

“THE BOOK OF STARS”: Understanding a Consumer’s Fan Relationship with a Film Actress Through a Narrative Transportation Approach

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ABSTRACT

Although consumers have always been fascinated by the works and private lives of film stars, scant attention has been paid as to how the relationship between fans and film actors expresses itself in everyday consumer behaviour. This paper sets therefore out to explore celebrity fandom as a holistic lived experience from an individual fan’s insider point of view. Using subjective personal introspection, the lead author provides insights into his own private everyday lived fan relationship with the actress Jena Malone. The findings indicate that the fan engages with the film star’s public persona through a personal intertextual reading of “reliable” media texts, which can even result in a feeling of “knowing” the celebrity like a personal friend—and even “love.”

Acknowledgements

The lead author would like to thank in particular Ms. Debbie Malone for her encouragement, patience and all the invaluable insights that she has provided for this research. Further thanks go to Ms. Jena Malone for inspiring the lead author (though obviously without her knowing) to this research and paper, which has been funded by the Waterford Crystal Ph.D. Scholarship.

INTRODUCTION

Since the dawn of the Hollywood star system in the early 1920s, consumers have always been fascinated by the works and private lives of film stars and any other celebrities (Barbas 2001; Dyer 1998; McDonald 2000). Indeed, the public demand for celebrities has grown so strong these days that film actors, directors, musicians, athletes, novelists and models have without doubt become an essential part of our everyday culture (Gabler 1998; Geraghty 2000; Turner 2004) and contemporary market economy (Thomson 2006). Surely, most people tend to have merely a fleeting interest in celebrities per se and enjoy primarily the exchange of gossip with other like-minded individuals (Turner 2004). But some consumers experience a significantly more intensive level of interest and admiration for an individual celebrity and, subsequently, become what are commonly known as fans (Leets, de Becker and Giles 1995; O’Guinn 1991; Smith, Fisher and Cole 2007) or celebrity worshippers (McCutcheon et al. 2003). And, as it happens, I’m one of them. Ever since I bought by chance the DVD of the indie-film *Saved!* (US 2004) back in April 2005, I have been the devoted fan of the young, attractive and very talented actress Jena Malone, who features primarily in lesser known, yet much more interesting and challenging indie-films such as *Donnie Darko* (US 2001), *The United States of Leland* (US 2003), *Four Last Songs* (UK 2007), *Into the Wild* (US 2007), *The Ruins* (US 2008) and *The Messenger* (US 2009). But what is it exactly that attracts an ordinary consumer like me to become and remain the devoted fan of a film actress? What does the lived experience of being the fan of a film actress (or any other celebrity for that matter) mean for the individual consumer? And how does celebrity fandom express itself in everyday consumer behaviour?

Because these are very interesting questions, it is quite surprising that little research has so far sought to address them. In order to fill this knowledge gap, the current study provides some insider insights into a consumer’s holistic everyday lived fan experiences with one’s admired celebrity from an existential-phenomenological

perspective (Merleau-Ponty 1962; Thompson 1997). Using subjective personal introspection (Brown 1998; Gould 2008; Holbrook 1995), I describe and examine hereby my own private lived consumption experiences of becoming the fan of the film actress Jena Malone back in 2005. In doing so, this research is not only looking for any evidences that either support, question or even contradict previously held assumptions about fandom, but also draws on narrative transportation theory to explain a fan’s experienced relationship with one’s admired celebrity as an immersion into a “melodramatic narrative.”

THE DANGEROUS LIVES OF CELEBRITY FANS

While a growing interdisciplinary body of literature has been investigating in particular sports and media fans, it still lacks a coherent understanding of what actually constitutes fandom in the first place. In fact, the interpretation of what a fan is seems often to be highly dependent on the underlying agenda of the researcher studying the phenomenon (Smith et al. 2007). What is clear, though, is that both academic literature and popular media have placed fans consistently on the receiving end of negative stereotyping, ridicule and bad press (Barbas 2001; Jenson 1992). As desired, fans are conceptualised either as uneducated, gullible and vulnerable “numbs,” who are easily manipulated by the dangerous and controlling popular mass culture (Boorstin 2006; Fiske 1992; Gabler 1998; Schickel 1985), or as subversive and creative rebels against the corporate establishment, who poach and utilise commercial media texts to create new textual products (Barbas 2001; Jenkins 1992; Turner 2004). Some authors portrayed fans as members of neo-religious cults, who worship celebrities like gods through shared rituals and the sacralisation of associated items within like-minded communities (Kozinets 1997; O’Guinn 1991). Others described them as geeks and alienated, lonely social misfits, who experience for various reasons deficits in their social skills and networks (Horton and Wohl 1956). While often being intelligent, well-educated and highly successful at work or school, these consumers feel in their private lives lonely, rejected and stigmatised especially by those others, who may be less intelligent and creative, but more privileged in terms of social skills, status and/or physical attractiveness (Kozinets 2001). Fandom would provide a means of compensation and social interaction with similarly isolated individuals. In following Munsterberg’s (1916) legacy, however, some social psychologists have recently set out on a quest to confirm sensationalist stereotypes in the popular media by portraying fans as cognitively inflexible, gullible and dull individuals (McCutcheon et al. 2003) or, even worse, as delusional, pathological-obsessive stalkers (McCutcheon et al. 2006).

In light of these devastating views of fans, admitting to one’s infatuation with a film actress and risking to be branded with one of the common stereotypes seems to be an unwise move. But maybe there is much more to a consumer’s personal fan relationship with a celebrity than previous research have uncovered so far. Indeed, despite their different perspectives, all those studies have essentially two main things in common. Firstly, previous research studied only certain, more “extreme” subgroups of fans on special occasions such as Star Trek conventions, fan-club meetings or fan-blogs (Jenkins 1992; Kozinets 1997; O’Guinn 1991) while paying scant attention to the ordinary everyday lived experiences of the “normal” fan. Secondly, the fandom literature has focused either

on the social dynamics and symbolic relationships that consumers form with other fans within their respective consumption subcultures (Kozinets 2001; Richardson 2004) or on the mental well-being of celebrity worshippers (Leets et al. 1995; McCutcheon et al. 2003, 2006) instead of exploring the nature of fans' personal relationships with their subject of admiration. Hence, a narrative transportation approach may provide some alternative explanations to fill the literature gap and to reconceptualise our understanding of fans. Narrative transportation theory (Gerrig 1993; Green and Brock 2000) was developed to understand the phenomenon of "getting lost in a book," where the reader is so absorbed in a story that s/he becomes temporarily unaware of one's surroundings. Gerrig (1993) described the narrative transportation experience as a psychological process, whereby a consumer ventures mentally to a narrative world by some means of transportation (i.e. the text) and by performing certain actions such as imagining the story, characters and sceneries. In doing so, the reader travels some distance away from one's daily life, which even becomes temporarily inaccessible, and after some time returns back home again—though "somewhat changed" by the experience of the journey (Green, Brock and Kaufman 2004). In allowing the consumer to immerse oneself into exciting narrative worlds, where one could experience a different self and engage with fictional characters like real friends, the narrative transportation process provides the consumer with a temporary means of escape (Batat and Wohlfeil 2009).

But how can drawing on narrative transportation theory explain a consumer's fan relationship with a film actor/actress? After all, the theory was initially aimed at understanding the mental activities of reading a book, while film actors are living people. The rationale behind the proposed approach, however, becomes clear when consulting the stardom literature. Rather than as real human beings, Dyer (1998), Geraghty (2000) or Turner (2004) viewed film stars essentially as living textual images or human brands, whose on- and off-screen persona, personal identity and reflected values are carefully designed ("authored"), positioned and managed in the media by talent agencies (or previously by the Hollywood studios) to suit specific market needs (Thomson 2006). Thus, the consumer's interest in the admired celebrity can be interpreted as a kind of "losing" oneself into the factual melodramatic narrative (Argo, Zhui and Dahl 2008) that is the film star's public life as presented by various media texts that may include film characters, interviews, articles and gossip. In a study on film consumption, Wohlfeil and Whelan (2008) found that the personal engagement with the melodramatic story and its characters is further enhanced through "out-of-text intertextuality" (Hirschman 2000) by which the consumer connects them to one's own private life experiences. Similarly, the fan may sympathise (= feel with the film star as an observer), empathise (= share the film star's feelings due to similar personal experiences) or even identify (= feel the film star's feelings as one's own) with the admired celebrity like a media character (Cohen 2001; Wohlfeil and Whelan 2008). After all, it is extremely unlikely that we would ever get to know the real, private person behind the film star's public image in the media (Dyer 1998).

INTO THE WILD (OR METHODOLOGY)

In order to gain some truly holistic insights into a consumer's personal everyday lived fan relationship with one's favourite film star, the consumer should be given a voice (Stern 1998) by focusing from an insider perspective (Smith et al. 2007) on the consumer experience in the way it presents itself to consciousness (Merleau-Ponty 1962; Thompson 1997). Thus, I use a controversial research method known as subjective personal introspection (SPI), which was introduced to consumer research by Holbrook (1995) over 20

years ago and advanced in particular by Gould (1993) and Brown (1998). In its purest form, SPI is an "extreme form of participant observation that focuses on impressionistic narrative accounts of the writer's own private consumption experiences" (Holbrook 2005: 45), where the researcher is also the sole informant. One of the major advantages of this research method is that it allows the researcher for an unlimited 24-hour access to an insider's everyday lived experiences with the researched phenomenon without having to wrestle with ethical concerns regarding the informants' privacy (Brown 1998). Moreover, SPI enables the researcher to explore the subjective nature of human feelings, dreams, sensations and streams of consciousness related to consumption (Gould 2008) in the very way they are experienced by the individual, but remain inaccessible through traditional scientific or qualitative research methods. Hence, for this study, I provide some introspective insights into my own private lived consumption experiences as a devoted fan of the film actress Jena Malone after having collected three types of introspective data.

My lived fan experiences in the period from April to September 2005 were obtained as retrospective data in a 36,000-words essay, which was written in September 2005 to describe how I became a Jena Malone fan. My everyday lived experiences as a Jena Malone fan from 11th September 2005 to 31st December 2006 were then collected as contemporaneous data while they occurred in real time to ensure a high degree of 'data accuracy' (Wallendorf and Brucks 1993). Contemporaneous introspective data field the unique advantage of providing a large pool of emotional data that would be inaccessible to any other research method that is based on retrospective recall or pure observation and, thus, inevitably lost forever (Wohlfeil and Whelan 2008). To ensure data accessibility for external review, I have recorded the data systematically, unfiltered and on the spot in a specifically assigned diary (Patterson 2005). In total, I obtained more than 150,000 hand-written words as raw contemporaneous data aided by 50 photographs for a thorough hermeneutic part-to-whole analysis (Thompson 1997). The entire transcript was read to gain a first sense of the overall picture. Due to early impressions, the data were broken into manageable, logically coherent chunks to be examined individually. Emerging key themes were then put into the context of each other and the overall consumer narrative. As the recorded data represented a 'plotless' sequence of instances, they were summarised in an extensive narrative that reflects the chronological order of events and stays true to the emotional consumption experiences and feelings. Due to the limited space, the following essay provides a brief snapshot of this consumer narrative with a focus on some interesting insights that have emerged iteratively from the introspective data recorded in 2005. The reader may be reminded that the emphasis is placed less on the recollection of factual behaviour but more on the emotional daily lived experiences (i.e. private feelings, thoughts, fantasies and daydreams) that enhanced or derived from the consumer's fan relationship.

CONFESSIONS OF A JENA MALONE FAN (AN INTROSPECTIVE ESSAY)

"As I said earlier, it all started back in April 2005, when I bought by chance the indie-film *Saved!* (US 2004) in a 3-DVDs-for-£20 sale. I can't really explain why, but I simply had this sudden urge creeping up in me that I had to own this particular film. And it has become one of my favourite films ever since! Moreover, from the very first moment I watched it, I was absolutely blown away by Jena Malone's acting performance in portraying the lead character Mary Cummings - a good Christian girl who tries to save her boyfriend from being gay by sacrificing her virginity, but gets pregnant as a

result and is, subsequently, ostracised exactly by those, who preach the Christian values of love, tolerance and forgiveness. Though I have to admit that I was very attracted to her beautiful eyes, her charming smile and her natural beauty, I was also totally captivated by her believable, natural acting performance and simply had to watch the DVD at once for a second time. But this time, I switched to the commentary of the leading actresses Jena Malone and Mandy Moore. While I listened to Jena Malone explaining how she developed her character within the context of particular film scenes, I became even more fascinated by her. Not only is Jena Malone an extremely good actress and very pretty, but she also seems to be an exceptionally interesting, smart and surprisingly mature young woman. Surely, there is always the danger of mistaking the actress with her character—unless you have seen her in a variety of other roles. For me, a really good actress is therefore one, who makes each of her characters appear to be believably 'real' and who manages through her performance that you enjoy even those films that you would have never watched otherwise.

Because only a few actors/actresses would meet these criteria, I wanted - no I needed - to find out more about Jena Malone as a person and actress as well as to watch other films with her. Hence, I started to browse the Internet for any information that I could get my hands on. Only, I could hardly find any at all! While there are hundreds of sites and articles for virtually every single talented and more often untalented (wannabe) celebrity on Earth, disappointingly little was available on Jena Malone. Nonetheless, I discovered on IMDb that Jena Malone, at the age of 20 back then, had already featured in 20 films, 3 TV soap guest roles and one audio recording of a theatre play.¹ Armed with this list, I started over the next weeks to buy the DVDs of *Stepmom* (US 1998), *Cheaters* (US 2000), *The Dangerous Lives of Altar Boys* (US 2001), *Donnie Darko* (US 2001) and *Life as a House* (US 2001). As I could relate to each of her characters empathetically as if they were 'real' people, each of her films that I watched convinced me more and more of her exceptional talent as an actress and increased an inherent desire in me to acquire ALL her films for my private film collection. But that was easier said than done, when I soon discovered that most of her films have only been released in the US as Region 1 DVDs, but not as European Region 2 DVDs. While in the past this would have been the end of my efforts, this time I started to look desperately for suitable alternatives like VHS videotapes or VCDs until I could replace them with a more suitable DVD release. Finally, I purchased an external DVD drive for my laptop, which I locked then into Region 1 to watch those US DVDs that I bought on Amazon.com or eBay to satisfy my hunger for her films. All the time, however, I also felt in me this strong desire to learn more about the 'genuine' private person Jena Malone - something I have never really experienced in this form before. Thus, when I discovered Rommelmann's (2000) LA Weekly article, I was (and still am) absolutely captivated by what I learned about Jena Malone's personal background and my admiration for her increased significantly.

Jena Malone was born on 21-11-1984 in Sparks, Nevada, as the unplanned result of a one-night stand and spent most of her childhood growing up in the poverty of trailer parks. With her single-mother Debbie being a struggling actress in an amateur theatre, Jena wanted to be a performer from early on and responded as a 10-year old to the ad of an acting school, which turned out to be a fraud. Nonetheless, Jena caught the eyes of both Beverly Strong,

who signed her on the spot to become her personal manager, and Anjelica Houston, who cast Jena for the title character in her directorial debut *Bastard Out of Carolina* (US 1996). Anjelica Houston also introduced Jena and her mother to Toni Howard, an influential agent specialised in child actors, who signed her immediately for International Creative Management. But what really impressed me most was that, even as an 11-year old, Jena preferred (to her manager's frustration) to feature primarily in those film projects that were dear to her heart rather than in commercially promising blockbusters. Thus, she turned down roles in *Air Force One* and *The Parent Trap* (Lindsay Lohan got the part instead) to play the lead characters in *Bastard Out of Carolina* (US 1996), *Hope* (US 1997) and *Ellen Foster* (US 1997), for which Jena received critical acclaim, some film awards and a Golden Globe nomination. Yet, life in Hollywood didn't turn out to be that glamorous for Jena and her mother. As Debbie was required by law to be present on set at all times, she couldn't work herself and Jena became the family's sole breadwinner. It also meant that Jena received only home-schooling—though concluding from her interviews, she seems to be very intelligent, very well read and really knowledgeable. But worst of all, after approx. 30% of her gross earnings were already deducted as fees for her manager, agency, accountant, lawyers, etc., her full income was taxed at 45%, although film production companies were required by Coogan's law to pay 30% of a child actor's salaries into blocked trusts, which only become accessible at the actor's 18th birthday (Rommelmann 2000). This meant that Jena was rarely left with more than 7% of her earnings to live on.

When finally faced with a bill of \$150,000 in back taxes and near bankruptcy, Jena filed, aged 14, for legal emancipation from her mother, which was granted at her 15th birthday, in order to work legally like an adult in the film industry and to access her blocked trusts to pay off her debts. Since then, she is managing her own career without the interference and approval from others (Calhoun 2003; Rommelmann 2000). This also included firing her manager Beverly Strong and any other stakeholders, who had profited from her in the past, as well as switching to United Talent Agency, who offered much more favourable terms and absolute creative freedom. Furthermore, Jena focused on portraying complex young female characters with real problems in challenging and artistically creative independent film productions rather than on fulfilling some ominous stereotypes in those typical teen-comedies (Lyon 2008; Miller 2006). That's why she also refuses to do glamour photo shoots for fashion or celebrity magazines that would 'present girls with false beauty ideals they can hardly fulfil and only make them feel inadequate' (Rems 2004). In contrast to many other young film actors, she shunned the glamorous LA party life as well by moving back to Lake Tahoe, where she felt happy as a child (Calhoun 2003; Lyon 2008). To me, this explains maybe why Jena Malone managed the transition from child actress to a serious young adult actress so effortlessly without losing her integrity, while so many other former child actors like her contemporary Lindsay Lohan struggled or even failed in their careers. I was really impressed by her life story and how she managed, despite her young age and the economic as well as personal pressure she was under, to remain true to herself. I felt, somehow, inspired by her.

Back in Germany, I grew up as one of those latch-key kids in a disadvantaged working-class neighbourhood. Fortunately, my parents were among the very few, who were steadily employed and earned a small, but regular income that enabled us to move to a slightly better neighbourhood when I was 12. Because films have always provided me with a mental escape, being an actor was a passion of mine from early on as well. I even joined the drama society in school, which was pretty much the best experience of

¹By autumn 2009, Jena Malone, now aged 25, has already featured in 31 films, 5 TV soap guest roles, 2 film voice-overs, one audio recording of a theatre play and starred in two Off-Broadway plays in 2006 and 2009.

PHOTO 1

My "Treasure" of Hand-Signed Autographs Addressed to Me



my entire schooldays. Yet, in contrast to Jena Malone, I lacked her determination to follow my dreams. Moreover, due to my poor grades, my parents insisted that I had to focus only on relevant 'practical' subjects and made me quit again. To be fair, I wasn't probably talented enough to succeed as an actor anyway. Still, there has always been this inner feeling of something's missing... After working a few years in sports retailing, the film *Dead Poets Society* finally inspired me to go to university and, eventually, become a lecturer instead. Since learning about Jena Malone's personal life story, I have the deepest respect for her and how she succeeded against all the odds in doing what she wanted to do. She is not only extremely talented, but also managed to resist all the temptations of glamour, party-life and the commercial exploitation of the Hollywood machinery without losing her personal integrity. As I said, quite an astonishing achievement for a young woman from a poor social background! And, by October 2005, I had become so fascinated by Jena Malone that I simply wanted to hear and read more about her in order to understand her thoughts and feelings as a private person. But because she doesn't fit or fulfil the typical celebrity life-style image of glamour and scandal, the media (especially in Europe) seem largely to ignore her and meaningful articles are unfortunately rare.

Nevertheless, despite the scarcity of meaningful information in the media, I still managed to acquire a few cultural magazines with really interesting interviews with or articles about Jena Malone on eBay (i.e. Calhoun 2003; Lyon 2008; Miller 2006; Rems 2004) by

paying often more than the actual retail price for them. But for me, they are totally worth it! And when *Pride & Prejudice* (UK 2005) was released in Irish cinemas, my excitement was further enhanced by the opportunity to watch Jena Malone for the first time on the big screen. At the same time, I experienced in addition to my already strong admiration for her artistic work also a growing emotional attachment to Jena as an attractive woman. In fact, I really fancy her as the normal, intelligent and interesting woman I perceive her to be with all her positive and negative qualities. Indeed, I would love to meet and go out on a date with her. But as it is highly unlikely for that ever to happen, I began instead to look for some personalised items of Jena Malone, such as original hand-signed photos, that would give her a kind of tangible presence in my life. When Jena Malone gave her Broadway debut in *Doubt* (US 2006), I came into contact with a professional autograph trader, who offered me to get any photo image that I would email him signed by her in person. A few days later, he asked me whether I would like it if Jena would dedicate them to me personally. Was he kidding me? If that's possible, I obviously would love that! And, indeed, he managed that Jena signed a total of 21 photos with a personal dedication to me (Photo 1), which have become my most-valued treasures ever since, because they truly symbolise her 'physical' presence in my life. Moreover, as Jena Malone is always on my mind, so to speak, I must admit that she also occupies a certain space in my everyday life that goes beyond the mere acquisition of associated items and

films. But that's a different story that would go beyond the limited scope of this paper."

HOPE (OR DISCUSSION)

Although the introspective essay only covered the first 9 months of my personal Jena Malone fan relationship, I will now discuss one particularly interesting insight that emerged iteratively from the data by drawing on narrative transportation theory (Gerrig 1993; Green et al. 2004). While previous studies conceptualised fandom mainly as the social interaction between like-minded individuals within their respective consumption subcultures (Jenkins 1992; Kozinets 1997, 2001; Richardson 2004), the introspective data clearly show that my own personal fan experiences and any subsequent consumption practices focused exclusively on my emotional attachment to Jena Malone herself and on my admiration to her artistic work as an actress. In fact, during the entire 16 months of contemporary self-observation, I have never shown any intentions to share my intimate admiration for her with other fans either online or in person, but preferred to enjoy it just by myself instead. Obviously, the only exception would be Jena Malone herself - but that's quite a different story and unlikely ever to happen (Barbas 2001). Now, it can be argued that the main reason as to why my observed fan experiences revolved solely around the personal relationship with the film actress rather than the participation in an ominous fan community is that I would actually be "in love with her" - which may not be so untrue. After all, sexual attraction surely played a role in capturing my initial interest in Jena Malone and, in some way, continues doing so as part of an ongoing romantic infatuation. But how can you actually "love" somebody you don't know, have never even met in person and most likely never will? Drawing on narrative transportation theory would provide in particular some insights into this intimate - but in the literature largely neglected - aspect of fandom.

There is strong evidence in the presented introspective data that my continuing admiration for Jena Malone derived from my personal engagement with her artistic work as an actress as much as with her private persona. However, as I'm unlikely to ever get to know Jena Malone personally, my impression of her personality is essentially an intertextual reading of what I, as a consumer, perceive to be relevant and 'reliable' media texts such as her TV and print media interviews, her personal websites and detailed articles in better magazines (Barbas 2001; Dyer 1998; Geraghty 2000). But while Dyer's (1998) stardom theory suggested that a consumer's image of a film star would be static and externally managed by the media, the introspective data actually indicate that it is constantly evolving within the consumer's mind; similar to the images we have of those people we regularly encounter in our everyday lives. The consumer internalises the celebrity's public persona psychically within oneself, loads it with personal thoughts, feelings, fantasies and meanings and, then, projects this personal impression back onto the film actress. This would explain why my personal impression of Jena Malone's personality emphasised especially those aspects of her character and personal life-style that resonate strongly with my own private life experiences, ideals, dreams and desires and, hence, strengthen my emotional attachment to her as a "genuine person." This continuous process of introjection and projection (Gould 1993) allows thereby for the feeling of "knowing" the film actress like a friend, whose career and life choices are then followed empathetically as if s/he is a media character in an ongoing melodramatic narrative (Argo et al. 2008). For instance, I empathised genuinely with Jena Malone in how she handled so maturely all the problems she had to face even at such a young age and admired how she developed into such a smart, nice and interesting personality without ever losing her personal integrity.

The current stardom literature is thereby also contradicted with

regard to how consumers (and especially fans) relate to film stars. In his seminal work *Stars*, Dyer (1998) viewed film stars as systems of semiotic images that personify the society's cultural ideals of success, glamour, the extraordinary and even the divine. Thus, in drawing on selected examples from the Hollywood studio era of the 1920s to early-1950s, Dyer theorised that fans would admire film stars as "flawless, superior" human beings, who display a consistent personal image both on - and off-screen through the portrayal of mainly those film characters that seem to mirror their own "true" personality and life-style in real life (Barbas 2001; Geraghty 2000). My admiration for Jena Malone, however, results from her ability and flexibility as an actress to portray a diversity of characters that often differ significantly from her off-screen persona as much as from each other. But more importantly, my emotional attachment to Jena Malone derived actually from viewing her as a "normal" girl with all her own personal character strengths and weaknesses rather than as a semiotic signifier of some cultural ideal. This means that I adore her primarily as an interesting, smart, natural, beautiful and talented young woman, who also has her flaws, some "bad habits" and makes mistakes from time to time - just like you, me and anybody else. My feelings of empathy and infatuation for Jena Malone are even further enhanced by engaging in out-of-text intertextuality (Hirschman 2000; Wohlfeil and Whelan 2008), whereby I linked her personal life-story with my very own private life experiences to an extent where I even partially identified with her (Cohen 2001). This becomes particularly evident in my reading of Rommelmann's (2000) article, when I compare both our upbringing within disadvantaged social backgrounds and admire her courage and determination in following her dreams, while I failed to do the same even under less severe circumstances.

THE RUINS (OR CONCLUSION)

In heeding Smith et al.'s (2007) call, this introspective research studied celebrity fandom from an "insider" perspective in order to explore the nature of consumers' emotional attachment to their favourite celebrity. The main finding that emerged iteratively from the introspective data is that a consumer's fan relationship revolved primarily around one's personal engagement with the celebrity's artistic work and public persona, whereby the latter is essentially the fan's personal intertextual reading of what s/he perceives to be relevant and "reliable" media texts. Drawing on narrative transportation theory can hereby explain in particular how and why fans often develop and experience the feeling of "knowing" the celebrity personally, incl. his/her private thoughts, feelings, personality and way of life, despite having never even met the real person. This experienced "bond of emotional closeness" can at times be strong enough to elicit within the consumer a feeling of "personal friendship" or, in some way, even a feeling of "love" towards the admired celebrity. Moreover, it would also provide an explanation as to why fans sometimes feel enormously disappointed, when their most desired dream of actually meeting the adored celebrity in person comes true, because the celebrity turns out to be a different person in private life or just can't live up to the (maybe unrealistic) imaginary person that they have created in their mind (Gross 2005). Of course, I don't suggest that the presented introspective data and the proposed interpretations could be generalised. Instead of imposing only my own interpretations on you as the reader, I would like to encourage you to derive your own understanding of a consumer's fan relationship with one's admired celebrity through your personal engagement with the presented consumer narrative (Gould 1993; 2008; Holbrook 1995; 2005) and connect it to your own private life experiences.

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