

# **Conceptualizing celebritization: a product of mediatization, personalization and commodification**

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## **Introduction**

Celebrity, the modern mass mediated fame, has become a defining characteristic of our mediatized societies. It is ever-present in news and entertainment media – boosted by formats such as reality TV, – in advertising and activism, and it has deeply affected other social fields, especially politics, but also gastronomy or even religion, as celebrity has become a valued capital to be used in power struggles. Celebrity status, it is argued, renders one “discursive power” or a voice not to be neglected (Marshall, 1997: x), and it is supposed to function as a general token of success (Bell, 2010: 49).

Several authors have also discussed celebrity culture’s importance for social cohesion or identity formation (e.g. Marshall, 2010; Sternheimer, 2011). Or, as Ellis Cashmore phrases it:

Like it or loathe it, celebrity culture is with us: it surrounds us and even invades us. It shapes our thought and conduct, style, and manner. It affects and is affected by not just hardcore fans but by entire populations (Cashmore, 2006: 6).

Yet we must remain cautious not to fall prey to easy functionalist interpretations of celebrity culture. As Nick Couldry (2004: 124, 8) contends, the social function of celebrity discourse is not a given and must be empirically corroborated first. Not everyone thinks celebrity culture is as important, just as it probably does not enable a general community-feeling. Still, he continues, our attention is incessantly drawn to the discourse and performances of celebrities, which makes them at least a recurring reference point for people’s social practices.

In the analysis of the shift towards the cultural and societal prominence of celebrity, a number of scholars have used the term “celebritization” (e.g. Boykoff and Goodman, 2009; Lewis, 2010). However, depending on the author, celebritization is defined in different ways, stressing other dimensions or aspects. Added to this complexity is the inconsistent use of the related term “celebrification” among other authors (a.o. Gamson, 1994; Turner, 2006). Therefore, starting from the difference between celebrification and celebritization, this paper aims to propose a systematic conceptualization of celebritization, which will be undertaken in two steps. First, by theoretically disentangling the different indicators of celebritization, or its essential manifestations, and second, by discussing celebritization’s moulding forces, or its constitutive processes.

## **Celebrification and celebritization**

When evaluating the literature on celebrification and celebritization, both terms appear to be used almost interchangeably sometimes, with some authors applying celebrification for changes that are termed celebritization by others (e.g. Gamson, 1994: 191) – or the other way around (e.g. Rockwell and Giles, 2009: 186). Still, some recurrent patterns can be discerned in the semantics of both concepts. In general, celebrification refers to changes at the individual

level, while celebritization is related to changes at the level of social fields, for example politics or the arts.

### *Celebrification*

To begin with, celebrification can be defined as the process whereby ordinary people or public figures are transformed into celebrities – e.g. certain film stars, academostars, celebrity politicians or so-called socialites as Paris Hilton. This transformation is a confirmation of individuality (Braudy, 1986: 7) and consists of the embodiment of a subjectivity that unites “the spectacular with the everyday, the special with the ordinary” (Dyer, 2007: 35). Notwithstanding the paradoxical nature of the celebrity as both ordinary and extraordinary, it is still distanced from the ordinary. Consequently, the transformation from ordinary person to celebrity can be seen as a media ritual that both confirms this separation and legitimates the “myth of the mediated centre”, or the myth that the media are the essential gatekeeper to the imagined society’s centre (Couldry, 2003).

Celebrification also entails commodification: stars and, by extension, celebrities “are both labour and the thing that labour produces” (Dyer, 2004: 5). They are manufactured by the celebrity industry and themselves produce and help sell other commodities. For Chris Rojek (2001: 186-7), this commodification is the central element of celebrification, since he defines it as “the general tendency to frame social encounters in mediagenic filters that both reflect and reinforce the compulsion of abstract desire.” The incessant desire for commodities, whereby wanting is stronger than having, makes consumerism essential to the self-projection of people’s identities and their interactions (see also Bell, 2010: 95). In this sense, the celebrity presents and personalizes “[t]he two faces of capitalism – that of defaced value and prized commodity value” (Marshall, 1997: 4).

### *Celebritization*

Celebritization involves similar changes as celebrification, but these changes occur at the level of social fields instead of on the individual level. Scholars have particularly discussed celebritization in relation to (electoral) politics (e.g. Evans, 2005; McKernan, 2011; Turner, 2004), but also (environmental) activism (Boykoff and Goodman, 2009), fashion, literature, academia, medicine, etc. have been studied or mentioned as examples (see Gamson, 1994: 186). Celebritization can best be understood as a long-term development, or a “meta-process” (Krotz, 2007), at par with globalization, individualization or mediatization. It is a meta-process because it lacks a clear starting or endpoint and is dispersed in space and time, not strictly following a specific direction. Therefore, it would be misleading to think of celebritization as simply an ‘increase’ of celebrity in space and time.

First, regarding space, terms like “global stars” and “worldwide celebrity” are not uncommon in literature (e.g. Choi and Berger, 2010; Kellner, 2009). Behind these terms lies the assumption of a global celebrity culture, or at least of the recognition of certain individuals on a global scale. While this might be plausible for a few exceptions like Barack Obama (Kellner, 2009), the question remains how far one’s fame should stretch to speak of “global celebrity”. Furthermore, we may not ignore the differences between individualistic and collectivistic societies, and its implications for the value of achieving celebrity status therein. Also, every culture or nation has its own heroes, stars and celebrities. Most of these people’s fame does not reach beyond cultural or national boundaries, which makes celebrity culture essentially a plural and heterogeneous phenomenon. Hence it could best be described as a patchwork of several small and some bigger celebrity cultures with differing degrees of overlap.

Second, even though some historical figures have been discussed in terms of fame (e.g. Alexander the Great (Braudy, 1986) and Lord Byron (Mole, 2008)), little attention has been

paid to the prevalence of celebrity in previous epochs. This relative lack of historical awareness is epitomized by Richard Schickel's (2000: 23) adage that "there was no such thing as celebrity prior to the beginning of the twentieth century." However, as Elizabeth Barry (2008: 252) summarizes in her introduction to the special issue on *A Cultural History of Celebrity*, celebrity culture has its roots in Romanticism, in Madame Tussaud's celebrity wax figures and in public speeches by Victorian scientists. Moreover, the special issue demonstrates that mechanisms behind our modern celebrity culture, like representations in the printed press, have been and still are co-existent with "engines of fame" such as being knighted (Barry, 2008: 252).

Summarized, the contextualization of celebritization in space and time learns that it should be understood especially as a meta-process that points to certain changes in the nature of celebrity and its societal and cultural embedment, rather than merely as an absolutely expanding phenomenon – as several authors also proclaim (e.g. Turner, 2004: 17).

### **Celebritization: conceptual model**

Concerning the change in nature of celebrity, celebritization has been defined as a democratization of celebrity, or the idea that there has occurred a "shift of emphasis from achievement-based fame to media-driven renown" (Cashmore, 2006: 7). One does no longer need to achieve something or possess a special talent to become famous, appearing in the media and just being famous is thought to be sufficient now (see also Boorstin, 1992).

Concerning the societal and cultural embedment of celebrity, several interpretations have been given of celebritization. First, it has been used to denote both the (increasing) mobility of celebrities within media and entertainment (e.g. combining careers in the movie, music and fashion industry) and the 'transgression' of these celebrities into areas traditionally not associated with fame (Lewis, 2010: 583). Common examples are celebrities endorsing or even turning into politicians (e.g. Street, 2004), or celebrities involved in environmental politics (Boykoff and Goodman, 2009).

Second, and related to these last examples, is that also some politicians have turned into celebrities (e.g. McKernan, 2011). This is part of what can be labelled the 'diversification' of celebrity, as several social fields can be seen to produce celebrity personalities. According to Neil Gabler (1998: 156), this diversification of celebrity can be described as "an issue of supply and demand." In his view, the supply of available entertainment and sports celebrities did no longer meet the audience's growing demand for celebrities. Therefore, the media were forced to create or find new supplies by "widen[ing] the beam of their spotlight" (Gabler, 1998: 156). In other words, it is through the mediatization of certain social fields that celebritization can possibly occur.

Third, Joshua Gamson (1994: 191) contrasts this view by suggesting that a "celebrity logic" lays behind the diversification of celebrity – although his analysis is focused almost exclusively on politics (see also Rojek, 2001: 186). The overload of mediated information combined with the severe struggle for attention, he says, predictably results in the colonization of several arenas by celebrity logic. Hence emotionalization and dramatization – which have been categorized as elements of personalization (see below) – become common strategies to capture people's attention and consequently to seduce them to consume and establish attachments with products and brands (including political parties and persons). Paul Hewer and Douglas Brownlie (2009: 482) elaborate on celebritization as commodification by arguing that "celebritization describes what happens when the logic of celebrity is exploited as a mode of production in the service of marketing ends."

This overview of current definitions and tentative explanations of celebritization exposes their rather mechanical or even causal nature (especially in Gabler and Gamson) and overall the lack of a holistic understanding of this meta-process. However, if we combine

these disparate views on celebritization and logically integrate them into one model, we can gain a comprehensive insight into its chief manifestations and moulding forces, which form two clusters in our model (see Figure 1). The first cluster consists of the three main indicators (or manifestations) of celebritization, namely democratization, diversification and transgression. The second cluster is formed by the three interrelated moulding forces or engines of celebritization, namely mediatization, personalization and commodification. In the next paragraphs, this conceptual model is further clarified.

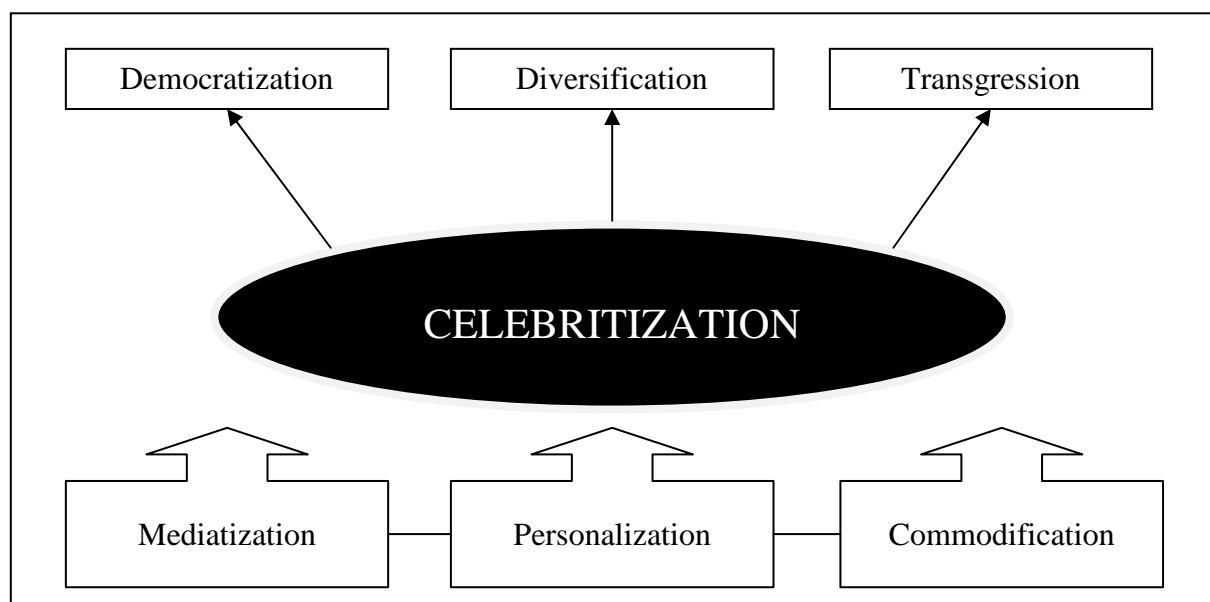


Figure 1: The conceptual model of celebritization

### Indicators of celebritization

The interpretations of celebritization surveyed above indicate that this meta-process can be observed through internal as well as external dynamics: internally, the nature of celebrity changes through its democratization; externally, celebrity is produced in other social fields traditionally less permeated by celebrity status (diversification) and it advances the mobility within and across certain social fields of people using their celebrity status (transgression).

#### *Democratization*

Several authors have pointed at the languishment of meritocracy in celebrity culture as they believe that fame has been increasingly disarticulated first from innate qualities and later from achievement (e.g. Cashmore, 2006; Gamson, 1992; Marshall, 1997). Stated differently, there is a shift from achieved celebrity to attributed celebrity (Rojek, 2001) as everyone is now thought to be able to ‘be famous for fifteen minutes,’ as Andy Warhol once predicted. Implied in this notion of democratization is especially the increased access of (ordinary) people to climb the stairway to stardom.

The role of (new) media technologies and platforms is crucial here, with the internet and reality TV often given special mention. Karen Sternheimer (2011: 8), for example, speaks in this context of the decentralization of celebrity production: while in previous times a small circle of film studios was the dominant decision maker, today the internet and its social websites (e.g. Facebook) and participatory media (e.g. YouTube) have created the do-it-yourself-celebrity. Yet, many of these new-found celebrities are bound to the media industry by contracts that measure up to the ‘old’ film industry’s strictness (Marshall, 2006: 643).

Reality TV, on the other hand, offers its participants a transient glimpse of celebrity culture and has been heralded as a democratizing force because it paves the way for marginalized groups in society to public visibility. Nonetheless, these groups are not themselves producing mainstream content (Tyler and Bennett, 2010: 378) and they push unionized and well-paid actors out of the market by offering non- or low-paid services (Collins, 2008).

Indeed, the political economy of reality TV is based on the rapid circulation and constant renewal of its participants, which implies that these celebrities-in-the-making rarely have a serious opportunity to establish a (media) career (Turner, 2006). As Sue Collins (2008: 89) aptly expresses: “Most of these reality TV vets find that in the sixteenth minute, they are not absorbed into the celebrity system; rather, their celebrity currency runs out and they are channelled back into obscurity.” Most of the participants in reality TV do not outgrow the ontology of what Chris Rojek (2001: 20-1) has called “celetoids”, or persons who are instantaneously in the spotlight but unable to hold attention and thus forced to return to anonymity. Some of the examples he gives are one-hit wonders, lottery winners and stalkers.

Given the many arguments that nuance the democratizing role of reality TV and the internet, Graeme Turner (2006: 157) concludes that “celebrity still remains a systematically hierarchical and exclusive category, no matter how much it proliferates.” Therefore he suggests it is better to replace democratization by “demotic turn”, which signals both the striking visibility of ordinary people in the media and the potential role of celebrity in everyday life (Turner, 2006: 153). It follows that we should not be dazzled by the seemingly diverse and democratic character of celebrity, but pay attention to how and by whom it is produced, which obviously bears ideological consequences. “In other words, the democratizing claim risks becoming indistinct from neoliberal ideologies of market meritocracy, which use the rhetoric of equality of opportunity to disguise and sustain massive inequality” (Tyler and Bennett, 2010: 379).

Couldry (2010) supports this view as he explains how (participants in) reality TV-programmes and DIY-celebrities contribute to the propagation of neoliberal discourse. On the one hand, programmes such as *Big Brother* or channels such as YouTube serve as an “expanded zone of self-display” (Couldry, 2010: 82) or a platform for self-branding where individuals are integrated in a profit dynamic and neoliberal logic. The self becomes a monetized commodity that is gradually unpacked and reduced to mere exchange value. On the other hand, these platforms for self-branding reinforce neoliberal culture’s “rationale of ‘self-improvement’” (Couldry, 2010: 81) and “normalize a particular type of individualism, a self-improvement project that does not necessarily rate caring for others as a high priority” (Couldry, 2010: 80).

In sum, the democratization of celebrity is only relative and must be critically evaluated. While it enables underrepresented social and cultural groups to gain media attention, the celebrity and media industries exploit the participants in reality TV and DIY-celebrities to increase their profits. These manufactured celetoids are turned into commodities that implicitly support and reinforce both the inequality of the celebrity system and the spread of neoliberal discourse.

### *Diversification*

A second indicator of the societal and cultural embedment of celebrity can be found in its diversification. Celebrity is not the exclusive domain of entertainment and sports, but is also apparent in politics (Street, 2004), gastronomy (Hyman, 2008; Mitchell, 2010), business (Hayward et al., 2004) or even in academia (Moran, 1998; Williams, 2006). Above, we have seen that authors who explicitly use the term celebritization explain this diversification as a mechanism of supply and demand (Gabler, 1998) and as a consequence of the strategy to

capture the media's and people's attention (Gamson, 1994). Other authors, who do not use celebritization but still address this diversification, together draw a more complex picture.

David Giles (2000: 25) gives a central role to the media in explaining the diversification of celebrity by linking it to the growing numbers of media outlets. Since there are more TV channels, newspapers and magazines, more people are given a fore – politicians, presenters, but also people not exploiting a specific talent. Furthermore, through narrowcasting several niches gain prominence, which can lead to the creation of celebrity chefs (e.g. Hyman, 2008), lifestyle gurus (Lewis, 2010; Powell and Prasad, 2010) and other celebrities. However, this rather media centralistic view offers only a partial explanation and necessitates the inclusion of economic rationales and field-specific dynamics.

According to Charles Kurzman and his colleagues (2007: 360) it is especially a profit dynamic that drives people in different sectors to pursue fame. Directly, a certain celebrity status can enable attorneys, CEO's or doctors to ask higher fees and thus earn more money. Therefore, they hire public relations agents to increase their visibility in their particular field but also, if possible, more generally in the media. Indirectly, a celebrity status can generate profits through the introduction into previously closed networks or invitations for social events where relations with other elites can be established. This increased social capital can subsequently be converted into economic capital, for instance through the participation in private equity funds or other potentially lucrative investment projects.

Celebrity status can not only be used for economic profit, but also as a means to acquire or control power, especially in the political realm. In fact, the realms of politics and entertainment are not that different when looking at the creation of their public personalities. Whereas a politician must embody the affect of the people, state and party, an entertainment celebrity should capture the audience's affect (Marshall, 1997: 203). Yet celebrity status is not as stable as other sources of power and it needs to be continuously reconfirmed, which can cause the politician being trivialized and reduced to the level of other pure entertainment figures (Pels, 2003: 57-9).

In contrast with this absorption of politics by celebrity, the celebrity system does not as easily penetrate into the relatively autonomous academic field according to Joe Moran (1998: 70). In academia the construction of celebrities is more controlled by its elites and is more dependent on market rules and internal dynamics. Publishing houses, for instance, are incrementally governed by principles of saleability and marketing, making it more difficult to publish monographs for young and unknown scholars compared with the big names in the field. Still, through procedures such as peer review, internal dynamics of academia are not completely outwitted by market rules.

Overall, the diversification of celebrity proves to be a complex process, influenced not only by the media, but also by the market and capitalism, power struggles and internal dynamics. This discussion, and especially the last point about academia, marks an important point for the study of diversification and also celebritization, namely that these are not singular (meta-)processes changing society or culture at large, but instead should be analyzed and compared in specific social fields. These relatively autonomous fields value celebrity status and other forms of capital in different ways, while market rules resort diverse effects depending on the organization of the field. As a result, celebrities can be very different on the level of their production, ontology and meaning depending on their field or professional area (Marshall, 1997; Turner, 2004: 17-8).

### *Transgression*

The third indicator of celebritization is transgression. This concept is borrowed from P. David Marshall (1997: 105-7), who defines it as the ways in which film stars break with their

conventional screen personalities. In other words, transgression involves the creation of an extratextuality that renders the actor or actress a degree of autonomy as public personality. This can be done by playing characters that are very different from previous roles or by generating media attention to establish him- or herself as a celebrity – for example by (partially) exposing the private life.

This paper expands this original interpretation of transgression in two ways. First, by extending its reach from film stars to any person that possesses a certain degree of celebrity status, including academostars, chefs, politicians, CEO's, sports or religious people. Second, by defining transgression as the process through which celebrities use both their relative autonomy as public personality and their celebrity status to develop other professional activities within their original field or to penetrate into other social fields. Transgression is thus a twofold process that captures the mobility and convertibility of celebrity.

Transgression within a social field occurs when celebrities diversify their activities in the field in which they have established their celebrity status. According to Lee Barron (2006: 526), this is especially apparent in the media industry, where celebrities increasingly move into alternative careers, also in other media. Elizabeth Hurley, for example, became famous as actress, model and wife of Hugh Grant, and later moved into film production. This kind of transgression can be seen as an answer to the 'democratization' of celebrity, especially to the rapid circulation of celebrity commodities, and thus as an attempt to establish a more lasting career, building on one's celebrity status before it vanishes (Barron, 2006: 535).

Transgression across social fields occurs when celebrities are granted or force access into another social field by capitalizing on their celebrity status. Some movie stars, for instance, have converted their celebrity status into political power by becoming Governor (Arnold Schwarzenegger) or even President (Ronald Reagan) in the United States. Some other reasons for this external transgression are the pursuit of exposure, a positive image, influence or money. Sometimes enterprises, organizations or campaigns can also profit from the involvement of celebrities, for example through their increased media exposure or brand likeability (e.g. Erdogan, 1999) – although it has potential drawbacks for the kind of message that the organization wants to communicate (see Meyer and Gamson, 1995).

There are also limits for the celebrities themselves in transgressing into other social fields. While entertainment and sports celebrities can make statements about several topics relatively easily, they need more credentials or cultural, economic and social capital when engaging in activities that require a higher degree of involvement. In these cases, it is not sufficient to possess a fan base as power source or some personal link with the subject as a token of legitimacy. As such, transgressions are not without risk for celebrities, because it is often not clear to what extent the audience will tolerate them (Marshall, 1997: 107).

A final point that must be stressed is that these (external) transgressions are bidirectional, meaning that it is not only entertainment and sports celebrities who are penetrating into other social fields such as politics, but that it is also possible the other way around. We can think of politicians becoming board member of multinationals or sports clubs, professors entitled jury member for book prizes, financial experts who are offered deals by publishing houses, etc. Although not all of these transgressions should be completely reduced to the fact that they are possible because of celebrity status, there is no question that it plays at least a minimal role.

### **Moulding forces of celebritization**

In tracing the different understandings of celebritization, several (meta-)processes have been identified as its moulding forces, namely mediatization, personalization and commodification. It is obviously beyond the scope of this paper to discuss these three (meta-)processes in detail,

hence the focus is especially on their connection with celebritization and to a lesser extent on their interrelations.

### *Mediatization*

In many (also negative) accounts on celebrity culture, the media are perceived as one of the main culprits for its prosperity and deep entanglement in society and culture. Especially in political analyses, mass media are seen as a major contributor to the creation of celebrity politicians (e.g. Pels, 2003), because they are thought to shape the climate and the operational logics by which politicians have to perform. This influence of the media is generally termed 'mediatization', which can be broadly defined as the meta-process comprising changes induced in society and culture through the pervasiveness of media – which makes them 'environmental'. Media are not constrained to technologies in this account, but include social practices, media as organizations and as a social institution (see also Krotz, 2009: 23).

In general, mediatization can be considered as both a prerequisite and a possible catalyst for celebritization. Since celebrities are essentially media personalities, it can be expected that the social field in which these celebrities are produced, is to some extent already mediatized. In these mediatized social fields, individuals have a potential advantage when they are media-savvy and able to become a media personality or celebrity. Stated differently, some social practices can be organized or anchored by media, which might have influence on the creation of media personalities or on the collective and subjective importance of attaining celebrity status. It can be hypothesized then that a greater degree of mediatization of social fields might result in a stronger celebritization.

However, both theoretically and methodologically, the question how to observe the degree, let alone unravel or distinguish between the several stages of mediatization (and celebritization), is very difficult to answer. Jesper Strömbäck (2008) made an attempt by discerning four phases in the mediatization of politics, but although his model was not meant to be unidirectional, still three main problems arise. It is unclear (1) what is the lower limit in each of the phases to speak of mediatization, (2) how to use this model in empirical studies and (3) if and how this model can be applied to other social fields than politics.

The same applies *mutatis mutandis* to the checklist Andrea Schrott (2009) developed. Even though it provides a more systematic instrument for the analysis of mediatization, it is very difficult to give a straightforward answer to questions such as "Is the actor's guideline the criteria (sic) of media logic?" or "In which way are unintended consequences of mediatized actions processed?" (Schrott, 2009: 56). Still, the author recognizes the limits of her instrument by arguing that it needs to be refined and tested empirically on more cases.

What further complicates this picture is the interdependence of mediatization with other processes in the constituency of celebritization. While mediatization is key to understand celebritization, it is clearly not its sole engine. As demonstrated above, the matrix of (meta-)processes and factors influencing the creation and importance of celebrity can differ thoroughly, depending on the social field. The first meta-process that should be added is personalization.

### *Personalization*

The mediatization of politics has stimulated the personalization of politics spectacularly, according to Gianpietro Mazzoleni (2000: 325), but of course mediatization was not its starting point. The personalization of politics goes back to its earliest stages and concurs with the embodiment of individual and institutional power. As a result, the individual has been central in historiography, which turns the history of Western civilization to a certain extent into a history of fame (Giles, 2000: 12). "Celebrity status operates at the very centre of the



culture as it resonates with conceptions of individuality that are the ideological ground of Western culture” (Marshall, 1997: x).

Also today, an individuocentric worldview is promoted in the news, operationalized through storytelling techniques and narrative conventions that emphasize the individual over the collective and the personal over the structural, for example by using spectacular and human-interest stories (Curran, 1996: 141; Harcup and O'Neill, 2001: 276-9). In this way, personalization is closely linked with celebritization. Yet it must be stressed again that it would be a misconception to put the media at the centre of the explanation of – in this case – the meta-process of personalization. In politics, for example, also internal reformations can dramatically affect the personalization of politics, for instance by shifting the weight from the party to the politician through changes in the electoral legislation.

A systematic conceptualization of the personalization of politics that includes these different aspects has been presented by Rosa van Santen and Liesbet van Zoonen (2009). Even though this typology is tailored to fit politics, it can easily be transposed to other social fields such as the economic or religious field. There are seven types of personalization that can be summarized in three clusters: individualization, privatization and emotionalization. Individualization implies the scrutinization of politicians' professional qualities, such as integrity or reliability. Privatization means that the focus shifts from the public to the private lives of politicians, while emotionalization entails a shift from the public to the private persona of politicians.

For some authors (e.g. Turner, 2004) these shifts from the public to the private are the turning points in becoming a celebrity. However, the dominant public-private binary has recently been revised and expanded with the “popular self”, which denotes the (re)presentation of an ordinary and fun persona without disclosing private details (see Driessens et al., 2010: 319). Indeed, politicians, lawyers or CEO's participate in talk shows often to develop their popular persona and in this way also their celebrity status. Obviously not all politicians, lawyers or CEO's participate in talk shows or disclose their private lives. This implies that one's personality is also an important aspect in (not) becoming a celebrity, although the social practices of colleagues can create certain expectations and standards that can build up the pressure to take part in the media and celebrity circus (Langer, 2010).

### *Commodification*

While personalization results in a great(er) prominence of the individual subject and its dimensions beyond the public, commodification turns these individual subjects (but also objects, relationships or ideas) into commodities by bestowing them with economic value. As cited in the discussion on celebrification (see above), a commodity can be defined as both the product and the producer of labour. This definition echoes Marxist theory which stresses the social character of commodities: they are bought and sold on a market, for a variable price that is the monetization of the commodity's exchange value. Hence commodification has been described as “endemic to the logic of capitalism” (Ralph, 2009: 78) and as “the seemingly irresistible process in which everything appears subject to the intensity of modern-day capitalism” (Cashmore and Parker, 2003: 215).

The same applies to celebrities, which are generally perceived as products of capitalism (e.g. Kurzman et al., 2007; Marshall, 1997). Still, there is disagreement on what exactly is commodified in the case of celebrities: according to the narrow view of Kurzman et al. (2007: 353) it is reputation, whereas Cashmore and Parker (2003: 215) argue that it is the “human form”. This paper follows the last view, since reputation is only one aspect of the commodification of the individual: also their name, image, hair(dress), clothing style, to name but a few, are turned into things to be sold and consumed. Indeed, celebrities are essential in

creating audiences and markets (Marshall, 1997), which they do also explicitly through endorsements of products and brands.

Important to note is that stars and celebrities are not only products and producers of alienated labour, but that they also embody and personify the ideology of capitalism (Dyer, 2007; Marshall, 1997; Rojek, 2001). As Marshall (1997: x) writes, “the celebrity as public individual who participates openly as a marketable commodity serves as a powerful type of legitimation of the political economic model of exchange and value – the basis of capitalism – and extends that model to include the individual.” Notwithstanding this hegemonic function of celebrity, it can also be counter-hegemonic and foster critical consciousness according to Sean Redmond (2006: 40): “[c]elebrity-commodity intertexts leak, they are ideologically porous, and countervalue emerge in their sign systems.” Many derivative celebrity-commodities, such as movies, pictures, advertisements, songs or merchandising, can go against the grain, question normative readings, empower citizens and call for action.

Redmond (2006: 40) gives the example of the commercial for Britney Spears’ fragrance Curious, which “is for girls to experiment, to try out sexual scenarios and encounters, both with boys and other girls,” and thus is believed to question “patriarchy and stereotypical gender norms.” However, two critical remarks must be made here. First, although consumers may have the freedom to purchase potentially counter-hegemonic commodities, producers can be seen to use them to commercial advantage (Jansson, 2002: 16). Second, and more fundamentally, it is “one thing to be transgressive about sexuality, religion, social mores and artistic conventions, but quite another to be transgressive in relation to the institutions and practices of capitalist domination” (Harvey, 2002: !!).

## Conclusion

This paper has started from the difference between celebrification and celebritization to provide a systematic conceptualization of celebritization. Celebrification can be situated at the individual level and involves the transformation of ordinary people or public figures into celebrities, who are characterized by their blending of the ordinary and the extraordinary. Celebritization has been situated at the level of social fields which implies that it is not a singular process affecting society and culture at large, but should be analyzed and compared in specific social fields. Moreover, celebritization is a meta-process, which means that our focus should be less on measuring its decrease or increase, but rather on analyzing its changing nature and social and cultural grounding.

Accordingly, three main indicators of celebritization have been identified: democratization, diversification and transgression. The democratization of celebrity proved to be only relative: although marginalized groups get a fore, their often very short career as a celetoid is exploited by the media and celebrity industry. This only strengthens the hierarchical celebrity system and the propagation of neoliberalism. The diversification of celebrity, or the production of celebrity personalities in a wide range of social fields traditionally less permeated by celebrity, seemed to be a very complex process, stimulated not only by the media, but also by internal dynamics, power struggles and market forces. The transgression of celebrity operates within and across social fields, thus comprising both the mobility and convertibility of celebrity.

As a reflection of the complexity and heterogeneity of celebritization’s constitutive processes, this paper has proposed a triumvirate of (meta-)processes: mediatization, personalization and commodification. In our media-saturated societies, the media are all-pervasive and directly or indirectly affect to different degrees the social fields. In mediatized social fields, it can be advantageous to be media-savvy and become a celebrity, because it enables to capture scarce attention, which can be observed for example in politics, a social

field that is thoroughly mediatized. However, it remains a hypothesis that the degree of mediatization can be linked to the degree of celebritytization; furthermore, prudence is in order to not only quantify an essentially qualitative development.

Personalization brings forward the individual at the expense of institutions and structures and also involves the exhibition of the ordinary of extraordinary persons. Consequently, it comprises mainly three aspects, being individualization, privatization and emotionalization. Commodification, finally, is the process that turns 'everything' into commodities, things that can be traded and consumed. Celebrities are the ultimate human commodities, both products and disseminators of capitalism.

Much of the available literature on celebritytization, mediatization and personalization is focused on the political field, especially when it is empirically based. While this might seem a logical consequence of the large attention for politics paid by the media, it does not relieve researchers to study these meta-processes in other social fields. Focusing beyond politics and more into areas as the economy, the judicial system, academics or religion, to name but a few, will not only strengthen empirical claims about celebritytization, mediatization and other related (meta-)processes, but also enable to nuance and advance our theoretical models.

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