

Case 10-E

Tom Cruise, Katie Holmes and Suri Cruise: Do Celebrities Have Privacy?

LEE WILKINS

University of Missouri—Columbia

One definition of celebrity reads as follows: People who are famous for being famous. Tom Cruise, one of the most popular actors of the late 20th and early 21 century, may well fit this definition, although his body of work in film has won some critical acclaim as well as enormous box office success.

That box office success also has been fueled by publicity, and much of that publicity has been focused on Cruise's personal life, including his multiple marriages. When Cruise was first dating his now ex-wife Katie Holmes, also an actress, he announced his affection by jumping up and down on the interview couch live on Oprah Winfrey's television show. Holmes and Cruise were often photographed in public; they were relentlessly pursued by photographers known as paparazzi. When their child, Suri, was born, there were no photographs, a consistent stand for Cruise who, with ex-wife Nicole Kidman, did not allow either of their adopted children to be photographed until the younger one was about two years old.

In early, 2012, Cruise and Holmes divorced, a split that was reported publically in multiple media outlets. Both Cruise and Holmes were interviewed and photographed, particularly in the summer of 2012 when both parents individually took their daughter on outings to tourist destinations in New York and to Disney World in Florida. You can find many photographs of Cruise, Holmes and Suri Cruise through a casual internet search.

Micro Issues

1. Some theorists suggest that celebrity, because its oxygen is publicity, should not be subject to the same ethical standards regarding privacy and other sorts of individuals? Analyze this argument, using ethical theory to support various approaches.
2. Was it appropriate for media outlets to publish photos of the Cruise and Holmes during this time? Of Suri?
3. Are the details of the Cruise/Holmes divorce ethically distinct from the fact that the marriage has ended? Justify your answers in terms of ethical theory.

Mid-range Issues

1. How should Cruise's or Holmes' character influence media coverage of them as individuals, particularly their private lives?
2. Is there something more invasive about photographing Suri than photographing her parents? Is a photograph necessary for a journalistic purpose?
3. Should there be different standards for the tabloid press such as TMZ or Jezebel than for more mainstream media? If there are different standards, how do you account for them?

Macro Issues

1. How does your reasoning apply to the coverage of Michael Jackson's death, particularly his drug use and the charges—none of which were proved in court—of child molestation? Does the same reasoning apply to public officials, for example diplomats, athletes, or elected officials?
2. Photographs of celebrities increase magazine sales and web hits. Do you think these financial incentives outweigh ethical concerns in the coverage of celebrities? Should they?
3. How does the concept of celebrity relate to the concept of popular and elite art? Critique your analysis from the point of view—of journalists, strategic communication professionals, of artists themselves.
4. How do you think Kant would analyze the concept of celebrity? Our response to celebrities?