

# ABSOLUTES



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I'm at peace. I'm angry. I'm  
sad. I'm confident. I'm full of  
doubt. I'm a work in progress.  
I am enough.

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# WHAT'S INSIDE

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# IN SEARCH

Fame isn't always so fortunate.

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American pop singer Britney Jean Spears spent twelve years of her life controlled by her father, Jamie Spears before she could terminate the conservatorship that allowed it.

A conservatorship is a legal arrangement where a judge appoints a representative called a conservator to make decisions on behalf of the conservatee (Weiner). The singer's famous 2008 public meltdown after a series of questionable and conspicuous behaviour led to the judgment that she was mentally and physically unfit to care for herself, which permitted Jamie Spears to regulate his daughter's finances, health, business deals and personal life (Jones and Bey).

Spears's most devoted fans had long been wary of the conservatorship terms and whether it was in her best interest. During these twelve years, the pop star repeatedly toured the world, released multiple albums, and appeared in various television shows. But despite the numerous comebacks, Spears, at 38 years old, was still legally not her own person and her fans began vocalizing their dissatisfaction with her lack of freedom.

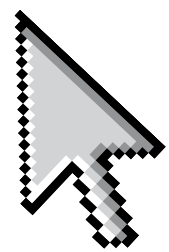
It wasn't until the Britney's Gram podcast sharing the message of a lawyer – formerly associated with the firm overseeing Spear's conservatorship – who showed concern about how the star's father was running her life did the #FreeBritney movement re-emerge.

In this movement, Spear's family members were at an advantage because they had complete power over the primary agent: Britney. Their strategy relied heavily on two tactics of control: counter-persuasion and rationalizing privacy (Bowers et al). Through the conservatorship, Spears had to create videos and Instagram posts letting her followers know they had misunderstood her family's intentions. When those videos led to the public believing it was a plea for help, the family adjusted their strategy to tweeting and posting about their love for her, her health, the need for their privacy and how the public needed to stop creating false narratives.

The push-back did not stop fans from coming to the courthouse every day to protest for Spear's independence at her trial. Their unwavering love and support finally gave Spears the courage to speak in person for the first time about her experience. She admitted to lying about her well-being over the years for fear of not being taken seriously, saying,

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# OF



# BRITNEY

"I've lied and told the whole world I'm OK and I'm happy — it's a lie. I thought just maybe if I said that enough, maybe I might become happy because I've been in denial. I've been in shock. I am traumatized," she said. "You know, fake it till you make it. But now I'm telling you the truth, OK? I'm not happy. I can't sleep. I'm so angry it's insane. I'm depressed. I cry every day," (Jones and Bey).

The reality of conservatorships is that Britney Spears is one of the untold thousands across the United States. The conditions in these arrangements are sometimes made so restrictive conservatees are often susceptible to abuse (Jones and Bey). What can start as a temporary deal can become permanent. Once a judge arrives at a decision, there are no annual expirations or renewal processes, leaving victims defenceless. Although her case was unique because of her famous status, it still took a lot of time and observation for the public to notice something was wrong (Jocelyn).



This case opened up the conversation on transparency issues in this law. It caused lawmakers, amidst the trial, to introduce a bipartisan bill to help those manipulated into a conservatorship in the same way Spears was (Stracqualursi).. The FREE Act (AB 1194), which went into effect on January 1, 2022, makes broad changes designed to empower conservatees to have a say in the decisions made about their lives and holds private fiduciaries accountable for their actions (Stracqualursi).





# Rare Beauty

## A NOTE FROM

Actress, singer and businesswoman Selena Gomez has made her name synonymous with her mental health activism.

In 2015, she announced that she was diagnosed with lupus, an autoimmune disease affecting the joints and kidneys, on Instagram. While documenting the experience of her kidney transplant in 2017, she spoke about the toll it was taking on her and her mental health. Two years later, she revealed she had bipolar disorder (Kenny).

Her vulnerability broke some of the inaccuracies of mental health stereotypes often portrayed as unstable and violent in mainstream media. By publicizing her journey of navigating her illness, she started dissipating the taboos surrounding it and swayed the public's perception of its reality, bridging the gap between her and her audience, who can visualize themselves and their struggles in the story (Foss,321).

Story-telling narratives are a resourceful rhetorical approach as it eliminates any tendency to argue against or undermine a point of view (Foss, 323).

Dam McAdams, a professor of psychology at Northwestern University, says, "Life stories do not simply reflect personality. They are personality, or more accurately, they are important parts of personality, along with other parts, like dispositional traits, goals, and values." This narrative becomes a form of identity and increases pathos. What the person chooses to include in the story and how they convey it shape and reflect who they are (Beck). Therefore, the life story defines why what is said is important, the qualities of that person, who they will be and the efforts they may make.



@rarebeauty

So proud of the work we are doing with Rare Impact- our first-ever Social Impact Report is out now. Thank you to my amazing @rarebeauty team and to all of you for making this possible!

# SELENA

Gomez introduced the Rare Impact Fund as part of her cosmetic line Rare Beauty in July 2020. The purpose of this health-focused initiative is to destigmatize mental health by creating a culture of self-acceptance. Their goal of raising \$100 million over ten years by donating 1% of Rare Beauty's sales to Rare Impact with additional help from outside partners and foundations will provide mental health support for people of all ages, races, genders, and backgrounds. According to the brand's 2021 Social Impact Report, Rare Beauty exceeded its year goals – donating over 1.2 million in grants to eight organizations specifically expanding mental health education and accessibility.

The overwhelming hype pre-launch, successful beginning post-launch, and the continued momentum of support for its activism efforts show how influential her narrative and her role as the owner of the young brand have been. Gomez has consistently encouraged her followers with mental health issues to embrace their unique and rare traits and pushes this message through every avenue, whether it be the product name, reminders on the packaging, her beauty regime as well as curated health posts (at least once a week) on both the business and her personal Instagram page.

Consumer-brand identification theory suggests that a high self-brand relatability produces stronger self-brand identification. For consumers, if their attitudes toward the brand are more positive, it will increase their association and purchases, enabling a brand to achieve higher levels of advocacy (Ghosh).

Rare Beauty's activism practices what it's preaching and goes beyond simple advocacy/messaging since its purpose aligns with its owner's personal values. Her presence in the comment sections of her Rare Beauty and Rare Impact social pages strengthens her ethos in her advocacy. She proves to her brand's consumers how involved and determined she is, validating the brand's moral foundations, thus creating a rapport of trust for her online-offline activism.

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Using her story, voice, and platform, Selena Gomez has made genuine world-changing moves for her beliefs, giving her followers an optimistic catharsis that it is possible to heal when confronting the hardest truths.





# JUSTICE

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With his reputation shattered, Depp appealed in the American court system seeking \$50 million in damages from Heard due to defamation caused by the false statements in her article (Stone).

The jury's verdict, which favoured actor Johnny Depp during the 2022 defamation trial against ex-wife Amber Heard raised numerous concerns about the future of domestic violence abusers (Maddaus).

Depp faced major public scrutiny after Heard released her op-ed essay "I spoke up against sexual violence – and faced our culture's wrath. That has to change," in the Washington Post two years prior. When the newspaper The Sun U.K labelled him a wife-beater, Depp took them to court in a libel lawsuit, which he lost when the Judge deemed that the claims made by the paper about him were substantially true on account of alleged accusations Heard had made against him (Dodgson and Cheong).

Although his co-workers, celebrity friends and family spoke out of his innocence, the backlash was too invasive. He lost his most famous role as Captain Jack Sparrow in Disney's The Pirates of the Caribbean, his new role as Gellert Grindelwald in Warner Brother's The Fantastic Beasts (a Harry Potter spin-off series) and all additional opportunities he had scheduled at this time.

The presiding Judge of the case, Penney S. Azcarate, allowed the trial to be televised live for transparency as the case generated so much media frenzy that she worried it would lead to hazardous conditions around the courthouse (Maddaus). Whether this was a strategic agitation strategy by Depp's legal counsel, it did help Depp gain validation as the public began believing his testimony over Heard's by the fourth week of the seven-week trial.





# FOR JOHNNY



On social media, with Tik Tok in particular, the hashtag #justiceforjohnnydepp gained 7.5 billion views, while #amberheardisaliar had 1.2 billion. Reddit forums like r/JusticeforJohnnyDepp and r/PiratesOfTheCaribbean mobilized more than 17,000 members who supported Depp and began creating, posting and up-voting posts and memes of him smiling and laughing during the trial while Heard is smirking and pretending to cry (Dodgson and Cheong).

These posts also circulated across Instagram, Twitter and Facebook.

Youtubers, including practicing lawyers, began streaming the trial to review and comment on the inconsistencies in Heard's defence, cross-examinations and credible witnesses, further igniting the notion that she may have lied about everything.

Clicktivism is not a be-all or end-all strategy for social activism but a method that allows engaging with a lot of people. The final verdict of the trial had no connection with what was happening online; however, it did form a solidarity that enabled Depp's standing as a victim instead of an aggressor in the public's eye – which often is its goal (George and Leidner).

The consequence of this entire spectacle was the strain it put on the Me Too movement. With Depp's win, many feminist critics believe it sets women's credibility on the line and that, once again, misogyny has influenced the system (Dodgson and Cheong). Conversely, men began speaking out with slogans, "Men are victims too," expressing that there is no such thing as a perfect victim. Many of Depp's supporters admit that he made questionable moves during the formal couple's marriage, but it does not mean he cannot be a victim because he is a man (Padilla-Tompkins).





# TO WHOM



Hamza Walker is the Executive Director of LAXART, a non-profit art gallery in Los Angeles, California, that presents a niche public space for experimental exhibitions and public art initiatives to a new generation of artists and curators. His goal here is to support the risk-takers and the unique voices of contemporary artists by gathering art pieces to enrich and educate his audience on diversity and race (Wolfe). The curated collections in his exhibitions generally favour thought-provoking art pieces that combine to form a big picture and likely feature some controversial concept (Grabner).

In 2017, the Whitney Biennial had on display *Open Casket* (2016) by Dana Schutz. Its initial intention as a memorial to Emmett Till soon became the focal point of massive outrage by the Black community. Protests began after artist Parker Bright told the public that Schutz, a white person, "had nothing to say to the black community about black trauma" (Greenberger). He had written on the back of his grey shirt, "Black Death Spectacle," which went viral on social media. An open letter penned by Hannah Block was directed to the Whitney Museum, asking them to remove and destroy the painting. It is not okay "for a white person to transmute Black suffering into profit and fun" (Greenberger).

Walker presented a different perspective on the controversy in his interview with Julie Weitz in 2018. He expressed how misguided it was to want to destroy a painting without context. In his eyes, Dana Schutz was not the enemy. It was a painting; it was art, and one should try to redirect the conversation and have it be more casual and constructive instead of fetishizing it further. What would have been a practical approach was if Dana had sold the painting and donated the money to an organization such as the National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People. For Walker, her work of Emmett Till was just another painting. He questioned why people were not looking toward artists like Kerry James Marshall or Jack Whitten, who had moved to Hauser & Wirth at that time, "here's a senior black artist getting paid. Let's celebrate that."

With artwork like *Open Casket*, it is important to establish a proper distance from the art to be able to debate about it. There is no question as to who's entitled or who owns this subject; there is no right or wrong. Instead, people should note the audience's interpretation of the art.

Alleyship could play a pivotal role in art activism, demonstrating community effort in defining social and political issues through subjectivity, complexity and contradiction. It would be a different type of discourse, far from the simplified positions that can only be black-and-white and left-and-right.

Currently, museum spaces and biennials have been underrepresenting people of colour. But suppose artists like Dana Schutz can bring forward uncomfortable topics to these places. In that case, they can use their privilege to open dialogue about such issues, uplifting marginalized communities and inviting them into these establishments so they may present themselves (Jackson).

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# TILL BELONGS

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