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December 5, 20\_\_

Is having celebrity culture good or bad for society and the individual?

Choi, Chong Ju and Ron Berger. "Ethics of Celebrities and Their Increasing Influence in 21st Century Society." *Journal of Business Ethics*, vol. 91, no. 3, 2010, pp. 313-318. Chong Ju Choi, a former International Business professor, and Ron Berger, a lecturer at two Israeli Colleges, explain the influence of celebrities through the media. As the internet develops, the influence of celebrities expands as news and information is more easily spread to followers. This expansion makes it easier for individuals to follow or even obsess over famous people in society. According to a study by Heinrich and Gil-White in 2001, "humans have the ability to observe and then mimic complex behaviours" (315). A hierarchy then forms from this ability where the most valued skills are placed at the top, which others try to attain. Even being close to those who have mastered those valued skills satisfies the desire to be at the top of the hierarchy; in the modern day, those at the top are celebrities. The internet only magnifies this desire and creates "bandwagon effects," increasing the prestige of fame (314). Because of the awe fame inspires, society tends to ignore the flaws of those who are looked up to in the presence of their other attributes and abilities. The large following the celebrities have attained has given them a larger influence as they are able to reach a greater audience easier. Now, celebrities have expanded their area of public influence into politics and other issues beyond entertainment. For example, Jude Law attempted "to negotiate with the Taliban in Afghanistan" (313). The negotiations were not successful, but that a Hollywood actor

even attempted to accomplish this political feat shows the increasing power of fame.

Choi, Chong Ju and Ron Berger. "Ethics of Global Internet, Community, and Fame Addiction."

*Journal of Business Ethics*, vol. 85, no. 2, 2009, pp. 193-200. Former International

Business professor Chong Ju Choi and Ron Berger, a lecturer at two Israeli colleges,

explain how the increasing influence of the global internet influences the power of

celebrities and its effect on people in modern-day culture. As it grows, technology and the

internet allows each person more and more access to information, communication

methods, and gossip. As a result of this development, celebrities' messages are spread to a

wider audience much quicker than before. Herding and bandwagon pressure often results

from the flood of information on the internet. Herding is "when a consumer's choice

depends on the decisions of others, helping to accelerate the process of critical mass

build-up, social lock-in effects and increasing returns," and bandwagon pressure occurs

when people buy a product or follow a famous person simply because it is popular among

the rest of society (196). A kind of fame addiction results from the availability of

information about celebrities and these pressures making people want to follow the

crowd, causing them to want to know everything about celebrities to keep up with the

society they are surrounded by. They become absorbed into celebrity lives, and fame is

prioritized above all other characteristics because people want to be like the celebrities

they watch. In consequence, there is also a decrease in community interaction because

celebrity culture becomes the most important as people join the bandwagon of celebrity

followers. A study referenced in Robert Putnam's *Bowling Alone* says that "American

society increasingly avoids various community driven activities ... Americans entertained

friends and family 16 times a year in 1980, but only 8 times in 2005” (193). As the internet and celebrities become a larger force in society, other people become less important.

Furedi, Frank. “Celebrity Culture.” *Society*, vol. 47, no. 6, 2010, pp. 493-497. Professor of sociology Frank Furedi argues that the modern-day media searches for celebrities and celebrity associations to identify relevant or note-worthy people. Furedi defines “celebrity” as “an adjective that signifies that someone possesses the quality of attracting attention” and can be of any career or subject area (493). However, as technology spreads and evolves, the idea of celebrities has become more popular, causing the media to “[manufacture] ... relatively unexceptional celebrities” (493). While celebrities who become famous through their talents still do exist, the “easily-disposable celebrity” shows the temporality of the media and how it can dismiss someone just as easily as it can make them famous. Society also likes to talk about celebrities with a kind of familiarity that emphasizes their normality. Some are even “referred to by their first names” and they are placed above the average person while their averageness is also emphasized (494). Although celebrities can create a relatable figure for people to connect with, a study from the UK showed that “celebrity followers are three times as likely than others to be involved in community organizations and two times less likely to participate in volunteer work” (495). This study shows that those who follow celebrities do not spend as much time out participating in activities with live people; rather, they get their fill of “human interaction” through the internet in celebrity watching. Because celebrities receive their fame from fan recognition rather than public approval, they do not need to meet any

certain standard to stay famous. The media focus draws so much attention to them that it can be dangerous since there is no one to check the celebrities beside the popular opinion.

Gamson, Joshua. "The Unwatched Life is Not Worth Living: The Elevation of the Ordinary in Celebrity Culture." *PMLA*, vol. 126, no. 4, 2011, pp. 1061-1069. Professor of Sociology

Joshua Gamson explains that modern society has begun to focus on the ordinariness of the lives of the famous rather than the exceptional aspects. While they used to be portrayed as an elite group of extraordinary individuals, they are represented by the media as relatable to the average person. A large part of this development comes from the change in what makes a celebrity famous. The first way, which used to be the more common method, is when a person is widely recognized for "achievement, merit, talent, or special internal qualities, earning admiration and attention" (1063). These are actors, singers, chefs, builders, or those possessing other impressive talents they are praised for. The second way is when someone is made famous by "investors, publicists, makeup artists, magazine publishers... they are factory products" (1063). This process of becoming famous is becoming more popular with the rise of reality TV, the internet, and social media sites like Facebook. They allow people to be *made* famous, and celebrity status suddenly appears more achievable by anybody. Gamson outlines the three types of internet celebrities: the anticelebrity, the self-made celebrity, and the microcelebrity. The anticelebrity is a completely ordinary person who becomes famous because a quirk they possess becomes a widely known joke. The self-made celebrity created an "empire" for themselves by creating an identity for themselves and playing the system to make them famous without going through the traditional process. The microcelebrity is a person with

a small group of fans who work to make the microcelebrity famous. However, these internet-made celebrities are not nearly as rich or popular as TV or movie ones, but there has also been a shift toward viewing even the TV famous as more ordinary and relatable in order to promote them to an audience used to the new internet famous ordinariness.

Garland, Robert. "Celebrity Ancient and Modern." *Society*, vol. 47, no. 6, 2010, pp. 484-488.

Robert Garland, a doctor of Ancient History and Professor of the Classics, explains the psychology, benefits, and defects of celebrity culture both in the past and the present. Positive or negative, people have always desired attention, and Garland explains four reasons why people seek celebrity status: recognition for abilities or deeds; remembrance after death; a desire for wealth, sex, and power; or visibility in order to promote a cause. He also describes the two psychological effects of being a celebrity. The first is attention and stress causes the person to change their view of their self, mostly in a negative way due to the critical scrutiny they receive from fans. The other effect is that being a celebrity destroys "one's ability to enjoy anonymity and privacy," and puts a great amount of pressure on their private life (486).

Garland next discusses the positive and negative effects of celebrity culture on society. Celebrities can act as positive role models, inspiring people to imitate their good deeds. The celebrities themselves can also be motivated by the attention they receive to "perform acts of public generosity" in a kind of competition with other celebrities to gain more prestige (486). A last benefit is celebrities can even help to unite or stabilize a society in a shared admiration. Despite all the positive effects, celebrities can also have a damaging effect of society. They can produce negative role models or focus too much on

people “who deserve no public attention with a spurious glamour,” such as gladiators (487). It can inspire “feelings of loneliness, inferiority, and hopelessness” in people trying to become celebrities but have no success which could turn into “resentment towards celebrities” (487). Average individuals may think they can easily become celebrities too and become unable to accept that it is almost impossible. Finally, celebrities most often are individuals who are good at self-promotion rather than those who are actually talented, putting certain personalities at an advantage over others who are not as outgoing or willing to put themselves in a position to be recognized. Though celebrity culture changes and evolves over time, the basic psychology of those involved stays constant.