

## 0.1 Chapter 1: capitalism: Media

### 0.2 Media

## 1 On Pleasure in the Downfall of the Mighty

We like it, though we might not always admit that we do, when a celebrity falls from grace. Yesterday they were on the red carpet, everyone was their friend. Now they are in a humiliating divorce; or they are up on drugs charges; or maybe theyve been caught trying to punch an employee . They had what looked like such a great life; now its all falling apart.



Getty

It can seem pretty squalid to enjoy this kind of news. How evil must we be to actually take pleasure in seeing someone go through hell in public. But perhaps something rather different, and a lot more to our credit, is going on. We are mesmerized because we crave intimacy.

When you really are close to someone its not only their good sides you see; you get to know them more deeply. You see their sufferings, you are there when things go wrong. Part of what constitutes a close friendship is acquaintance with the dark stuff: you know all about the terrible divorce; the drinking bouts and the insecurities.

But mostly this doesnt happen. Mostly we only ever encounter the edited, airbrushed surface of public figures. We say we like strength and admire success. We do, but weakness and failure makes us more connected to the people we like.



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**1.0.0.0.2 It can be easier to feel closer to someone when things aren't going so well for them**

Weird though it sounds at first, people become more likeable when we know their flaws. They seem more like us. We're routinely terrified that if people knew what we are really like they'd ditch us. If they knew what we're like when we're in a rage, or drunk or depressed or when we lash out verbally at someone, they'd think we were monsters. Yet the truth is, because we are all like this to some extent, it is actually reassuring, even nice, to hear about the messes in the lives of others. It's not cruelty that takes us there, but the need to know that we are normal, that our own troubles are not a unique curse, but that similar things happen even to people who on the surface have all the things we lack.

In the background, with a lot of celebrities, we can sense a huge effort to be perfect. If only they can cook better than anyone, if only they can act in the most successful films, if only they can make a fortune, then people will at last like them.

But, paradoxically, the celebrity who tried and failed may actually be more likeable. They are doing something more important than they ever could through being perfect. They are rehearsing in public something we all need to do: learn, somehow, to live with our awful flaws, our vulnerability, and our secret patheticness.

If we only ever see models of poise and accomplishment, we end up with a very strange relationship to ourselves. We start to think that our own muddled, troubled selves are not acceptable and are abnormal in terrifying ways. The limited information we get about other people usually encourages that distorted picture. So it is a great relief genuinely heartening and welcome to be shown that its normal to be messed up.

When we take pleasure in reading these stories we shouldnt be ashamed of ourselves. We are circling round something important, though not quite closing in on it as yet. Its not that we need to stop, we just need to do it better.

The pact with disgrace should go two ways. We benefit from their public humiliation; so we should reciprocate and extend to them the compassion we so desperately want others to give us.