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Quantum fluctuations in space, science, exploration and other cosmic fields... served up regularly by MSNBC.com science editor Alan Boyle since 2002.



Alan Boyle covers the physical sciences, anthropology, technological innovation and space science and exploration for MSNBC.com. He is a winner of the [AAAS Science Journalism Award](#), the [NASW Science-in-Society Award](#) and other honors; a contributor to "[A Field Guide for Science Writers](#)"; and a member of the board of the [Council for the Advancement of Science Writing](#).

Check out Boyle's [biography](#) or send a message to Cosmic Log via cosmiclog@msnbc.com.

THE SCIENCE OF DEAD CELEBRITIES **The science of dead celebrities**

Posted: Monday, July 06, 2009 9:52 PM by Alan Boyle



Eric Thayer / Reuters

Michael Jackson fan Leandro Lapagesse of Brazil clutches a handful of memorabilia outside the Forest Lawn Mortuary in Los Angeles on Monday.

Why do celebrities such as pop star Michael Jackson exert such a pull, especially when they've just passed away?

For decades, psychologists have been studying the one-way relationships we create with celebrities. Some researchers say such connections are merely a fact of life in a media-saturated age. Others suggest that celebrating dead celebrities offers a way to come to terms with our own mortality - and reach for a

kind of immortality as well.

The public fascination with Jackson is certainly beyond dispute: When word of his death circulated on June 25, it almost [broke the Internet](#). Hundreds of thousands of mourners are expected to [converge on downtown Los Angeles](#) for Tuesday's memorial service. Sales of music and memorabilia have spiked so high that some speculate Jackson is [worth more dead than alive](#).

Even Gayle Stever, a psychology professor at Empire State College who studied the Michael Jackson fan phenomenon 20 years ago, is amazed at the response she's been seeing on [her Facebook page](#). "Fans that I haven't heard from in 15 years are finding me on there," she told me.

Jackson's fans sparked Stever's first research project, and since then she's been studying the relationships that fans have forged with celebrities ranging from singer Josh Groban to the stars of the "Star Trek" and "Lord of the Rings" on-screen sagas. The way Stever sees it, such ties, known in the trade as "parasocial relationships," can be just as real as your ties with family and friends.

"We are biologically programmed to be attracted to human faces and human voices," she said. "In the last 100 years we've been able to 'know' people through media that normally we wouldn't know ... and I think our human brains don't always know the difference."

That means the grief felt by Michael Jackson's fans can be as deep as the grief one feels over the death of a family member. "The key to why people are affected by the death is to ask why we are affected by any death. I don't think it's any different, whether it's a parasocial attachment or a person we saw in real life," Stever said.

Stever said the intensity of that feeling doesn't necessarily depend on how big the star is. As an example, she points to Craig Parker. Craig who? He's the guy who played [one of Orlando Bloom's elven pals](#) in the "Lord of the Rings" movies.

"That actor has a fan base of devoted, die-hard, attached fans, and the attachment to someone like that, who you've never heard of, is just as intense, just as personal, just as important as the attachment to a Michael Jackson, or my current study, who happens to be Josh Groban," Stever said. "The magnitude of the star doesn't correlate to the intensity of the attachment."

Celebrity action at a distance

Is that a bad thing? Not necessarily. In a series of studies published last year in the journal [Personal Relationships](#), the University of Buffalo's Jaye Derrick and her colleagues found that some college students viewed their favorite celebrities as being more similar to the way they saw themselves, while others saw celebrities as being more similar to the way they'd like to be. The first group tended to have high self-esteem; the second group was judged to have low self-esteem.

"Basically, we found that with low self-esteem people, these celebrities embodied their ideal selves," Derrick told me. "High self-esteem people saw them more like their actual selves."

One of the more interesting outcomes was that once the low self-esteem subjects reflected on their favorite celebrities, they tended to rate their own self-image higher. In fact, thinking about celebrities was more of a mood-brightener than thinking about their own partners - which led the researchers to conclude that "parasocial relationships can have [self-enhancing benefits](#) for low self-esteem people that they do not receive in real relationships." (They hastened to emphasize, however, that celebrities can't replace real friends.)

In a follow-up study published in the Journal of Experimental Social Psychology, Derrick and her colleagues found that [merely watching television](#) can give some people a sense that their social needs are being met.

A kind of immortality?

Psychology professor Chi-Yue Chiu and Pelin Kesebir of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign found even deeper meaning in a [series of studies](#) presented last year at the annual meeting of the Society for Personality and Social Psychology. They found that our feelings about the legacy left behind by celebrities could be affected by reflection upon our own mortality.

In an e-mail from Istanbul, Kesebir explained the point behind the research:

"Famous people, at their best, are sacred heroes who reflect what we hold to be the best of our culture and society. As such heroes they are considered less mortal than ordinary humans, both symbolically and literally. My research shows that this perception of cultural heroes as imperishable serves to alleviate death anxiety.

"After being reminded of their mortality, for example, people think that famous people will be remembered for a longer time in the future, attesting to people's desire to see these celebrities as symbolically immortal. And the more celebrities represent cultural values, the more is the desire to see them as everlasting.

"In research I conducted two years ago, I had participants answer the hypothetical question of how long Michael Jackson (among other celebrities) will be remembered after he dies, after making them write either about their mortality or some other control topic. Participants reminded of their mortality on average thought that he'll be remembered for 104 years, whereas participants in the control group thought that he'll be remembered for only 60.71 years.

"That study revealed that to the extent that famous people represent cultural values, they are perceived to be symbolically immortal, and this perception intensifies after reminders of mortality. In another study, I showed that people think that if they board the same plane as a famous person, the plane is less likely to crash, to the extent that the famous person on board represents cultural values.

"As also suggested by the expression 'celebrity worship,' parallels between religion and the veneration shown to certain celebrities are plentiful. Iconic stars like Michael Jackson occupy the status of a demi-god, if not a god, in the eyes of their fans (incidentally, a word that has religious origins) and thereby provide meaning and existential stamina to them the way religions provide to their believers. Michael Jackson's death will therefore be very hard on his die-hard fans.

"They will experience the shock of seeing the annihilation of something they inwardly deemed to be imperishable (just like a god). In a way, they have lost one of their bulwarks against existential anxiety, and they are in a vulnerable state now. With time, though, they will come to accept his

literal death and derive a similar sense of stamina from his symbolic immortality."

What do celebrity fans seek?

Some might say Kesebir is taking her conclusions too far. It's unlikely that any of Michael Jackson's fans ever seriously regarded him as a literal god (although there's already a [not-completely-serious effort](#) to deify him). And Stever pointed out that hard-core, borderline pathological fans make up a small proportion of the typical celebrity fan base (although some studies suggest that a larger number of people engage in milder forms of [celebrity worship](#)).

"Fan bases are made up of just as diverse a group of people as any other group," Stever said. You can find zealots in any population sample of significant size, whether you're talking about a celebrity fan club or the local fraternal lodge, she said.

Stever said that, in her experience, most fan clubs are all about "appreciating true talent, and seeing the fan base as an opportunity for social networking." So when thousands of people show up at the [Staples Center](#), or go online to share their feelings about the King of Pop, the experience might be as much about connecting with a community of like-minded fans as it is about immortalizing the silenced celebrity. That funerary tradition is [as old as any mythology](#).

What do you think? Is the mourning of Michael Jackson a throwback to ancient religious rites, a media-generated spectacle or a healthy catharsis for millions of fans? Feel free to leave your comments below.

Derrick's co-authors for the self-esteem study, "[Parasocial Relationships and Self-Discrepancies: Faux Relationships Have Benefits for Low Self-Esteem Individuals](#)," include Shira Gabriel of the University of Buffalo and Brooke Tippin of Detroit. Her co-authors for the television study, "[Social Surrogacy: How Favored Television Programs Provide the Experience of Belonging](#)," include Gabriel and Kurt Hugenberg of Miami University.

Join the Cosmic Log corps by signing up as my [Facebook friend](#) or hooking up on [Twitter](#). And if you really want to be friendly, ask me about my upcoming book, "[The Case for Pluto](#)."

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Stever has the right ideas about recognizing true talent and social networking in being a "die-hard" fan of a celebrity. There is a whole social network that happens with getting to "know" the celebrity as the "icing on the cake".

Marie, Encinitas, CA (Sent Tuesday, July 07, 2009 1:18 AM)

I'll take the Greek gods over so-called "celebrities" any day. I say this out of extreme conviction that the "celebrity culture" is highly toxic. It encourages people to live vicariously through others instead of seeking firsthand meaningful life experiences. It promotes a passive rather than an active lifestyle. This can be seen from the very language involved. "Celebrities" are labeled stars, and one can argue that those whose lives revolve around them could be considered the equivalent of planets.

The Greek myths are archetypes that are classic in their timelessness, in the fact that they actively engage us. These characters all represent parts of us, archetypes, as Carl Jung called them. They are not human beings, yet they are part of us all.

This is very different from the current veneration of living human beings, which could be considered a re-creation of the concepts of nobility, aristocracy and royalty. Why? Because it establishes certain people as being essentially of a "higher station" and more worthy of attention than most others. It is in direct contradiction with the founding principle of this country, which is that all people are created equal. Equal does not mean identical, but it does mean of equal worth. So if Michael Jackson does something, it is no more worthy of media attention than if anyone else does it.

The "celebrity culture" is teeming with people who have absolutely no talent but terrific marketers who could sell snake oil and become millionaires. How many Susan Boyles are out there, who are just as talented, if not more so, than these so-called celebrities, yet get absolutely no recognition?

If any people should be considered heroes and admired, it is our veterans, who put life and limb on the line every day fighting for us. It is not surprising that many veterans are livid about Michael Jackson's death getting this much attention when our soldiers die and are maimed every day and get nothing from the media.

I am a writer and an actress and a person of very high self-esteem--mine has probably reached Earth orbit! :) Why should I make gods or icons of other performers when I can do the same thing they do, and in many cases, I can do it better than they can? Why should I worship them when people in the industry recognize my talent only to say, "but I can't market you?" That's why, when the subject of "celebrities" comes up, I say, these so-called "stars" should be idolizing me rather than the other way around. Of course, I would rather see no human being idolized unless he/she actually accomplished genuinely great things.

Performing is a talent, and acting is a craft, but it is not heroism, and no performer deserves millions for one film or show. If that kind of money goes to anyone, it should be research scientists, such as the person who will one day find the cure for cancer. The fact that it goes to self-indulgent performers instead is a good reason why young people want to be athletes and models when they grow up instead of doctors and scientists.

As my science major college roommate used to say, the only stars I recognize are the ones in the sky. There is no evidence that any human being, in Hollywood or elsewhere, is generating his/her own light by nuclear fusion. And I refuse to live my life as a planet revolving around someone else.

Laurel Kornfeld (Sent Tuesday, July 07, 2009 1:39 AM)

Like MJ or not, most of us can identify with a particular song of his, which invokes memories of times long gone. It's not because MJ was particularly

likeable - he wasn't - and his behavior extremely circumspect to say the least. But I did like Billie Jean.

[sycologist](#) (Sent Tuesday, July 07, 2009 2:28 AM)

IT fills a purpose; not everybody *is* going to go out and have meaningful life experiences. In the old days a person like that sat around the cottage and thought about basically nothing. This can help give a focus; I just prefer to idolize someone like AMber Benson instead of Farrah or The Michael.

bobk (Sent Tuesday, July 07, 2009 8:25 AM)

I think fans of MJ are in love with the IMAGE of the man. They are NOT in love with the actual person, who none of us really knew. At the BET awards last week, Janet Jackson said, "To you, Michael is an icon. For us, he was our family member." I think people project a bigger-than-life status to celebrities (because of his music, images, videos). However, that status is no more accurate of that actual celebrity than Tom Hanks is actually Forrest Gump. It's just an image portrayed to the public at large. And, that's what people mourn. The MJ fans, we mourn the loss of a perceived person. If many of us knew MJ personally, we would probably be disappointed or disinterested. It would be like learning that there is no Santa.

Carl (Sent Tuesday, July 07, 2009 9:39 AM)

As our socialization (and humanity) within our own community/society dwindles, especially for younger members, the rise of celebrity worship increases. Unfortunately, there is no mystery left. Celebrities do everything under the sun and it is reported (for money) to the general public. And because of these reportings, the trends set are viewed as wholesome. In the past, police officers, teachers, religious men and women, firemen were persons who were cherished and looked up to for admiration. It was a realistic adoration since 'we' could see their strengths as well as personal flaws. Due to the crumbling structure of our own communities because of outside pressures enhanced by the 24/7 media as well as other social ills being accepted as benign and 'good' (gang initiations, drug use, murder, greed and total love of money) our own communities are not an example of what is admirable. End result: we look outside of our lives for our own fixes to our woes.

If you ever need to see where this is all going, read a few good science fiction novels. Our society is in the midst of collapsing.

Kathleen Pritchett, O'Fallon, Illinois (Sent Tuesday, July 07, 2009 10:31 AM)

I don't quite understand society on it's hold, when Michael Jackson was going through his trials the whole world watches; but they never say they did not believe he was innocent. Now the whole world is mourning his death, he needed these people to stand up for him when he was alive now he can't see them they are coming out to do what. They are fooling themselves, I am sorry he had to go this way; but every body will one day leave this wicked world, but where are they going when they leave this place. Pray for his children they will need all the prayers they can get. Why so many doctors and medication they all needed to go to jail for what they put him through even the Judge who was responsible for some of his pain needed to retire. They put him through Hell now he is at peace may his soul have rest.

H .S. MTL ,QUE (Sent Tuesday, July 07, 2009 10:40 AM)

Micheal jackson is a man of integrity in-born of music, his voice and body fitness in dancing attract me mostly with god gift talent. I love him and also miss him, dead has snatched my best musician, I lov u uuu. may yur gentle soul rest in perfect peace. I will continually playing his musics until the earth sumersaulted. RIP Jackson

[Austin Ikogwe, Lagos, Nigeria](#) (Sent Tuesday, July 07, 2009 11:03 AM)

Michael, in a way, was our generation's Mozart. He was a child prodigy who went on to capture the imagination of millions w/ his lyrics, music and his dancing. He broke through a racial barrier, topping the charts and creating a fan-base that circled the globe.

All while his personal life became more and more bizarre and problematic. Die-hard fans made excuses for his plastic surgeries and "legal difficulties", often blaming his troubles on an abusive father and an abnormal, or complete lack of a normal, childhood. He was "Peter Pan" with his Neverland Ranch and seemingly childish understanding of the "real" world.

Even other celebrities rushed to his aid and defense. He married, procured children, and yet was always the Boy King who must be coddled and protected from reality. He lived a life so far removed from normalcy one has to wonder how that affected him psychologically. One of his friends arranged for a late night trip to a closed grocery store and Michael spent an hour or more happily shopping "like a kid in a candy shop"!

Being only two years older than Michael, I was right there, along for the ride as our generation watched his meteoric rise to this ultra-stardom and then the shooting star and it's inevitable fall into this fiery mega-burst across the heavens.

While I enjoyed some of his music and got a thrill out of his dancing and videos, I never got swept up in the mania. He was always like a very talented, but very weird, little brother to me. I'd grown up with him, watched his metamorphosis, shaking my head at his peculiarities, frowning at the lawsuits and felony charges. Did he do it? I have no idea.

I believe that most of the fans that are over-the-top "fanatics", came to know him late in the game. The 20-30-somethings that never knew him as a child star, except in videos. The ones who only knew the man with the accomplished voice and moves. The video-agers. It's just a theory of mine.

I admit I was very shocked when I heard that Michael was dead. I was expecting Farrah's death and felt the grief that a very brave woman and icon of my youth had passed away, but was also glad that she was at peace. I had just lost my estranged father the week before, a man I hadn't seen since early childhood. I can admit that I felt more grief for Michael. He was, at least, a more constant presence in my life, albeit an impersonal one. I knew more about Michael, and in that strange way that song lyrics can touch your heart, felt more of a connection with a dead singer than with the man who had fathered me. I will watch the memorial, maybe a tear will fall for a sadly distorted life and a great talent silenced. Then I will move on, occasionally getting in the mood for a little music from "MJ". May he rest in peace. Finally.

Susan, Buffalo, MO (Sent Tuesday, July 07, 2009 11:07 AM)

Thank you, Laurel, very well put. I think we know there are too many people out there living very empty and unfulfilling lives.

Sue (Sent Tuesday, July 07, 2009 11:21 AM)

Having lived in Memphis during the time of Elvis, during his death, and the present. I have talked to many Elvis fans and asked them what their fascination was with Elvis and almost all of them said "we can relate to him, so we live our lives through him" as weird as that may sound.

Mark Ronza Memphis tn (Sent Tuesday, July 07, 2009 11:28 AM)

I agree with Professor Stever. Although fans might come together because of an admiration of the celebrity, most stay for the lifelong friendships and the social networking.

Fan clubs aren't just the "screaming and hysterical fans" just wanting to touch their idols. I have found the people in the fan clubs that I have met very diverse. They can range from the teenager who is "in love" with the celebrity to the housewife to the professional. Meeting the celebrities and getting to speak to them makes you realize that they are people just like you and appreciate them that much more.

Kathy Wang, Richmond, Ca (Sent Tuesday, July 07, 2009 11:39 AM)

The media orgy over Michael Jackson's death is absurd and sickening. The hyperbolic pandering to 'fans' and constant coverage illustrates the shallowness of our society. Yes, he wrote some very nice music and sure could dance. He was also a pedophile.

His music sales now are beyond huge, all fueled by the media's constant clamoring about how 'great' he was. The masses can't discriminate this fad for what it is and they buy memorabilia just to be participants - far better to put the monies to use helping other people instead of t-shirt merchants and record companies.

Meanwhile, other people die (Farrah Fawcett) and they receive scant coverage. The situation in Iran progresses, N.Korea has gone ballistic, the economy is in meltdown, etc., and ALL we care about is MJ's death and the funeral today, like he was a great statesman?

Play the Symphony in the Key of Woe Minor please...

Bill W, Gig Harbor, Wash (Sent Tuesday, July 07, 2009 11:50 AM)

Laurel,

Saying no one deserves millions for one show is like saying no one deserves millions for anything. It's called the free market economy, and if a person is worth that in the market, if enough people will buy what they do, then anyone in this country DESERVES to make as much money as they can. It doesn't matter whether you're Henry Ford, Bill Gates or Michael Jackson. It's called America, Laurel. You might want to consider dealing with it.

tommyB53 (Sent Tuesday, July 07, 2009 11:53 AM)

a media-generated spectacle

Greg, Houston, Texas (Sent Tuesday, July 07, 2009 11:58 AM)

It's a media-generated spectacle.

Bethany Meisberger, Pittsburgh, PA (Sent Tuesday, July 07, 2009 12:06 PM)

Personally, I think it's sad that people reserve such affection for celebrities and not for the people that actually matter. What screwed up priorities people have. Especially when the only reason celebrities do what they do is for profit. These people don't care about you. They want your bank account. So very, very sad.

Gail Cooke, Calgary, AB Canada (Sent Tuesday, July 07, 2009 12:21 PM)

Today on July 7, his body will be put to final resting, May God bless you, my megastar, your star will keep shining through. for me, you are the most wonderful human being although I have never met you or meet you one on one, but my gut telling me that you are so very special. that's the thing, wonderful person usually die so early. you, your music and dance will be remembered by many people, especially me and my family.

Imelda, Atlanta, GA (Sent Tuesday, July 07, 2009 12:23 PM)

As our "Socialist" Politicians rapidly sacrifice our sovereignty and liberty, from the nationalizing banks and the auto industry, to the "capp and tax" bill passed by the House, The totally bought and paid for main stream media found a very convenient cover for what they SHOULD have been reporting, by cramming Michael Jackson's death down our throats. We have lost a celebrity, yes, but what is more important. "The graveyards are filled with indispensable men." Charles DeGaulle

Forrest, Fort Wayne, In. (Sent Tuesday, July 07, 2009 12:34 PM)

I think the main point of this article is not to whom people "worship," but it addresses (and raises questions about) the reasons why we do it.

True, there is much celebrity worship due to marketing and the mass media. If it were not for the inventions of radio, television, and recorded music there would be very few celebrities. There are many talented people around our world...just look at all the reality shows and you'll understand that very clearly.

We tend to idolize those that affect our emotions (plus we tend to listen to the pundits and evaluators). Once we have been touched by a song, a story, an event, we tend to connect with the person(s) that are the messengers of that message or story. Many do have trouble differentiating between those reality and fiction, however, and they attach themselves to that individual or group and voila - a "star" is born.

Why do we do that? I guess it fills the need to worship something or someone. I agree that in some ways it may lessen the reality of death, but yet, listening to music or seeing a program or movie in which the principal actor/musician is dead brings our mortality right back into my mind. Many people say that they don't worship anything. I disagree...we all worship some thing or some person, be it a god or otherwise.

If we just realize that Michael Jackson was just one person (talented, yes), and in effect, was no different than anyone else, it puts his death into proper perspective.

I tend to try to do this with all "celebrities." I am a fan of Josh Groban, "Lord of the Rings," as well as "Star Trek." But I have never paid enormous amounts of money or spent alot of time in the world of "celebrity worship." I am interested, yes, but I remember, that at the end of the day, they, too, go home to their partners, have issues and struggles, and "down" days. Many times, they themselves can't handle the fame and idolization. Michael couldn't.

While it is sad that MJ died the way he did, he is just like me... a human being.

Brad, Cleveland, OH (Sent Tuesday, July 07, 2009 12:43 PM)

I am really sad to hear that he is not with us anymore. However, he will live in our hearts forever; because of his talent and greatness to charities. MJ rest and peace and I as many will never forget you.

Debby Flickinger, Pleasant Hill, CA (Sent Tuesday, July 07, 2009 12:45 PM)

I've been reading these messages and they range from total disgust at Michael's lifestyle to total adoration. The fact is that celebrities (most of them) are by far the most egotistical individuals on earth. When Michael was going through the trials and tribulations brought about by the accusations of children who claimed that he molested them, his counterparts were no where to be found. Many of them made jokes about him. Now all these "entertainers" want to be a part of his memorial service. That's disgusting! Michael may have escaped incarceration after the scandal, but he couldn't escape condemnation or the loss of his wealth. The fact is, law enforcement discovered many disturbing things in his home that pointed to a sexual deviant. But if the families of the so-called victims were willing to take money for the abuse of their children, attorneys and the accused were more than willing to pay, whatever the cost. This is a real eye opener and says a lot about our society and what we're willing to overlook. But rest assured that if John Doe committed these same acts with young boys, he would not be so lucky. I guess money and prestige can buy you almost anything. Anything but mortality that is. In the end, no one could save Michael from himself. He died a broken, lonely man. A man who was tortured by a painful childhood, a man who destroyed his own face out of fear and an overwhelming lack of confidence. Our society is failing at a staggering rate. Mankind is anything but kind. For a man with so much talent, with an absolutely angelic face and a beautiful voice, he became a monster constantly running from himself.

Bell, La. (Sent Tuesday, July 07, 2009 12:46 PM)

He was a great artist and i will miss him,i grew up listening to him and hs music brings many fond memories of different times all through my life.after all isnt that what music is all about

L. Hess Fulton,NY (Sent Tuesday, July 07, 2009 12:49 PM)

So much sorrow for the close friends and family of Michael Jackson. And my condolences for the families of Ed McMahon, Farrah Fawcett, Billy Mays, Karl Malden. While I am a fan of all of the above, life will go on. I am so blessed not to have lived my life so vicariously thru the life of a celebrity. A private burial would have been sufficient. All of the hoopla @ the Staples Center is not necessary. Why are we not focusing on the present state of our nation? Priorities, please.....

Glynn Hebert, Lafayette, LA (Sent Tuesday, July 07, 2009 12:54 PM)

Any canonization of an artist is misdirected at best. However, as often as not people (read: fans) read a lot more meaning - and perceive substance where none exists - into things that the artists never intended; see John Lennon: "We're more popular than Jesus now; I don't know which will go first; rock 'n' roll or Christianity"

Anyway, the fact is that as long as an artist with MJ's capabilities and possibilities remains in our world, the chance of something artistically special being once again created, is possible; with his passing, that chance is lost. Michael Jackson was many things to many different people, but what cannot be denied is that artistically, he was a genius and the potential for the special art he was capable of producing will be missed. May he rest.....

P.B.inLosAngeles Los Angeles, CA. (Sent Tuesday, July 07, 2009 12:55 PM)

I follow Johnny Depp's take on his own fame and 'celebrity'.

He said "I am just an average guy with a really cool job." or something to that effect.

I think that is the only healthy way to look at actors, singers, athletes and other performers.

Omega the Unstar Struck Guy Denver CO (Sent Tuesday, July 07, 2009 12:55 PM)

I guess its a matter of insecurity. I do not understand why to give so much attention to a celebrity when your troops are being defeated in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Ali, Dubai (Sent Tuesday, July 07, 2009 12:58 PM)

I don't understand how people can say he was a child molester, when he was acquitted. Have they ever been accused of something they didn't do. This was on a grander stage. Like his brother Jermaine said, the world was not ready for such an enlightened person. Michael Jackson evolved beyond the understanding for the average person. [...]

Theresa Cochran (Sent Tuesday, July 07, 2009 1:03 PM)

It will do no good to say it to the diehards, but you need to get a life of your own. MJ was a great performer, but it ends there. He was a human being with many of the same faults, and a few more manufactured ones, but flawed as we all are. So go out, love your family and friends, and become the best human that YOU can be.

Greg, CDA, Idaho (Sent Tuesday, July 07, 2009 1:04 PM)

Fascinating that Michael is referred to as MJ. In the sports world, indeed most of the entire world, MJ refers to Michael Jordan. Now there's a real talent

that literally soared.

I echo the kudos for Michael's music and dancing. He made sure that the girls who just want to have fun, did, and the boys who wanted to have fun with the girls who wanted to, did, too. And hence, many of us had fun together and likely will still.

But sadly, "fun" has usurped meaning, purpose, service to others, deference, and giving others a hand up. "Fun" and the ability to provide it has become more of a litmus test for "admiration" and fawning than character, integrity, fidelity, charity, kindness, generosity, and love. Michael provided a context and musical milieu for fun, had fun doing so, and arguably had too much "fun" playing with children. But we had too much fun singing along with him, imitating his dance moves, and grooving to his beat to care or criticize sufficient to stop him.

Laud his musical genius. Rue his self-absorbed, spendthrift ways and his boundary-crossing behavior with children. Pity his "nature," "nurture," and "numbing" experiences with sychophants, wanna-be's, leeches, and voyeurs; he was a product of all and his lifestyle is not to be emulated nor extolled. He may have had an excuse to live as he did, but not a virtuous reason.

Let the family bury their dead. Let them mourn, grieve, and remember their son, brother, father, and uncle. Let the rest of us celebrate his music, learn from the mistakes of his life, and do one thing every month of our life, if not more frequently, to ensure one other person, just one, experiences not just fun, but lasting kindness, hope, joy, dignity, and affirmation. With or without a moon walk.

[William J. Green, New York, NY](#) (Sent Tuesday, July 07, 2009 1:05 PM)

To TommyB53: I guess in your view if enough people buy some junk snake oil that a con artist has convinced them will make them look younger or lose weight, that con artist deserves the millions too. Drug dealers offer a product many people buy; in your view they deserve their millions as well. Sorry, but the "free market economy" isn't God. Look at the results of the "free market" when regulations were lifted--massive abuses in the worlds of banking, finance, housing, etc. My way of "dealing with it," as you put it, is to fight this phenomenon with all that I am and all that I have. And before you call me a communist, you should know I am a firm believer in democracy. However, unrestrained capitalism is not democracy. And the freedom our soldiers are fighting for includes freedom to speak out against these abuses and lead boycotts against them. If the American people turned off their TVs and started reading and actually using their brains, they would really that those who do the most good for society--medical researchers, scientists, social workers, veterans--are the only ones who truly deserve the millions. If they want to stay brain dead and keep supporting snake oil sales people, it's this whole country's loss.

I'll go for the Beatles instead: "You say you want a revolution..." It's about time!

[Laurel Kornfeld](#) (Sent Tuesday, July 07, 2009 1:06 PM)

One has to wonder how big a deal this would have been if he didn't have the tour coming up. He was out of the public eye except for the occasional news blurb for at least the last decade.

I don't mourn his death because he was nothing to me. I enjoyed the entertainment but I enjoy a lot of music and movies and my only connection is the money I pay to see or hear it.

There are a lot more important people that have done much more for humanity than MJ but when they pass there is a quick note and nothing more. Even a dead Pope doesn't get this much press.

The funny thing is we watched as Farrah passed and there was a pretty big deal made of it until MJ died then all other news came to a screeching halt.

McNair is shot and killed and you might see a new headline once in a while updating the investigation, this happened three days ago. MJ died 13 days ago and at minimum there are 10 stories running just on MSNBC.

News is no longer reported, it is created so they can milk every single dollar out of it that they possibly can. MJ's worth more now than he was alive and Elvis was still the highest money making entertainer years after his death.

This man died by his own hand just like any other junkie on the street. We have not built a high enough pedestal to keep the drugs away from him. You have a spoiled man boy that surrounded himself with yes people and it ended the way you would expect it to end. He lived an excessive eccentric lifestyle but we celebrate and mourn him like he was the second coming.

Once the tears are dried and all the tributes are done all you will have is your dreary job and life to go back to, if you are fortunate enough to have a job.

There is no Neverland Ranch in your future so live your life to the fullest and stop doing it vicariously through other people.

Pop culture has taken over as the most important aspect of life. It is used to raise your kids and shape them into disrespectful whiny brats because life doesn't mimic the world of Hannah Montana. Tickets for sporting events are through the roof. Your current television is not good enough. It goes on and on and bleeds you dry and now another millionaire is dead and we are going to celebrate him.

By the way, the country is still in a recession and the unemployment rate is still above 9%. Put as much effort into your own community as you do mourning dead celebrities and we might make change for the good on this rock we call home.

[Jim GH,OH](#) (Sent Tuesday, July 07, 2009 1:30 PM)

i love mj and i dont believe the stories about the child molestation. his music is inspiring and if he made so much money out of it, it shouldnt be an issue. rip mj.

[ade, lagos, lagos](#) (Sent Tuesday, July 07, 2009 1:33 PM)

What a total waste of money (gold casket, etc.) What good use could have been made of it to heal children or feed the poor. I feel the same way about the elaborate expense of the Pope and Rome and the Church edifices here in the US. Where are our priorities?

[Pat , Dallas, Texas](#) (Sent Tuesday, July 07, 2009 1:34 PM)

good by michael

[burl pilgrim fort worth texas](#) (Sent Tuesday, July 07, 2009 1:40 PM)

He has been a great singer and a great person is really painfull know that we don't have him anymore, I remember when my mom used to play his songs, I remember the first vinyl disk we have.... We are gonna miss him forever...

Adriana Aguiar, Ecuador (Sent Tuesday, July 07, 2009 1:42 PM)

I agree that our society has it's priorities bass ackwards. We celebrate and condone those who fail us time and time again. Having said that, I, personally, think that we should be able to celebrate the the person's accomplishments and life when mourning their death. John F. Kennedy was a huge womanizer and has had his presidency scrutinized for choices he made. yet most in our society holds him in high esteem for his legacy he left behind. Elvis had a myriad of problems but is still regarded as "The King". Those of us who mourn the celebrities we love, mourne their good legacy and let God judge the rest.

Melanie (Sent Tuesday, July 07, 2009 1:46 PM)

i agree with bill w. enough already and why does it have to be played on every station, not everyone really cares to watch

kay lith, illinois (Sent Tuesday, July 07, 2009 2:23 PM)

As long as people know the facts about famous people they admire, (their faults and their positive attributes), I don't see it being a problem; Unless it's taken to the extreme. A fan of Thomas Edison, Leonardo daVinci, Albert Einstein might be inspired to do good and achieve something important. I was not born a Christian, but, Karen Anne Carpenter (drummer/singer) had such an impact on my life, I converted and I am glad that I did so. Most fans do know the difference between admiration and idol worship-turning a celebrity into a demigod.

Benst, Albany, NY USA (Sent Tuesday, July 07, 2009 2:24 PM)

Michael Jackson had a great deal of talent. I grew up listening to his music and was always blown away by his ability to entertain. But I certainly would not mourn for him the way I would a family member or close friend. I do however feel a great deal of pity for his children. They certainly will always have enough money, but let's face it, they will now be raised by the same people who turned Michael into the sad emotionally disturbed man he was.

KevinLisa (Sent Tuesday, July 07, 2009 2:25 PM)

IF MICHAEL JACKSONS LIFE AND DEATH SERVE ANY REAL PURPOSE TO MOST OF US..IT IS TO DEMONSTRATE THE COMPLETE LACK OF CONNECTIVITY THAT FORTUNE,FAME ,AND WEALTH HAVE TO ANYONES HAPPINESS OR FEELINGS OF FULFILMENT.

K R PARKHILL (Sent Tuesday, July 07, 2009 2:31 PM)

It's a terrible spectacle. He was a great entertainer with way too many issues. I cannot believe even in death he could not have his privacy but at least not for profit this time, at least not his. This man was not a president or even a princess, he was a singer and dancer who escaped the justice system due to his enormous wealth. Shame on this society for it's adoration of him and allowing him to escape what would have put any "average joe" in jail.

Nancy, Lynn, Ma (Sent Tuesday, July 07, 2009 2:33 PM)

I think that a lot of what's been said in this string can be put in the category of "agenda setting", which is a fundamental theory in mass communication study. We allow our media to tell us what to think about and who is important instead of us dictating what we want to see and hear. Clearly this is a situation where our media is telling us what to think about (Jackson's passing) and "giving us what we want", because they told us his passing is the most important event of the moment.

Anyone watching that crazy Tour de France? Lance Armstrong is back. *waves hands around* DISCUSS!

Anne Young, St. Louis, Missouri (Sent Tuesday, July 07, 2009 2:45 PM)

We had 40 years of wonderful music from Michael Jackson. In 40 years of wonderful music, at LEAST one of his songs had to have touched a part of each of us. Putting the young man on a pedestal and then knocking him down when he didn't live up to everyone's expectations (which were WHAT?) -- what a sad, sad way for him to live the last few years of his life. He was not aware of how important he was. Rest in peace Michael Jackson...

nancy b, Anaheim, CA (Sent Tuesday, July 07, 2009 2:48 PM)

Focus on Jesus, He is coming soon. He alone is King of Kings. The only way to heaven is through Jesus. I am sorry for MJ passed, but anyone ever think or ask if MJ is in heaven or hell. It is not good for a men to gain the world if he looses his soul.

j totowa, nj (Sent Tuesday, July 07, 2009 3:25 PM)

The coming together of our like-mindedness I think points to the true reason why so many are drawn to the memorial. It is a reflection of our common humanity even if our lives bear little or no resemblance to each other in how we live life. It is cathartic.

MJ lived larger than life and people respect that even if you didn't buy any of his recordings.

Thomas Ashby (Sent Tuesday, July 07, 2009 3:27 PM)

..Also, the world becomes a somewhat lonlier place when people like MJ leave it. I think that is why humans come together at such times.

Thomas Ashby (Sent Tuesday, July 07, 2009 3:36 PM)

Celebrities/Stars are human like the rest of us.The difference is that they market their talents for the world to see and enjoy. They provide the rest of us with various venues of entertainment. How boring and depressing the world would be if the only media coverage would be about wars, politics, the economy etc. Celebrities give us an "escape" from the real world. They brighten our world with their many talents, trials, and tribulations. Their deaths end their future creativities -it is in that respect that they will be missed. Farewells and funerals are societies way to help those grieving the loss. May Michael's family and friends find comfort from the out pouring of love that has surrounded them at this difficult time.

Charla'- York, Pa. (Sent Tuesday, July 07, 2009 4:16 PM)

i'm sad MJ's gone, but somehow, his passing away, is like GOD'S slap to the face of MEDIA, when all the world was focused on IRAN, GOD slapped and said, don't u guys have anything better to do than project a country's internal problem?

John Doe (Sent Tuesday, July 07, 2009 4:23 PM)

I personally grew up with Michael Jackson and did share my love of his music with my son. He has continued that with his own love of music...this was a beautiful tribute to a very very talented person. Being talented and using that talent to help others is to be respected. However, to "salute" him as the US Congresswoman Lee of Texas did is totally out of touch with the "real" world. Save it for our troops, the true givers in our world. They give their lives, hence a salute. Shame on her!!!

sue n. Buffalo NY (Sent Tuesday, July 07, 2009 4:26 PM)

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