



## Idol Curiosity

What's a fan to do when a star acts badly? **BY LINDA K. WERTHEIMER**

**THE EVIDENCE OF MY EMBARRASSING SECRET** lies at the bottom of the old stereo cabinet in the family room: DVDs of *Lethal Weapon*, *Lethal Weapon 2*, and *The Patriot*. Yes, I admit it: I love Mel Gibson movies. My infatuation with his acting—OK, and also with his oh-so-blue eyes—began when I saw *The Year of Living Dangerously* three decades ago. Since then I've paid to see 20 of his movies, so I am a fan. But I am also a Jew. And with Gibson back in the news for reportedly making obnoxious comments about Jews, I've been struggling to decide what to do.

This kind of dilemma isn't new, but sometimes the answer is obvious. In late April, an African-American player on the Washington Capitals scored the goal that knocked the Bruins out of the playoffs. Within minutes, a number of angry fans posted racist comments to Twitter. Should

other fans stop wearing their Bruins jerseys for fear of guilt by association? Of course not—they don't represent Boston or the team.

But the problem gets more complicated when the private and public lives of someone you admire seem to conflict. Say you think Mitt Romney would make a great presi-

dent—should an animal lover not vote for him because he once transported his dog on the roof of his car? Can you still root for Tiger Woods in spite of his affairs? I don't know. And I don't know what to do about my Mel Gibson movies, either.

Recently, I sought advice from Andreas Teuber,

a philosophy professor at Brandeis University. "In your house, don't you want to surround yourself with things you value so when you come home they serve as a reminder of what matters to you?" he asked me. Think, he added, of what Mahatma Gandhi said when he was on trial for protesting the British government's rule of India: "Noncooperation with evil is as much a duty as is cooperation with good."

Now, it's not as if Gibson has committed evil acts. He has, however, reportedly made slurs that I find revolting. During his drunken driving arrest in 2006 he is said to have told police "the Jews are responsible for all the wars in the world." In April, a screenwriter claimed that Gibson regularly used terms like "Jew boy" and "oven-dodger." A week or so later, Gibson was speaking at a film premiere when he was asked whether he had problems getting along with his Jewish director; that prompted a producer to say he was Jewish, too. "Funny, you don't look Jewish," Gibson quipped.

I don't want to ever appear like an apologist for anti-Semitism. When I was growing up in rural Ohio, my family woke one morning to find swastikas etched on our house and car windows. My husband's mother lost her parents in the Holocaust, and she escaped the Vilna ghetto. We're raising our son to be proud of his Jewish heritage.

**"I've got a little bit of a temper."**

Mel Gibson on *The Tonight Show With Jay Leno* on April 27

This is why I didn't see *The Passion of the Christ*, which drew ire from some critics who said Gibson's depiction of Jewish characters would encourage anti-Semitism. But nor did I have the reaction of a Jewish friend, who promptly threw out her copy of *Max-erick*. When we live in a capitalistic society, she told me, we show our values with our pocketbook.

But if we dig hard enough, many of us can surely find morally reprehensible traits about a celebrity or public figure we adore. So I've decided to create a dichotomy. I separate my admiration of Gibson's screen persona from my view of him as a person. I no longer covet his autograph, something I desperately wanted as a teenager, but still let myself enjoy his movies—at least the ones that don't have anti-Jewish themes.

Could Gibson do something that would finally lead me to toss his movies in the trash? Probably. He just hasn't crossed that line yet.

*Linda K. Wertheimer is a freelance writer in Lexington. Send comments to [magazine@globe.com](mailto:magazine@globe.com).*