

What We Can Learn from Katy Perry's Depression

Superstar Katy Perry's 2017 album *Witness* sold "only" 180,000 copies the first week it went on sale.

Expectations dashed, Perry [fell into a depression](#). She explains her overwhelming disappointment, "I have bouts of situational depressions and my heart was broken last year because unknowingly, I put so much validity in the reaction of the public, and the public didn't react in the way I had expected... which broke my heart."

Some may feel little empathy for Perry. Her album was the 91st biggest selling album of 2017. She tours to adoring crowds all over the world. How she could think the world didn't give her enough appreciation?

Yet, Perry's affliction is universal. Many of us seek to fill our existential neediness with something from the world and find that others and circumstances never deliver enough to extinguish the ache.

The more recognition, the more appreciation we seek from the world, the more we ache.

Author and sports coach [Garret Kramer often explains](#) to clients why he has no technique to help remove their feelings of insecurity. He puts it this way:

"Insecurity is the natural effect of one thing: attaching their identity or well-being to this situation or that. And I'm defining a situation as a circumstance, event, relationship, environment, object, or anything that evolves, changes, appears, or disappears. In fact, insecurity is SUPPOSED to occur when we identify with something that's transient. It's completely normal."

In other words, the permanent status we seek can never be

found in the world. Perry's false idol was album sales. Don't we all have our own false idols? If our idols are not focused on our career, we may be disappointed when family members don't appreciate our efforts on their behalf. When we identify our emotional and spiritual well-being with things outside of us, like Perry, we suffer when the world doesn't deliver.

Brad's Status

Brad Sloan founded and runs a non-profit organization. He is comfortable financially and has a loving wife and son. Brad has a wonderful life, and he doesn't know it. Emotionally, Brad is an insecure, neurotic mess.

The cause of his suffering: Brad wants the world to acknowledge his "specialness" and the world won't.

Brad, played by Ben Stiller in the comedy film [Brad's Status](#), is a fictional creation of Mike White. A talented director, writer, and actor, White is one of the most astute observers of the human condition working in Hollywood today. The film takes us inside Brad's head to see how Brad's fixation on status is ruining his life.

Brad seeks status through his college-bound son whom he

accompanies on college visitation tours. Waiting during his son's interview at Harvard, he eagerly tells another parent about his son's accomplishments. "What does your son do?" he then asks. The other parent icily replies, "What does he do? He goes to high school."

Brad meets two friends of his son on the Harvard tour. He wonders why he had never met such women in his college years. He fantasizes about the coeds idolizing him and falling in love with him as they romp on a sunny beach.

He imagines the lives of his friends; their cars, planes, mansions, and early retirements are out of reach in his ordinary life. More money, he thinks, will bring him more status.

Brad takes no responsibility. Self-deceived, he blames his wife Melanie for his middling success, thinking, "Melanie is so easily satisfied. Her contentment undermines my ambition."

Out to dinner with a college friend who is now famous, Brad is stunned and angered when the friend reveals he never thought of Brad as a rival. You can hear the wheels turning in Brad's head, *Wasn't I good enough to be a worthy competitor?*

Brad never enjoys a present moment; he is living in his thinking, continually comparing the present to what might have been were he to have more status. "Where did it all go wrong," he wonders over and over again.

Brad lives his life filtered through his search for status; his experience of the present moment is distorted. *Brad's Status* is a comedy encouraging us to reflect on the many ways seeking status ruins our experience of life.

The Way Out

Brad is waiting for his status to change before he can be happy. His thinking is stuck on rehearsing thoughts about what should have happened. He is trapped in the illusion that the present moment is merely a portal to some future moment when the world will love him the way he deserves.

Whew! No wonder Brad is in a constant state of low-grade misery. The needs of Brad's self-identity are always at the forefront of his thinking.

The only moment love and happiness can be experienced is now. When in the present moment we relinquish (at least temporarily) the demands of our status seeking self-identity, we can experience love and happiness.

Brad has confused cause and effect. He thinks his unfulfilled present is the cause of his tedious self-centered thinking. Instead, his self-centered thinking is the cause of his unfulfilled present.

As a result, Brad's level of insecurity is off-the-charts. If you watch *Brad's Status*, reflect on times you've felt insecure when you attached your wellbeing to something occurring in the world.

Katy Perry reveals what she learned from her own experience of ruminating about her status: “That brokenness, plus me opening up to a greater, higher power and reconnecting with divinity, gave me a wholeness I never had. It gave me a new foundation. It’s not just a material foundation: it’s a soul foundation.”

How refreshing to hear an entertainer speak openly of finding meaning in something more significant than the limits of their own self-concept. Perry is learning what we all must: No amount of status will ever bring the peace and happiness we seek.

—

[Image: Flickr [Annefegurasin](#), CC BY 2.0]