

Reading celebrity gossip helps ease our fear of dying: study

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If one of your great fears is dying, you may want to start reading up on [Paris](#), Lindsay and Angelina.

No, it won't help you live longer, but a new study in Psychology Today reports that identifying with celebrities helps us boost a sense of our own immortality.

To many of us, celebs seem so above it all that we think if we dress, act and eat them, we'll actually be like them. And - just like our fave demigods - we'll leave behind a lasting legacy, the researchers found.

The study, from the [University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign](#), was reported by psychology grad student Pelin Kesebir and her professor, [Chi-Yue Chiu](#).

"What we found is that the universal fascination with celebrities can be explained by this desire for immortality," Kesebir said in a phone interview. "Famous people are perceived as immortal in the symbolic sense, and their perceived imperishability serves as a buffer against our fear of the nothingness that comes after death."

Thinking about death makes us look for meaning in the world by identifying with people whose legacy will survive us, Kesebir says. "We strive for the symbolic form of immortality," she says.

Interestingly, not all celebrities are perceived as immortal, the study found. People want to read about celebs who represent our own cultural values. "The thinking is like this: I might die some day, but the values of my culture and those who represent these values are everlasting," Kesebir says.

Keeping abreast of celebrities in order to feel better about ourselves is common, says [Wendy Kaufman](#), founder of Balancing Life's Issues, a national executive training company that helps employees deal with family and work challenges. "We have such a strong fear of death, and the only thing that makes it more bearable is if we think our legacy can live on forever," she says. "If we can believe that we will always live on in other people's minds, it's not so terrible to die. By reading up on celebrities, we link our legacy to their legacy."

But keeping up with celebs can be a double-edged sword. "If people become really obsessed with celebrities, it can make you feel stressed and dissatisfied," says [Debbie Mandel](#), author of "Addicted To Stress" and "Turn On Your Inner Light." "You can get upset that you don't have their wealth or their looks. You feel that you can never make it, which promotes a fear of failure."

When it comes to celeb watching, a little can go a long way. "It isn't healthy if we feel like we know all about their marriages and sex lives, and are on a first name basis with them," Kaufman says. "If you can read about celebs and laugh and put it in perspective, there's no harm in it."

Reading about celebrities who represent our values can inspire us, according to study co-author Kesebir. "It can make us believe in the possibility of a meaningful existence in the face of death," she says. "We all need values to believe in and heroes who embody these values to look up to."