

Why we must stop hating people we don't know



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I have a confession to make: I can't stand Tom Cruise. There is no logical reason — after all, I have never met him, and I am unlikely to, but when his name comes up in conversation, for some reason my toes curl.

Meghan Markle is creating similar feelings across the globe, despite being a new mother with a beaming smile. All she has done is fall in love with a popular royal, yet [the negativity around her is palpable](#).

Such strong feelings arise in many of us for seemingly no reason at all; if we compiled a list of people, names such as Adam Goodes, Gwyneth Paltrow, Ben Affleck, Delta Goodrem and Taylor Swift would probably come up.



People get agitated by singer Delta Goodrem. Picture: AAP Image/Darren England

All, like Markle, are regularly flayed by the public which doesn't seem to warm to them despite their undoubted talents and achievements.

So what drives these irrational feelings of negativity towards people we do not know?

Well, this is the uncomfortable part that we must accept: it is often those deadly sins of envy, jealousy, pride and wrath.

Those sins emerge when we look at someone we think doesn't deserve the status that has been foisted upon them. We think they're not particularly talented, intelligent or even likeable, yet they have a mass fanbase and a career that earns them huge amounts (yes, I am talking about Justin Bieber).

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Then add to that our own deeply held, built-in biases — those things we don't like to express openly around gender, race, religion, sexual orientation, political preferences — and the vitriol begin to roll out.

That doesn't mean some celebrities aren't in some way responsible for generating that dislike from the public.

Meghan Markle's warm and welcoming smile helped her become a star on the TV show *Suits* but it's an achilles heel when stories of poor behaviour leak out from behind closed doors, whether true or not.



What has Meghan Markle done other than have a baby and a nice smile? Picture: Toby Melville — Pool/Getty Images

To the public the generous smile then becomes disingenuous, a false face, making claims of boorish behaviour seem even more sinister.

In truth, we tend to prefer the rebels, the rule breakers, those who stand up to authority, people who push boundaries, carve up taboos and play up in ways we wish we could. That's how former Test star Shane Warne apparently survives any number of scandals without a scratch and the many, many Kardashians keep raking in the millions.

We expect the bad boys and girls of the world to behave as they do because they wear their flaws on their sleeves. That way they're more relatable to us.

But there are limits: if the behaviour pushes the boundaries too far, then a teenage Disney rebel like Miley Cyrus shifts the public perception from rebel to something else in the minds of most people. Gyrating across the floor at the MTV Music Awards will do that.

Nick Kyrgios is in a similar mould: the Happy Gilmore of tennis is a prodigious talent who insists on doing things his way in a staid sport.



Nick Kyrgios is another celebrity who presses people's peeved button. Picture: Clive Brunskill/Getty Images for Laver Cup

Deep down we want to like him but he pushes the boundaries so far that he makes it hard to do.

One thing celebrities and the rest of us share is flaws, which is why it gets our gears grinding when those lucky few in the limelight take a holier-than-thou attitude to life in the era of celebrity activism.

Whether it's flying around the world in private jets to lecture the rest of us on climate change or leaping upon popular causes as self-appointed representatives of the "people", those celebrities are inevitably caught in a world of their own importance, oblivious to the eye rolling.

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Having an opinion is one thing. Being an expert is something else altogether. Kanye West may well be able to rap like a champion, yet somehow he thinks that qualifies him to be an adviser to President Donald Trump (although perhaps it actually does).

Self-styled lifestyle queen Gwyneth Paltrow uses her fame to push expensive and weird remedies and that's why when she separated from Chris Martin, fans applauded the Coldplay star's decision to go out for a steak immediately after the couple split.

The good news is that there is a bunch of celebrities who we will never see on a UN panel, sitting across from a president or pushing a health product — they are our animated screen friends.



Try and see the good in people, like Sulley from Monsters, Inc. Picture: Supplied

My favourite is Sulley from Monsters Inc, the big cuddly blue monster who gave us the beautiful message that laughter is much more powerful than screams.

So, if you find yourself falling into “hating” on the famous, then think about Sulley and try to channel your time and energy into something positive.

That is what I try to do when I think of Tom Cruise. It's not easy, but with a little bit of effort it does help to overcome my negative thoughts.

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