Celebrity Studies
Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:
http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rcel20

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Available online: 17 Mar 2010

To cite this article: Graeme Turner (2010): Approaching celebrity studies, Celebrity Studies, 1:1, 11-20
To link to this article: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/19392390903519024

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Approaching celebrity studies

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The analysis of celebrity, celebrities and celebrity culture is one of the growth industries for the humanities and social sciences over the last decade. Psychologists warn us of the dangers of ‘celebrity worship’, sociologists interrogate young people about their personal expectations of fame, and even a discipline with as attenuated a relation to popular culture as literary studies now studies such things as ‘post-colonial celebrity’. The textual richness of celebrity culture is proving irresistible, and so the fetish for textual analysis that dominated so much of the 1980s has found itself right at home in the study of celebrity. But is this what we want from the study of celebrity? What are the approaches that are most needed, and which are likely to be the most productive for those of us in cultural and media studies for whom celebrity has become part of the heartland for the study of popular culture? This article will discuss some of the options, and in particular it will ask how we might establish a stronger base for the study of the industrial production, as well as the audience consumption, of celebrity.

Keywords: celebrity studies; celebrity culture; media consumption; media production

The rising tide of celebrity

There is no sign yet that the spread of celebrity culture has reached its limits. Rather, celebrity content has become fundamental to the news media in the twenty-first century. From mass market magazines to nightly television programmes to online editions of newspapers, celebrity news has proved its capacity to attract attention and to drive consumption. Where celebrity news might once have been more or less confined to a specific range of print and television outlets, it is now a category of content that can be found right across the media spectrum. The growth of new media has generated new ways of representing, consuming and producing celebrity while online journalism – especially where it is developed as an additional platform for the mainstream print media – has also had an expansionary effect. One revealing detail is the growing trend for the so-called ‘quality’ newspapers to foreground celebrity stories and photo galleries in their online editions when they would be reluctant to identify with something as downmarket as celebrity news in their print editions. At the other end of the spectrum, in the zone of the paparazzi and the shock-horror scandal sheets, celebrity journalism has also found new vehicles through which to infiltrate mainstream media markets. While relatively anodyne television entertainment news formats such as E! News have been screened for many years, a significant recent development is TMZ’s migration from its niche as an edgy, muck-raking, explicitly disrespectful, celebrity gossip and news site to become a high-rating prime-time cable television programme (it commenced screening on weeknights in the United States

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in January 2008). *TMZ*’s rise to industry respectability, notwithstanding the fact that it has stuck to its original style and focus, demonstrates that even the most shameless exploitation of celebrity culture can find a place within the mainstream television schedule today. Inherently spectacular, closely tailored to contemporary news values, endlessly iterative and renewable, celebrity news is perfectly built for rapid news cycles, short-form news and for the contemporary media’s preference for entertainment-based content.

It doesn’t stop there, of course: celebrity culture has infiltrated politics, literary publishing, sport and business; and in the local shopping mall, talent contests of one kind or another offer the simulation of fame to pre-teens and ‘tweens’ on a regular basis. In one of the major shifts in the production of television, the rise of *Idol, Big Brother, Fame Academy* and the like have taken us to a point where whole television formats depend upon exploiting public interest in the opportunity of becoming a celebrity, however briefly. In most places where they have been screened, these formats have had no difficulty in generating participants; indeed, their popularity may be implicated in the results from surveys of youth attitudes in locations such as the United Kingdom and Australia which list fame as one of the primary goals young people hope to achieve in the future.¹

Within the academy, as well, the analysis of celebrity, celebrities and celebrity culture has been one of the growth industries for the humanities and social sciences over the last decade. Indeed, there has been a bandwagon effect as the celebrity of celebrity studies has grown. Social science disciplines such as psychology have climbed aboard to talk about the psychological dangers lurking in the rise of ‘celebrity worship syndrome’ (or ‘CWS’) (McCutcheon *et al.* 2002) – initially discussing it as a clinical condition but allowing CWS to be taken up in the press as a means of explaining the whole of celebrity culture. Even disciplines with virtually no theoretical interest in, or any methodological approaches appropriate to, the analysis of popular culture – such as literary studies – have entered the field; there is, for instance, one collection of essays dealing with ‘post-colonial celebrity’ emerging from post-colonial literary studies (Clarke in press). Despite side-shows such as these, the heartland of celebrity studies remains within media and cultural studies where academics already interested in popular culture and representation have readily applied themselves to the discussion of particular celebrities as texts. Such discussions turn up regularly in undergraduate coursework materials as well as in the readers and themed collections that have lately begun to populate the field (e.g. Andrews and Jackson 2001, Holmes and Redmond 2006, Marshall 2007).

Those of us who have published our research on celebrity know how easily we can ourselves be incorporated into the regime of publicity and promotion upon which the celebrity industries depend. It would be a fair guess that just about anyone who has published significant amounts of material on celebrity will have experienced some media interest in their work. Personally, especially since the publication of *Understanding celebrity* (Turner 2004), I have had journalists call regularly, from all around the world, as each new performance of extreme celebrity (Michael Jackson’s funeral, for instance) or bad behaviour (anything involving Britney Spears or Lindsay Lohan) occurs. Typically, they want to know why academics are interested in celebrity, if it is a bad thing for media consumers to be interested in them too and, finally, what should be done about it. It is interesting that journalists come to academics seeking a moralistic or censorious opinion; it is rare for an interview not to include at some point an explicit invitation to offer an on-the-record judgement about the personality or behaviour under examination. At the same time, it is pretty clear that journalists don’t take celebrity especially seriously as a social or cultural formation; it is in the news, to be sure, and so it must be pursued, but ultimately most journalists seem to think it is an ephemeral phenomenon. In fact, I have found that a sure-fire
way to end the interview early is to launch into a detailed analysis of why we are interested in the production and consumption of celebrity, aimed at suggesting that this is a complex and important focus for cultural research. That kind of response seems to spoil all the fun.

Celebrity studies, so far

A concerted attempt to make a proper intellectual investment in the study of celebrity is, then, both timely and worthwhile. The launching of this journal provides us with an opportunity to discuss what something called celebrity studies might do; and a starting-point for that is a frank examination of what celebrity studies is doing now. So, let me make some personal observations on how that looks to me. For a start, I do not see a great deal of depth or variety in academic writing and research on celebrity. Most of the readers and edited collections (and, significantly, there are many more of them than there are book-length studies) tend to work over similar subjects in similar ways. These subjects, in turn, tend to be drawn from a limited pool of individual celebrities or celebrity-related media ‘flashpoints’ (Marshall 1997), and the mode of analysis is primarily textual and discursive. There are other approaches, of course, but they are in the minority.

From time to time, we have new formations of a theory or a history of celebrity (see Rojek, for instance, in 2001); there are examinations of the production of celebrity (Turner et al. 2000); and there have been several important studies of those who consume celebrity (Gamson 1994, Hill 2007), with the prospect of more audience studies coming out over the next few years (such as the current project being conducted by Bev Skeggs and Helen Wood on the consumption of reality TV). Overwhelmingly, however, the field is populated with analyses of individual celebrities either as media texts interesting in their own right or as pointers to broader cultural formations or political issues; in either case, the focus of analysis is upon the details of their representation through the media.

Much of this has proved to be valuable work, and there can be no question that celebrity has demonstrated its usefulness as a productive location for the analysis of cultural shifts around gender, race or nationality, for instance. It is important that such work continues. However, I think it is also important that we ask if this is all we want from a field called celebrity studies? For my part, I think we need to do more to actively foster other approaches to studying celebrity. To do that, we need to remind ourselves that celebrity is not only a category of media text nor merely a genre of media discourse. There are a number of ways through which we might define and thus approach celebrity that would help us account for other dimensions to its function and significance. In the rest of this article, I want to talk a little about the varied ways in which we might define celebrity – as representation, as discourse, as an industry and as a cultural formation – and what kinds of research agendas or analytical approaches could flow from these definitions.

First, to be sure, celebrity is a genre of representation that provides us with a semiotically rich body of texts and discourses that fuel a dynamic culture of consumption. Secondly, celebrity is also a discursive effect; that is, those who have been subject to the representational regime of celebrity are reprocessed and reinvented by it. To be folded into this representational regime – to be ‘celebritised’ – changes how you are consumed and what you can mean. The process of celebritisation is widely seen as transformative but with markedly varying political significance; at one end of the spectrum of opinion, it would be described as a form of enfranchisement and empowerment, but at the other end as a mode of exploitation or objectification. In its most extreme and worrying instances, celebritisation can produce something close to abjection (think of Britney Spears or Jade Goody at various points in their public careers). While the actual politics of the operation
of celebrity in any particular instance, then, will be conjunctural and contingent, nobody
denies that celebritisation has the capacity to generate ‘real-life’ consequences. Indeed, it
is the more idealistic interpretations of this potential that generates the demand for places
in reality TV shows which offer individuals the chance to subject themselves to precisely
this process of transformation. Importantly, even though the demand for celebritisation in such
cases is framed in terms of the individual seeking validation of what they think of as their
essential selves – mainly their intrinsic ‘star’ quality – we know that the discursive effect of
celebrity itself is more the consequence of the mediating (or, more accurately, the production)
process than of the recognition of the particular qualities of each individuated self.

Equally importantly, and this is a third category through which our analysis might
function, the celebrity which is the objectified outcome of this discursive effect is itself a
commodity. Like any other commercial product, what P. David Marshall (1997) has influ-
entially called ‘the celebrity-commodity’ can be manufactured, marketed and traded – and
not only by the promotions, publicity and media industries – and so it can repay invest-
ment, development, strategic planning and product diversification. At the most pragmatic
level, for the individual concerned, their celebrity is a commercial property which is fund-
damental to their career and must be maintained and strategised if they are to continue to
benefit from it. In terms of what this means for the development of celebrity studies, it
highlights the necessity for celebrity studies to find ways to map and understand the
increasing structural importance of the production and consumption of celebrity to the
shape of the media and entertainment industries. Celebrity, that is, also needs to be under-
stood and studied as an industry.

Finally, and in the end possibly most importantly, celebrity is also a cultural formation
that has a social function. Not only is celebrity implicated in the production of commu-
nities such as fan groups or subcultures, not only does it generate celebrity culture and
social networks, it also participates in the field of expectations that many, particularly the
young, have of everyday life. As we have seen earlier, this latter aspect is now regularly picked
up in the media, but so far this has produced little in the way of analysis or explanation. In fact,
it is notable that while celebrity’s social and cultural implications are probably the aspects we
understand least at the moment, they are also the aspects about which we should be most
legitimately concerned in the long term (and I will return to this in the next section).

In my view, it is currently a weakness in the field that celebrity studies, to date, has
concentrated so much on the first of these categories – examining celebrity as a genre of
representation – with some attention to the second, on celebrity as a discursive effect. In
many ways, it is true, such a preference is understandable. It also has some precedents in
the history of cultural and media studies as a field. Cultural studies began in a similar
manner, by focusing its attention upon media texts as a means of demonstrating what
kinds of information or insights cultural and media analysis could provide. The degree of
arbitrariness in the choice of text, however, eventually attracted criticism. Foremost
among the critics was Jim McGuigan (1992), who questioned the point of focusing upon
transgressive television or cool urban subcultures when there were more powerful and
important popular cultural formations (such as the tabloid press, for instance) which
escaped analysis. It is a legitimate criticism, and debates about that kind of issue have
been part of the territory of cultural studies, on and off, ever since. None the less, as is so
often the case with the preferred objects of analysis in popular culture, it is the textual
richness and the sheer excessiveness of celebrity culture that attracts consumers and
analysts alike, and so it is not at all surprising that these have remained the focus rather
than the larger, more structural, political or theoretical issues. I also suspect that some in
cultural and media studies have welcomed the opening-up of a new location for the
There are at least two problems in terms of the implications this pattern of preferences raises for a field of celebrity studies, however. One is that the dependence upon the methods of textual analysis has a slightly regressive dimension, recalling the politically optimistic work performed in the late 1980s and early 1990s which provoked Jim McGuigan (1992), James Curran (1990) and others to attack cultural studies for its implicit populism and complacent ‘revisionism’. That is, while textual analysis certainly remains a valid methodology, in my view we have long passed the point where it can be seen as constituting an entirely sufficient basis upon which to mount a broad programme of cultural studies research. As celebrity studies moves towards developing what should be a more diverse and multi-disciplinary set of research practices, this is a concern it would do well to consider. The second issue is that much of this kind of writing takes us into very much the same territory that the media themselves have explored in their own analysis of celebrity. It would be disappointing if cultural studies’ writing on celebrity became indistinguishable from journalists’ celebrity profiles and feature articles in the weekend colour supplements and on current affairs television. It has to be said that there are some close similarities at the moment. Like the academics, the journalists are also focused upon the details of the representation of the celebrity, and engaged in a process of carefully attributing significance to them. Ironically, too, as the feature articles so often demonstrate, there is a potentially circular, and certainly reciprocal, relationship between the academy and the media around this subject matter. Both sectors feed off each other: the media quote us in order to legitimise their stories, while we mine them for empirical or textual evidence for ours.

My primary concern, however, is that what I would see as the more structurally important aspects of celebrity have been sidelined by the preferences I have been describing. Celebrity studies is not full of debates about how we might understand the celebrity-commodity and there is only a slim academic literature which focuses upon the production, trade, marketing or political economy of the structures which manufacture this commodity. Nor is celebrity studies full of research into, as distinct from theorising about, the social function of the cultural formation of celebrity. None of these are easy topics and approaching them involves drawing upon a range of disciplines, knowledges and research methods; but they do seem to point towards profitable ways of developing new directions for celebrity studies in the future.

**Difficult questions for celebrity studies**

How might we go about developing celebrity studies in the future? For a start, I believe we need to establish a stronger base for the study of the industrial production of celebrity. This is where I see a significant gap in celebrity studies, and there are at least two angles from which it can be addressed. The first would examine the structural effect of celebrity upon production in the globalising media and entertainment industries. While any approach would need to be aware of and responsive to local and national production environments, the primary target for this first set of examinations would be to understand the roles played by transnational organisations. These would not only include the usual media and entertainment interests, but also the large advertising and promotional interests involved in, for instance, the promotion of celebrity properties as a component in the development of transnational branding. This is a much larger set of questions than just those to do with celebrity, however, and so there is another angle of inspection that could
address the celebrity industries from a more manageable vantage point. It could interest itself in the processes and practices through which celebrity is produced and marketed in particular local or national regions and markets in order to pick up the different levels at which the production of celebrity articulates with varying patterns of media regulation, production, distribution and consumption, as well as understanding the regimes of professional practice, that determined how these organisations operate.

If celebrity is a commodity, then I want to know more about the industries which produce that commodity. To the extent that it has interested itself in the political economy of the media, cultural and media studies have largely focused upon the traditional points of attention. Just as has its competitor paradigm, American mass communications studies, cultural and media studies have, in recent years (reluctantly in some cases), turned their attention to debates about regulation, ownership and control, with the attendant problems of concentration, cross-media interests and the increasing organisational and corporate connections between the media, business and government. Much of this turn towards structural issues seems to have been triggered by the market and regulatory disruptions caused by the growth of digital media; cultural and media studies’ interest in the latter has forced them to take more seriously the role played by the former. Nonetheless, and notwithstanding the boom in interest in the expansion of digital media, for most of us the working definition of ‘the media’ remains very much the same: the producers and distributors of content through print and electronic platforms – radio, television, newspapers, magazines, but now with the addition of the various platforms of on-line media. It is time we investigated ways of updating this working definition. Few would argue against the notion that the publicity and promotions industries have now become structurally embedded into the media economy: they generate large amounts of content; they establish relationships which allocate exclusivity or otherwise regulate access and rights; and in many other ways secure a relationship of interdependency between media outlets, publicity and promotions agencies, the media and entertainment production industries and the promotional or advertising arms of other large businesses. The televising of professional sport, for instance, involves complex contracted relationships between sporting organisations, television networks, media rights holders and distribution agencies, advertisers and large transnational brands such as Nike, Coke or Nokia. In such relationships it would be interesting to know where the power lies, and so a key area of investigation might be the commercial connections which deploy celebrity as a means of advancing transnational branding across a wide range of industries, not just media or entertainment.

A contemporary account of the media needs to include such participants within its horizons in order to recognise the significance of their interests and influence. We know that most of what the publicity industries do is either unacknowledged or deliberately masked; once publicity is revealed to be commercially motivated it loses its capacity to function as news. However, their influence has become so pervasive across the media and entertainment industries that we need to find ways of removing the mask in order to directly investigate how that influence is managed and operated. Political economy may well be the place to start, by tracing formal or informal commercial links or networks between promotions and publicity agencies, their clients and the media organisations to which they provide access. As I said above, this involves far more than celebrity and opens up a much larger set of questions. However, beginning to ask those questions might place us in a position from which we are able to examine the agencies’ practices, roles and functions – much as we did many years ago, for instance, when we began examining the practices which over-determined the industrial production of news.
The even more difficult research question, however, and one that really must be at the heart of celebrity studies, is what to make of celebrity culture as a social or cultural formation. In the critical tradition of cultural and media studies, particularly in its Anglo-American formations, we have refused to make direct connections between the consumption of media products and their cultural or social effects. We identify that kind of work with the American mass communications tradition. Indeed, years of inconclusive effects studies are probably among the motivations for the development of cultural studies approaches to understanding culture as a contingent and conjunctural process in which the consumer is believed to have some degree of agency. So, when a journalist asks us ‘what effect does celebrity have on the culture’, I suspect most of us (well, I certainly do) simply refuse the terms of the question. However, recently I was prompted to question whether that is indeed an adequate response. I supervised a thesis written by a Malaysian student, Jamilah Maliki, which examined the local reaction to a Malaysian version of *Fame Academy, Akademi Fantasia* (Maliki 2008). *Akademi Fantasia* was a highly individualistic, highly sexualised (by Asian standards) and youth-orientated programme screened within a largely Muslim, traditional and morally conservative society. The conflict of values that shaped public debate about the show became quite fundamental to its reception. By many of its critics – and not just politicians or religious leaders – the show was seen as carrying the potential to undermine traditional values, particularly those to do with education and employment, while raising illusory expectations of personal fame among Malaysia’s young people. While we, as Western viewers, might think such concerns radically overvalue the power available to a single television show, the level of concern within the community upon which Jamilah was reporting suggested that those who were most directly affected had no doubt that this programme, with its payload of celebrity culture, was an ideological and moral Trojan horse for modernity and Western values.

There are plenty of examples of similar concerns being expressed in communities outside the West. Marwan Kraidy (2009), for instance, has discussed the reactions to reality TV formats in the Middle East, where programmes have been cancelled, and in one case a *fatwa* was invoked, as a means of controlling what was officially regarded as a threat to the social stability of these cultures. We also know that the government of the People’s Republic of China has taken a more direct interest in the formats which create celebrity in the wake of the Mongolian Cow Super Yoghurt incident, where the winner of a reality show was sufficiently non-normative in her personality and appearance to embarrass the government (Fung, 2009). Now, such programmes in China are so focused upon national political and ideological objectives that Wanning Sun and Yuezhi Zhao (2009) have coined the term ‘indoctrainment’ to describe them. Perhaps this is just paranoid behaviour from governments unwilling to take a chance that these forms of popular culture represent no threat to social stability and cultural tradition. But what if it is not? What if there is merit in the idea, and evidence to suggest, that popular entertainments may have the power to ‘change the culture’ by going over the heads of government and speaking directly to the audience? However mediated that power might be, it seems to me that we need to be prepared to think about such a possibility. At the moment, in media and cultural studies, we are very poorly equipped to do that.

How might we go about understanding the cultural function of celebrity within contemporary Western popular culture? We know it is implicated in the construction of fan cultures, in young people’s expectations of their possible futures and in many of the dominant discourses about sexual attractiveness and sexual desire. What else does it do, though? Is it possible to attribute an independent influence to celebrity as a set of representations or discourses about the fashioning of the self, or alternatively to map its relationship to broader
shifts in the culture? To take a specific example, is it possible that the promotion of certain kinds of spectacular behaviour in order to advertise a reality television programme (I am thinking of *Big Brother* or *Ladette to Lady*, for example) may have an effect on what young people regard as desirable or acceptable behaviour in their everyday lives; or would such advertising only work if it simply reflected shifts towards such behaviour that are already embedded in the culture? Such questions are quite difficult even to approach without appearing to fall into one of a variety of disreputable camps: those who see celebrity as one of the more inflamed examples of tabloidisation; those who assume that media produces effects simply through representation; or those who use their critique of celebrity culture as a means of delivering a moralistic or taste-based critique of the consumption choices of certain sections of the community.\(^5\)

It is important for us to try to negotiate the narrow path between these positions in order to continue to ask such questions. Indeed, they articulate to an issue that I have written about elsewhere: that is, how the rise of celebrity culture interacts with (and indeed exemplifies) a significant change in the cultural function of the media. In *Ordinary people and the media* (Turner 2010), I argue that celebrity culture is one of the areas through which we can trace the prosecution of what I suggest is a new role for the media: as the generator or author of social identity/ies. Rather than merely representing or mediating identities originating in other sectors of the social or the political as it once might have done, the argument goes, the media now seems able to promote its own constructions of identity – for example, as a by-product of the recruitment of participants for reality TV or through other forms of industrially based celebrity. The provocations for my argument include the visibility of these versions of identity in social surveys of young people’s attitudes mentioned earlier, where young people voice their ambition to be famous as if it was a career objective of itself, and without much considering the nature of the career they might undertake which would produce that fame. Also implicated is the observation that many of the contestants in a format such as *Idol* express their conviction that their uniqueness or ‘star quality’ is likely to be recognised through the performance process. This conviction seems independent of any confidence in their particular skills or talent: the recognition is regarded as a personal validation and, paradoxically, the less talent is involved the more categorical and empowering the validation. These two observations are used to raise the possibility that notions of media visibility, of recognition through the establishment of the celebrity-commodity, or of access to Coulardy’s ‘media centre’ (2000), are becoming embedded in our culture’s repertoire of understandings of what it is to be a subject, what constitutes identity and what kinds of performance of identity might be desirable.

If there is anything to this, then it would indicate an important cultural role for celebrity culture, and thus an important analytical function for celebrity studies. It is not yet clear how we get to such issues – what kinds of research projects, what kinds of methodological strategies, even what kind of questions, need to be investigated in order to come up with a sufficiently contingent and nuanced account of the cultural function of celebrity that would help us to understand its participation in the cultural construction of identities; but there is at least a prima facie case to argue that we are wrong to be complacent about the current situation. It is a point I have made elsewhere in relation to the capacity of reality TV to ‘translate’ western versions of cultural identities for audiences in non-western markets:

\[^1\]he fact that reality TV also operates so effectively as a translator of cultural identities is potentially disturbing. Among the purposes of translation is to enable consumption and thus to enhance the accessibility of the identities the programs carry. While it might suit the entertainment industry to argue that their projects are harmless enough, programming which sets out to produce cultural identities as a means of marketing a particular product does carry the capacity to generate significant, if unintended, cultural effects. (Turner 2010, p. 68)
The added problem I raise here is that these unintended cultural effects – which may well be quite profound – are largely generated in pursuit of commercial rather than social or political outcomes, although they may well produce all three. If they do then go on to influence or even perhaps change the way we think about identity, there is little reason to expect that such a change has our interests or those of the society as among its motivations.

Conclusion

It is important that celebrity studies does more than simply participate as just one further contributor to the discursive regime surrounding celebrity. While the textual complexity and dynamism of celebrity culture is among its key attractions, celebrity studies must be aware of the danger of responding only to that – of using its analytical strategies to produce something that is, in the end, largely descriptive. There is now a sufficient theoretical and historical basis for us to embark on more ambitious programmes of research that involve more direct enquiries of audiences, producers, publicists and so on in order to develop a body of structural information, as well as textual materials, that might help us to better understand the operation and function of celebrity. Crucially, in my view, the field of celebrity studies will have a much stronger base if it concerns itself with understanding the industrial production, as well as the audience consumption, of celebrity. We can only learn so much by using media representations as the raw material for outlining the many ways through which celebrity has permeated the assumptions and discourses which inform the construction of cultural identity. I think we can develop more, and other kinds of, material for this task by approaching celebrity through a more varied range of methodological strategies – some of them drawn from more empirical modes of enquiry. Multi-factoral, conjunctural and multi-disciplinary approaches are needed to ensure that we fully explore the productiveness of celebrity as a site for examining the function of the media and the cultural production of identities.

Notes

1. A study conducted by the UK research organisation YouGov in 2005 surveyed 800 young people in the 16–19-year age group (Cassidy 2006). They found that one in 10 of the teenagers would abandon their education if they had the chance to appear on television and that 16% of the teenagers surveyed believed that they would eventually find success through celebrity. Nine per cent believed that becoming famous was a great way to become wealthy without bothering about acquiring skills or qualifications and an additional 11% said that they were ‘waiting to be discovered’.


3. Here, I mean a culture of consumption based around media representations of particular individuals and the related modes of constructing identities.

4. There have been a few studies (McDonald and Andrews 2001, for example) which look at the political economy of televised sport, sporting celebrities and the development of transnational brands, but even so the examination of the relation between sport, television and transnational celebrity advertising is probably one of the more neglected areas of media studies in recent years. Everyone seems to agree it is important, but it has still not developed as a focus of major research projects.

5. There is work out there which is beginning to find ways of asking these questions. Couldry et al.’s (2008) large empirical study of media consumption and social engagement included a related study of a group they described as their ‘celebrity cluster’. An article from this study examined the particular modes of engagement with public and political issues this group exhibited, and found that it ran against the grain of much of the theorising of the political potential of the broadening of access that celebrity culture is often assumed to represent (Couldry and Markham 2007).
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