

Thao Thanh Tran

Dorian Johnson

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Celebrities Should Be Seen for Who They Are

Taylor Swift told the *Rolling Stone* this September 2019 in an interview that people had so much fun hating her, and they did not really need many reasons to do it while she was not sure exactly what she did was so wrong. “They decide something you’re doing is incorrect, that you’re not standing for what you should stand for: You’re a bad example.” She added, “I felt like the situation was pretty hopeless. I wrote a lot... about what it’s like to feel like you’re in a shame spiral” (Hiatt par. 6-12). Bad for Taylor to be that famous, to be a global superstar—to entertain us. And this is despicably too bad for us: we live like we do not care about how the stars of society think and feel—we clap for them for that they look the way we like, then we slap them instantly the moment we do not agree with how they look. Is this kind of one-way pressure we create for celebrities to appear flawless particularly necessary? Should not we want celebrities to charmingly live up to only our standards?

There is a popular view that celebrities are role models for children and young people to look up to—and that we want a good life for our future generation—therefore, there should only be good examples seen from celebrities. A study shows that as young people look for new role models other than their parents, they look up to celebrities and form strong one-sided para-social relationships (celebrity-fan relationships in which the fan knows much about the celebrity, but the celebrity knows nothing about that fan). Through the strong one-sided para-social relationships, the fans develop socioemotional bonds with celebrities and experience them as real

friends. In the lives of the fans, celebrities become their “super-peer,” their prestigious significant others, and the models for broad ranges of copycat behavior (Ouvrein et al 943-944). Seen in this way, from celebrities and the pathways to success they lusciously represent, it is understandable that we want to pressure celebrities to live up to the images of good examples to secure the bright future of our children and young people. But, from the images of good examples, do we see the lives of the living persons or just filters and make-ups of some figures idealizing the widely held standards of being successful in our society?

The death of Kim Jong-Hyun on December 18, 2017 brought the world’s attention to the manufacturing of flawless images of K-Pop (Korean pop music) idols. Jong-Hyun had been lead singer of the hugely popular band SHINee and K-Pop star for almost ten years. In his suicide letter, Jong-Hyun said that the depression he battled had finally taken over. What have been seen as potentially contributing to his suicide are Jong-Hyun’s grueling effort to maintain a good example and the hurt taken from comments whenever he failed to appear flawless (Green par. 8). Should we not worship celebrities for their good images without seeing them for who they are, how they think and feel, and what standards they have for themselves?

We learn about celebrities through their work that represents who they are and the images about them. And we can learn more about them by listening to them. We should give them safe space and opportunities to speak their hearts and minds. Our bonds with another can be strengthened conversations after conversations, from which we may realize the value of the freedom of expression. “Freedom of expression, in all of its symbolic varieties, are the foundation of human being... and the realization of our humanity depends on the protection and fostering of freedom of expression,” Thomas Cushman stated in his article “The Fate of Freedom of Expression in Liberal Democracies” (348). We should never make celebrities feel blocked by

the pressure to appear flawless, by the thinking that society is not ready to listen to their own points of view, that society does not see them as living persons who change and have their own standards.

Overall, because celebrities and their good examples are important in boosting the level of oughtness of social norms, of what we think are normal pathways in our society (Lindenberg pp. 101), we have expectations for them to be good examples for our children and young people. On the other hand, we want our future generation to look up to successful persons not idealized figures. We want to hear celebrities speak for themselves so that we all can learn the real them and the now them. When we open the doors of compassion and acceptance for different and new standards, we know that new pathways to success are welcome, and hopefully there is no shame spirals for those are pressure to maintain the successful images and those that want to be successful.

No matter what, it is always up to us to decide and make change to what is acceptable and what is important in our culture. We love our favorite celebrities, but we should never suffocate them to do what only fits our standards. And when celebrities are seen doing what we deem as bad examples, we should not inhumanely bash them. Let them speak. After all, only when we are able to share and learn from examples of one another can we question what is good and what is better for ourselves—we can understand and learn from one another's standards to move forward together with empathy.

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