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# Introduction: Celebrity in the Digital Era

## *A New Public Intimacy*

This book (apart from this new Introduction) was written more than seventeen years ago with an odd dialectic of bravado and caution. Its boldness lies in its claim to the expansiveness of celebrity culture and that something in the constitution of the hyper-individual of contemporary culture articulated formations of power. Its tentativeness is in its analysis of the contemporary, bridging the separate spheres of popular culture and political culture with clear continuities and connections. The book played on this bizarre dual dialectic of celebrity: celebrity represented the ephemera—the least-valued—and also represented the clustering of significance in the entertainment industry, and by implication other realms, in its expression of individuality.

Since then the public sphere has been transformed. Popular culture still has the dimensions of popular music, television, and film, but these practices and experiences have been dramatically refracted through online culture, which has accelerated our access to celebrity culture. We can quickly discover new turns of identity of, for example, Miley Cyrus, as she shifts her presentation of the self for a more “mature” audience with a haircut and provocative videos, but the change is even more profound than this. In our contemporary world, the instantaneity of celebrity images and the ubiquity of our “search” culture mean that celebrities inhabit a social space closer to us than ever before. We can move from Internet sites such as TMZ or Perez Hilton and from online news media to an array of paparazzi images of celebrities in various public and private places with a speed and ease that has transformed our use of magazines and television talk shows or even our need (often linked with teen culture, as developed in chapter 6) to plaster our bedroom walls with images of our icons. Augmenting this connection is that we can “follow” people, not in some vague fan sense of old where a collection of images from printed sources might be made but via social media such as Twitter

or Facebook. Updates on those people we are following are signaled on our mobile phones.

In some ways our culture is more exposed, and our celebrities have been reconstituted as the overexposed individuals of contemporary life. For instance, the online site of the BET cable entertainment channel shows the singer and actor Beyoncé's life through Tumblr, a multimedia social networking website. Beyoncé is pictured in forty-five images that are highly constructed into apparent forms of public privacy while she drives, relaxes, parties, or even holds her baby daughter in a spa pool. This site is just one of many that exhibit celebrities. Techniques attempt to attract our attention and our gaze as we increasingly allow these online and networked screens to be elemental and connected parts of our everyday existence. Celebrities are in effect closer to their audiences and have to reconstruct the media sources of their public identities away from television, popular music, and film.

We have become a culture that accepts what I call a *new public intimacy*. Celebrity is a very public form of discourse about the dimensions of what is public and what is private and, ultimately, what is intimate. The level of exposure—the capacity of our technologies to record and to transmit images, text, and sound—and an online culture that has new expectations of exposure have helped expand our comfort with public intimacy. To understand the extent of this public intimacy, one only has to look at the quite remarkable availability and accessibility of online video pornography. The thousands of websites that link professional pornography with publicly available amateur videos are truly astounding in breadth and in the quite overt acknowledgment that our sexuality and forms of sexual expression can be exposed and read as public. Online pornography simply represents the extreme of malleable boundaries of public and private that are consciously explored via the more widely acceptable celebrity culture. Thus, we see a certain relentless exposure of individuals: Britney Spears without underwear in a car with Paris Hilton; Kanye West assaulting a photographer at the Los Angeles airport; the American Idol impresario Simon Cowell kissingly intimate with the married woman who would eventually bear his child; the sex videos of Kim Kardashian and Paris Hilton; Prince Harry fully exposed in a Las Vegas hotel.

It is small wonder in this changed world that the actor Jodie

Foster, who has been under the spotlight of celebrity for most of her fifty years, lashed out at the assault to privacy in her 2013 Golden Globes acceptance speech for a Lifetime Cecil B. DeMille Achievement Award:

I have a sudden urge to say something that I've never been able to air in public. . . . If you had been a public figure from the time that you were a toddler, if you'd had to fight for a life that felt real and honest and normal against all odds, then maybe you too might value privacy above all else. Privacy. Someday, in the future, people will look back and remember how beautiful it once was.

What Foster underlines is that we have normalized putting the famous under the microscope to such a degree that their private lives are open to the public. The demarcations of propriety have broken down to the point that fame and celebrity are naturally linked with private revelation for public consumption and that hidden intimacies have become some sort of desire for an inner truth and meaning that is oddly tied to prurient and voyeuristic pleasures.

Celebrity culture's role is equally at play in breaking the boundaries of the influence of entertainment culture on other activities. This book explores the mapping and charting of entertainment into politics via celebrity, and since its first publication, the application of techniques of fame and notoriety have further migrated into our politics as well as the rest of our lives. Delineations between news and entertainment are no longer clear in most forms of television news production or online news and increasingly print-related news as well. Political reports have become less distinguishable from reports about celebrities. Major political figures such as former Australian prime minister Kevin Rudd (whose following of more than 1.2 million is perhaps inflated with fake accounts) and U.S. president Barack Obama (with more than 35 million followers) amass numbers that resemble those of major celebrities: the reigning king and queen of Twitter, Justin Bieber and Lady Gaga, each have around 40 million followers (although as with politicians, 30 percent of these followers are likely phantom or fake accounts to boost the total). It is clear that prime ministers and presidents not only Tweet but also allow themselves to be managed by digital media experts who build their following. As *Celebrity and Power* explains, politics has borrowed and learned a great deal about the presentation of the public

self from the entertainment industries in its building of affective connection with voters, and much of online culture promotes the blending of these boundaries.

The most evident changes in contemporary culture do not necessarily shift the meanings of celebrity culture but do show that it has intensified and expanded. Not only is there more material about celebrities from more sources, but celebrity culture has been analyzed with greater depth over the past fifteen years. Some of that analysis emerged from critical journalism and popular books, but much came from academic research. There has been a flurry of intellectual work on celebrity and celebrity culture, partly as a result of the publication of this book.

I will explore here what kinds of analyses and critical investigations around celebrity have emerged from academics and cultural critics and then, from that slightly shifted vantage point, what has changed in how celebrity is presented and represented in contemporary culture. I will conclude this Introduction by describing the new directions that need to be taken in the research and understanding of celebrity that are being partly driven by the quite remarkable transformation of our systems of media into online culture. This will take us to a more generalizable understanding of the relationship between conceptions of the public and individual identity, and I will boldly (and perhaps with a new tentativeness) propose that there is a need for what I call *persona studies* because of the flattening and appropriation of celebrity culture into the contemporary worlds of social media and social networks.

## Studying Celebrity: The New Legitimacy

At a conference in Geneva in 2010 titled “Celebrity News,” the organizers provided a subtitle: “An Oxymoron?” The question mark underlined the wobbliness of the value of celebrity in the news and perhaps accentuated the still tenuous legitimacy of studying celebrity. The most remarkable feature of the conference for me was how regularized the study of celebrity had become. A number of doctoral students there from many parts of Europe and the Americas were researching aspects of celebrity. Their techniques demonstrated their familiarity with quantitative tools to map the effects of celebrity culture on the structure of the media. The hosts of the conference

had extensively investigated celebrity and news from a variety of vantage points to work out discursive and narrative structures. The overall study of celebrity at the end of the first decade of the new millennium is integrated into the academy and a wider intellectual culture far more than it was in the 1990s.

This solidification of the field became even more evident at the inaugural Celebrity Studies Conference in December 2012 at Deakin University in Melbourne, Australia. An international group of scholars presented papers, and it was clear that a certain intellectual maturity had emerged, including recognition of a historical body of work, a clear attempt to connect to intellectual traditions and approaches, and even subgroups of research directions. The conference was a salute to the establishment of the academic journal *Celebrity Studies*, initiated by scholars Sean Redmond, James Bennett, and Su Holmes and first published in March 2010. Intellectually rich, the journal has profoundly stimulated the study of celebrity.

The development of this intellectual trend in media and cultural studies is at least partly related to this book. *Celebrity and Power* was first published in 1997 and was one of the catalysts for the proliferation of writing on celebrity. Its focus and its sources for research and writing differed markedly from the literature on stardom that had emerged predominantly in the 1970s and 1980s and were partly motivated by prominent objects of study. When Diana, former Princess of Wales, perished in a Parisian tunnel ostensibly chased by paparazzi in August 1997, a new cycle of reading celebrity was generated. Academic publications appeared just as quickly as biographies generated by journalists immediately after the death of someone prominent or writings that captured a brief moment of an individual's fame. The most visible of these was the book *Planet Diana*, edited by Ien Ang, which tried to map how celebrity became a means of understanding aspects of a globalized entertainment culture as well as the affective dimensions of mediated and famed individuals. But embedded in the meaning of Diana was a new understanding of the public-private divide. In reaction to Diana's death, celebrities decried with a new earnestness how the public via the media had crossed a line and invaded the realm of the private. Publicity was becoming redefined as a negative consequence of celebrity culture at its most extreme. The 1997 debate about a public individual's right to privacy broadly expanded with the emergence of the Internet and its

websites and blogs. From then on, the public–private demonstrative structure of celebrity became a way for the culture to investigate its own increasing technologies of surveillance, viewing, and exhibiting the self.

## Literary Celebrity

Simultaneous to this reinterpretation of the public–private divide was a new generation of scholarship that began to identify the spreading tentacles of celebrity culture. Perhaps the most vigorous of these new investigations were those derived from literary studies. The closest antecedent to this research was in the journal *Biography*, but book-length studies defined it. Efforts were made to understand the relationship of authors with their readers from the nineteenth to the twentieth centuries. An early development was Richard Salmon's article on the emergence of patterns of asking personal questions of major authors in interviews published in the arts press in the late nineteenth century. More significant were Joe Moran's *Star Authors* and Loren Glass's *Authors Inc.*: these works have been instrumental in spawning an array of investigations of historical celebrity that tried to capture the construction of personality of the author beyond the text. Tom Mole's edited collection *Romanticism and Celebrity Culture* is arresting in its capacity to identify the romantic constitution of individuality and celebrity in early nineteenth-century literary culture. What makes these studies that explore fame in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries valuable is that they identify the origins of celebrity culture. For some authors, Lord Byron represents a new form of celebrity literary star filled with an individualized pathos that became the model for future popular music icons. For others, the model is the complete personal revelations and attempts at intimate disclosures of the self that were publicly proclaimed by Casanova in his eighteenth-century multivolume autobiography. Still others point to how the public sphere played with the scandalous directions that Oscar Wilde embodied in the late nineteenth century as signaling the true movement of individuals into a public–private form of publicity of the self. Since 1997, detailed work has advanced on the origins of the intensification and interest in public individuals and literary figures and how they established an audience through their books and then continued to extend that connection through the public communication of elements of their lives. Writers such as

Aaron Jaffe and Jonathan Goldman further explore how modernism is articulated through literary celebrity. Timothy W. Galow extends this research into the practice of writing and its inflection via celebrity and self-promotion, where writers begin to play in the world of constructing public personas in their realization of this changed world of public renown even as the literary discourse defines their practices as modernism.

Partially because of this focus on literary celebrity, in 2001 the highly respected journal *Minnesota Review* published a special issue on “academostars,” intellectuals who were in some cases public intellectuals but also served as a hierarchy of personalities in relationship to their position in academic debates and associated conferences. Indeed, this study of academics was linked to several other developments in looking at public intellectuals within celebrity discourse. Early work from Russell Jacoby and Bruce Robbins led to extensive research on public intellectuals as a subset of literary and media celebrities, with Atherton’s work and interviews of key public intellectuals such as Noam Chomsky of particular note. Two collections on the movement of the intellectual into various public spheres present challenging conceptualizations of how personalities from the academy and their ideas translate into contemporary flows of media: along with the 2012 issue of the *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society* edited by Patrick Baert and Barbara Misztal, the work of Karyn Hollis and Silvia Nagy provides a chart to facilitate understanding of the power and structure of public intellectuals as they play out in the world of the celebrated.

What is interesting about this development in literary scholarship and the associated dimension of public intellectual discourse is that they coincided with a turn in cultural studies to articles and books about literary celebrity as a starting point to investigate social and cultural phenomena. The extensive catalog of such writings underlines the movement from the text to the authorial voice and ultimately into a debate about the audiences cultivated by these relationships in the wider public world.

## **Historicizing Celebrity: From Renown to Charisma and Documenting the “Structure of Feeling”**

Historians, no doubt influenced by these developments in cultural studies as well as by intersections of their work with literary



historical research, have expanded the investigation of celebrity, and the nineteenth century is once again of particular significance. One of the most interesting collections is *Constructing Charisma*, edited by Edward Berenson and Eva Giloi and perhaps inspired by the original historical work on fame's history by Leo Braudy, which deals with charisma, fame, and power in nineteenth-century Europe. Berenson's work on imperial celebrities recounts how Henry Stanley in Britain and Hubert Lyautey and Pierre Brazza in France embodied the colonial expansionist rhetoric and desires in their beings and public personalities and operated as famed individuals in the late nineteenth century. Giloi's chapter, which discusses the connection between German royalty and an audience of fans as autograph hunters, is prescient for later research on fan culture that is now a major area of analysis in celebrity studies. This historical research made its own interdisciplinary intersections in chapters about Sarah Bernhardt and her embodied patriotism by Kenneth Silver; the reception of the play *Cyrano de Bergerac* in fin de siècle France by Venita Datta; and a study by Dana Gooley of the public persona of Franz Liszt in all its metaphorical associations with the transition from royalty to mass public where performance, theater, and the production of the public self are discussed in their protean forms. On one level, this research on fame in the nineteenth century articulates what Braudy describes as the first century of mass culture, and what we are seeing through the lens of celebrity is the manner in which media produces what Stephen Minta poignantly refers to as the "push-pull quality . . . of charisma," where public intimacy makes the populace—the audience—simultaneously close to the object of their gaze and affection yet obviously so distant. This parasocial phenomenon dependent on forms of mediation and extension best articulates the persistent power of celebrity and deserves further investigation, whether from the historical perspective or in defining with greater precision the affective connection generated by these associations between public individuals and "subjects."

Because the nature of celebrity is dependent on understanding a "structure of feeling" (Raymond Williams), it is difficult to provide historical antecedents without documentation. The sense and sensibility of a particular era's relationship to the individuals who have achieved fame disappear and reattach to other objects and other embodiments. Some writers have taken the mantle from Braudy's

original work and at least endeavored to knead the nature of those connections of one to many into a historical reading. A more recent effort to map a connected history of celebrity is Fred Inglis's *A Short History of Celebrity*. Inglis identifies the celebrity era as roughly the past 250 years; his approach is through examples that are indexically significant at identifying the gestalt of a particular period and more intentionally describe the movement and "progress" toward our contemporary celebrity-saturated culture. For Inglis, the idea of renown and its conception of absolute authority, as exemplified in Queen Elizabeth I's regality, presence, and almost mythical reading of power, predate the idea of celebrity in its spectacle of proper order and deference. Celebrity is built on this kind of spectacle but relies on a commodity culture, resulting in a constitution of value and a personification of value that demarcate a different configuration of order and structure. Place and social activity within those places are critical to Inglis's efforts at charting celebrity: thus London's theatrical and performance scene in the 1760s defined a new consumer culture that saw the city rather than the court as the place to be seen and the place to engage in a new definition of a public self. Theater, novels, and a middle class that saw these leisure activities as significant in the new definition of the self were the playground of this emergent celebrity culture. Inglis also draws on Paris's own theatricality of consumption via haute couture and the department store in the middle to late nineteenth century, where the mix of classes could see, through the glass of the department store and arcade windows, the idealizations of consumption—a spectacle of possibility whether one bought anything or not. Artists flourished in this world and were celebrated for their public play and display, becoming stars. He adds to these two building blocks of celebrity culture the capacity of late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century New York to make conspicuous consumption, acquisition, and presentation of the self overcome the old-world, class-based hierarchies and allow further definitions of a celebritized public self. Inglis's broad-brush account of this history focuses on figures such as Byron, Baudelaire, and Sarah Bernhardt as exemplars of this transforming public world that could embody its new directions. These layers of development lead Inglis to the twentieth-century culture in which celebrities become experts via support industries in the relationship between the technologies of exhibition and the audiences that they

cultivate. Although there is an incompleteness in Inglis's historical work, his excursus does validate the clear relation between consumer culture, capitalism, and individuality that forms the theoretical cornerstones of *Celebrity and Power*. His elaborations and anecdotal writing provide an enrichment of these links between large cultural changes and the emergence of celebrity culture. Writers on theater and performance have without doubt substantiated Inglis's claims to nineteenth-century structure of feeling around celebrity, and the pioneering work that Luckhurst and Moody achieved in their collection on celebrity and theater since 1660 is worth noting.

Another effort at historicizing the formation of celebrity is John Potts's intriguing *A History of Charisma*. Potts works through the deployment of the term *charisma* as it appears originally in the Christian apostle Paul's letters and its continuities and discontinuities during the two millennia since then. He restricts his discussion to Western uses and its migration from the original Greek into Christianity and, via Max Weber, into wider use in politics and sociology by the twentieth century. Only some elements of the term *charisma* carry through time. Potts identifies that the original meaning of *charisma* is "gift," and in some senses that idea of a gift translates between its secular deployment by Weber, its subsequent pervasive use in popular and political culture in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, and its originary religious use and the evangelical charismatic movement best exemplified in Pentecostal speaking in tongues. Potts concludes that the use of *charisma* consistently occupies the gap between reason and irrationality and spirituality: "it denotes something of the mystery, the inexplicable, in human relations." Whether used to describe the It factor from contemporary talent programs or the ineffable attractiveness of Obama's rhetoric and presence, or even the self-help literature that encourages a search for the inner "gift" of leadership and vision, charisma is a kind of power that is not totally dissectable. According to Potts, charisma is authentic in its ineffability; where celebrity can be manufactured and produced, whether by the ancient king Alexander (whose "The Great" moniker is, as Brandy has intoned, determined by his manipulation of the media of his day) or by the publicity industries that have surrounded entertainers and politicians throughout the past two centuries, charisma transcends those efforts at artifice and fabrication. Potts's work is valuable for its historical reading of difference in the elevation of particular people and their actions and the conclusion that these kinds

of differences are sometimes attributed to the powerful but indeterminate essence of charisma in individuals.

## Power, Politics, Influence

These historical investigations of celebrity underline how celebrity is related to power. In *Celebrity and Power* I explored the way that celebrities embody audiences and in that way provide pathways for the articulation of power and influence both by cultural industries and by comparison and adaptation to political institutions. What is interesting to see since its first publication is the wealth of material that explores these dimensions much less tentatively than I did in describing the worlds of entertainment and politics and in seeing that these areas are indeed continuous in their constitution of popularity in popular culture as much as political culture. What makes them related has been explored through a number of channels but probably no more powerfully than by understanding the support structures providing the presentation of political leaders and entertainment celebrities. The study of how publicity, media relations, and public relations operate in entertainment industries and in politics has expanded considerably since the first publication of *Celebrity and Power*. For example, my own book *Fame Games*, co-authored with Graeme Turner and Frances Bonner, investigated the work of agents, managers, and publicists in constructing a celebrity industry in Australia. Charles Fairchild's use of the term *attention economy* in his analysis of *American Idol* similarly explores how public personalities are framed and situated for attraction and audiences in a highly constructed way.

Beyond studies of the campaigning and publicity machines of political leaders, certain key authors have provided important contributions to how politics and power intersect with celebrity. Some have relied on chapter 8 of *Celebrity and Power* in their interpretation of the profound link between entertainment and its embodiment of audiences through techniques similar to those used by politicians to embody the citizenry of a country. John Street's work is perhaps the most sophisticated as it both advances what I had developed and integrates other key writing in the area. Drawing from the work of West and Orman and their *Celebrity and Politics*, Street isolates two dimensions of celebrity and politics and assesses their consequences. First is the development of celebrities becoming politicians

in the tradition of Ronald Reagan, Arnold Schwarzenegger, Sonny Bono, John Glenn, and (in the Australian context) Peter Garrett. From West and Orman's perspective, this dimension of celebrity cultivates a politics that focuses on winning, image, and popularity, perhaps without a relationship to relevant issues, because these kinds of figures are experts in the attraction and attention economy. This critique has emerged since President Reagan in the 1980s—the first American president to have been a film star and actor. Because of the intensity of the mediated presentation of politicians over much of the past half century, the capacity to construct an image of authenticity and connection has become a standard criterion for political success. Indeed, a number of articles and book chapters have referred to the rise of Obama as an exemplary model of this different political playing field and Obama's capacity for embodiment of political desire, often through his rhetorical flourish and his representation of a different kind of leader. He was the master of what Douglas Kellner calls the "media spectacle," which helped contribute to Obama's political success in 2008 and 2012. His aura as a political celebrity can also have negative consequences, as when he is seen as being as lightweight as other celebrities and without requisite experience, as Jeffrey Alexander's reading of the 2008 campaign reveals. Sean Redmond's study of the Obama "avatar" and Heather Nunn and Anita Biressi's reading of the clear play of emotion in political contestation both underline the role of affective connection in politics and power and how Obama has perhaps generated this in embodiment and rhetorical vision more than any other American politician. Redmond explains that Obama is a "liquid political celebrity" (drawing from Baumann's writing on liquid modernity) who generates incredible affective connections to his vague but inspiring messages that resemble advertising slogans in their capacity to include people in an emotional upswing but ultimately provide a message that is undeliverable in the everyday of political machinations. What we can summarize from Street's categorization of the celebrity politician and these extensions of that thinking by other writers is that political celebrity as media spectacle is in some ways cleaved from the grind of politics and policy, making them connected but ultimately unrelatable domains in the contemporary moment: the continuous campaign of the public rhetorical self—even the president—is imbued with the celebrity spectacle that serves as a continuous form of ideological support for the operations of government.

The second dimension of political celebrity that Street elaborates on from West and Orman's categorizations is that of the intervention of a celebrity into politics—what is now often called celebrity activism. Since the first publication of *Celebrity and Power*, celebrity activism has indeed been one of the most active research areas in the exploration of politics, power, and celebrity. The relatively innocuous connection between Hollywood's stardom and the White House has been documented in a journalistic book by Alan Schroeder that does not fully address the full implication of celebrity activism. Street's thesis, that celebrity intervention can shift political debate from its usual binarisms and patterns, has been investigated by critical scholars through key celebrities such as Bono, Angelina Jolie, George Clooney, Ben Affleck, Pamela Anderson, Brigitte Bardot, and Madonna. In my own collaborative work, I have explored the play of celebrity activism in the generations of AIDS research. The recent *Transnational Celebrity Activism in Global Politics*, edited by Liza Tsaliki, Christos A. Frangonikolopoulos, and Asteris Huliaras, provides a series of essays on particular aspects of how the attention economy via celebrity intervention and concern helps orchestrate aspects of global geopolitical culture. Dan Brockington's provocative work collected in his *Celebrity and the Environment* provides historical dimensions to how environmental activism and wildlife conservation have been shaped by celebrity interventions from Steve Irwin to David Attenborough, as well as the way white researchers "heroically colonised" the protection of species like the mountain gorilla. In a special issue of *Celebrity Studies* in 2013, Jo Littler and Mike Goodman edited a series of articles on "celebrity ecologies" that expand the work of Brockington and others around the role of celebrity advocacy. This research provides evidence of inherent contradictions in the politics of celebrity activism. On one level, celebrities do in fact shift our attention via the various media who cover their activities, implying a new form of agency. In some cases, that new agency can generate even greater involvement by nations, by individuals working through collectives, and by raising the significance of certain humanitarian organizations. On another level, celebrities in what Chris Rojek refers to as "celanthropy" (drawing from the work of A. Bishop and M. Green's book *Philanthrocapitalism* and Cooper's work and resonating with the newer *Age of Icons*, edited by Fridell and Konings) distract and move the allocation of resources in bizarre and idiosyncratic ways. Nonetheless, the power in celebrity

advocacy has shifted contemporary politics well beyond the simple endorsement of a political candidate by a celebrity, which had operated in American and other national politics for many decades.

A further subset of politics and celebrity is the continuing research on scandal. In this book, I have referred to scandal as a form of transgression of the structured and industrial and branded persona in entertainment. Scandal can allow the individual to transcend that identity, or it can lead to the disappearance of the celebrity from public consciousness. In an effort to describe the dominant structures of presentation in politics, I focused on the constructed nature of political election campaigns in the constitution of a political identity. John Thompson's definitive book *Political Scandal* concentrates on how scandal transformed political culture. Thompson charts a number of types of scandals, from financial and power scandals to ubiquitous sex scandals, and provides one of the best analyses of the Clinton–Lewinsky scandal as well as the British Profumo affair of the 1960s. There is no question that the graphic nature of the media reportage and commentary development of the Clinton–Lewinsky scandal further exacerbated the breakdown of the divide between private and public in politics, a breakdown already in evidence in entertainment celebrity coverage and scandal for most of the twentieth century.

## **Fandom, Affect, Emotion, and Privacy**

The understanding of the attribution of affect is critical to comprehending the power of celebrity whether in clear political dimensions or in other forms of cultural politics. *Celebrity and Power* (primarily in chapter 3) developed the idea of affective power to describe the emotional attachment that audiences have toward celebrity figures. Study of affect has blossomed since the first publication of this book, and its link to research and writing on celebrity has expanded accordingly. The affective relationship between audience members and celebrity has been best explored by researchers who focused on fan culture. The majority of that literature tends to have followed Henry Jenkins's leading work and has looked more closely at programs, serials, and films in their formation of fan subcultures. Jenkins advanced this research through his study of how fans interact in what he calls the participatory and convergent new media culture; work on celebrity culture has paralleled these efforts through close

studies of fan relationships with each other and parasocially with their celebrity object. Of greatest interest is the work of Kerry Ferris and Scott R. Harris, who have studied these efforts of connection as a social ethnography of celebrity sightings, and in *Stargazing* they detail the impact these have had on individuals, where their mundane world is transformed by what seems to be extraordinary. As a sociologist, Ferris investigates through close analysis and interviews the paradoxical social phenomenon of the parasocial interactions challenged by temporarily being in close proximity to a celebrity. She describes these as “seer-narratives” that are divided between “recognition work,” where people recount their identification and sighting of celebrities, and “response work,” where the seers actually attempt to engage with celebrities (but generally avoid fully engaging in an effort to acknowledge their right to privacy). Her work reveals the social rituals and forms of deference in operation in these unusual situations.

Redmond’s work intersects with the role of affect—a kind of visceral reaction to a star image—in his writing. Using phenomenological approaches and autoethnography, Redmond often attempts to tease out the play of sentiment and how it imbricates itself with individual experiences. His work possesses in its actual writing style the power of celebrity affect as it is articulated in the individual and by implication more widely.

Affect also figures prominently in efforts by key researchers to study the bizarre celebrity attraction of the notorious. David Schmid’s *Natural Born Celebrities: Serial Killers in American Culture*, Mark Seltzer’s *Serial Killers*, and Richard Tithecott’s *Of Men and Monsters* present an important trilogy of research in the social psychology and culturally extended discourse of the infamous and how the boundaries of crime present a remarkable pull on the collective imagination. Ruth Penfold-Mounce has widened this research through her analysis of celebrity and criminality, where the notion of transgression is explored more fully and from the perspective of the boundaries of activities by celebrities. Some of this research could now be applied usefully via psychology into the disturbing psychosis in American culture where achieving notoriety may be part of a mental health impetus that has motivated mass shootings by individuals during the past twenty years.

There is no question that some of this research is also informed by psychologists’ investigation of fame and its effect. Although others



have attempted to integrate psychology (for instance, A. Evans and G. Wilson), David Giles's *Illusion of Immortality* best manages the relationship between social and psychological aspects of fame and celebrity and works from the developing subdiscipline of media psychology. His research has expanded to include the beginnings of the analysis of the effect and affect of fame on the famous, an important area for further investigations with his collaborator Donna Rockwell. Also operating close to the actual construction and production of fame is Cooper Lawrence, who has developed a career as an expert commentator and journalist on fame and celebrity with a psychological approach buttressing her own claim to authority. Her book *The Cult of Celebrity*, written in a popular and accessible vernacular, identifies the fascination with fame that circulates through youth culture in particular. Apart from identifying a tendency toward narcissism in both stars and those who crave the spotlight, Lawrence notes that celebrities serve as social bonds or points of contact for people—a common language in contemporary culture that both works for and reveals the need for other, stronger social bonds. Lawrence has identified the key affect of celebrity culture: its capacity to make connections and embody those connections both for an elaborate industry and for social networks however they are formed and however loose and relatively unstable they may be.

## Other Directions in Celebrity Studies

The previous describes the key research trajectories that have emerged in this field since this book was originally published. I have not included all of the activity, but these are most of the conceptual and theoretical directions that researchers and cultural critics are taking in the study of the public personality. Very briefly, here are some other areas that are being engaged with vigor. They cross many of the categories already outlined and are worth exploring further.

### Gender Studies

A gender studies approach has expanded the insights of *Celebrity and Power*, where the idea of the personal as political is writ large in the analysis of celebrity. This has been particularly effective in literary studies and in the exploration of the historical operation

of fame, as well as in the study of sport and female celebrity. Gendered address is central in research around magazines and celebrity both in Joke Hermes's foundational research on readers of magazines and in Kim McNamara's valued contribution on the circulation of the paparazzi image and its control. Tabloidism has been a source of articles that deal with the representation of female celebrities in magazines such as *Heat*. Gossip and "stolen" photographs published in magazines reveal a celebrity's hidden and scandalous behavior, and this process has been accelerated in the online presentation of celebrity stories. How young girls and women read these images of celebrities has been investigated in various settings that establish how identity and meaning of famous people are embodied by audiences. Research about celebrity and representations of the body such as B. R. Weber's analysis of Britney Spears brings to light the way that gender permits quite different public discourses of the self. This difference along gender lines was the motivation behind Su Holmes and Diane Negra's historically and contemporarily rich volume on female celebrities. The range of studies of female celebrities has extended to ways in which the maternal and the familial are embedded in the display of the contemporary celebrity. Holmes and Negra coined the term *toxic celebrity* for some new patterns of cultural politics. Key figures such as Lady Gaga can be seen as iconic figures who actively explore gender meanings both in performance and in their "intimate" connection to fans via Twitter. A growing body of literature on Lady Gaga and her forms of self-reflexive performance and discourse on fame (her debut album was titled *The Fame*) resembles 1980s and 1990s studies of Madonna in its articulation of flamboyant difference and connection. Drawing from quite different sources, L. van Zoonen's celebrity-inflected analysis of two European heads of state, Germany's Angela Merkl and Finland's Tarja Halonen, traverses cultural-political territory that has also been explored in a more entertainment-oriented direction: politics and women. There is little doubt that celebrity and gender continue to represent an active site for the exploration of a wide spectrum of cultural politics.

## Sport

Emerging from leisure studies and the sociology of sport and its intersection with media and communication, a growing

research trend addresses sport and celebrity. Early figures such as Garry Whannel and D. Rowe have been joined by the research team of David L. Andrews and Steven J. Jackson with their original edited collection, *Sport Stars*, and their subsequent writing. Ellis Cashmore has provided useful case studies of particular sporting personalities and has developed a sophisticated reading of sports stars and race. Cashmore, with Andrew Parker, has written key research that explores the masculine sporting body and its commodification. This work on the body and its mediatized representation has spawned further research on the migration of meaning of masculine sporting icons. Momin Rahman's article on "queering" David Beckham helps explore these transforming meanings of sports stars. The field of sport and celebrity has produced some of its strongest work in studies of gender and race. These have often been individual case studies, for example, an investigation of the transforming character of Tiger Woods or an exploration of cricket stars in the context of popular culture. Equally valuable has been the writing on key figures in sport; the work on the Williams sisters is noteworthy. Commodification, sponsorship, and authenticity are investigated with depth in Barry Smart's *The Sport Star*. Research on the significant influence of sports celebrity on contemporary media and sports has been extended in a number of ways, from the cultural economy of sporting stars to celebrity endorsements, which are more often drawn from studies in marketing than derived from sociology, media, or communication or cultural studies.

## The National and the Transnational

Celebrity is often transnational, and the study of celebrity has expanded quite remarkably across borders and within other borders. *Celebrity and Power* focuses on North America, primarily Hollywood, New York, and Washington, D.C., in its approach to understanding the power of celebrity. Since then, culturally specific research on celebrity, particularly that based on nation-states and language groups, has grown. The dimension of this scholarship is beyond my linguistic capacity, but numerous works have been translated or written in English. There is an intriguing book-length study of Japanese sporting celebrity by Dennis Frost. A volume edited by Edwards and Jeffreys on Chinese celebrity charts interesting distinctions among notable individuals that have developed historically in

Chinese mediated culture and demonstrates a growing scholarship in the area. Pramod K. Nayar's sophisticated reading of celebrity culture from an Indian perspective places transnational culture in a national context exceedingly well. First establishing the materiality of icons, the affective depth and connection to particular celebrated images of personalities, Bishnupriya Ghosh effectively explores the mediation of global icons in South Asia through a series of examples drawn from the Indian subcontinent. His work identifies new directions beyond the textual analysis of celebrity while still working through the semiotic depth of any particular iconic image. Canadian celebrity and its literary culture have been given serious consideration in Lorraine York's work as well as by Samita Nandy's investigation of the popular and iconic structure of fame in contemporary Canada.

## Media

In some ways, the originary home of celebrity studies is the study of the film star. Academic book-length studies of individual stars in film and popular music have advanced over the past fifteen years and are often collected in series. Studies of stardom have included gender-related approaches such as Diane Negra's volume on ethnic female stardom (particularly in film) and the intricate research of television presenters by Frances Bonner. Augmenting the study of television stardom and celebrity are critical historical sources such as Susan Murray's reading of 1950s television. James Bennett and Su Holmes have provided a valuable mapping of the meaning of television stardom and celebrity informed not only by the transformations in reality television but also the constitution of familiarity and revelation that has been part of much of television history in a variety of formats. The formation of celebrity is still dependent on key media industries such as television, and research on these media still forms a powerful dimension in study of the public personality. In a very real sense, the media traverses all the studies of celebrity: the specificity of media form (from popular music to television, to film and the Internet) situates the reach of celebrity culture as well as the form of connection. *Celebrity and Power* establishes the importance of the media form in structuring a relationship between the culture and the audience within that culture. New media forms challenge the organization of our affective connections to celebrity and need much further work.

## News and Journalism

A great deal of research has developed over the years related to the news media and its imbrication in the development of celebrity culture. Nineteenth-century journalism, in its appeal to a wider populace, began developing what Charles L. Ponce de Leon refers to as human interest stories, and his writing on this area isolates well the transformation of the press's focus to people as opposed to facts. This tradition may well have been related to yellow journalism, but it expanded outward into the lifestyle sections of newspapers and the women's and mass entertainment magazines that emerged from the early to mid-twentieth century. In terms of categories, celebrity news is often placed in "soft" news as opposed to the more political "hard" news, and it must be understood that these terms define another gender line in news production. In more contemporary-focused scholarship, Annik Dubied has been instrumental in developing research on the content of people-oriented journalism—celebrity journalism—particularly in Europe: two major special issues in key journals in the last four years have advanced this work. Of particular note in this research is the conceptual work and analysis on a transformed public sphere by Jarmil Dakhli. Marc Lits's research has explored the movement of celebrity discourse from the realm of entertainment into politics, and Dubied's own investigations advance what constitutes celebrity news and her subsequent content analysis of celebrity news presentation.

## Law and Celebrity: Privacy and Intellectual Property

As with other kinds of discourses, the law permeates many of the categories that have emerged in celebrity studies. It is certainly ever present in scandal and moments of visible transgression. The law also figures centrally in debates about intellectual property and the protection of privacy. This area has expanded as an area of serious research from the earlier work of Rosemary J. Coombe and Jane Gaines into the important mapping of Kembrew McLeod, where he explores the development of online culture. Robin Barnes's close analysis of particular cases and trajectories of rulings both nationally and internationally identifies the fraught and contentious public-private boundaries of celebrated individuals. The intersection with

sport and celebrity figures in the work of Andrew Parker and also in K. McNamara's research on the paparazzi online economy, which identifies the ubiquity of how privacy and property figure in contemporary celebrity culture and its constant flow between the anarchic forms of possession in the exchange of information, gossip, and images among users and the vigilance in establishing the capital of the personal as valued and controlled.

## Overviews

As well as these specific areas of inquiry, a number of books have attempted to provide comprehensive overviews of celebrity in contemporary culture. Popular critical readings of celebrity culture appear with regularity. Worthy of further consideration is Jake Halpern's *Fame Junkies*, which in the end provides a detailed ethnography on both the desire for fame and the efforts made by people to achieve fame. My own edited collection from late 2006, *The Celebrity Culture Reader*, was designed to amass what had been written over the past half century or more into coherent categories. Holmes and Redmond developed two volumes over the past decade that identified the current strains of research and perhaps were precursors to the *Celebrity Studies* journal. Graeme Turner's *Understanding Celebrity* has had a major impact on the field, particularly in the interpretation of the transformation of news in the era of tabloidism but also in its capacity to summarize conceptually areas of development in the study of the celebrity phenomenon. His follow-up work on television's demotic turn, *Ordinary People and the Media*, also provides a critique of the democratic thesis of popular culture studies and its translation into the era of contemporary television and the Internet, which has enveloped writing about the power of celebrity. Chris Rojek produced two books on celebrity that are worthy of both considering and debating. His first, *Celebrity*, provided useful categories of ascribed, achieved, and attributed celebrities that identify the range of ways fame is presented in contemporary culture. Along with John Frow's essay "Is Elvis a God?" Rojek's reading of the relationship between religion and celebrity is one of the best investigations of the aura, charisma, and affect that celebrities embody and that resonate with others. Rojek was one of the first to effectively consider notoriety versus fame and how transgression feeds into the

attraction of celebrity culture. His follow-up work *Fame Attack* looks at the particular harm of celebrity culture and takes issue with a public sphere that is often hijacked in its representation of issues, in its hierarchizing of value, and in its skewed concentration of time on individuals who are literally undeserving. Along with Turner's rereading of a public sphere that is less democratic and more what he terms demotic in its exploitation of ordinary people in the media, Rojek is countering previous work on popular cultural studies and simultaneously broaching a new direction for the study of celebrity—an approach that places caveats on our previous exuberance with a more sophisticated critique.

## Celebrity Now: What Needs to Be Done—Persona

As all of this research and writing demonstrates, a great deal about celebrity has been revealed over the past seventeen years since *Celebrity and Power* was first published. The volume and breadth of this work on celebrity is truly astounding. There is no question further research can be derived from looking at new generations of people in the spotlight and how they help us make sense of culture; however, it is important to identify key changes in the contemporary environment. My own recent study and writing is focused on exploring these new directions, and it is worthwhile concluding this new Introduction to *Celebrity and Power* with where the insights from this book have led me.

First, it is important to recognize a significant transformation of our media environment. *Celebrity and Power* concentrated on how celebrities *embodied* their audiences; in chapter 8, I extended that concept of embodiment in order to understand how politics embodies the populace. That research derived from the particular way in which individuals were celebrated in different forms of popular culture and media. Film, television, radio, magazines, and newspapers are media that have worked extensively and intensively on building their power of *representation*. I refer to these media forms as *representational media*. Representational media supports what I call a *representational cultural regime* that relies on the capacity of these media to simplify, filter, and distill those very few people in our culture who act as representatives. Celebrities are, in effect, a form of representation in the field of popular culture, and they have relied on media to give them their power and their voice. This capacity to represent

is instrumental in understanding how celebrity as a formation of contemporary individuality has migrated out of entertainment culture into a wider political culture. Our political systems similarly are twinned with representational media: the form of representation in contemporary democratic politics depends on media that help simplify debate and highlight key leaders to represent issues, parties, and alliances in an embodied way.

In many ways, the representational cultural regime reached its zenith via television and its moving-image broadcasting model in the 1980s. Very large sections of many countries' populations were watching a relatively small array of television programs. News programs were powerful at capturing specific issues and personalities. Many news anchors of national broadcasting systems became powerful celebrities, such as Walter Cronkite in the United States by the 1970s. What has become evident since the 1980s across many cultures and nations is a dispersion of representative culture by the media. The early stages can be seen in the development of subscription and cable television. Fewer people were watching the same programs—although it must be said that the pattern of cable television replicated the patterns of messages produced by representative media such as television and film. This dispersion was exacerbated by the different uses made of television from the 1980s. Video games, home videos, VCRs, DVD players, and eventually hard-drive replay television devices led to an even more dispersed audience, one that was no longer subject to the program schedules of major networks.

This shift was further accentuated after the 1980s with the development of online sources of information and entertainment. With more sophisticated delivery of content and a greater capacity of computers and even mobile devices to accommodate moving images, the flow of media and information has become even more dispersed. This alone requires a rethinking of how traditional media maintain their relative power to represent a culture. These different sources have at the very minimum challenged the representational cultural regime that had operated over the past two centuries through various media, cultural, and political institutions. More significant is that the movement of information has also changed and that a new layer of mediation is regularly part of the flow of content, ideas, and information. The key transformation is that individuals are now heavily involved in the distribution of content—in effect, individuals act as mediators. Via social media that have emerged over the past ten



years, such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Tumblr, and Pinterest, and via socially networked content distribution systems such as YouTube and Flickr, hundreds of millions of individuals with their own friends and followers are producing what I call *presentational media*. For instance, the penetration of Facebook is now close to 50 percent of the North American population and 12 percent worldwide, with some estimates of close to one billion subscribers in 2013. Much of what individuals distribute is produced by traditional media sources; nonetheless, individuals are presenting this material to others with comments and determinations of whether something is “liked” or “disliked.” Although not exclusively, online culture and its closely affiliated mobile media culture are allowing the development of a *presentational cultural regime* where the self and the individual are more prominent in constructing what are really micropublics of associations. It is important to realize that while representational culture remains powerful and dominant in its capacity to shape and embody contemporary experience, presentational culture is in ascendance and is becoming more central to the organization of meaning, significance, and power.

Through technology, the socially networked individual has become more prevalent in the creation of contemporary culture and a linchpin in the organization and flow of cultural forms and practices. The number of followers on Twitter, the number of views for a particular YouTube video or image on Tumblr, the tracking of Twitter hashtags’ virality, and the number of friends on Facebook are defining the new metrics of fame and, by implication, value and reputation. Emerging from these forms of social media, fundamental to presentational culture and its presentation of the self, is a greater portion of the populace engaged in processes of an attention economy that used to be the province of celebrities. In other words, people—young, middle-aged, and old—are managing their profiles through regular updates, adding pictures, pointing to music and media they have enjoyed, identifying places they like, and expressing themselves about other people’s activities for sharing.

The incredible amount of activity in contemporary culture that explores the boundaries of the personal, the private, the intimate, and the public resembles the discourse of celebrity but expands pandemically beyond that realm because it deals with the general population. As much as celebrity informs these new practices of the public self, it is important to see that these extensions of celebrity culture demand

a related but parallel area of inquiry, which I call *persona studies*. The term *persona* identifies what we all engage in as we publicize, perform, and present versions of ourselves. In contemporary networked culture, it also identifies the micropublics that serve to construct different calibrations of the way that public personas operate. In all these dimensions, persona studies borrows and develops from related intellectual traditions. It is certainly built on Jung's notion of the mask of persona, but persona studies inhabits and intersects with the work of those who have explored online culture and have found Goffman's work on the presentation of the everyday self valuable for understanding the dimensions of presentation in social media networks. Persona studies is equally informed by studies of identity and the performance of identity that has been elemental to the work of Judith Butler as well as others who explore the performance of the self with a certain intensity. This kind of research connects persona studies to the proliferating work on branding the self in a variety of contexts. Micki McGee's book *Self-Help Inc.*, in its study of the making of the self through the myriad of books that help us constitute an individuated identity, is in the vanguard of research that identifies the production of the self as fundamental to contemporary life. Theresa Senft's book on *Camgirls* explicitly explores the essential work that publicizing the self has become in the contemporary moment. Zizi Papacharissi's edited book *A Networked Self* explores dimensions of these new public selves that are emerging. Of particular importance is the work of danah boyd in understanding the techniques of producing new publics; boyd's collaboration with A. E. Marwick explores new dimensions of online "micro-celebrity," extends our thinking on public personas, and identifies directions that research in persona studies can follow fruitfully. Providing an evolutionary biology and psychological grounding with key terminology is the work of Weber in *The Created Self*. Weber explains that the created self is the new normal experience of everyday contemporary life: "What is different now is the deliberate, intentional creation of self in the absence of a single overarching culture. . . . We increasingly think of the self as an art form to be created, a material to be sculpted." Weber conceives of the self in a constant state of either contraction or expansion. He employs the idea of the "projective empathy" of the self that best describes our current condition of a widespread reaching for the status of a public persona via online followers and friends.

The directions of this research are manifold. What can be discerned

from a close analysis of this transformed contemporary culture is that we have entered what I call a *specular economy*, where our individual selves in their mirrored or projected form are regularly exchanged via our social media. In effect, we present ourselves for public perusal and consumption in a manner that is pregnant with objectives and purposes but occasionally appears to be devoid of either. Consider the proliferation of “selfies,” or self-portraits, in online and mobile culture. Because of the ease in both taking a photograph and then digitally distributing it, selfies are a new means of expressing the self to others. Occasionally, selfies go viral because of their relative uniqueness, and a minor celebrity moment is initiated. The cultural practice of selfies underlines a new assurance in the exposure of the self in the public world and the acceptance of the possibility that what is exposed may be exploited, but it also betrays the new necessity of larger portions of our population engaging in the games of public personas and gauging their appropriate levels of accessible intimacy.

Just as celebrities do, social media users have to *manage* their reputations. This need is underlined by relatively new online application monitors such as Klout that calibrate one’s impact and report those statistics to the individual user. This management of reputation extends from the social and interpersonal into portfolios and work as the play of persona and its individualization of labor transform how we work and simultaneously produce a new anxiety related to our work identities. Alison Hearn’s research on the “branded self,” historically via the *cartes de visite* and in both reality television and online culture, identifies fruitful directions in the way individualized personas have become commodified and organized for wider consumption. Building personas has become an industry in the proliferating online and offline self-help literature, as Harold’s work reveals, and books such as those by Alan Mulholland (who presents himself as a “persona coach”) and Maggie Craddock are some of the products. It has become a new way to conceptualize marketing new products and ideas, where the metaphor of persona is extended outward in a dominant trope of contemporary culture. In my own recent collaborative work with Kim Barbour, I investigate more closely how academics are managing their public personas as they attempt to grow reputations through online culture and its shifted knowledge economy.

One can readily see that persona studies as it extrapolates from its origins in the phenomenon of celebrity culture requires research

into the meaning and implications of our individual public identities. Public reputation and celebrity-like status now need to be interpreted and analyzed in many professions as well as in many social settings. Persona studies is beyond a cultural narcissism and beyond what I thought was a bold assertion seventeen years ago that entertainment culture and its constitution of public personalities informed and provided clear tropes of identity for political culture. A comprehensive investigation of persona and its play across culture, transnationally and within newly generated micropublics as well as within different practices, leisure activities, careers, and professions, should be next. Remarkably (for me at least) *Celebrity and Power* continues to be the intellectual launching pad for this new research. I encourage you to explore this book and extend its insights into our new expanded world of public personas. I will do likewise.

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