

Time for Them to Fly?

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Envision a rainbow of glittering lights and 20,000 starry-eyed pre-teen girls screaming at the top of their lungs. I attended a Jonas Brothers concert last August and the energy of fans was mind-boggling.

Bombarded with this teeny-bop fanaticism, my mind revisited a time when boy bands sent my hormones reeling. My heart spun back to my first concert ten summers ago starring the oh-so-dreamy Backstreet Boys. I was ten, and Nick Carter was a few years older. Just a few. But he was beautiful. His beach-blond hair had a tendency to look perfectly disheveled and his bright blue eyes had Cupid sending arrows through my heart. Among Nick's many big-screen moments that night, there was one on-camera appearance that I remember vividly: singing "Everybody (Backstreet's Back)" and dancing with slight indecency, he had me love struck.

The Backstreet Boys engendered in me the same magical and feverish obsession that defines Jonas Brothers fans. As is characteristic of boy band worship, fans live and breathe anything and everything that emanates J-O-N-A-S. But where do these obsessive-compulsive personalities come from? On the surface, girls are attracted to the brothers' image as a band: drool-worthy good looks, a unique, punk-infused-prep style, and an energetic stage presence. Lured by these dazzling visuals, fans deem the trio rock n' roll eye-candy.

"They're perfect, everything about them," raves my fourteen year old sister. Encompassing this perceived perfection, however, is a much larger force of attraction: the two-dimensionality of it. Though we've all experienced it in different ways, our early teenage years were, at some point or another, socially awkward and emotionally complicated. For adolescent girls, the Jonas Brothers are glamorous facades that cover up the gaps of uncertain emotions and social stress.

I would be lying if I said marrying Nick Carter never crossed my mind. Similarly, Jo Bro fans

share the common dream of becoming a Future Mrs. Jonas. Their love and confidence is not disillusioned by the rocket-high competition: three in a million, one in a million if you're picky. There is a common consensus that Joe is the favorite; however, a true fan loves them all equally, "Even Kevin!" says my sixteen-year old sister. Kevin is the oldest of the three brothers, and in her opinion he's simply not her type. When I asked my youngest sister how happy she would be, on a scale of 1-10, to marry a Jonas, she exclaimed,

"The scale would break! That's how happy I would be!"

Since fans do not know the brothers beyond their music videos and stage presence, it is highly unlikely that their infatuation would gain momentum beyond its two-dimensionality, but isn't that the point? For most pre-teen girls, the concept of having an intimate relationship with a boy is unfamiliar and shaky territory. Therefore, what better way to test out new grounds than from afar? Influence comes from other fans themselves, too: girls feed off of what other girls appear to love. With thousands of female voices across the nation echoing Jo Bro approval, the fear of rejection is non-existent. Each concert is a massive date, without the nerve-racking one-on-one intimacy.

Despite this collective dream of walking down the aisle, Jo Bro fans are drawn not to the romantic implications of such a relationship, but to the social opportunity to romanticize. The concept of having a mental, not a physical commitment with the brothers is what matters most to fans. This is apparent through their persistent efforts to creatively emulate the band's image. The Jonas Brothers are known for their unique style, which they perfect with cigarette jeans, vintage inspired tees and oddball accessories. Mix these trends with Chuck Taylor All-Stars, Ray Ban wayfarers, and self-made t-shirts excessively written with Mrs. insert name Jonas, neon pink hearts and O-M-J (Oh My Jonas) and you have yourself a true fan. However, while copying their style may seem like a physical attempt to become closer to the band, it is the mentality behind the dress-up that is more significant. Ultimately, fans strive to exist in mental unison with the boys, whether it means tattooing Joe's name all over their arm with marker pen, or sporting dog tags to be reminded of Nick Jonas' fight with diabetes. That these

obsessive efforts exist in stark contrast to their dream of walking down the aisle substantiates this attraction as mental, not physical. Is it realistic that Kevin, Joe or Nick would be inclined to marry a girl who dressed just like him? Probably not. These physical accessories do not carry over to a three-dimensional relationship; instead, they lend themselves to a two-dimensional sense of closeness that exists only in the mind.

My sister was lucky enough to have a seat near the front of the stage that night, and unlike most fans, she was able to meet one of the brothers on a very physical level. Standing along the edge of the stage, Gabby was bold enough to reach out and touch Joe Jonas's shoe as he danced and sang. "It was surreal," she recalls. "I'm never washing my hand!" Her dreamlike moment with Joe's foot substantiates the claim that traditional forms of intimacy are of little importance when it comes to establishing a connection with the band. Somehow, the act of touching Joe's shoe, a physical object, put the two strangers in connection with each other without having ever met.

The Jonas Brothers are perfectly poised in their realization of the hormonal maturity of their fan base, and they perform in tune to that. Fans respond to these songs as if Kevin, Joe and Nick are singing directly to and about them. Singing relentlessly about teenage crushes and undeserved heartbreaks, the Jonas Brothers have certainly followed in the footsteps of their boy band forerunners. Yet the Jonas Brothers also offer a far more creative pool of lyrics. Their hit "Year 3000" raves optimistic energy about future time travel and living underwater. "That's Just the Way We Roll", mentions a whale in a swimming pool and houses painted psychedelic colors. Such songs vocalize a fun-loving, youthful attitude toward life, and release the social tensions that are prevalent among an adolescent fan base. Furthermore, songs like "A Little Bit Longer", inspired by Nick Jonas' struggle with diabetes, warrants fans' acceptance of the occasional hardship that all are inevitably subject to. "Waiting on a cure...but none of them are sure...a little bit longer and I'll be fine," echo thousands of voices quivering on the edge of heartfelt sobs. The band's music is perfectly composed for its specific audience, granting fans a range of emotional experiences to ward off any hormonal dramas and

complexities.

The Jonas Brothers' close ties to the Disney channel have always caused me to undermine fans' obsession as juvenile; however, it is far from childish. Instead, the Jonas Brothers are the connectors, assisting each adolescent girl in their transition from pre-teen to young woman and dissolving the anxieties and pressures born from friendships and love-interests at that stage of her life. Like most artists, the Jonas Brothers will someday fade from the pop culture arena, but when they do, their fans will have reached a point of maturity that no longer calls on them to fill the emotional void that boy bands fit. Until then, however, Kevin, Joe and Nick will keep fans Burnin' Up...mentally, of course.