

Cult leaders brainwash their followers, turning otherwise logical people into programmed recruits who lose their ability to think for themselves in their quest to follow the leader.

Celebrity worship draws on the same hardwired drive to follow the leader. When people become fascinated by celebrities, they are literally spellbound, hypnotized, which often leads them to irrational behavior that closely resembles that of a cult member. They reject family and friends, and create a false universe that revolves around an event, a person, or even a brand.

Take a Sip of Kool-Aid and Read On

We all experience at least a fleeting interest with movie stars, professional athletes, or even celebrity CEOs such as Warren Buffett. At what point does that interest cross the line from fan to fanatic? At what point does a personal passion cross into an obsession? When do enthusiasts become cult members?

In the same way cult members sacrifice their personal lives for a group, one might say the same occurs with other individuals and groups that aren't normally considered "cults." One man's cult is another man's brand.

Like cults, fascinating brands don't try to speak to everyone. They narrowly target and recruit a specific type of person and mind-set, even to the point of polarizing outsiders. Is this so different from being a fervid devotee of a certain brand?

At my alma mater, Duke University, students would camp out in tents for a week in order to snag seats at Final Four basketball games. Is that a cult?

How about iPhone buyers waiting in line for the next release?

What about NFL sports fans during the playoffs, or Brazilian soccer fans during the World Cup?

What about NASCAR fans' devotion to certain drivers? Phish fans and Deadheads?

Ironman triathletes who train seven days a week?

What can you learn from all this in order to lead people in an inspiring direction?

Flirtation and Fascination

The darkened cocktail lounge of the Saint Paul airport Marriott is a social petri dish, commingling business travelers from otherwise unrelated companies, cities, and professions. The lounge's ferns-and-brass ambiance offers these road warriors a comforting mixture of familiarity and anonymity.

In between serving Sam Adamses and glasses of Kendall-Jackson chardonnay, bartenders witness the nightly routine of strangers engaged in flirtation, a timeworn ritual that often progresses from suggestive glances to the elevator banks in two hours or less. Had these bartenders studied Irenäus Eibl-Eibesfeldt's research in evolutionary anthropology, they'd realize that they're front and center at a nightly performance of the flirtation tango, a series of dance steps choreographed over the millennia by the Martha Graham of mating dances, Mother Nature herself.

Whether a woman regularly quotes Carrie Bradshaw from *Sex and the City* or belongs to a society with no written language, she'll flirt using almost exactly the same nonverbal signals as other women across continents, cultures, and geographies. Eibl-Eibesfeldt discovered that women from around the globe, from craggy, remote islands to metropolitan centers, use the same repertoire of gestures when determining whether a potential mate is available and interested. Flirting, like all fascinations, is innate.

The Canoodling Tango

In her aptly named book *Sex*, Joann Ellison Rodgers describes Eibl-Eibesfeldt's discovery of just how all women flirt. A female begins fascinating a male by smiling at him, raising her brows to make her eyes appear wider and more childlike, then quickly