

Consequences of celebrity obsession



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- Sewon Chu

Celebrity/Media Addiction

In this world we live in, there are over seven billion people with many different dreams and ambitions. Some are satisfied with living in a small village with close relationship with just about everyone living in that village. Some are content to live the fast-paced life of the metropolis, where millions of people carry on their daily lives. Then there are some people who seek fame through acting, singing, beauty or their hard work and have their faces all over the media: celebrities. Celebrity is defined as not only those who sing, dance, and act but just famous or well-known person according to Merriam-Webster Dictionary.[1]Celebrities exist in all parts of the globe because they are essential needs to human life called entertainment. Entertainment is a necessity to human life because it brings joy, happiness and different sorts of positive feelings. However, it has expanded from just pure entertainment into something more serious recently. Now, the public is starting to become heavily interested in the daily personal lives of these celebrities because of the media, which has led to many people becoming obsessed with the lives of celebrities. People are obsessed with celebrities now more than ever because the obsession has become an integral part of our daily lives that results from psychological and social reasons.

According to the *Daily Banter* , one of the reasons why people are obsessed with celebrities is because our brains think that the leaders or creative innovators should be respected.[2]Celebrities can become inspirations to the future generations who aim to become acknowledged for their hard work one day in fields that may be very difficult to become successful in. People are

able to form a bond in their minds with their favorite public figure through the assimilation of the celebrity's characteristics and have positive emotions when they think about that celebrity.[3]Granted, some of the actions by celebrities are not the actions leaders or innovators should be doing, such as drug usage, but the public is interested in all aspects of a celebrity's life because of the media coverage. When a celebrity couple like for an example artists Beyoncé Knowles and Jay-Z has a child, the news of the birth was all over social networks, newspapers, T. V., and internet news. However, if someone who was just an ordinary couple were to give birth to a child, only their friends and families will know about the good news. As a result, because the celebrity couple will have media exposure of their child's birth, they are considered " more special" than the ordinary couple even though they are doing the same thing: giving birth to a child, which leads to other ordinary people to pay attention to the news of the celebrity couple. The fact that media is exposing these news about celebrities makes ordinary people have this notion that the celebrity is special which leads to the feeling of envy and the need to make those celebrities their personal role models. Also, when the media shows the celebrities, the celebrity tends to live the luxurious life. They wear nice and fashionable clothes that are sometimes custom-made, wear exquisite jewelry, drive or hire a driver that drives their exotic cars, drink expensive alcohol. This result in people wanting celebrities as their role models because with their talent and fortune they were able to make these purchases.

Having a celebrity for a role model can be positive because role models help people aspire to become better and grow as a human being. Celebrity

admiration can have an influence on other people. For an example, when celebrities donate money to charity and be philanthropic to others or win awards for their hard work, it inspire people to become the same better person. One good example was how many well-known people such as Bill Gates, Whoopi Goldberg, Matt Damon, Will Smith, Kevin Hart, Anne Hathaway and Benedict Cumberbatch took part in the ALS Ice Bucket Challenge which served as a cause to raise awareness of Lou Gehrig's disease. Consequently, this led to many people to participate as well. But certainly celebrity influence can't only be positive. While the ALS Bucket Challenge may have succeeded in raising awareness to people and it was for a good cause, many people did it without knowing what ALS even is, also they forget the fact that there are parts of the world that has little to no access to fresh/clean water. So while the ALS Bucket Challenge has raised awareness for a disease, in a sense, it has left people less aware of the water shortage issue in other countries. Also, this shows just how much celebrities can influence ordinary people in a negative way. They forget that they're wasting water because famous people were doing it which means that in some cases people will be blinded and wouldn't be able to differentiate whether what their role model celebrity is doing is the right thing or not. For an example, celebrities such as Justin Bieber and Miley Cyrus both have a massive fan base. When they were younger than they are now, they had an innocent image as well as their talent that attracted so many fans. However, now that some years have passed since they debuted, it seems as though their image has become rather negative. There are YouTube videos that show Justin Bieber trying to fight a reporter and also he was charged with DUI (driving under the influence) in Florida, and Miley Cyrus has made some

controversial music videos and statements. The reason why this is a major problem is that media exposure to these negative characteristics mixed with obsession about these celebrities will make people think that what they are doing is reasonable and in turn, result in people imitating those celebrities. Celebrities have so much influence now that even the governor of California from 2003 to 2011 was none other than Arnold Schwarzenegger[4], who is an immigrant from Austria. Before Schwarzenegger, Ronald Reagan was also a celebrity turned governor, and he went further as to become a U. S. president. The point is not if these two men were the right choice but the point is that it seems as though celebrity influence has a greater power than people realize.

Psychologist James Houran has conducted a survey of more than 600 people and has discovered a psychiatric condition: celebrity worship syndrome.

[5]According to the survey, one out of three Americans and British has it to a certain degree that the groups were divided into three different categories: entertainment social, casual stargazing; intense personal, feeling a connection with a celebrity; borderline pathological, similar to a stalker. He believes that the numbers will intensify with the advancement of technology such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and other social media which allows easier access to information worldwide. People will “ share”, “ like”, “ tag”, “ retweet” videos or articles about celebrities and whoever is their social network friend or follower will have access to that celebrity news.

Technology has indeed become an important factor as to why people are becoming more and more obsessed with celebrities. Today, the access to media is easier than ever before; there are magazines solely dedicated to

stories about the latest celebrity gossip, known as tabloids. Other than that, there are various social network sources as mentioned before such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and other social media that can provide the latest update on celebrity news. Also, TV news channels cover celebrity gossip when there are other important news stories to be discussed.

It has become a trend nowadays to know the basic knowledge of celebrity gossip as Daniel Kruger, an evolutionary psychologist at the University of Michigan points out, “ Knowing what is going on with high-status individuals, you’d be better able to navigate the social scene.”[6]If a person does not know the latest news of a certain celebrity, that person can possibly be socially excluded from a conversation or a group because they lack the information. They do not want to feel like an outcast from their group of people so even if they do not care about celebrity gossip, some are forced to know all of the juicy gossip. Socially, people want to be fit in and have a sense of belonging in a community. As a result, people will spend more time watching the latest celebrity gossip instead of learning something new or better their lives in some way because they might believe that knowing the latest gossip is in fact bettering them because of the social benefits of fitting in. Today’s social standards of beauty has also become a poisonous because every year it seems as though those standards are becoming higher as more and more beautiful and handsome models become the faces of the entertainment industry. This leads to many young people to resort to plastic surgery because they believe that their natural face is unfit for the standard of society as Anisha Abraham and Diana Zuckerman points out in their article, *Adolescents, Celebrity Worship, and Cosmetic Surgery* :

“Cosmetic procedures have become pervasive, advertised in the mass media, and the subject of countless TV programs, such as Dr. 90210 (created in the United States but internationally known). The American Society of Aesthetic Plastic Surgery estimates that the number of children less than 18 years of age undergoing cosmetic surgery procedures by their members has ranged from 33, 000 to 65, 000 annually in the past 10 years, with nonsurgical cosmetic procedures ranging from 91, 000 to 190, 000 per year[7]”

As bad as celebrity obsession might sound, it can actually be helpful for people with social difficulties. Celebrities now can interact with their fans via social networks such as Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram and have a one-sided relationship with them. While it does sound like an unhealthy relationship, studies show that it is quite the opposite. There was a study conducted in 2008 by University of Buffalo researchers who discovered that “celebrity worship” helps people with self-esteem issues or fears or rejections by allowing them to have one-sided bond with a celebrity. Another study involved 348 undergraduate students completing a self-esteem questionnaire, writing an open-ended essay about their favorite celebrity, and then completing the questionnaire again. The results showed that people who initially scored low on the self-esteem, after completing the essay scored much higher the second time.[8] This shows that one-sided relationships with these celebrities fill the void of loneliness to those who have low self-esteem, and to those who do not have many real friends. These one-sided relationships can possibly help them become more social to other people as well.

Celebrity obsession should not be dismissed completely because the celebrities can become positive role models for the growth of people and the obsession can also assist people with social difficulties. However, it is evident that people are becoming more and more obsessed with media now than ever before and it is becoming a major problem. With the advancement of media technology, the accessibility of celebrity news is easier than ever before. Psychologically, our brains are programmed to instinctively respect or idolize someone who seems to be of a higher class and since celebrities attract attention we unconsciously believe they are of a higher class, which leads to celebrities having a major influence in people as well as people following the way celebrities act in their personal life. The fact that nowadays celebrity gossip is a necessity to be fit in is also another negative aspect of celebrity obsession, which leads to using cosmetic surgeries as an option.

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