..." Although she is very much engaged in a television culture, she mostly enjoys fiction (soap operas) and does not ascribe social importance to celebrities outside that domain.

They contest the weight attributed to celebrities and their dominance in youth culture: Fat Tony states "[young] people don't think for themselves. They follow that and maybe also fashion styles, music, and don't try to get to know other things". Living in a rural community, he lacks the image that celebrities always have the paparazzi around them and thinks those who appear in celebrity media do so intentionally and is correspondingly sceptical about all of this culture. Furthermore, Playboy, 17, also associates celebrity culture with female audiences, and with female celebrities who are "pretty... [and] don't contribute at all to our society". However, he struggles with setting out his own construction of 'fan' and 'celebrity' to express how he feels about Cristiano Ronaldo: he went to the same football school and played in the same position for 11 years as a young athlete, and concludes: "to say that I am his fan maybe looks childish, but no, it was really something that was with me through the years".

Conclusions

Through this analysis of young people's relationships with celebrity culture, looking at audience positions rather than merely looking at fans, we sought to relate fandom with other, more invisible and diffuse ways of relating to a media and cultural object. The positions and negotiations young people take contribute to the social meaning of celebrity in their group and what they regard as a valid youth culture. The map of these audiences is complex and dynamic, as it evolved and evolves over time in terms of both young audiences and celebrity stories and culture as it results from interactions between the fringes of young people's lives.

If families and social origin seem to hold influence among young people's position regarding celebrity culture, within the framework of popular culture, as Bourdieu (1979) would argue, gender (Pasquier, 2005) and age seem equally relevant factors to understanding patterns within this group. Younger children, girls and young people from more disadvantaged families seem more exposed to celebrity culture, especially through television, but their relationship is often more superficial and less engaged. They also pay more attention to local celebrity culture than do other more distanced groups. Fans have a relationship that is more elective and thus get involved in more activities around their idols.

However, participation and production cannot be morally valued: if those are criteria for fandom, can we exclude young people that do not have enough access or skills to engage in productive activities or establish new social relations around their object of fandom? The rhetoric of online fandom has been fascinated with the productive capacities of the new media, but not only are there significant relationships with celebrities outside online media, but also these have to be read against the social and economic status of these groups. The different relationships we were able to identify, while neither definite nor automatic, are crucial to understanding the cultural value of celebrity among this group and additionally, we hope, to put the cultural participation of fans in a context.

The cultural value of celebrities is thus not constructed merely by the media and the output of the cultural industries in a society where the media have only been commercialized fairly recently, but also and mostly by the audiences, including young audiences, in which fans have to find a place. We hope to have shown how celebrity studies and audience/fan studies would benefit from taking a wider stance at the intersection of the fields. Future lines of research include a focus on the relationship with national celebrity culture; and work with younger children, aged between 8 and 12, in order to seek to assess other forms of audiencehood and fandom.

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