

Syracuse Student Hopes to Change her Industry

By Adam Ontiveros-Oberg

SYRACUSE, N.Y., July 20, 2018 – If you ask people for their thoughts about California, most respond in one of three ways: They praise the beauty and splendor of Yosemite. They admire the small-town charm of northern California. Or they yearn to be at the center of the pomp, the glamour and the frenetic energy of So-Cal city centers. Melissa Marks fits right into the third group.

Marks is studying at the S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communications at Syracuse University. After she earns her degree in public relations, Marks aspires to become an entertainment publicist and work with celebrities.

Marks was born in Montclair, New Jersey, and soon after moved to Bloomfield, New Jersey. She had been born into an open-minded and progressive household. But over the course of her youth, in school and in extracurricular activities, Marks was stunned to learn about the extent to which LGBT people suffered. More than a decade of dance classes and performance



Melissa Marks, a student at Syracuse University, hopes to become the face of the entertainment public relations industry.

group memberships had introduced her to people who lived in awful situations in a society that made them feel unwanted in that society. This oppression, she reflected, was made worse because it barred them from expressing who they really were.

This shocked Marks, but it also taught her a valuable lesson: expressing yourself and your thoughts is one of the most important things in life. Expression is and was a way of claiming agency or one's individuality. Marks believes that the entertainment industry is built on the ability of one to express themselves. She argues that by being able to express our thoughts or beliefs, we could become accepting of everyone, regardless of culture, race, gender or wealth,

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and that this could come from the icons of society. In her eyes there is a message of acceptance, benevolence and charity that is often muddied by the glitz, glamor and drama that invariably surrounds celebrities. Marks hopes that entertainment publicists like her can bring that message of kindness out to the world.

She explained, “Celebrity as a status exists because we pay attention to these people. When people pay attention to you, it means that they’ll listen to you. This audience gives celebrities a platform from which they can advocate for social issues, and it gives them this incredible potential to help change the world.”

Lacey Harper, a close friend of Marks, agreed by saying that celebrities had an obligation to the public. “When you have a following, you need to lead by example... Even if marketing or branding obligations push celebrities to be silent on issues instead of potentially becoming controversial. I think that [Marks] can help fix that system. She’s sincere, honest and friendly enough that she can help both marketing teams and celebrities come together to be a force for change,” she said.

Marks describes her dream job as being a cross between a spokesperson and an event planner. Her job would be made up of monitoring television and radio news, fashion trends, celebrity gossip and other continually-evolving subjects that Marks admits she enjoys. The constant work, the frantic pace of the entertainment industry and the challenges of working with celebrities to spread their messages are parts of the job that excite her.

Marks is going to be the face of celebrity news in the years to come. With many people looking to celebrities for moral, spiritual and other types of guidance, Marks hopes that she can change the type of dialogue that surrounds these very public figures. If she can change the ways that celebrities act and address issues facing society, we can hope for positive change from an industry that grows more commercially, politically and socially influential every day.

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