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Is Fangirling a Religion?

A few years ago, I probably would have self-righteously considered myself a more religiously devoted person than most other people my age. Although I never went to church, I prayed every night before I went to bed and was confident that God would never let me down. Now, however, I've found myself becoming more skeptical about God and about religion altogether.

I haven't become totally disillusioned, but I rarely pray anymore and am finding it increasingly difficult to maintain a strong relationship with God. What's more, it is becoming harder for me to find the time and energy to pray, as silly as that may sound. Graduation is looming closer with every passing day, and since I've started grade twelve it seems that when I am not doing homework, I'm spending every spare minute online searching for scholarships or researching the seemingly endless list of universities and colleges that are available in my province alone. School is taking over my life, and my stress levels are higher than they have ever been. This is saying a lot, as anyone who knows me well will tell you that I am an extremely high-strung, anxious person even when I'm *not* swamped with schoolwork.

Some people decide to pray to God or go to church in order to relieve stress. As someone who is concerned about the strength of their faith, praying in order to become calmer about school would probably be the logical answer to my problem. As I, however, am an easily distracted person, I have turned to a much more tempting and admittedly enjoyable form of relaxation – watching Youtube videos and reading fanfiction.

Ever since I was twelve years old, the world of fanfiction and “shipping” has greatly intrigued me. Just the other day I was fondly reminiscing about the days of my youth (that is, five years ago) when I would read Total Drama Island and Pokémon fanfiction for hours on end during the summer. I would watch fan-made videos featuring fictitious television couples and become completely invested in their supposed relationships. Even though I rarely take the time to read fanfiction any more, my fascination with fictional television characters and their tumultuous, dramatic love lives has only increased since I was introduced to Tumblr and other fansites a couple of years ago.

What may seem insignificant to the casual television watcher has the ability to incite extreme emotion within me. For example, when Kurt and Blaine from *Glee* (yes I watch *Glee* - please don't kill me or god forbid, slushie me) finally had their first kiss in season two, I freaked out. No really, I freaked out. Maybe my reaction wasn't as film-worthy as some of the reactions to the

kiss that I've seen posted on Youtube, but be rest assured that I was screaming and flailing with the utmost amount of glee. (Pun most certainly intended)

Now if I've learned anything from Tumblr, it's that I am definitely not the only one in the world reacting to what they see on television in extreme ways. In fact, if I had to describe Tumblr in a few words, I would say that it is a sort gathering place for anyone who has ever been obsessed with anything. It certainly gives me comfort to know that other people share my opinions and can't help but flail uncontrollably whenever they see their favourite couple kiss on TV – going on Tumblr makes me feel that there's a possibility that I'm *not* completely insane. Even so, something still bothers me.

Over the past few months I've begun to consider the possibility that the only things that really excite or interest me are the relationships I see on television. Don't get me wrong – I haven't become completely indifferent about what happens in my everyday life; when one of my friends accomplishes something great, I am completely supportive of her. When my cousin got a new boyfriend after being in an unhealthy relationship for years, I was incredibly happy for her. I've realized, however, that it's possible that I have become more invested in the relationships of fictional characters than in my own relationships. A few months ago another cousin of mine got engaged and while I was congratulatory, my reaction to her engagement was not nearly as passionate as the reaction I had when Ben proposed to Leslie on *Parks and Recreation* a couple of weeks ago.

As cheesy as this may sound, perhaps one of the relationships that has been affected by my growing love for TV couples is my relationship with God. Instead of turning to God when I'm feeling particularly distressed or borderline- psychotic, I instead turn to my computer screen and delve into the comforting world of OTPs and GIFs.

I'm not saying that reading fanfiction and obsessing over TV couples is wrong or "anti-religious." My interest with fictional relationships has actually helped me to meet new friends who share the same interests as I do. I do, however, fear that my obsession has gone a bit too far. Have I made fangirling into a religion? After all, I go on Tumblr ritualistically each day, express my devotion to my favourite television couples by reading stories and watching videos about them, and frequently gather (virtually) in an agreed upon meeting place with other people who share my opinions. It could be in my best interest to cut back on the video watching and Tumblr refreshing and find other ways to relieve my stress. After all, it shouldn't be too hard; I could just cut down my time spent on the internet from eight hours a day to seven. (I kid... barely)