

Student Answer A

- Shu Min offers a balanced view of the impact of celebrity culture, addressing the concerns which Schumaker highlights in the local context. There is consistent evaluation of the writer's arguments in all her paragraphs.
- She shows awareness of the fact that Schumaker makes many generalizations in his arguments, and clearly demonstrates how his views are not applicable to Singapore. She raises several examples of celebrity influence to illustrate her points.

I agree with Schumaker that 'celebrity culture' has caused some detrimental effects to society but I disagree with his view that it has 'severely' harmed modern society.

Schumaker puts forth the argument that our culture has led to the 'commodification of the individual' and the 'individual image', leading to a materialistic, superficial society where only appearances matter. I agree with his argument here. During the Oscar and Golden Globe seasons, the mass media would feature the celebrities involved, often criticizing or praising their sense of fashion. This has inadvertently led to a greater consciousness of one's personal image in the world. The notion of beauty has clearly been set in stone. People are now obsessed with creating their best selves, so that they may live their own 'celebrity fantasy'. For instance, in the United Kingdom, plastic surgeons have reported increased cases of people requesting the sinewy shoulders of Keira Knightley, breast augmentations and other changes in the bid to look like their idols. In Singapore, schoolgirls who are merely sixteen undergo double eyelid surgery. Recently, it was reported that young working Singaporeans have almost no savings as they splurge on designer goods and apparel, clearly influenced by the media portrayal of a celebrity's glamorous life. This has warped the traditional values of thrift and diligence in Singapore.

However, I feel that Schumaker makes a sweeping statement about youth being utterly vanquished by the decadent celebrity lifestyle. In Singapore, although we are exposed to a slew of celebrity news and gossip, being in an Asian society detaches us from such influences.. With core values of hard work and family still very much entrenched in our multi-racial society, the younger generation is not really threatened by the celebrity onslaught. Participation in community services and projects have all helped root the young in reality and helped to fend off the adverse influences of celebrities. While it is undeniable that the young are brand-conscious and more aware of themselves, we are far from the doomsday scenario described by Schumaker.

I also do not agree with Schumaker's claim that celebrity influence and culture deters one from a genuine interest in politics. American actress Jennifer Aniston actively supports campaigns to encourage female voters to vote in the elections whereas Oprah Winfrey's support of Barack Obama did not necessarily influence more voters to support him. In Singapore, political apathy among youths does not necessarily arise from the impact of celebrity culture but is more of a genuine lack of concern. In fact, celebrity influence stemming from local director Jack Neo's insightful films about Singaporean lives have helped to increase awareness of governmental policies among the young. In addition, youths in Singapore are more aware of global problems as a result of celebrity-backed events such as

the recent Aids campaign, where celebrities wore red shirts to promote their cause. Hence, celebrity culture in Singapore can be beneficial as youths are able to exercise their discretion.

Cheong Shu Min
07S76



Student Answer B

- Jia Yun adopts a moderate stance in relation to Schumaker's arguments. She evaluates several of the negative impacts of celebrity worship in relation to Singapore. To illustrate her point, she makes specific reference to concrete examples.
- However, Jia Yun's response could have been more organised and focused. The first paragraph could have been less repetitive and the intricacies of Schumaker's ideas on the intertwining of politics and show business could have seen more discussion and evidence.

John Schumaker strongly argues against the presence of celebrity culture, providing convincing arguments that 'celebrity culture' is extremely detrimental to modern society. I feel that while celebrity culture is, indeed, largely detrimental, there are certain advantages that come with it, which can be observed in my generation. Although celebrity culture has its ills, it is being too hasty to state that no good arises from this culture.

Firstly, I agree that celebrity culture is indeed harming modern society as it has fuelled materialism in people. Schumaker notes that "celebrities have long prescribed our tastes in things" and that celebrity culture causes the "mass manipulation of consciousness and behaviour." Indeed, due to the presence of such strong celebrity culture, people have become increasingly obsessed with material needs rather than with intangible things like self-fulfilment, charity or true ability. Celebrities, seen as public figures worth worshiping, have become the emblem of all things "cool" and "savvy"; the public yearns to have what celebrities wear or use. Expensive gowns and jewellery formerly owned by celebrities are auctioned at exorbitant prices. Across the globe, crowds flock to purchase the huge variety of products endorsed by popular celebrities. This ranges from shampoo products endorsed by Korean superstar Rain to cars advertised by Orlando Bloom. Many of these stars do not possess high qualifications nor contribute much to society, yet people are in hot pursuit of everything related to these public figures. This is especially evident in my generation, where pop stars dominate the teenager market, endorsing many products. For example, Taiwanese celebrities like Jolin Tsai have caused short skirts and long eyelashes to be in vogue; while Korean celebrities have inspired a new desire for plastic surgery, with countries like Singapore seeing a marked increase in the percentage of teenagers opting for plastic surgery to improve their appearance. Such materialism can be attributed to the influence of celebrity culture in recent years. The effects felt by the current generation are evident. Hence, I agree that celebrity culture has been detrimental to modern society.

Secondly, I feel that celebrity culture is one of the main causes of political apathy in modern society. Schumaker argues that people are now "in a spectator mode", with many becoming "political couch potatoes" due to celebrity culture. I concur with his views. Celebrity culture has infiltrated modern society by being interwoven into politics itself. The whole dramatisation of politics has trivialised it and people are becoming more concerned with scandals and appearances rather than being interested in political agendas. In my generation, it is evident that many are politically apathetic, with little knowledge of political events. In Singapore alone, a recent street survey showed that many do not even know the names of our country's ministers. The same survey, when conducted on British teenagers, yielded similar results. Hence, celebrity culture has been largely detrimental to modern society.

Nevertheless, celebrity culture can be said to have positive effects too, in the sense that celebrities may use their popularity to champion certain courses. Schumaker states that Bono has championed the alleviation of world poverty, and it is these efforts which allow the world to truly see the severity of the problem and hence, seek a solution. In my generation where celebrity culture is rampant, it is these celebrities who are able to garner the support needed, hence providing opportunity for change. Hence, if seen in this light, celebrity culture may be beneficial. In conclusion, although celebrity culture has negatively impacted modern society and my generation to some extent, it still has potential to effect change in the world.

Wong Jia Yun
07S77

