

Achieving Celebrity:
An Anthropological Examination of Why We Consume and Desire Fame

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B.A. in Anthropology, June 2009, Northwestern University

A Thesis submitted to

The Faculty of
Columbian College of Arts and Sciences
of The George Washington University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Anthropology

May 20, 2012

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Acknowledgments

The author wishes to thank first and for most, Dr. Alexander Dent, who not only encouraged me to start this project, but who changed the way I see the world by introducing me to the anthropology of language. Dr. Catherine Allen, for her last minute advice and agreeing to be the second reader to this project, and The George Washington University Anthropology Department as a whole for their support and assistance. I would be remiss to not thank my parents for supporting me through this entire project, and my entire life – thanks mom for all those late night phone calls. I owe a great debt of gratitude to my friends and family, who put up with being ignored, as I became a hermit in the process of completing this. Particularly I'd like to thank my "sisters", Angelica who is always up for discussing "terrible" reality television with me, and Andreana for letting me express all my anxiety to her at 3am, as she's always been one degree ahead of me. Lastly, I would of course like to thank all the celebrities who continue to fascinate us with their daily lives and provide fodder for countless hours of ongoing thought and discussion.

Abstract of Thesis

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Celebrities hold a power over society as they captivate and hold members' attentions through the coverage of their daily activities and lives. Explained through Weber's concept of charisma and charismatic authority, Brim's description of the "fame motive", and changes in mediation, the desire to achieve fame and be in the presence of it has, and continues to, evolve through time. The Internet and the genre of Reality TV have allowed for the pathway to fame to be perceived as now traveling through the ordinary, rather than the extraordinary. 21st century celebrities, including the Kardashians, Tim Tebow and Jeremy Lin, and Charlie Sheen, encourage this new, yet flawed, idea that every person is capable of achieving stardom. However ordinary they may seem, these celebrities have connected their extraordinary qualities to this desire for celebrity interaction by utilizing intellectual property laws and creating marketable brands that are sold to their fan bases.

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Introduction: I Will Be Famous

“I could totally be famous if I wanted to be.” This was recently stated to me by one of my best friends of ten years who has no acting, singing, or athletic “talent,” zero political aspirations, and as far as I know, isn’t the next Steve Jobs or Bill Gates or anything else that would warrant her to achieve some type of fame. We had been watching *Bravo*’s most recent attempt at a reality competition show where two people with mediocre singing abilities were taken under the wing of one of the network’s *Real Housewives of Atlanta* stars, given a song and then primed and coached with the “winner” being rewarded a record deal. Like most reality television programming, this show documented all the dramatic moments of this process, including a number of tearful phone conversations, tough practices where the contestants are yelled at by someone who is in the “biz,” and finally a performance that is judged and a winner being crowned. This conversation between the two of us really began, when the less talented contestant won for his possession of the “it” factor over the more talented one who apparently lacked it, and I complained about how there was clearly a disconnect between having talent and becoming famous, or at least, given the chance to become famous, as was in this case.

The point of this story is that while I prompted this conversation by stating that anyone could be famous, I still assumed that an agent or Hollywood executive would have to decide that a particular person had something that could be marketed as talent, such as singing or acting (or even the “it” factor), and that a great deal of work would have to be put into developing them, selling them to an audience, and earning them fame. However, my friend saw it differently, and when I pressed her on what she meant and

how she would achieve fame, she replied that she didn't need to have any talent or any help from the Hollywood world. All she had to do was be seen, and documented as being seen, in the "right places", with the "right people", doing the "right things". These images would then be spread through various forms of media and eventually result in her achieving fame, for no reason other than being, for lack of a better word, famous. Beyond this ease with which she felt that she could achieve celebrity, there also seemed to be an underlying idea that she was actively trying not to be famous, and that fame was so easily attainable that any ordinary person could acquire it, if they felt so inclined.

This isn't the first conversation I've had with her or other friends about celebrity, and it is not the first or last time I've been left wondering about the cultural forces behind celebrity and fame. As reality television has boomed, and tabloid magazines have evolved in my lifetime, from the salacious and discredited *National Enquirer* to the glossy and credible *Star* and *In Touch* of today, I've pondered how fame and celebrity have changed and evolved. Images and stories of the hidden lives and activities of celebrities have increasingly dominated popular culture and there seems to be an unquenchable thirst for this type of news.

I've experienced this myself even, as when I was leaving for vacation during college with the same friend, the one request of her and her sister was to bring tabloid magazines with me for the sole purpose of allowing them to be able to catch up on the celebrity gossip that they had missed out on while being cut off from a television and the Internet for a week. I obliged, and we proceeded to read the same four tabloids repeatedly, every day over the next ten days, only to then have the same conversations, such as asking if we thought Britney Spears was going to live through the end of the year

or if Nicole Richie was pregnant or not. In retrospect, we were consuming the information in these magazines like addicts getting their fix. Interestingly, we weren't concerned with the "talent" that pushed these people into the public eye, but more, with the ability to view them as ordinary people and compare their lives to ours. We would say things like "Oh look, Britney's running in the ocean in her underwear, well at least I'm better than that" and "I think Nicole is just getting fat again. Sucks to be her".

Reflecting on this experience and my present celebrity consumption habits, I find myself asking why I care, what drives me to read these magazines, browse gossip websites, watch E! News, and maybe most importantly, why there is this desire to idolize these people and at the same time bring them down to or even below my level?

In this paper, I plan to address the questions that I have raised thus far, by exploring fame and celebrity through the lenses of social and anthropological theories; including the making of celebrity, acquisition of fame, desire for celebrity status, charisma and charismatic authority and mediation. I will attempt to explain how these theories and the introduction of new media have contributed to the building and making of modern day celebrities and will address how the composition of the sphere of celebrity has been altered, leaving the once highly guarded entry doors to be perceived as opened to anyone who has access to a camera and a computer. Finally, I will examine the role that intellectual property plays in the creation of celebrities and how they use it to acquire and maintain their fame. I will do this through the case studies of the rise of reality TV and the Kardashians, the recent events in the sports world of Linsanity and Tebowmania, and the rise, fall and rise again, of everyone's favorite Hollywood bad boy: Charlie Sheen. This work will impact the anthropology of technology and media (Mazzarella,

2004; Coleman, 2010; de Zengotita, 2005), intellectual property (Coombe, 1998; Lessig, 2004; Johns, 2009), discursive publics (Warner, 2002), the emerging field of anthropology of celebrity (Gamson, 1994; Starn, 2011; Schickel, 1985; Braudy, 1986; Rojek, 2001), and provide an analysis of an element of contemporary American culture (Boorstin, 1962; Halpern, 2007; Ferris & Harris, 2011).

Social Drivers of Celebrity and Fame

As the coverage and reach of celebrity has grown exponentially in the 21st century, understanding the underlying social forces and conditions that result in celebrity has become a quest of sociologists and anthropologists, who have speculated that fame is generated through the relationships formed between the celebrity and the non-celebrity. Sociologists, such as Chris Rojek (2001), suggest that there are a number of conditions that must be understood when attempting to dissect the modern celebrity and fame culture.

A celebrity is defined through their ability to leave substantial impact on the social and public consciousness. This is based on the ability of the collective public to attribute “glamorous and notorious status to an individual” that then create and feed the addiction for consumption of that person (Rojek, 2001, p.10). Like early film stars of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the manufacturing of the celebrity is created through the combined efforts of a team of “cultural intermediaries who operate to stage-manage celebrity presence in the eyes of the public” (Rojek, 2001, p.10). This may lead to the development of a false persona, which is presented as natural or candid to the audience, but is maintained through a highly structured illusion. Ultimately, this results

in a division between the private and public self of the celebrity and this distinction, along with the social distance it drives between the celebrity and the non-celebrity, often manifests itself through the inability of the celebrity to form and maintain what society considers normal relationships (Rojek, 2001).

Similarly, celebrity worship and the drive to become a celebrity can be viewed as pathological. This paradigm has been used to describe the attributes of the people who are celebrities, those who wish to be celebrities and those who wish to experience stardom through interactions with celebrities (Brim, 2009; Ferris & Harris, 2011; Gamson, 1994; Gamson, 2011; Halpern, 2007; Young & Pinsky, 2006; Rojek, 2001; Schickel, 1985). Often clouded as criticism of the celebrity culture or system of fame itself, the pathological diagnoses of celebrities range from a labeling as them as particularly narcissistic individuals, to the previously mentioned inability to form and interact socially in a normal manner (Young & Pinsky, 2009). “Celebrity as a pathology “ is not limited to those who are famous but is extended to include the fans and individual who support and crave celebrity (Brim, 2009; Rojek, 2011; Ferris & Harris, 2011). In his works on the driving forces of fame, Brim (2009), examines notable cases of celebrities throughout the 21st century, and he defines this force, and the desire to achieve fame, through the concept of the “fame motive” (p. 7). This is a learned, biologically based drive that develops within people through interactions within society, and results in a never-ending hunger to seek out approval and notoriety, or have interactions with those who have achieved these conditions themselves (Brim, 2009).

The “fame motive” is not considered to be an inherent drive that is natural to every human, and it is not an instinctual desire that everyone possesses. Instead, this

desire to be known by strangers is acquired as a response to rejection by those that are close to the individual. Humans have evolved to belong in social groups and when acceptance or approval is denied, they can develop a need for these to be met, that manifests itself in the desire for attention from strangers (Brim, 2009, p. 9). This can be reinforced throughout the lifetime in multiple experiences in different social groups, including familiar and friendship circles. The need for fame/celebrity, once cultivated, is never satisfied, and as Brim (2009) describes it, is a “chronic hunger”, that although may be satiated periodically, leaves the individual always seeking more attention, at a higher level, and for a more sustained period of time (p. 17).

Further development of the pathology of fame occurs from theorizing that fame and celebrity are a result of multiple historical processes that have emerged in recent times: the democratization of society, the decline in organized religion, the reduction of physical boundaries between people, and the commoditization of everyday life (Ferris & Harris, 2011; Rojek, 2001; de Zengotita, 2005). The elimination of the god-like king or monarch, and the reduction of worship of religious figures has left a void in the culture that has been filled through the construction of celebrities that now possess the power that was once held by these individuals (Ferris & Harris, 2011; Hughes-Freeland, 2012; Rojek, 2001). The physical boundaries restricting communication between groups of people have decreased over time, resulting in a lessening of our ability to know everyone in our, and our friends’ and family’s, respective social groups. As we move further apart and our social circles grow, our ability to relate to and discuss people we have in common is limited: you may not know my neighbor and I may not know your co-worker. However, who we both do know, are celebrities and what their daily activities have been

(de Zengotita, 2005; Grenier, 2011). By consuming the coverage of these events, we form parasocial relationships with these people, in which we feel a personal connection to their public persona but they have no connection to us (Grenier, 2011). This gives us the ability to discuss them, and they become the links that connect people who would otherwise be disconnected. Their activities become the focus of shared experiences in our lives that we then use as substitutes for traditional subjects of local gossip (for example, the town drunk), that we no longer have in common, to reflect upon our own actions and values. Tabloids and gossip websites feed these relationships by providing us with intimate details of these celebrities' lives, and through crafting headlines using language typically reserved for people we know, like referring to them in the 1st person (de Zengotita, 2005; Halpern, 2007; Grenier, 2001). As society becomes increasingly thirsty to fill these voids and maintain these relationships, the celebrity becomes another commodity in which people wish to own a part. The image or public face becomes the selling point that individuals want, and are capable of owning through the purchase of the various associated goods or products endorsed by them (Ferris & Harris, 2011; Gamson, 1994; Gamson 2011; Rojek, 2001).

If celebrity is a commodity then it is essential to understand the unit of exchange and the people who control the distribution of it (Gamson, 2011). Although the celebrities may be themselves sold, some are clearly considered more valuable than others. The first ranking of the value of celebrities was in 1997, when Hollywood reporter and journalists James Ulmer published the first version of *The Hot List*. *The Hot List* is based on the Ulmer Scale, which asks leading players in Hollywood to rank celebrities using a 100-point scale that measures every component of film making, that

then determines how much money the star's name will generate for a film on its own (Ulmer, 2010). The celebrities considered to have the most value are typically referred to as the A-list and those with the least amount of value make the D-list. These further break down to include pluses and minuses such as A+ and C-. The cut off between A-list, B-list etc, depends on the current status of their career, and throughout their careers, celebrities are capable of moving within these levels. Typically the only celebrities that are capable of making the A-list however, are those who have either achieved fame through some means related to accomplishment, or those that have been ascribed through the A-list status of their namesake. Those that are attributed fame through reality television, notorious acts, or other less-talent based means, are typically relegated to the lower level C- and D-lists (Ulmer, 2010).

The official rankings are used when casting projects by Hollywood filmmakers and elite, but these rankings and terms have also matriculated into the common vernacular of fans and media outlets, which have developed their own rankings and lists. Different sources have different criteria for what places a celebrity on the A-list versus the B-list, B-list versus C-list and on down the line, but it is mostly determined by the company that they keep, the events that they are invited to, their marketability, and how "in-demand" they are based on how much revenue they can generate through their presence in movies, television and even personal appearances. For example, Brad Pitt would be considered A-list and any of the *Housewives* would be considered D-list.

Although seemingly assigned arbitrarily in these circumstances, there is an underlying social force responsible for the origin of the value that assigns celebrities their location on these lists. Max Weber's (1947) theory on charisma would suggest that this

value is the equivalent of what he coined, “charismatic authority” (p. 359). Weber theorized that within cultures particular individuals were considered beyond the ordinary and were “endowed with certain supernatural, superhuman or exceptional powers or qualities” (Weber, 1947, p. 358). These powers are only available to select members of a society who are viewed as being of a divine nature, and result in the establishment of these individuals as leaders. In prior societies these may be those who were considered to be religious leaders, particularly skilled huntsmen or those who excelled in military conquests. In modern society, these individuals are those who become famous through whatever means that allow them to possess this type of charismatic authority (Ferris & Harris, 2011; Hughes-Freeland, 2012; Rojek, 2001; Weber, 1947).

For charismatic authority and power to be accepted as valid, those who are followers must recognize this individual’s possession of it. The recognition typically occurs through some type of action or event, which appears to the ordinary individual, to have divine origins (Weber, 1947). The charismatic individual then proceeds to accept his duty to this mission and thus acts accordingly to serve his followers. Although there is an inherent relationship between the authority figure and his audience, there is no recognition by the leader that he is, in fact, dependent on them for his support. Rather, he assumes that they must follow him for the continued success of the society; in whatever aspect he is responsible for leading (Weber, 1947). As quickly as charisma is dealt to these individuals, it can just as quickly be taken away if there is the perception by the audience that the leader is no longer in possession of it. Given the nature of the relationship between the individual and those who follow them, if the perception is that they no longer are endowed with these rights or gifts, they will no longer command a

leadership position as they did previously. The charismatic leader is often part of a charismatic group of followers who are close to and derive their own authority from the association they have with this leader, and who function to help complete the mission or orders that the leader has had bestowed upon him (Weber, 1947).

Essential to possession of charismatic authority, is that it falls outside the realm of the “everyday routine and the profane sphere” (Weber, 1947, p. 361). This suggests that it repels against rational and traditional forms of authority that control everyday actions, and mediate the routines of common individuals. These types of authority are bound to standards, accepted rules of society, and social interaction that venerate, and elevate the past. Charismatic authority, in its nature, opposes the rational and accepted rules by “repudiating the past” and acting as a “revolutionary force” that propels its possessors into leadership and celebrated roles, as long as it continues to be accepted and recognized (Weber, 1947, p. 361-62).

People such as these leaders, who possess authentic charismatic authority, naturally resist the standard economic conditions that would be associated with the average member of the society who lacks such powers. Although it is assumed that they will receive and reap the rewards in forms of voluntary gifts or bounty in the case of war, they are not expected to receive an income from daily and routine activities (Weber, 1947). Therefore, not only is the individual and the work they are doing seen as stemming from a divine or other worldly source, the income, property or other valuable objects that they possess, are seen as bestowed upon them as another gift from a higher power and essential to be able to complete their mandated mission (Weber, 1947).

In its nature, charisma acts as a driving revolutionary force that creates change and can alter the direction of a society in which it is operating. Because of this and its natural opposition to rationality and the socially accepted rules and norms, it is typically fleeting and temporary (Weber, 1947). However, that is not to say that it cannot be harnessed and transitioned into a permanent state that can be transferred from one leader to the next, when there is a desire for the “continuation and the continual reactivation of the community” by the followers and the leader, along with an even stronger desire for the continuation of the relationship between these followers (Weber, 1947, p. 364). It will then travel from one leader to the next, as determined by the followers, deserting the previous leader through death or other means, and promoting new leaders who possess the personal charisma through divine gift, designation, ritual or birth (Weber, 1947).

Every celebrity possesses some amount of charisma, however some possess more of this than others. Based on the length of time they command an audience and the source of their authority, celebrities can be divided into three types (Hughes-Freeland, 2012; Rojek, 2001). The first is the ascribed celebrity, whose fame is achieved through the power that is associated with lineage and legacy. This category is mostly comprised of socialites and those whose fame stems not from accomplishment, but who are born already commanding the attention of the public (Rojek, 2001, p. 17-18). Notable examples are the children of stars such as the Jolie-Pitt children and Blue Ivy Carter, the recent spawn of music icons Jay-Z and Beyonce. This type of fame is what gave legitimacy to the kings and queens of the past. Regardless of the works or subsequent actions undertaken by ascribed celebrities, the basis for their fame will always stem from their being born to famous parents or lineages.

The second type of celebrity is achieved celebrity (Rojek, 2001). This person garners their fame through their accomplishments, which then results in accumulation of social and cultural power. These celebrities typically demonstrate some talent that results in achievement and acknowledgment of greatness by the public (Rojek, 2001). These would be actors, musicians, and even politicians or notable philanthropists. When talent or skill are lacking, fame is no longer ascribed but is the third type of celebrity: the attributed celebrity. This is generally considered to be fleeting and a result of the mass media that markets an outrageous or momentary interest in a particular individual. Through sensationalism and the publicity machine, people with some alteration of the ordinary are vaulted to stardom for a seemingly unordinary action (Rojek, 2001). Examples include Nadia Silliman, the Octo-Mom and Monica Lewinski who was famous for being the woman President Bill Clinton assured us he did not have sexual relations with.

The amount of charisma each celebrity type is granted, and thus the ability to achieve and attract a large audience, is what establishes them as a commodity at a certain value. The greater the amount of charisma they have, i.e. the greater amount of attention they are able to draw as themselves, then the more highly valuable they will be perceived to be (Ferris & Harris, 2011; Gamson, 1994; Gamson, 2011; Rojek, 2001). Typically charisma itself is controlled through a well-maintained system of professionals including publicists, Hollywood elite and journalists, who decide, based on negotiations and interactions, who this should be granted to (Gamson, 1994; Rojek, 2001). This system ultimately then manufactures a charismatic leader that it can then package and sell to the public regardless of if they have talent, have achieved anything of substance, or represent

anything truly extraordinary. They have the ability to create a narrative that separates and distinguishes a celebrity from a non-celebrity, and provides “entertainment by ‘the very process of living’” (Gamson, 2011, p. 1063).

Famous for Being Famous: The Kurious Kase of Kim Kardashian

Every celebrity demonstrates these theories to some extent, however the epitome of harnessing charisma and exploiting the fame motive is Kim Kardashian and her family. One of the most famous people, or at least most interesting if you ask Barbara Walters, in the world today, Kim Kardashian has managed to turn what should have been a moment of shame and humiliation into one of the most lucrative brands in Hollywood. The daughter of Los Angeles attorney Robert Kardashian (member of O.J. Simpson’s dream team of defense lawyers) Kim never attempted to enter the spotlight herself through acting, singing or any other talent driven medium. She, instead, entered the public eye initially through being seen with the right people (as a stylist and friend of fellow socialite Paris Hilton), at the right times (Paris’s many public appearances or anywhere there was a camera), and the right places (well known nightclubs, hotels, and events) (Kim Kardashian, 2012).

However, in 2007, she was vaulted into stardom of her own, through the release of a tape depicting her and musical artist Ray-J engaged in sexual acts (Kim Kardashian, 2012). That same year, Kim and the rest of her family (mother Kris and her husband Bruce Jenner, siblings Kourtney, Khloe, Rob, Kendell and Kylie, and a cast of friends and other people of significance in their lives) began filming a reality show that followed them around during their daily activities. Since then, they have gone on to launch a

number of products under the Kardashian brand, including clothing lines, perfume, multiple spin-off's of the original reality show featuring different segments of the family, and licensing Kim's and other members of the Kardashian family's image to promote night clubs, products, and magazines among other things (Kim Kardashian, 2012).

The popularity of the Kardashians may appear to be somewhat of a mystery, but when looked at under the theories of fame and charisma it is easily explainable. The Kardashians, and specifically Kim, have managed to combine charismatic authority with the increased desire for interaction with celebrities who appear to be living a life congruent with ours. On these reality shows, the Kardashians engage in extremely ordinary situations that every family and individual goes through, include unflattering fights between family members, the birth of child and even mundane things, like deciding where to eat dinner, while at the same time, mixing in footage of extremely unordinary moments like public appearances, red carpet events and vacations the average individual could never afford. This mix not only signals to the audience that they could be, and are, just like them, but still keeps this fabulous life just outside of their grasp. This contradiction serves not to eradicate the traditional extraordinary nature of celebrities and their lifestyles, but rather reinforces how different they really are from the average person.

Kim's moment of achieving stardom was, to some unfortunately, with the leaking of her now infamous sex tape. The sex tape, not Kim's personality or ability to do anything, is what became famous, and, along with a certain part of her body, are owners of the authority and operate control and command over an audience. She, in response, could have chosen to hide and allow the charismatic authority and moment of fame to

eventually run its course, but instead chose to attach herself to these two elements. She continues to deny that it was a great moment for her, and maybe consciously she feels that way, but without her body and association with these events, she and her family would not be who they are today. By controlling the rights of her tape and trademarking her image, she was able to associate with, and transfer the authority, to herself, making her and those associated with her, famous, rather than just the tape and her backside.

The Kardashians have utilized the Internet and modern tools of promotion with the traditional Hollywood machine to promote their image and constantly renew their celebrity and the authority that they possess. The family is now a permanent fixture on television, with one reality show premiering its new season, immediately following the finale of the previous one. By being members of her charismatic group, Kim's two fully biological sisters have been granted some of her authority and have become celebrities in their own right, developing their own audience by carving out a niche for those who may reject or dislike Kim. By tweeting and interacting with their fans, they bridge that gap of the ordinary and continue to share the goings-on's of their lives through their personal websites. The addition of their new product lines including, a clothing and home goods line at Sears department store (the Kardashian Kollektion), a nail polish line (Kardashian Kolors) and various scents (one titled KK for Kim Kardashian), they allow their public to continue to feel like they have not only entered into their lives, but have now brought some of their lives into their world as well (Kim Kardashian, 2012). By expanding and building onto their brand, the Kardashians perpetuate their fame and constantly make their presence in the public eye justified. This feeds the relationships that the fans have

developed in their minds with them, and allows them not only to connect to the family, but to others as well.

The branding and continued use of the brand is so essential to Kim and her family, that during the planning of her wedding, to the aptly named Kris Humphris, Kim opted against the wishes of her fiancé to not change her last name to Humphries, purely to maintain her fame and ability to benefit from who she was. The culmination of this event was her mother (and manager) remarking that her name is trademarked, and proceeding to demonstrate the various strange products that Kim could now be known for if she became Kim Humphries. This demonstrates how her fame is built off the ownership and control of her name.

Recently, it appeared that Kim and her family's authority and subsequent fame had run its course, when she received a significant amount of backlash for the ending of her marriage after only 72 days (Kim Kardashian, 2012). Always priding themselves on being "authentic" and "real" for the cameras, when Kim filed for divorce coinciding with the premiere of the reality show that featured her and her new husband, many, including her husband, suggested that the entire marriage was a sham, and was purely concocted to generate more publicity. By appearing to stage an element of her life rather than allow for it to play out naturally in front of a camera, she undercut and destroyed the fantasy that her fans and consumers had created in their minds that she was just like them. Many of these fans felt taken for granted and fooled into being sold reality, when it was just another scripted story, taking advantage of their devotion. This was especially offensive toward those that had defended Kim against critics, and they considered ending their

support for the family. These fans felt that their trust had been violated, and if they weren't watching reality, then they weren't interested in watching at all.

Luckily for the Kardashian Klan, the latest installment of their television franchise: *Kourtney and Kim Take New York*, proved to provide enough insight into the demise of Kim and Kris's relationship, along with the strange conflicting nature of the extraordinariness and ordinariness of her sister Kourtney and her family, that it did not end their long run as American's most famous family. Kim's image however, has not fully recovered from the end of her relationship. Although she has faced attacks previous for her lack of talent, potentially plastic figure and face, or various life choices, she currently faces new criticism that could lead to her demise: being unauthentic and a fraud.

The Kardashians are not the first family to become famous, and are not the last to attempt to channel reality television and a sex tape into stardom. They are however, the most successful at building a brand and channeling charisma into fame, setting a template for those to attempt to follow.

The Historical Context of Celebrity

Given the social nature of human society, it is likely that there have always been those members that have garnered a larger amount of attention than others. However it was, like many elements of Western society, the Greeks and Romans of the 4th and 5th century BCE who first collectively defined how a person was able to achieve recognition within society (Braudy, 1984; Ferris & Harris, 2011; Gamson, 1994; Rojek, 2001). When the epics of Homer were put into written form, the heroes within them, Achilles,

Agamemnon, and Ulysses, were elevated to god-like levels, and worshipped by the masses after their death for their accomplishments in battle and vast travels (Braudy, 1984; Rojek, 2001). There was a collective ideology that was formed and accepted as valid among members of their societies of what the steps were to achieve fame. This laid the groundwork for individuals to actively seek out fame and fortune in life, rather than it being bestowed upon them after death in the form of a shrine (Braudy, 1984; Gamson, 1994; Rojek, 2001).

Where as the fame that the heroes of Homer's epics possessed during their lifetimes was only acknowledged following their death, the first person to have recognizably achieved fame in life was Alexander the Great (Braudy, 1984; Ferris & Harris, 2011; Rojek, 2001). As Braudy (1984) describes in his history of fame, Alexander the Great earned this title "for his constant awareness of the relationship between accomplishment and publicity" (p. 31). This would suggest, that he was the first to recognize his status among the people as famous, and utilize the forms of mediation available to him to continue to promote himself. Braudy (1984) further deconstructs the celebrity of notable historic figures by moving away from achieving fame purely through victory in war, and allows for celebrity and notoriety achieved through public action and spiritual connection.

Without discovering the 5th century BCE version of *People Magazine* describing Alexander the Great's latest night out, there is no empirical way to prove that he was, in fact, the first celebrity. This suggestion by Braudy (1984) is based on the assumption that modern principles were applicable to people who lived long ago. What is notable however, is that the examples that he uses throughout his analysis, including Alexander the Great, Julius Caesar, and St. Augustine, are still known and discussed by people today (Gamson,

1994; Braudy, 1984; Rojek 2001). They have been present in the collective conscious as celebrities of the past, and continue to be referenced and revered today for their accolades. If, as he suggests, fame from this era rested not only with the person during life but substantially after it, then Alexander the Great certainly has achieved this, as there are movies and television shows being made about his life today.

If historic celebrity is viewed through a modern conceptual framework, then like current celebrities, it would be based on the ability to control and maintain a devoted fan following. These ancient celebrities relied upon the forms of mediation that they had access to, in similar ways that today's celebrities do (Braudy, 1984; Gamson, 1994). These were however, limited to only those who had the means to access them. For example, Alexander the Great came from a ruling family and had the monetary and physical access to any sort of distribution material to increase the presence of his brand and accomplishments (Braudy, 1984; Gamson, 1994). This made it difficult for people of a lesser social standing to achieve any level of fame. However, as mediation changed and expanded from the 15th to the 18th century, the ability to become "famous" was also altered (Gamson, 1994, p.17-18). With the development of the printing press, people were able to put their face, names and individual identities out to the masses for consumption with less time elapsing between the event and the stories being printed about it (Braudy, 1984; Gamson, 1994; Rojek, 2001). Like celebrities of modern day, only those able of reaching and commanding an audience with charisma, were able to achieve the status of celebrity. They no longer needed to serve a substantial purpose to society, such as winning battles, leading public debate or have a divine spiritual connection, but had to provide something that people could relate to (Braudy, 1984; Gamson, 1994; Gamson, 2011; Hughes-

Freeland, 2012; Rojek, 2011).

Further changes in media in the 19th and 20th century, led to the development of the marketing of these people, and turned them into the controlled commodities that results in not just fame, but also celebrity (de Zengotita, 2005; Halpern; 2007; Gamson, 1994; Gamson, 2011; Rojek, 2001). Journalism became a career field that depended upon the consumption by the masses of media. With the far reaching capabilities of newspapers and the invention of photography, the ability to maintain the contextual basis of stories, and link images with words, allowed for news stories to move away from just relaying the facts of events, to telling the stories of the human players within them (Gamson, 1994). By making people the story, rather than events, finding the compelling person that would capture audiences and sell media, became the focus of those within this field. The more compelling stories would sell more media, increase the number of people who knew of those featured in these stores, and prove to be more lucrative for those writing them (Gamson, 1994; Ferris & Harris, 2011).

In response, a mutually beneficial relationship developed between those covering these individuals and those who were being covered. They both were, and are still today, dependent upon each other for their livelihood. While it may have been reporters for the local paper in the early 20th century, today this is most notably seen through the growth of the industry of the paparazzi¹ (Grenier, 2011). In the mid 20th century, the desire to be entertained by the masses through leisure activities resulted in the growth of the

¹ Paparazzi are independent photographers who follow celebrities and take candid, and often unflattering, pictures, to sell to media outlets. They are often aggressive in their pursuit, and will go to great lengths, including chasing celebrities in cars, standing outside their homes or waiting outside restaurants or bars they have gone into, in order to get the best shot that will sell for the highest price.

entertainment industry, and propelled those who could entertain through performance to the status of celebrity; conquering the box office, became the new form of conquering the enemy on the battlefield (Gamson, 1994). Although these appear to be vastly different, when viewed in historical context, both Alexander the Great and Brad Pitt are feeding the desires of the audience, whether it be protection from invaders or a ninety-minute escape from life as a lawyer. As people began to invest their money into celebrities and their products, the celebrity landscape was controlled more by the discourse generated by people rather than the people having the landscape presented to them (Gamson, 1994; Rojek, 2001; Braudy, 1984; Habermas, 1962). Sensing a need to control this discourse, the resulting system that is rooted in Hollywood today, including agents, public relations professionals, etc, was created in order to ensure that celebrities are portrayed as they want and need to be, both on and off screen, to keep them relevant in the public conversation (Gamson, 1994; Gamson, 2011). Those within the public eye, recognized that if they could control the perception of their image through media, they could further grow, and manipulate the audience to serve their own purposes: see their movies, buy their products, vote for them, etc (Gamson, 1994; Gamson, 2011).

As this desire to participate in the discourse was fed through the production of entertainment related magazines, it also created a desire to relate on every level to these people, and began the wanting for an ordinary type of celebrity, rather than an extraordinary one. It fueled the relationship that is formed between the celebrity and the reader, and the need of the reader to be able to reflect on themselves and their values (de Zengotita, 2005; Grenier, 2011).

The Sports Superstar: Tebow Time and Instant Fame

Change in mediation, adds to the number of avenues that can be taken to achieve fame, but does not necessarily eliminate the previous avenues in the process. Celebrities in the world of sports are an example of those who combine the aspects of achieving fame through victory in battle of the first celebrities, while tapping into the desire that dominates media coverage today for personal interest stories that resonate with prominent, and relevant issues in the average person's life. Recent examples of this are Tim Tebow and Jeremy Lin.

Tim Tebow is a quarterback in the National Football League. He started the 2011 football season as the backup for the Denver Broncos, but finished the season as the starter. Although widely thought to be lacking in many of the necessary skills that were required of a quarterback at the professional level, he was drafted by the Denver Broncos in the first round of the 2009 NFL draft, far higher than experts predicted. Known for his overt displays of his Christian faith, including writing Bible verse references onto his eye black² (later banned under a new "Tebow rule"), he has developed a devout following since his days as a high school player in Florida that then continued through championship seasons at the University of Florida. Tebow spent the 2009 and 2010 seasons as a backup in Denver but when the Broncos started the 2011 season 1-4, the demand by his followers and fans to start him, resulted in, against what appeared to be common football sense, him starting the next game. Proving his critics wrong, Tebow went on to win 7 of the next 11 games and lead the team to the playoffs (Tim Tebow; 2012).

² Eye black is worn under the eyes of athletes to deflect and limit glare while competing in sporting events.

Tebow's ability to win games, garnered a certain amount of celebrity the same way Alexander the Great did. He became a hero to fans of his team, and was highly publicized while doing it. His ability to bring the team back while behind in the fourth quarter, and often winning these games in dramatic fashion, created a narrative that included suggesting that, due to his Christian faith, he was playing with divine power. These circumstances are similar to the ones that propelled the heroes of Homers epics into stardom, and are the spark that endows him with the charisma to command the audience that idolized him. With this being unexplainable to those who study football, he created a national debate about his place in the game. ESPN and other major sports and news networks, used his devoted following and the conflict over his game to drive their media and focused a majority of their programming around topics involving him. The resulting celebrity from his victories on the football field, created demand amongst the public, that was then feed through unending coverage in the media. The more coverage he was given, the more the public develops their relationship with him, as they see him on TV, follow him on twitter and read about whom he is dating in tabloids. He not only lives the desired glamorous lifestyle of the celebrity that ordinary people covet, but he represents the Christian values that a large portion of society possess but who rarely see reflected back to them in the behaviors of celebrities and athletes in general. As long as Tebow can continue to win games and fulfill his role as the ambassador for Evangelical Christians, he will remain endowed with charismatic authority, and therefore within the ongoing discourse of fame.

The tie between winning on the athletic playing field and instant cult like celebrity is even more apparent in the case of Jeremy Lin, and the "Linsanity" that swept New York and the basketball world during the early spring of 2012. Jeremy Lin is an Asian-American

basketball player who attended Harvard and was picked up by the New York Knicks for a 10-day contract to try and make the team in 2012. Sitting on the bench for most of the contract, in an act of desperation, Lin was put into a game and went on to score 25 points and lead the team to victory. Like the situation in Denver with Tim Tebow, the Knicks were in the midst of a losing season, and like with Tebow, after Lin entered the line-up they went on to win 6 more games, bringing the team back to a .500 winning percentage and putting them into playoff contention. With the winning streak, the entire sports world was thrown into “Linsanity”, and a barrage of horrible puns using Lin’s name. The sports news landscape was dominated by coverage of Lin practicing, Lin looking for a new apartment, and even Lin turning down Kim Kardashian who wanted to date him (Jeremy Lin, 2012).

Again, Lin was seen as the unlikely hero who achieved fame through victory on the battlefield of sports. Unlike Tebow however, Lin appeared on the landscape seemingly out of nowhere. He was not heavily recruited in high school, played for a team that was never competitive for the national championship in college and went un-drafted by the NBA - changing teams multiple times in a year. In contrast, Tebow was known during high school and his underdog story focused more on the contradiction between his success in college and the unending doubt of professional football analysts that he could not play professionally. Lin’s moment of capturing charismatic authority was not simply established by winning games, but when he won games for a dysfunctional fan base that was starved for victories and, on some level, hope. Like Tebow, the celebrity of Jeremy Lin took off because he was able to combine the athletic and dramatic victories with a compelling human-interest story that many could relate to. Prior to Lin, there had been very few Asian basketball players. People of Asian heritage were now able to see someone

who looked like them, not only be successful in the sport, but as an important player on a well-known team. Beyond just this community, Lin's story resonated with every man who wishes they could play sports but simply is just not talented enough to do so, playing out the "rags to riches" story and fantasy narrative. Playing for Harvard and his lack of superstardom during his collegiate career, along with the story of him sleeping on his friend's couch during his time with the Knicks, made him appear to be fulfilling that dream of every average person of suddenly being capable of competing, and becoming the star of a professional sports team (Jeremy Lin, 2012).

Unlike Tebowmania however, Linsanity ended as quickly as it began. The Knicks began to lose, other teams figured out how to defend Lin, and the talent he appeared to have faded as well as the ability of the Knicks to win games. The official end came when it was discovered Lin needed season ending knee surgery, rendering him unable to play in the playoffs (Jeremy Lin, 2012). Without the winning and the talent, Lin no longer possessed the ability to garner an audience and his fame and charismatic authority, while not completely extinguished, have been significantly limited and pushed aside by other stories and other celebrities, ironically "Timsanity" as Tim Tebow enters the scene in New York after being traded to their football team, the New York Jets.

Both Tim Tebow and Jeremy Lin have demonstrated that the star athlete is the ultimate bridge between the celebrities of the past and celebrities of modern mediation. Although they currently are on different fame trajectories, Tebow's on the continual rise and Lin's falling, they both possess the key elements to achieving fame and separating themselves from other athletes who are equally talented but lack the ability to draw in the attention of the average person. The combination of a compelling back-story and

unexpected personal and team success, broaden the audience beyond the one that consumes sports, and vaults them onto the A-List of the celebrity world. As they continue to work within this framework, each has taken steps to build their brand through licensing of “Tebowing”, “Linsanity” and their respective images. It will be interesting to see how they utilize this new form of fame making to continue to capture the public’s attention in years to come.

“Reality” TV and the Internet Celebrity of the 21st Century

As with previous changes to celebrity culture, mediation continues to fuel alteration in the 21st century, as the Internet and the genre of reality TV allow greater access to fame by those who covet it for themselves, and covet knowledge about those who have it (de Zengotita, 2005; Ferris & Harris, 2011; Gamson, 2011; Grenier, 2011). Starting in the 1980’s, the development of the genre of reality TV opened a seemingly new avenue for fame seekers and those who wanted access to celebrities. Due to its ability to be produced for significantly less money than scripted television, it taps into the fame motive of many individuals who were willing to do anything for fame, and created a successful and never ending supply of new product (Gamson, 2011). Shows such as *American Idol*, *America’s Next Top Model* and other types of talent competitions, look to turn someone from outside the industry into someone with a successful career within the industry. They not only capture the ordinariness of the individuals they star, but go on to document and highlight the move of these individuals from ordinary to celebrity, filling and fueling the desire of many watching at home (Gamson, 2011; Jenkins, 2006).

However unscripted and random this may seem, this entire process is actually

carefully marketed and controlled by people who work within the confines and rules of the industry. They act as the divine power that bestows the charismatic authority upon these people, with the event of being chosen to participate in the show, as the miracle moment - “something must be special about this individual if they were chosen over me” is the thought process that will go through the mind of the viewer at home. Although it appears on the outside to be a random ordinary person who makes it on these shows, these constants are still put through a process that weeds them out from the millions of others who tryout, and they are selected based on a criteria that is unknown and unseen to the audience. In this sense, what appears to be an ordinary and random person achieving fame is really just a new iteration of the same process many stars went through. Normally celebrities are presented following this discovery process, but these shows present the celebrity before, during, and after it (Ferris & Harris, 2011; Gamson, 2011; Halpern, 2007). Often, however, once the setting of the show is no longer surrounding these individuals, they are stripped of the power to captivate their audience, which explains the incredibly unsuccessful rate of winners of these shows resulting in sustained celebrity – regardless of their level of talent. While the producers may have thought they had the power to maintain an audience through their talent, the audience was actually controlled through the ability to watch their daily life, relate to them as ordinary people, and form relationships with them, as if they were going through the experience along side them.

Ironically, this process is reversed for former celebrities that have lost their appeal and aim to recapture an audience that has deserted them. Even though they are just people, there is a feeling about celebrities that they are of a different kind, and therefore must live completely differently from the average person (de Zengotita, 2007; Gamson, 2011).

Reality TV focusing on the “ordinary” life of celebrities, such as *Hogan Knows Best*, or those that attempts to feature celebrities doing average things like *Dancing With The Stars* or *Celebrity Fit Club*, remove these people from their staged persona, and attempt to capitalize on the desire to gawk at celebrities either attempting to be average people or showcasing just how average they really are.

The influence of reality TV has played a role in the rise of the ordinary person as a celebrity, but has continued to operate within the established rules and boundaries of the Hollywood machine. In contrast, with increased forms of mediation and advances in technology, such as the Internet and social networking, the door has been opened for an individual to reject this system and become famous through their own self-promotion and distribution (Gamson, 2011).

A cursory look into the historical context of celebrity reveals that many changes in this culture are spurred by coinciding increase in access to media. The advent of the Internet has resulted in a new pathway for the capturing of fame. Social networking sites like Facebook, Twitter and YouTube, have enabled people to share thoughts, pictures, videos and just about anything with complete strangers, in any part of the world. This has altered the landscape of celebrity, as people can now become a celebrity for being themselves, and by allowing them to circumvent many of the previously required hurdles to fame (de Zengotita, 2007; Ferris & Harris, 2011; Gamson, 2011).

In this “bottom-up, do-it-yourself celebrity” anyone can take the tools that were once reserved for those of status within Hollywood and use them as forms of self-promotion. This allows anyone access into the world of celebrity who is capable of accessing the Internet and has the boldness to film themselves and then post it (Gamson,

2011, p. 1065). Like with the movie magazines of the 1950's, the inclusion of the audience participation in this discourse lends them to play a role into which one of the plethora of videos, images, blogs, etc that fill this space, become famous. They are able to vote, view and pass on those who they find interesting, a process that is commonly known as “going viral”³ (de Zengotita, 2007; Gamson, 2011).

In Weberian (1947) terms, items that go viral, and become popular out of this system, would be considered to possess a greater amount of charismatic authority than those who garner few views and are never recognized. If they were able to do this, this person would initially bypass the standard steps of waiting to be discovered and then sold to an audience by the publicity system of Hollywood. Instead, they could build their own audience through posting videos on YouTube, generate their own publicity by going viral and come to Hollywood with a built in public that is only then expanded upon by the public relations machine (Gamson, 2011).

The Internet age of fame produces celebrities out of ordinary people that previously would have never had a chance at reaching any level of stardom. The first type of Internet celebrity is that of the “anti-celebrity” (Gamson, 2011, p. 1065). This is the person who tends to possess some strange quirk but otherwise, is average, ordinary and has no talent of any type. Typically these are the people who are described by what they are doing, rather than for who they are, if you saw them on the street you would probably say, “that’s the guy from....” or “that’s the guy who did....”. A good example of this is “the greatest freak out ever” in which a teenager films his older brother freaking out after the cancelation of

³ “Going viral” is the process by which an image, video, or other text becomes well known in the public through Internet-based forms of communication, such as email and social network posts (de Zengotita, 2005).

his World of Warcraft subscription. People know what you are referring to, may recognize him occasionally, but most likely could not put a name to his face (Gamson, 2011).

The second type of Internet based celebrity is the “self-made, do-it-yourself celebrity” (Gamson, 2011, p. 1066). This person markets and brands themselves as a celebrity through social networking, such as MySpace, Facebook, etc and then parlays that into a traditional celebrity type without actually possessing or doing anything other than being well-known. This results in the concept of the “famous for being famous” person who will lend their image for the promotion and selling of numerous items, but will often fail to transition to the level of fame that requires at least some talent (Gamson, 2011). For example, Paris Hilton, Kim Kardashian, and other “famous for being famous” individuals may be successful at selling handbags, perfume or copies of tabloids, but have yet to make it in the world of movies or music, regardless of how hard they try. These types of celebrity are confined within the genre⁴ that they were granted charismatic authority, losing the ability to captivate the audience that supports their power when they attempt to move to genres where the ordinary is no longer elevated (Gamson, 2011).

The final type of Internet celebrity is the “microcelebrity” or celebrity that carves out a small niche and becomes famous to a small group of individuals (Gamson, 2011, p. 1067). Similar to the other types of Internet celebrity, they use social networking to draw in an audience that promotes this individual and their work amongst themselves. They rely heavily on “self-publicity”, and “the revelation of the ordinary self in everyday activity” becomes the vehicle through which this type of celebrity will gain attention (Gamson, 2011, p. 1067). These celebrities are minor in stature and do not reach the same level of

⁴ The use of genre in this paper refers to the concepts described in the works of Bauman and Briggs (1992) and Hanks (1987).

stardom in the general public as the other types of celebrities. However, they are considered A-list within their circle and within the realm of the Internet.

Internet celebrities are different from other forms of celebrity, as they are dependent not on their achievements, but on the ownership and marketing of themselves or their defining moments, in order to maintain relevance in the celebrity discourse. When a phrase, video or image goes viral, it develops a discursive public (Warner, 2007). These exist not in a physically binding space, but through the consuming of the text (video, film, television show, tabloid article) itself. They are self-organized, self-identifying, and the members are unknown to each other. Once established, they are always dependent upon increased and continued circulation that allows for consumption and participation by the members with the text (Warner, 2007). The Internet has allowed for the ability to grow and include new members into the discursive public and continue driving the demand for the text. The more this spreads, the more likely it is to be associated with the identity of the individual responsible for its original creation. The establishment of a discursive public is the catalyst for the divine moment that establishes this text as having charismatic authority and results in fame and celebrity. The text, not the individual, is what is granted authority, and command of a following. In order to capitalize on this fame and siphon off some of it for themselves, the person who uttered, created or appears in the text, must find some way to permanently link themselves to the text. The easiest way to do this is by claiming ownership through filing trademark applications, or claiming copyright infringement when someone else uses them. Whereas actors or singers would profit off of the sell of their movies or albums, Internet celebrities are able to use these devices to profit off their product: themselves. These devices are also used in response to the sudden demand for

access to these individuals as they enter the circle of celebrity. Although they may have used self-promotion to reach the point of viral-celebrity status, the manipulation of the brand through trademark and copyright laws by the Hollywood machine will enable them to achieve further fame and remain within the ongoing public discourse.

The rise of the viral-text-based celebrity, the desire for the ordinary and the fame motive are related to each other. The fame motive theory suggests that people are motivated toward seeking celebrity based on an evolutionarily cultivated desire to be accepted by their social group to which they belong, and is expressed through the elevation of and recognition of that person by the other members. This drive also motivates them to be “in the know” and participate in the activities that they perceive the majority of those around them taking an active part in (Brim, 2009). This is fulfilled when, as a text goes viral and begins to increase in popularity, one knows the context and the story behind the phrase and are able to use it with others, making them feel like they are in on the conversation, member of the greater social group and thus becoming a member of the text’s consuming public. They also feel that they are in some way interacting with that celebrity, furthering their parasocial relationship they feel that they have with them, almost like participating in an inside joke with that celebrity. They are also given the opportunity to siphon off some of the fame and feel elevated to the level of these celebrities through this connection or in reverse, bring the famous individual into the ordinary realm they live in (de Zengotita, 2007; Grenier, 2011).

For as many celebrities as viral texts create, they can also provide a new source of fame for already established celebrities, notably through the use of catchphrases. When one is associated with a celebrity it creates a situation where the identity of the celebrity

is forever linked to the phrase that they may or may not have been saying before becoming famous. These celebrities will then harness this fame by using intellectual property laws, similar to Internet celebrities, by filing for trademarks and copyright enforcement.

The idea of a celebrity filing trademark applications for their identifiable phrases is not a concept that is purely born out of this introduction of the Internet. Since the late 19th century, celebrities and people of recognition have been using the legal system to establish ownership of their likeness and identifiable characteristics (Rowland, 2002). The first instance of the catchphrase being included into this category was in 1983 when Johnny Carson of *The Tonight Show* fame, sued Here's Johnny Portable Toilets, Inc over the use of what he perceived to be his signature phrase: "Here's Johnny" (Warshavsky, 2006). Carson had previously trademarked his name for use on clothing and other merchandise, but never trademarked the actual phrase. He argued in the suit, that when people heard this phrase they would think of him and thus assume that he was in some way associated with the product that was being sold. Given the nature of the company, Johnny felt that this would in some way damage the brand and identity that he had cultivated (Coombe, 1998; Warshavsky, 2006).

The decision to allow Johnny Carson to maintain the rights and control over a string of words paved the way for these types of phrases to be included in the same sense as image and name. This then opened the door for the ability to legally obtain the rights to a phrase (other than a name) and control its use for anyone who felt like it was essential to their identity (Coombe, 1998; Warshavsky, 2006). Following this decision a number of already famous individuals began to copyright phrases both for their personal

gain and in an attempt to prevent others from benefiting from using their identity without their permission. This was also a way to control negative images or attacks on the individual through use of their image, name and now associated characteristics (Coombe, 1998; Bryant, 2008).

WINNING at Modern Celebrity Culture: Charlie Sheen

The Kardashians may have used the tools of modern mediation to establish their fame from seemingly nothing, but Charlie Sheen has used them to build upon an already established level of fame, and take him from famous to infamous in an incredible short amount of time. Charlie Sheen, the son of actor Martin Sheen rose to initial fame in the 80's when he followed in his father's footsteps and became an actor. Considered the consummate playboy and party animal, Charlie was known for engaging in dangerous activities, as well as associating with somewhat less desirable characters. He continued to work as an actor but suffered through numerous bouts of alcohol and drug arrests and other illegal incidents. In 2003 Charlie began work on a sitcom, *Two and a Half Men*, which went on to become one of the most popular shows currently airing (Charlie Sheen, 2012).

The beginning of Charlie Sheen's ascent to modern stardom, started in December of 2010 when he was arrested for domestic violence while on vacation with his then wife and their two children in Colorado. Following this incident, Charlie was involved in a number of other events, including a wild night at the Plaza Hotel in New York and a trip to the hospital in which he insists was the result of a hernia, not drug induced. Following his erratic behavior, his bosses at CBS and Warner Brothers decided to shut down production on Sheen's sitcom, effectively putting it into hiatus earlier than planned. Not taking kindly

to effectively being told to take a time out, Sheen began an all out assault on his boss Chuck Lore, which included interviews on almost every major news program in the country (Charlie Sheen, 2012).

Unlike typical celebrity interviews that follow in the wake of a public image crisis in which the person attempts to appear controlled, demure and sane as possible, Charlie Sheen appeared to be the exact opposite. Clearly on the offensive in his quest to take down Warner Brother and CBS, he did not apologize, admit he was going to rehab or even that he had a problem, or appear to be in what is commonly referred to as “damage control”. Sheen was not only unapologetic but rather defiant that not only was he sane, but that he was above and better than any of those that were critical of him. He proceeded to answer questions in unexpected ways with a number of phrases and words that became part of the common everyday speech in America. Most popular are his utterances of “duh, Winning!”, “I’m bi-winning”, “I got tiger blood, man”, “Adonis DNA”, and referring to himself as a “warlock” and his girlfriends as “The Goddesses”. Sheen’s rants are also loaded with sports metaphors, military references and references to other mythical creatures and magic that conjure up notions of power, dominance, advanced or superhuman strength or knowledge, and general success that cannot be matched by others (Charlie Sheen, 2012).

Sheen, previously a non-user of social media, joined Twitter and amassed over 1 million follows in a little over 24 hours, a Guinness Book Word Record (Coyle, 2011). These phrases launched a number of websites devoted to them including LiveTheSheenDream.com, which allows viewers to click a picture of Charlie’s face to generate random quotes from his various media moments. There is currently a book of his quotable phrases available on Amazon and he himself is in the process of penning a

memoir about his life, as well as embarking on a tour across the United States where he is basically talking to the audience about his life in what is now dubbed “Sheenspeak”.

“Tigerblood” went on to be the second most used hashtag⁵ on Twitter in 2011, second only to #Egypt and followed closely by #Japan, #Superbowl and #Jan25 (the day the Egyptian revolution began) (Pous, 2011).

Prior to his complete meltdown, Charlie Sheen was a traditional celebrity who had grown up in the Hollywood system and earned his fame through both his talent in acting and his notoriously outrageous lifestyle. This put him at a distance from the average person, and personified what used to be admired in a celebrity. People wanted to live his charmed life, rather than have him live their boring life. He engaged in situations and behaviors that would result in anyone but him being arrested and losing everything. The lack of the Internet and citizen journalist that everyone with a camera phone and twitter account has now become, hid most of these adventures from the public eye, and the traditional Hollywood PR machine worked to control how he was portrayed to the public. Through the creation of his catchphrases, he was able to continue to fight what he perceived to be a system of being held back by his bosses, and his mind, win. He allowed people to not only access him through using his catchphrases, but also tapped into a feeling everyone has had of hating their boss, and live out the fantasy of not only telling them off, but...winning. Every time someone says, tweets or references “WINNING!” they channel a small part of Charlie Sheen and take on his persona. These phrases generated a new level of fame for Charlie by endowing him with a different charisma than he previously had

⁵ A “hashtag”, represented by the # symbol, is used to mark keywords or topics, emphasize meaning, and to categorize or index tweets (posts) on Twitter (What are, 2012).

earned. He already had been given authority to command an audience through his acting accomplishments, but he now also had been granted some through his ability to let people into his life.

“Winning”, “Tigerblood”, etc had become so popular and such a part of the cultural lexicon that they were included in tweets and advertising by McDonald’s, and used by the RedCross to help bring in donations and increase awareness of their causes (PBH Network, 2011). In the typical response of today’s celebrity, he recognized the need to control the use of these phrases, as they were now an identifiable part of who he was. To prevent others from capitalizing or using the authority that these phrases carried to promote their own celebrity, Sheen filed trademarks applications to be sure to associate himself with them in every way. Through utilizing the Internet to increase the spread of these phrases within the cultural lexicon, he built a new brand that lead to further endorsements and a higher level of fame.

Charlie’s meltdown and the popularity of his strange phrases prevented him from disappearing from the world of Hollywood completely. They gave him a new audience and endowed him with charisma to carry this audience that was willing to buy the products he was selling, and transferred it to anything that he was associated with. The size and scope of the public that he reached made him marketable and kept his acting career alive, where without them, he would have just been another “has-been” to wash up on *Celebrity Rehab* and fade into the background. Although he has since been to rehab again and his manic meltdown has subsided, “WINNING!” is still a part of the lexicon and still used in reference to Charlie Sheen today. By mastering the power of the Internet and becoming relatable and in some sense “ordinary”, Charlie was able to cement his fame in the mind of

the public forever and become both a traditional celebrity, as well as a modern one.

Conclusion: The Never Ending Story

Although it may appear that there has been a boom in the coverage and scope of celebrity related stories in recent time, the curiosity over celebrities and their daily lives is nothing new to society. They have been created, distributed and sold to the fans that harbor a desire to know, and be known, that has been around as long as humans have formed social groupings. As demonstrated through social and anthropological theory, this has been fueled through underlying social forces that have driven the desire for and acquisition of fame long before Kim Kardashian stepped foot on her first red carpet. Brim's (2009) description of what he calls the "fame motive", demonstrates that evolutionarily, humans have fostered and developed through social interactions, an internal drive to seek out the attention of others within their social circles. This motive has been fed through the ability to garner fame for oneself, and the ability to recognize and consume information about those who have achieved it. The process to achieve fame can only be done through the possession of what Weber (1947) describes as charisma and charismatic authority. The acquisition of this gives some members of society the power to control others, and in the case of celebrities, happens in the moment when they capture the attention of their audience and develop a following, or fan base. Historically this can be put into context, and one can recognize that these drivers and actions have been occurring to those in our society since the first great civilizations, and possibly even long before that (Braudy, 1986).

While we can be quick to dismiss the modern version of celebrity as just a continuation of the previous forms, there are significant differences to who and by what

means people achieve and maintain fame in the 21st century. Driven by developments in mediation, celebrities and the culture surrounding them, respond by utilizing them to acquire charisma and charismatic authority. Developments in technology have given us new forms of media that have allowed ordinary people to perceive that they are capable of achieving fame in easy and simple steps, regardless of what form it is in or how it comes about. With the Internet and the genre of reality TV, we have formed closer, although be it still fictitious, relationships with celebrities, and are able to access their lives and live vicariously through them in real time and in more ways than prior to these developments (de Zengotita, 2007; Ferris & Harris, 2011; Gamson, 2011). These forms of media allow us, as we watch seemingly ordinary people become stars, to believe that everyone has a chance at this and that it is easily attainable. As we view people who appear equally, or even less, qualified than us, achieving fame, we not only live out our fantasy of becoming famous, but also begin to believe that we could, and should be that person. The average individual may believe that they can and should be famous, but clearly not everyone who posts a video, auditions for *American Idol*, or writes a blog achieves stardom. For this to happen, there still must be something that compels people to care, draws them in, and entices them to continue buying the product that is the celebrity. For those few that do reach celebrity status, the focus then shifts from achieving fame, to maintaining it. Seen through the examples of the Kardashians, Tim Tebow and Jeremy Lin, and Charlie Sheen, marketing and the ability to link the fame associated with these types of unique aspects with identity, is a key element for these modern types of celebrities. Done through the use of trademark and copyright filings and applications, these allow for the harnessing and continuation of the charismatic authority that these individuals have been granted from

their initial burst onto the celebrity discourse.

Nothing in life is static, and celebrity and fame are no exception to this rule. Since my vacation five years ago, a new crop of celebrities dominate the weekly tabloid and gossip website headlines (Britney and Nicole Richie have been replaced by the Kardashians, stars of the series *Teen Mom*, and others), but the stories that are being covered are essentially the same. Focusing on relationships beginning and ending, how much weight people have gained or lost, and of course, any sort of mental health breakdown, there continues to be the building up of these people in their triumphs, and then when they fail, tearing them down, only to have them build themselves back up again (the positive stories always coming in the form of exclusive interviews granted by the star with accompanied posed photo shoots, and the negative stories through “sources close to the celebrity” and awkward paparazzi images). The ability to access this information about celebrities and the way the celebrity is created has also changed. Twitter has been invented, Facebook opened to everyone and YouTube became the new version of a demo tape recorded in someone’s garage. If I had asked my friend if she thought she could be famous then, I’m almost certain she would have replied yes, but with the same notion that I still had today: that she had to do something to earn that fame. It is apparent that although the concept and presence of celebrity has not changed, there has been a change in the mediation, presentation and consumption of celebrity that has altered not only my perception of the pathways to fame, but her perception of the availability of attaining it as well.

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