

Perception or reality;

You be the judge...

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Forgive me if this sounds like a story you might have heard before... Michael Jackson was a star above all stars so the story goes; redefining and towering over what are now stayed positionings for the pop music genre: childhood protégée, teen pop idol, young heart-throb, adult tough guy, rock god...) and could not commit a fault when he was in the favor of the world's dons.

Anything out of the ordinary was viewed and associated with the expected lifestyles of the rich and famous; a misunderstood man-child reliving a childhood marred by an abusive father and extreme stardom. Media captions painted a portrait (not overlooking his own personal efforts) of a god amongst commoners; crowned the undisputed (but self-proclaimed) King of Pop and revered by legions the world over.

As he progressively fell out of the favor of these social pundits, what was viewed as eccentric and Hollywood sheik suddenly became weird and stale. Mainstream media captions now make reference to a deranged social maverick, mutated by years of excessive facial reconstruction and self imposed skin de-pigmentation; a struggling 'has been' on the verge of bankruptcy and living amongst starved animals and yes; the undisputed favorite that features as a tag line to every commentary – an accused yet acquitted child molester!

Just like the stars that fill the galaxy once overgrown, this one (the biggest thus far in the human context) started to disintegrate of its own fuel; the same media that created

and capitalized from his image, started to break him down with even more momentum.

The story could easily end here but that wouldn't really be me now would it (let me hear an Amen!!!!)

What is evidenced in the MJ saga is what can arguably be viewed to be a natural mental disposition innate to most human beings – paradigms or a mindset fixation that impairs our ability to see beyond the obvious or what we are used to. We develop patterns based of predefined parameters or events that we use to interpret future signals that we receive without much interrogation. This is our nature.

Take the time to look at those you like and don't like and assess the reasons for not liking them or liking them to begin with... In many cases it becomes an egg and chick predicament doesn't it? "Do I like them because of what they do or do I like what they do because I like them?" "Does someone do a lot of good things because I only see the good things and ignore the rest?" "Do I see the bad things because someone does a lot of bad things or because that's all I look for?" When we like people for whatever reason (physical attraction, family bonds, referral power, authority, buddy'ism, shared interests, racial/ ethnic/ religious links and so on), we are more likely to focus on the good things when passing general judgment on them. Likewise when we do not like people, we are more likely to focus on their weaknesses or the bad things they do to define them...

Have you ever formed judgment on someone you don't know just because of something you have heard in the grapevine? What happens next? The first wrong thing they do becomes an "Aa Haa" moment. First impressions anybody... It

becomes an up-hill battle just to convince yourself that you can like that person; they often have to go ridiculously out of their way to impress you – the ‘non-believer’. Do you know that this is the premise for most of what we know to be social prejudice and segregation; the ‘us’ versus ‘them’ fixations.

In a society like ours, where duplicity and hypocrisy are generally consumed survival tactics, it becomes even harder to sort out people’s true intentions. How many of us have mastered the ‘frown-behind-a-smile’, or the ‘jicho la pembeni’?

Michael Jackson is not only the King of Pop (as was confirmed by his 50 sell out shows in the UK), but he has earned merit enough to be considered the King of Perseverance also. He did not allow the perception of others to deter his reality and he has survived through the worst of times as a result; he was down and instead of picking him up, people, in the name of money and other vices, chose to kick him down further. But he persevered and endured the insult and ridicule in a way that very few of us could because he was true to his reality.

The moral of this story is simple but complicated still; a lot of reality is what you perceive it to be and a lot of perception is the reality you choose to know...