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Paparazzi Laws

In 2007, Britney Spears went through a very public meltdown. After living under a media microscope for years, the public was fascinated when she crumbled under the pressure and shaved her head and attacked a paparazzo's car with an umbrella (Puente). Her story is just one example of the trend in today's society towards not only idolizing celebrities, but also lauding their falls from grace. This has led to a boom in paparazzi activity in recent years, in a classic case of supply and demand. The public and media demand to know every sordid detail about celebrity lives, and the paparazzi deliver (Puente). In the last couple of years, however, there has been an ongoing debate about the ethics of whether the children of celebrities should be subjected to the same treatment by the paparazzi as their parents. When considering the debate, however, it is essential to recognize that a child's innocence should never be sacrificed for the entertainment of others. Due to the unethical conduct of the paparazzi and the potential for harassment, paparazzi activity should be limited to exclude the photographing of celebrity children.

In 2013 a law was passed in California that banned photography of celebrity children, and, while this may seem like a simple law, there were still many who opposed it. Those opposed to the law argued that celebrities are an economic commodity (Fisher 2). A group of paparazzi argued against the law claiming that it would hurt their livelihood (Fisher 2). Photographing celebrities is a business, they argued, and it should not be prevented. While valid, what this

argument fails to consider is that the law was aimed to protect the children of celebrities from the paparazzi. The celebrities themselves were not included in the language of the law, and, as a result, the livelihood of paparazzi will likely not be impacted. Additionally, opponents also argue that the celebrity parents chose to enter the public life, and therefore cannot complain about the consequences (Fisher 1). When an actor or actress signs on to make a film, they are also agreeing to the public scrutiny that comes with it. While this is true, it does not acknowledge that it is just the parent that agreed to the attention. Just as any other child in the country, they have no involvement in his or her parent's career.

Part of the new law in California that bans the photographing of celebrity children includes fines of up to \$10,000 and added potential for civil law suits for violators. When considering the emotional and mental distress that the paparazzi can cause, this seems like a small violation. Actress Halle Berry, a major proponent of the new law, issued a statement detailing her concerns for her child. She said, "It is my hope that this is the beginning of the end for those overly aggressive paparazzi whose outrageous conduct has caused so much trauma and emotional distress" (Fisher 1). She further details instances in which she has been harassed by the paparazzi, culminating in her six year old daughter sobbing in the back seat of their car, asking Berry if they were going to be killed (Fisher 1). For a child, it is hard to understand what exactly is happening. They do not see a man trying to make his living. No, they instead see a stranger jumping out from behind a bush. Imagine, for just one moment, how terrifying that must be to a six year old. In order to prevent long lasting emotional and mental trauma for the child, the paparazzi need to be more regulated.

Part of the new law rightfully changes the definition of harassment. According to the new law, it is now unlawful to photograph or record "a child without the permission of a legal

guardian by following the child or guardian's activities or by lying in wait" (Puente). Essentially, this new law is not a new concept. It is merely clarifying the definition of harassment. For years the paparazzi have been operating under the assumption that there was some sort of exception for celebrities (Puente). Instead this law calls paparazzi activity what it is: stalking and voyeurism. It is unlawful for the average person to harass another, especially a child. The media has created a culture in which scrutiny of celebrity figures is demanded. This should not be confused, however, with the promotion of harassment. Just like any other career, there needs to be professional ethical regulations. Lawyers, doctors, teachers, and police officers all have regulations put on them for how they can and should conduct themselves. This new law regulating paparazzi activity is essentially the same thing: it takes a career and attaches a code of ethics.

At its core, the paparazzi profession profits on the scrutiny of others. While this is an expected consequence for celebrities, it should not be assumed that their children are also fair game. In order to protect the innocence of children everywhere, the paparazzi should not be allowed to photograph them. These children are not here for entertainment, and they should not be regarded as such.

Works Cited

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