

# To See and Be Seen: Celebrity Practice on Twitter

Convergence: The International  
Journal of Research into  
New Media Technologies  
17(2) 139–158  
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sagepub.co.uk/journalsPermissions.nav  
DOI: 10.1177/1354856510394539  
con.sagepub.com



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## Abstract

Social media technologies let people connect by creating and sharing content. We examine the use of Twitter by famous people to conceptualize celebrity as a practice. On Twitter, celebrity is practiced through the appearance and performance of 'backstage' access. Celebrity practitioners reveal what appears to be personal information to create a sense of intimacy between participant and follower, publicly acknowledge fans, and use language and cultural references to create affiliations with followers. Interactions with other celebrity practitioners and personalities give the impression of candid, uncensored looks at the people behind the personas. But the indeterminate 'authenticity' of these performances appeals to some audiences, who enjoy the game playing intrinsic to gossip consumption. While celebrity practice is theoretically open to all, it is not an equalizer or democratizing discourse. Indeed, in order to successfully practice celebrity, fans must recognize the power differentials intrinsic to the relationship.

## Keywords

celebrity, intimacy, micro-celebrity, performance, self-presentation, Twitter

## Introduction

Networked media is changing celebrity culture, the ways that people relate to celebrity images, how celebrities are produced, and how celebrity is practiced. Gossip websites, fan sites, and blogs provide a plethora of new locations for the circulation and creation of celebrity, moving between user-generated content and the mainstream media. The fragmented media landscape has created a shift in traditional understanding of 'celebrity management' from a highly controlled and regulated institutional model to one in which performers and personalities actively address and interact with

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fans. We conceptualize celebrity as an organic and ever-changing *performative practice* rather than a set of intrinsic personal characteristics or external labels. This practice involves ongoing maintenance of a fan base, performed intimacy, authenticity and access, and construction of a consumable persona. Increased access to technologies of content creation and distribution has popularized techniques of ‘micro-celebrity’, using social media to develop and maintain an audience (Senft, 2008). Micro-celebrity can be understood as a mindset and set of practices in which audience is viewed as a fan base; popularity is maintained through ongoing fan management; and self-presentation is carefully constructed to be consumed by others. Just as we now see ‘regular’ people adopting micro-celebrity tactics to gain status online, we also see famous people using similar techniques on social media sites to maintain popularity and image. We argue that ‘celebrity’ has become a set of circulated strategies and practices that place fame on a continuum, rather than as a bright line that separates individuals.

To investigate these changes, we look at celebrity practice by famous people on the microblogging site Twitter. We draw from Erving Goffman’s dramaturgical metaphors to consider how celebrity practice is *performed* with the help of others. Through analysis of tweets from 237 highly followed Twitter users, we find that celebrity practice involves presenting a seemingly authentic, intimate image of self while meeting fan expectations and maintaining important relationships. Three case studies – pop star Mariah Carey interacting with fans, teen queen Miley Cyrus demonstrating public connection to other teen starlets, and gossip columnist Perez Hilton uneasily walking a line between insider and outsider – show how Twitter is rife with complex negotiation of multiple audiences including intimate friends, practitioners, and fans. For these individuals, celebrity is successfully practiced when it provides the illusion of ‘backstage’, giving the impression of uncensored glimpses into the lives of the very famous. Although there is no way to determine the ‘authenticity’ of any celebrity practice, this uncertainty appeals to some audiences, who enjoy the game playing intrinsic to gossip consumption (Gamson, 1994). Celebrity is maintained through mutual recognition of power differentials by fan and practitioner, and maintenance of one’s fan base through performed intimacy, affiliation, and public acknowledgment.

## Celebrity Theories

Celebrity is a complicated cultural construct. In the popular sense, celebrity is a noun meaning ‘a famous person’. This is a binary, personal quality: you are either a celebrity, or you’re not (e.g. ‘Angelina Jolie is a celebrity’). Celebrity can also refer to a state of being or cultural phenomenon (e.g. ‘celebrity culture’ or ‘celebrity magazines’). Media and cultural studies scholars similarly conceptualize celebrity as several different things (Gamson, 1994; Marshall, 2006; Turner, 2004). Celebrity has been framed as a historical process (Braudy, 1986); as part of the mass culture industries (McLeod, 2002; Rojek, 2001); as a semiotic system (Dyer, 1986; Rahman, 2006); and as the apex of democratic individualism (Marshall, 1997). Graeme Turner argues that:

Celebrity is a genre of representation and a discursive effect; it is a commodity traded by the promotions, publicity and media industries that produce these representations and their effects, and it is a cultural formation that has a social function we can better understand. (Turner, 2004: 9)

Turner outlines three primary scholarly definitions: (1) celebrity as a way that people are represented and talked about; (2) a process by which a person is turned into a commodity; and (3) an aspect of culture which is constantly being reinscribed and reformulated.

Although famous people represent an increasingly significant part of mass media, for many academics, they personify the trivial, dangerous decadence of American culture (Ewen, 1989; Lowenthal, 1961). In keeping with this viewpoint, people who enjoy consuming celebrity culture have been pathologized, portrayed as miserable or lonely, or seen as cultural dupes (Feasey, 2008; Jensen, 1992). However, celebrity images are culturally pervasive; they have become part of our day-to-day lives (Turner, 2004: 17) and part of the raw material through which we construct identities and engage in public discourse (Feasey, 2008; Gamson, 1994). More recently, fandom has become a subject of study in its own right (Baym, 2000; Jenkins, 1992, 2006b). In the tradition of active audience studies, theories of ‘participatory culture’ examine how people draw from media texts to create and produce their own cultural products (Jenkins, 2006a; Lessig, 2004). Understanding not only how the celebrity construct functions as a product within media industries, but how and why people make meaning from celebrity culture in their daily lives, is essential as we see the process of celebrification trickling down to blog writers, social network site participants, YouTube stars, and other social media users (Senft, 2008). Celebrity can now be practiced by a greater number of people.

The logical conclusion of these theories and shifts is to look at celebrity as a learned practice rather than an inborn trait (what *American Idol* calls the ‘X-Factor’). Reality TV popularized a behind-the-scenes, self-conscious examination of celebrity construction; online, this goes one step further. Theresa Senft defines ‘micro-celebrity’ as a technique that ‘involves people “amping up” their popularity over the Web using techniques like video, blogs, and social networking sites’ (2008: 25). ‘Micro-celebrity’ describes a prevailing style of behavior both online and off, linked to the increase in popularity of ‘self-branding’ and strategic self-presentation (Hearn, 2008; Lair et al., 2005). This phenomenon was first noted in camgirls, young women who broadcast images of themselves 24/7 to interested audiences (Snyder, 2000). Their strategic micro-celebrity is distinct from the inadvertent fame resulting from internet memes, such as the ‘Star Wars Kid’ and ‘Tron Guy’. Micro-celebrity involves viewing friends or followers as a fan base; acknowledging popularity as a goal; managing the fan base using a variety of affiliative techniques; and constructing an image of self that can be easily consumed by others. As we will see, these resemble techniques that extremely famous people use to manage audiences on Twitter, rather than relying on formal access brokers like managers and agents to maintain the distance between themselves and fans.

While the distinction between micro-celebrity and ‘real’ celebrity might once have been a question of popularity, approachability, or mainstream status, this article looks at how ‘traditional’ celebrities have adopted techniques formerly characterized as ‘micro-celebrity’. We view celebrity practice as a *continuum* that can be practiced across the spectrum of fame rather than a schism. This essay examines how celebrity is practiced by the very famous, yet we are interested in the larger cultural shifts indicated by these celebrity performances and recognize the need for research on the daily practice of celebrity by non-famous individuals.

In this article, we define celebrity as a *practice*. Whenever possible, we refrain from referring to people as celebrities, preferring to use ‘celebrity practitioners’ or ‘famous people’ to avoid the binary implications of the noun. However, since celebrity-as-noun is the prevalent usage within both scholarly and public discourse, we use it in reference to other works and discourses.

## Twitter and Method

The microblogging site Twitter lets people post quick 140-character updates, or ‘tweets’, to a network of followers. Twitter asks participants ‘What’s happening?’ resulting in a constantly-updated stream of

short messages ranging from the mundane to breaking news, shared links, and thoughts on life. In Twitter's directed model of friendship, users choose others to 'follow' in their stream, and each user has his or her own group of 'followers'. There is neither a technical requirement nor social expectation of reciprocity (particularly with famous people, although this differs by user group). Tweets can be posted and read from the web, SMS, or third-party clients for desktop computers, smartphones, and other devices. This integration allows for instant postings of photos, on-the-ground reports, and quick replies to other users. The site launched in 2006 and broke into the mainstream in 2008–2009, when user accounts and media attention exponentially increased. Twitter had approximately 18.2 million users in May 2009 (Nielsen Company, 2009), increasing to 27.2 million by January 2010 (Quantcast Corporation, 2010). As of 2010, the most-followed Twitter users are well-known organizations like CNN and Whole Foods, very famous people and public figures, from President Barack Obama to actor Ashton Kutcher and pop star Britney Spears. While Twitter can be used as a broadcast medium, the dialogic nature of Twitter and its ability to facilitate conversation has contributed substantially to its popularity.

This popularity has contributed to media fascination with the site. Unlike individuals famous primarily for their affiliation with social media properties, such as Tila Tequila on MySpace or Tay Zonday on YouTube, Twitter attracts actors, pop stars, authors, politicians, and others with established fame, such as Oprah Winfrey, Senator John McCain, Shaquille O'Neal and Weird Al. Although people known primarily for their online presence, like marketer Pistachio and video blogger iJustine, are well-represented on Twitter, the most-followed Twitter users are, for the most part, the conventionally famous.

Given this, we used Twitter to understand how celebrity is practiced through interactions between famous people and fans, friends, and other practitioners on Twitter. Part of the appeal of Twitter, as we will discuss, is the perception of direct access to a famous person, particularly 'insider' information, first-person pictures, and opinionated statements. Those celebrities who use Twitter primarily to 'broadcast' publicity information are seen as less authentic than those using the tool for dialogue and engagement with fans. One of our first methodological tasks was to work out who authored accounts of famous people.

We collected data from all people in the 300 most-followed Twitter accounts (as measured by Twitterholic.com during May and June 2009), including actors, musicians, technologists, politicians, reality television stars, and so forth for a total of 237 individuals; the remaining 63 accounts were media, companies, and organizations. We captured all tweets from these individuals and logged the total number of tweets, average tweets, and frequency of popular Twitter practices to understand how the most-followed individuals used the site. We sent 'at-replies' to all 237 people and 100 other highly followed people, and corresponded with those who replied. We closely observed more than a hundred accounts of famous people and their fans, and engaged in a deep qualitative analysis of 20 verified Twitter accounts that we identified as representative types of well-known actors, musicians, politicians/pundits, and technologists. We read the most recent 2–3 months of tweets from these users, noted each content type or use, and aggregated types across users.

We are aware that not all 'celebrity' accounts are authored by the celebrity in question. To account for this, we analyzed a sample of highly followed accounts in an attempt to determine how many were authentic. It is very difficult to determine whether or not an account is authored by its purported owner, an assistant, or someone hired for that purpose. All of the accounts that we considered are verified, which means that either the famous person or their representatives vouch for the account. While some accounts are clearly identified as written by a team – tweets from the

'Britney Spears' account are attributed to Britney, her manager, and her website – others are written by 'ghost twitterers' in the voice of the celebrity (Cohen, 2009). This is distinct from fan-written or imposter accounts; celebrities hire impersonators for a variety of reasons. Some famous people lack the time or interest to maintain an account but view it as a good marketing tool; some have managers who discourage direct access to fans; and still others are under contract to a team, studio or production which expressly forbids candid tweeting (Wallenstein and Belloni, 2009). From a sample of 144 highly followed accounts, we determined that 105 were written by individual famous people, 7 by a team (publicists, assistants, and so on), 11 by a team plus the celebrity, and 21 were indeterminate. In making our assessments, we used a number of measures, including whether tweets were identified as coming from a team member or assistant; whether the account was mentioned in news stories about 'ghost twitterers'; references to the account by Twitter or other technology experts; the proportion of publicity versus personal messages; the use of first-person voice; the presence of misspellings or grammatical errors; whether tweets seemed 'safe' (as in vetted by a PR team) or covered controversial or negative topics; and so forth. We analyzed the applications used to post tweets, noted whether pictures were posted directly from a cameraphone to a service like Twitpic or YFrog, and categorized pictures as candid or formal publicity stills. Finally, we investigated whether the celebrity answered questions or directly corresponded with fans. Obviously, these are subjective judgments. We are confident that the majority of accounts maintained by famous people are written, at least in part, by the individual themselves.

While some Twitter users choose to protect their accounts, the majority of those with high follower counts make their feed public. All the accounts we looked at were public. The messages we analyzed are also public; we use the actual usernames of both fans and highly followed people in this article, since the tweets are publicly searchable and accessible (while tweets are only publicly searchable for 21 days, they can always be directly accessed from the user's page). Twitter allows for private, person-to-person tweets that do not appear on public pages, called direct messages (DMs). This article references several practices that Twitter users have developed to facilitate conversation on the site, namely @replies, retweets, and hashtags. @replies, or 'at-replies', are public tweets that use a '@+username' convention to refer to other Twitter users; these can be used to identify people, address tweets to particular users and attribute quotes (Honeycutt and Herring, 2009). @replies are common on Twitter and 42 per cent of tweets in our sample are @replies. The second type of common user practice we tracked was the retweet (RT), a repost of another person's tweet (see boyd et al., 2010, for a comprehensive look at retweeting). This is less common, and only 5 per cent of tweets in our sample were retweets. Hash tags, or the # sign followed by a word, mark tweets with descriptive terms. On sites like Delicious, Amazon.com, and Flickr, tags are used for many purposes, only one of which is classifying the tweet's subject matter (Golder and Huberman, 2006). On Twitter, tags are typically used to group tweets together by subject, such as a conference or meme; 6 per cent of the tweets in our sample included hashtags.

## Performing Celebrity on Twitter

Like other public genres of social media, Twitter requires celebrity practitioners to negotiate a complicated social environment where fans, famous people, and intermediaries such as gossip columnists co-exist. These multiple audiences complicate self-presentation, since people present identity differently based on context. Erving Goffman's 1959 work *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* suggested that people, like actors, navigate 'frontstage' and 'backstage' areas in any given social situation. This can be understood in terms of place. For instance, a restaurant's floor is

frontstage, since employees must interact in front of an audience of bosses and customers. More candid talk between servers can take place backstage, away from the watchful eye of the employer. These concepts can also be understood in terms of content. For instance, intimate details about one's life are understood as part of the 'backstage' while professional communications can be seen as a 'frontstage' performance. However, frontstage and backstage are always relative as they depend on audience, context, and interpretation.

Goffman's work is related to symbolic interactionism, a sociological perspective which maintains that meaning is constructed through language, interaction, and interpretation (Blumer, 1962; Strauss, 1993). Symbolic interactionists claim that identity and self are constituted through constant interactions with others – primarily, talk. Individuals work together to uphold preferred self-images of themselves and their conversation partners, through strategies like maintaining (or 'saving') face, collectively encouraging social norms, or negotiating power differentials and disagreements. What Goffman refers to as 'impression management' takes place through ongoing adjustment to perceptions of audience judgment (1959).

Very famous people constantly navigate complex identity performances. The ostensible disconnect between a famous person's public persona and 'authentic' self is fueled by tabloid magazines, paparazzi photos, and gossip columns that purport to reveal what a particular starlet is 'really' like. Celebrity scandals often involve the exposure of personal information to the public, such as outing someone as queer or the dissemination of photos, 'sex tapes', answering machine messages, emails, and other purportedly backstage documents. This tricky territory has traditionally been navigated with the help of assistants, agents, public relations personnel, bodyguards, and other mechanisms that broker access between famous person and fan. On Twitter, however, this infrastructure is not available. As we will see, celebrity practice involves the appearance and performance of backstage access to the famous, presuming that the typical celebrity persona involves artifice. In Joshua Gamson's taxonomy of celebrity watchers, he writes:

A good chunk of the audience reads the celebrity text in its own language, recognizing and often playing with the blurriness of its vocabulary. They leave open the questions of authenticity and along with it the question of merit. For them, celebrity is not a prestige system, or a postmodern hall of mirrors, but ... a game. (1994: 173)

Determining whether readers are watching an 'authentic' individual or a performed 'celebrity' persona is not entirely the point; it is the uncertainty that creates pleasure for the celebrity-watcher on Twitter.

Simultaneously, celebrity practice reinforces unequal power differentials. While Twitter users who do not use the site instrumentally may think of their followers as friends or family (Marwick and boyd, 2010), celebrity practice necessitates viewing followers as *fans*. Performing celebrity requires that this asymmetrical status is recognized by others. Fans show deference, creating mutual recognition of the status imbalance between practitioner and fan. In return, fan-practitioner relationships move beyond parasocial interaction, the illusion of a 'real', face-to-face friendship with a performer created through watching television shows or listening to music (Horton and Wohl, 1956). In parasocial relationships, or what John Thompson calls 'mediated quasi-interaction' (J Thompson, 1995: 98), a fan responds to a media figure 'as if s/he was a personal acquaintance' (Giles, 2002: 289); in contrast, Twitter suggests the possibility of interaction. There is no singular formula for celebrity practice; it consists of a set of learned techniques that are leveraged differently by individuals.

## Public Recognition and Fan Maintenance

Like much social media, Twitter creates a ‘context collapse’ (boyd, 2008) in which multiple audiences, usually thought of as separate, co-exist in a single social context. The practice of celebrity involves negotiating these multiple audiences to successfully maintain face and manage impressions. Celebrity practitioners use public acknowledgment, in the form of @replies, to connect with others. Fans @reply to famous people not only in the hope of receiving a reply, but to display a relationship, whether positive or negative. If fans receive @replies back, they function as a mark of status and are publicized within the fan community. Celebrity practitioners’ public acknowledgement of friends, peers, and colleagues is rarely critical, primarily adhering to frontstage norms of public appearance. Famous people mention fans to perform connection and availability, give back to loyal followers, and manage their popularity.

Celebrity practice requires constant interaction with fans to preserve the power differentials intrinsic to the performed ‘celebrity’ and ‘fan’ personas. Celebrity practitioners approach this in different ways. For example, Soleil Moon Frye, better known as 1980s child actress ‘Punky Brewster’, frequently tweets inspirational and funny anecdotes about parenting:

Moonfrye: RT @bklyndafna @Moonfrye DAILY QUOTE The future belongs to those who believe in the beauty of their dreams. – Eleanor Roosevelt

Today, Frye runs a children’s boutique in LA; her followers are primarily women with children. In this example, bklyndafna tweets an Eleanor Roosevelt quote to Moonfrye in a gesture that resembles gift-giving. This marks bklyndafna as a fan and affiliates her with Moonfrye’s general values. To show appreciation, Moonfrye publicly retweets (RT) the quote to her followers, retaining bklyndafna’s original attribution. This mutual public recognition of commonality allows Moonfrye to articulate ongoing connections with her followers.

People spending time with other Twitter users online or in person often mention it in their tweets, identifying the other person through the @username convention. For example, when MariahCarey tweets about her friend Jasmine Dotiwala, an MTV producer and gossip columnist, she chooses to identify her by her Twitter username:

MariahCarey: @jasminedotiwala just sang the Vegas remix of “these are a few of my favorite things and did a little dance in a terry cloth robe” hilarious

This establishes intimacy between Carey and her followers by sharing personal details from her life while publicly identifying jasminedotiwala as a friend – a performance of backstage access – and inviting her followers to check out Jasmine’s Twitter stream. This maintains the power differential between an average fan and the singer’s intimate friend, since Jasmine is marked as someone who spends time with Mariah in person. It also provides a public endorsement of Jasmine’s Twitter stream. While some highly followed users reference others without being prompted, others will acknowledge friends as a favor to direct attention their way. This is particularly visible through the practice of retweeting:

KevinRose: RT: @garyvee announcing my 1st business book <http://tinyurl.com/garyveebook> – congrats to @garyvee, crush it!

Greggrundberg: RT @WilfridDierkes “watch My Name is Earl tonite cause if it gets canceled my family is moving in w/you.” Peeps please watch. Save us all!!

Both these tweets demonstrate publicly articulated relational ties: between Digg founder Kevin Rose and motivational speaker Gary Vaynerchuk, and between actor Gregg Grunberg and producer Greg Garcia. This practice suggests insidership between the participants, but it also highlights the dynamics of attention on Twitter.

Public acknowledgment, of either friends or fans, is not always positive. Twitter user Leproff sends an angry tweet to Republican politician Newt Gingrich about Reagan, who responds tersely:

Leproff: @newtingrich I do not agree when you say that USSR collapsed because of Ronald Reagan. This is a historical lie!

NewtGingrich: @Leproff do you really believe the soviet union would have disappeared without reagan. Read peter schweizers book reagens war

Gingrich's tweet reinforces his image as an ornery conservative, but the act of responding also shows that he takes time to talk directly with followers. The potential of such interactions implies that fans are faced with accountability to the actors and singers they gossip about. Some famous people directly address gossip, for instance:

LilyRoseAllen: and no i didnt say that stuff, ive never met cheryl, or her husband , noe david beckham. please dont believe that rubbish.

NewtGingrich: A false story was planted this morning about my sueing twitter. This is totally false and we have repudiated it with the media

Hollymadison123: @PerezHilton Criss and i r not back together . . lol!

Rumor-mongering, whether by follower or gossip columnist Perez Hilton, can theoretically be directly corrected. Of course, fans may choose to believe the rumor even if the famous person chooses to reject it and not all fans read all tweets written by a celebrity. As with any other medium, correcting a rumor on Twitter can be more challenging than starting one.

While gossiping about celebrities is a common practice that creates social bonds and provides a frame for discussion of larger issues (Feasey, 2008), participants on Twitter run the risk of being publicly shamed by the individual they are discussing:

Trent\_Reznor: Perfect example of the kind of complete parasitic delusional asshole that makes you regret fame: @AngieZherself.

Trent\_Reznor: And you're not anonymous dear, you are Angela L. Zajac from Worcester with a criminal record.

While Trent Reznor's decision to publicly shame one of his fans may be seen as an attempt to gain control and push back against someone that he perceives as an 'asshole', this too may backfire. There are plenty who seek attention and will settle for negative attention. While public relations professionals and magazine editors traditionally managed information flow through spin control or strategic censorship (Sternbergh, 2004), Twitter gossip may be silenced through direct acknowledgment from celebrity practitioners. At the same time, it may also be ignited.



## Affiliation

Affiliation is the process of publicly performing a connection between practitioners and fans using language, words, cultural symbols, and conventions. Teen rapper Soulja Boy's use of language is virtually identical to that of his audience, primarily young hip-hop fans ('That song me & Lola did is Bumpin in the whip my speakers goin ham!'). P Diddy uses inspirational and inclusive language to ally himself with his followers: 'Let's stay focused to day people! Today can be the start of a positive change in our lives. Claim it and do it!!!! Just do it!!!!' Soleil Moon Frye tells stories about the difficulties of childrearing that emphasize the similarities between herself and her primarily female followers. Mariah Carey's fans have a language ('HBF', 'lambs', 'LYM') that create linguistic ties with each other and their favorite singer.

Links and retweets provide good examples of the affiliative use of cultural markers and symbols. Generally, highly followed users RT or link to items that interest them and presumably their followers. In these examples, liberal pundit Rachel Maddow and actor Ashton Kutcher send out URLs:

Maddow: Remember that wicked scary job loss chart? Here it is among budget docs with some of its wicked scary chart friends (pdf!) <http://is.gd/11AJ>

@aplusk: this is amazing thanks 4 sharing RT @ShaynaSkim: A guy single-handedly starts a dance party! MUST WATCH <http://bit.ly/wh4cA>

Maddow links to a White House-provided PDF of economic charts, implying that her followers – news junkies, policy wonks, and armchair economists – would find it interesting. Maddow is not tweeting about her life, but a common interest she shares with her followers. In contrast, Ashton Kutcher RTs a funny video of a concert-goer dancing to indie artist Santigold. (Note that both are using URL shortening services, which abbreviate long web addresses to fit Twitter's 140 character limit.) The cultural markers in this tweet – hip music, an outdoor music festival, goofy dancing – affiliate Kutcher with his teen and 20-something base. These links are presumably chosen both to provide value to their fan base and to emphasize commonalities between the practitioner and his or her followers.

## Intimacy

Twitter allows celebrity practitioners to create a sense of closeness and familiarity between themselves and their followers. Highly followed accounts vary in performed intimacy; while some mostly broadcast information about an upcoming tour or book, others write about personal subjects, post exclusive content, or chat about their daily lives. This type of strategic revealing found on confessional talk show appearances, tell-all autobiographies, and magazine interviews has been criticized as 'second order intimacy' (Rojek, 2001: 52) or the 'illusion of intimacy' (Schickel, 1985: 4; Turner, 2004). This point of view maintains that performed intimacy is synonymous with parasocial interaction and a poor substitute for actual interaction.

While it is true that the practice of celebrity involves strategically managed self-disclosure, we should not be so quick to judge the closeness created by Twitter as false and second-best. First, Twitter does provide the possibility of actual interaction with the highly followed person, in the form of a direct message or @reply. Second, the 'lifestreaming' function of Twitter encourages 'digital intimacy' (C Thompson, 2008). The many seemingly insignificant messages serve as phatic communication (Miller, 2008); rather than sharing meaningful information, many tweets serve a social function, reinforcing connections and maintaining social bonds (Crawford, 2009). If we accept that Twitter creates a sense of ongoing connection with one's real-life acquaintances

and friends, following a famous person's tweets over a period of time may create an equally valid feeling of 'knowing' them. Finally, as we will see in the following case studies, users can and do let things slip via Twitter that would never be revealed in an interview with *People* magazine.

On Twitter, performative intimacy is practiced by posting personal pictures and videos, addressing rumors, and sharing personal information. Picture-hosting services, such as YFrog and Twitpic, allow users directly to post cameraphone pictures to Twitter. Famous people frequently use these services, creating the illusion of first-person glimpses into their lives. Ashton Kutcher, for example, tweets pictures of himself on set, during talk-show appearances, and posing with his wife Demi Moore and celebrities such as actress Mischa Barton and R&B singer Usher. Pop singer Katy Perry posts pictures of her nails, her tour bus, and her meals while performing around the world. Similarly, streaming video services like uStream are used by musicians like Bow Wow and Snoop Dogg to broadcast studio recordings and live performances, while others post funny videos, take questions from fans, or host live events. Shaquille O'Neal, for instance, filmed himself lip-synching and tweeted the link to his followers. While these pictures and videos add a visual dimension, they are still strategically chosen by the practitioner, in contrast to the unauthorized candid found in tabloids and gossip blogs.

As we have seen, other famous people use Twitter to directly address rumors. The same technique is used to respond to fan criticism or comments. For instance, Shaq retorted to a follower who said his sneakers were ugly:

@Naimthestar yea dats why I sold 80 million pair since 1992 at 3 dollars per pair comn to me, do the math

In addition to publicly recognizing and responding to a fan concern, this information makes the fan feel that they possess insider, candid knowledge about the sports star. Contentious discussions are not uncommon:

Jake\_Banks: @ddlovato the Jonas Brothers, are just a disney fabrication who did not earn their fame and thusly are undeserving of such a large spotlight

Ddlovato: @Jake\_Banks It's funny that you call them a "disney fabrication" but they have fans of ALL ages and they do deserve the spotlight.

Ddlovato: They've been touring and working extremely hard for years and they still haven't stopped. They're the hardest working people I know of.

Lacey22211: @lilyroseallen why dont u just accept anyone on ur Myspace? its a fucking music page! wtf??? Cunt

LilyRoseAllen: @lacey22211 because people spam my page, and post loads of noise as comments.

These exchanges demonstrate how Twitter has contributed to changes in the parasocial dynamic. While parasocial interaction is largely imaginary and takes place primarily in the fan's mind, Twitter conversations between fans and famous people are public and visible, and involve direct engagement between the famous person and their follower. The fan's ability to engage in discussion with a famous person de-pathologizes the parasocial and recontextualizes it within a medium that the follower may use to talk to real-life acquaintances. As we have seen, Twitter makes fans accountable for rude comments, taking the subjects of gossip out of the realm of fantasy and repositioning them as 'real people'. Traditional settings for

in-person celebrity–fan interactions, such as autograph signings and award ceremonies, are highly managed and limited in scope. In contrast, although Twitter conversations are mediated, they appear off-the-cuff, contributing to a sense that the reader is seeing the real, authentic person behind the ‘celebrity’.

### *Authenticity and Sincerity*

In *Sincerity and Authenticity*, Lionel Trilling (1972) distinguishes authenticity from sincerity. He conceptualizes authenticity as a display of the hidden inner life, complete with passions and anguish, while sincerity is the opposite of hypocrisy – honesty without pretense. Both these elements matter on Twitter. The intimacy engendered by celebrity tweets provide the glimpse into the inner life that fans want, while at the most basic level, fans want to ensure that the person tweeting is sincerely who they claim to be. Twitter is generally a site where personal disclosure and intimacy are normative (Marwick and boyd, 2010), so access, intimacy, and affiliation are valueless if an account is fake or written by an assistant. The process involved in vetting whether a person is really who they claim to be reveals the appeal of celebrity practice for fans: the potential for disclosing the ‘truth’, the uncensored person stripped of PR artifice and management.

Users frequently debate whether Twitter accounts are written by who they claim to be. The site *truthtweet.com* verifies or debunks accounts like *Tina\_Fey* and *The\_Pitts*. During our research, accounts for Seth Rogen, Michael Phelps, and Tina Fey were identified as impostors and subsequently shut down (*Tina\_Fey* was renamed ‘FakeTinaFey’ and the comedian Tina Fey took over *Tina\_Fey*). Some of these demonstrably false accounts are valued for their satirical value or effective impersonation, such as ‘FakeSarahPalin’ whose tweets include things like ‘This “death panel” thing is really taking off! Suck it, Luntz, you got p0wned Palin style. Srsly!!!’ In June 2009, Twitter introduced verified accounts that certify ‘genuine’ famous people. As previously discussed, not all ‘celebrity’ accounts are written by the purported individual. In our own efforts to account for authenticity of Twitter accounts, we focused on the *signals* of authenticity. Judith Donath discusses how subtle online signals function as identity cues, given the dearth of physical evidence (1998). Given the presence of typos in most participants’ tweets, we expect that ‘real’ celebrity practitioners will make grammatical or spelling mistakes. Tweets that are personal, controversial, or negative – in other words, that contradict the stereotype of the overly managed ‘celebrity’ account – signal greater authenticity than safely vetted publicity messages. If the writer interacted with fans, used the first-person voice, and posted candid snapshots, they seemed more authentic, as did their use of mobile clients such as Tweetie or Twitterberry. Of course, our assessment is only based on the available signals; we have no way of validating our best guesses. Similarly, fans carefully evaluate the *sincerity* of celebrity accounts.

Trilling’s alternative meaning of authenticity, as passion and interiority, is also crucial to Twitter’s appeal. ‘Authenticity’ is a social construct that is ultimately always relative and context dependent (Bendix, 1997; Cheng, 2004); it seems that self-disclosure, and therefore what it *means* to be authentic, is expected more on Twitter compared to other venues. While we accept that a *Cosmopolitan* cover story on pop star Katy Perry will probably be a bit boring, we anticipate that Perry’s Twitter feed will be in keeping with her glamorous, wacky image. Celebrity practice that sticks to the safe and publicly consumable risks being viewed as inauthentic, while successful celebrity practice suggests intimacy, disclosure, and connection. In the next

section, we look at three case studies of celebrity use of Twitter to see how the co-existence of fans, friends, other celebrities, and gossip columnists are navigated differently using these and other practices.

### Three Case Studies

#### *Mariah Carey: Fan Relationships with Celebrities*

The pop singer Mariah Carey has been releasing successful albums for 20 years, and has a devoted, loyal fan following which she calls her ‘lambbs’. While Carey is the best-selling female artist in the USA, her volatile career has included two highly publicized marriages, a divorce, the failed film *Glitter*, and a televised mental breakdown. Perhaps because of these personal tribulations, her fans send her intimate public messages that often resemble a quick text to a friend:

OMJitsReva: @MariahCarey On my way to NYC be there in 21 hours, yep I’m catchin teh greyhound... hope ur in town and i c u

halima12: @MariahCarey hey, been in the garden with sugapie dunking her in the pool & givin her a ride on the lilo. been playin E=MC2 :) watcha up 2?

ShayneFly: @MariahCarey Had to put our family dog to sleep tonight. I know you know how it hurts. Im missing a piece and my stupid face is all wet :(

These messages both demonstrate the power of parasocial interaction and how Twitter changes it. Fan LaurenDayMakeUp responded to our question about her Twitter interaction with Mariah, ‘I follow @MariahCarey becoz she has been with me through her music everyday of my life 4 the last 15 years! She inspires me!’ But unlike listening to music, social media suggests the possibility of the media figure responding, which intensifies the interactive credibility.

MariahCarey: Trying to DM as many nice folks as possible. Thanks for all the love as always. I love twitter cos I can really stay in touch w/you.(Cont)

Fans know that Mariah uses Twitter to communicate directly with friends and fans, meaning she may potentially respond to them. As a result, fans directly ask for responses:

Rochyta: @Mariahcarey We miss you, Mariah! I had a terrible day today. It would be great to read a “hi” from you.Te quiero muchísimo. Rocío- Spain.

OriginalJengsta: @MariahCarey Today is my birthday and my birthday wish is to get a Twitter shout-out from MC - can you swing it?? -Nancy Jeng

Receiving a message from a highly followed individual is a status symbol in itself. User OMJitsReva writes on her profile, ‘Check my FAVs [favorite tweets] for celebs that have tweeted me back! I feel like a mini-celebrity.’ This is also a public performance of access. Users tweet to Mariah not only to feel a sense of connection with her, but also to publicly acknowledge the lack of distance between themselves and the singer.

AviHBF: @dieguitoLAMB Mariah DM’d me today!

DieguitoLAMB: @AviHBF OM\*G!!! YOU LUCKY GURL!

LoyalLamb88: @AviHBF Wow! That’s awesome . . .

AviHBF brags about receiving a direct message; the responses show the value of this within the fan community. One fan, MiMiGreat, posted ‘Mariah wrote me a DM!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!’ upon receiving her own message. Notably, Mariah uses private direct messages rather than public @replies. This could be a way to avoid public accountability, but it also means that fans can claim that Mariah wrote to them even if she did not. Mariah’s tweet about ‘loving Twitter’ and the excited responses from fans comprise a *performance* of fan interaction. Mariah could claim to interact with fans privately without actually doing so, or could have an assistant write DMs. For Mariah Carey and her fans, Twitter seems to be about the perception of availability and fan access.

### *Miley Cyrus: Celebrity Relationships with Celebrities*

Celebrity practitioners also interact with other famous people on Twitter, creating revealing performances of what appear to be intimate interactions. Truly private interactions between famous people, with no public audience, are invisible to fans. Highly publicized romantic relationships and friendships covered by gossip magazines create the illusion of insider access, but are still public. Twitter allows the public visibility of casual friendships between famous people, which both creates a sense of insidership for fan observers and requires celebrities to navigate carefully. Celebrities must constantly shift between performing their stage persona, concealing or revealing personal information, and creating intimacy and authentic self-presentation for the benefit of their fans. At times, it becomes difficult to discern what is performance and what is ‘real’; this is precisely the kind of juxtaposition that fans love.

Teen star Miley Cyrus began a public feud with fellow singer/actors Demi Lovato and Selena Gomez after posting a mocking parody of the girls’ home-made video series on YouTube (Beer and Penfold-Mounce, 2009). Speculations on the origin of the feud include internal Disney rivalry; conflict over Gomez being labeled the ‘Next Miley Cyrus’ by the press; and tension after Lovato dated Cyrus’ ex-boyfriend, teen idol Nick Jonas. The feud was heavily covered by the entertainment press, fueled by Nick’s brother Kevin wearing a ‘Team Demi and Selena’ t-shirt in public. Cyrus, Lovato, and Gomez have publicly denied a feud and were photographed in late 2008 having dinner, presumably a staged event as damage control to counteract fallout from the rumors (Kidzworld, 2009). While Lovato and Gomez are publicly ‘best friends’ who continue to present themselves as such, Cyrus and Lovato engaged in a somewhat surprising ongoing series of public interactions on Twitter:

Ddlovato: Now I’m with my other two best friends in the entire world... @selenagomez and @mileycyrus. What an amazing day. :D

MileyCyrus: @ddlovato is one of the bestest friends in the world :)

Ddlovato: @mileycyrus I’m comin’! You better visit me on tour!!! Idk how long I can go without seeing you :)

MileyCyrus: @ddlovato I dont know if I’ve ever needed someone as badly as I need you right now.... I miss you sweet girl.

Ddlovato: @mileycyrus awww :( make me tear up why don’t ya?! I love you so much. I’ve ALWAYS got your back.

These tweets can be viewed as strategic frontstage performances. It’s irrelevant whether or not Miley, Demi and Selena actually are friends, since the frequency and emotional tone of the messages mark them as performative – Cyrus and Lovato want their fans to *know* that they are

friends. Notably, there are no interactions between Gomez and Cyrus on Twitter. This creates the possibility that the performances are not entirely false; instead, they may be a self-conscious, exaggeratedly ideal view of teenage girl friendship.

This performance of friendship changed shape a few months later, when Demi broke up with Miley's brother, Trace. Miley and her mother (MommyTish) tweeted about the breakup, presumably referring to Lovato:

MommyTish: It really makes me sad that most people find it so easy to hurt other people. Why is that? I never want to hurt anyone..... EVER

MileyCyrus: @mommytish We can't control the path of their wicked hearts mama. All we can do is shine a light & guide their way back home. Smile mommy.

MommyTish: I wish I was the one hurting. I wish I could switch places with you right now, because I would. You love so deeply, you deserve that back...

Miley's apparent reference to Demi's 'wicked heart' might suggest that she and Lovato are no longer the best buddies they claimed to be. Lovato and Trace Cyrus traded tweets back-and-forth that could be read as passive-aggressive:

DDlovato: I know there's such thing as a Mr. Right... But can there be such thing as a Mr. Not Right Now...?

DDlovato: Now listen I think you and me have come to the end of our time.. What'd ya want some kind of reaction? Well, okay that's fine. :)

TraceCyrus: Another storybook ending.

Ddlovato: I'm sorry, was that supposed to hurt? Hm... Oh well :)

TraceCyrus: I just got really confused... Is it possible to breakup when you were never together with someone and only friends? Hmm this is new to me

This appears to be a backstage conversation involving the whole Cyrus family and a very personal subject, going on in public. While an agent or manager may have been the impetus for Lovato and Cyrus's public declarations of friendship, similar public declarations take place on social network sites among non-celebrities every day. Interactions between users create publicly visible relationship lines, marking friendship, romantic entanglements, breakups, flirtations, rivalries, and alliances. It is not surprising that celebrities – particularly teenage girls whose peer group conduct their social lives via social media – do the same thing. The scrutiny may become too much; in October 2009, Miley Cyrus left Twitter in a whirlwind of publicity, stating in a home-made rap video posted on YouTube 'Everything that I type and everything that I do, all those lame gossip types take it and they make it news (MandyMiley 2009).

The Cyrus–Lovato 'feud' demonstrates that reading conversations as performative or real is neither neat nor easy. Celebrity is practiced through scripted attempts to give backstage access. But just as actually getting backstage at a rock show does not provide true access to the band, neither does reading tweets provide insider access. The performance of celebrities interacting with no thought of fans, press, or managers on Twitter is actually managed interaction that creates the perception of intimacy. That is not to say that celebrities do not let things slip on Twitter; this is precisely why studios such as Disney and Dreamworks see Twitter as a liability (Wallenstein

and Belloni, 2009). There is indeed a tension between deliberate self-presentation – what Erving Goffman called impressions ‘given’ – and unintentional self-presentation, or information ‘given off’ (1959). It is the inability to tell what is strategic and what is accidental, as well as what is truthful and what is not, that makes Twitter so enjoyable for fans.

### *Perez Hilton: Celebrity Intermediaries*

The gossip columnist, a perennial fixture in mass media, has gained a new importance as a result of the explosion in tabloid journalism, paparazzi, and celebrity websites. The gossip columnist has traditionally provided the fan with ‘insider’ access to celebrities, thereby giving a sense of the backstage environment. Gossip columnists functioned as a middleman between celebrities, who were traditionally managed and protected, and fans, whose access to celebrities had to be brokered. However, in the past the gossip column was highly managed, with carefully chosen and orchestrated stories planted to drum up publicity. Perez Hilton, née Mario Armando Lavandeira, built a large following by posting criticism of celebrities and defacing tabloid pictures. Perez is open about his desire to be part of the world he covers, and tweets and posts pictures of himself hobnobbing with the very people he used to condemn. Gossip bloggers like Perez revel in posting topless photos, unverified rumors, public outing of gay celebrities, and other unauthorized snippets of information. Perez trolls Twitter for juicy bits of gossip, responding indiscriminately to his fans and to celebrities. His liminal status – not quite a celebrity, but not a fan – is made clear through his tweets, which manage to be both sycophantic and abrasive. But what function does he serve as a middleman when celebrities are directly interacting with fans?

The following tweets were sent by Perez to tabloid and reality TV fixture Heidi Montag, who had been tweeting frequently about religion:

PerezHilton: @heidimontag Do I need to stage an intervention???? You and @SpencerPratt are out of control!!!!!!

PerezHilton: @heidimontag P.S. Did you stop smoking weed? Are you going through marijuana withdrawals? Why have you been acting so strange?

HeidiMontag: @perezhilton because Jesus has really woke me up! He is coming back soon and I need to save as many souls as i can! this life is so short!

Hilton’s followers commented on the discussion:

winyeemichelle: is rofl’ing at the conversation/argument between @PerezHilton and @heidimontag

Crystemethod: @PerezHilton Thank you for trying to quiet down Heidi’s Jesus talk! I’m thinking about unfollowing her too! xoxo Canada Loves You!!!!

The conversation between Hilton and Montag appears to be public in an entirely different way than the Miley Cyrus and Demi Levato conversations. Hilton insults Montag, who is generally unpopular, in a way clearly visible to his audience, primarily readers of his blog. He is performing as an insider, demonstrating access. Hilton may criticize Montag, but she @replies to his comments. He simultaneously performs outsider status by acting as a harsh critic of the entertainment community. This conversation gives readers the impression of intimacy, but it is done in front of an audience. Hilton’s interactions can be understood as a practice of social grooming. The concept of ‘social grooming’ comes from apes, who spend hours picking bugs from each other’s fur.

This pastime has a bonding function: apes who groom each other are less likely to fight, and more likely to help each other. Robin Dunbar points out that language is highly efficient compared to physical grooming; while apes only have the grooming time to maintain limited relationships, language lets people sustain relationships with complicated social networks (Dunbar, 1996). In other words, gossip and small talk perform a grooming function in human societies. People check in with each other and trade pleasantries and tidbits about current events, mutual acquaintances, or television shows (Donath, 2007; Dunbar, 1996). The publicly accessible back-and-forth small talk that Hilton engages in with famous individuals is a form of performed social grooming:

PerezHilton: I've been listening to @TaylorSwift13 this weekend about as much as @HeidiMontag and @SpencerPratt have been shouting-out Jesus!

TaylorSwift13: @PerezHilton Aww thank you :) :)

PerezHilton: @taylorswift13 I see a lot of Grammys coming your way, young lady! xoxo

PerezHilton: @AubreyODay I love how much you love your dog! Dog is God spelled backwards, a wise blonde once said. :-)

AubreyODay: @PerezHilton lol. she's honest, pure, and forever forgiving. i don't know that i can say that about anyone else i know other than children.

Hilton has to balance satisfying an audience that wants candid information about celebrities and tempering the perception that he has become an insider. Simultaneously, this type of back-and-forth solidifies Taylor Swift and Aubrey O'Day's status as famous singers; the deference they are shown by fans and borderline figures like Perez separates them from the average person. This balance creates friction between Hilton and his readers:

Motherlode47: @PerezHilton do u not have a job to go to instead of harrassing Spencer and Heidi

Myka234: I <3 when celebs call out @perezhilton for posting fake stuff. Like @hollymadison123 just did. Brilliant. #perezsucks

auracooperman: Really wishes @perezhilton would stay the f in hwood and stop trying to be buddy w. Taylor and kellie, sorry perez they have morals!!!!

These tweets show detractors complaining about Perez's conversations with Spencer Pratt and Heidi Montag, his seemingly inauthentic attempts to be friendly with Christian country stars Taylor Swift and Kellie Pickler, and his practice of posting unverified gossip. At the same time, some of his less famous followers criticize him for responding to celebrities rather than regular people:

tweeeeeeeeety: @PerezHilton you never reply to me!!

His liminal, outsider status is reinforced by Twitter users, who do not treat him with the awe appropriate for a famous actor or musician, but as a regular person who should not attempt to rise above his status. While to some people, Perez successfully performs celebrity – 'celebrity', after all, is relative – his in-between status requires careful management.



## Significance

The internet has had an enormous impact on celebrity culture. It has created a plethora of new outlets through which discourses of celebrity circulate. Internet gossip sites such as *Perez Hilton*, *Pink is the New Blog*, and *The Superficial* are less regulated and subject to commercial pressures than magazines or television shows, and user-contributed content sites like *Oh No They Didn't* often scoop the tabloids. Simultaneously, the past decade has seen a massive increase in celebrity-related magazines, tabloids, television programs and 'celebreality' shows, increasing spaces for celebrity images and discussion. Some scholars argue that the popularity of celebrity gossip has increased the public's capacity to 'exercise control' over the processes of celebritization (Feasey, 2008; Turner, 2004: 20); this process is compounded in online venues where people can contribute content, post comments, or simply view a larger set of opinions than those presented in the mainstream media. Arguably, this 'new media democracy' (Braudy, 1986; Turner, 2004: 79) allows celebrity personas to be constructed and interpreted in an ongoing process that exists between reader, fan, and celebrity, both on and offline.

Concurrently, the increasingly uncertain economics of the entertainment industry have led some performers and personalities to seek alternative means of publicity. Following in the footsteps of tabloid staple Paris Hilton, reality television stars such as the women of MTV's *The Hills* or Bravo's *Real Housewives* franchise try to extend their 15 minutes of fame by courting the entertainment press, staging pseudo-events (Boorstin, 1961), and reaching out to fan communities. Similarly, the fall of the multi-national record industry has forced musicians to take control of their careers. Up-and-coming bands book tour dates, arrange press opportunities, create fan clubs, release music over blogs or social networking sites, and manage fans using YouTube, MySpace, Twitter, and other social media tools (Knoppner, 2009). Fans organize renewal campaigns for programs such as *Veronica Mars* and *Jericho* to pressure television networks, while increasingly, producers and showrunners are adopting these well-organized and often successful techniques (Becque, 2007; Murray, 2004). Publishing houses encourage authors to organize book tours, to blog, and to reach out to readers using sites like GoodReads (Kachka, 2008). This independent self-promotion is not done by real superstars, who stick to the talk show and *Vanity Fair* circuit (Julia Roberts, George Clooney, and Angelina Jolie are not on Twitter or MySpace), but for most workers in the entertainment industry, social media is a necessary part of creating and maintaining a fan base.

Our analysis of the practices of famous people on Twitter reveals how social media can be used to maintain celebrity status. Entertainers, public figures and technologists actively contribute to the construction of their persona through public interaction with fans. This type of active labor is strikingly similar to that practiced by bloggers, online glamour models, social media gurus, and other people practicing micro-celebrity. However, we do not mean to suggest that micro-celebrity is a democratizing practice. Micro-celebrity practitioners do not see the returns on their efforts that mainstream famous people do; their dreams of financial success or trappings of wealth are rarely achieved. Moreover, celebrity performance of access and affiliation reveals the inner workings of unequal status, making power differentials clear. Responsiveness on Twitter is variable: while Ashton Kutcher may not write back to his fans, a fan will typically write back to him, and Ashton Kutcher will typically respond to other celebrities. This type of public recognition marks certain people as more important than others. We see these tensions embodied in people like Perez Hilton, who occupies a liminal space where he is criticized for responding to celebrity practitioners rather than fans. Celebrity is by necessity a co-performance that requires fan deference and mutual recognition of unequal status to succeed – otherwise, the practitioner is famous only in his or her own mind. Twitter does, to some extent, bring

famous people and fans 'closer' together, but it does not equalize their status. Rather, it reveals that the *reasons* for power differentials between 'celebrities' and 'non-celebrities' are performative constructs that can be leveraged by anyone with a webcam, social network site profile, or Twitter account for their own uses. But practicing celebrity and having celebrity status are different. It remains to be seen whether the opening-up of these techniques will create spaces for different types of celebrities.

New media not only provides new outlets for the exploration of celebrity, but complicates the dynamics between celebrity practitioners, their audiences, and those who occupy spaces in-between. Interactions between famous people are typically brokered through entertainment media or kept from public view; Twitter allows famous people to make their conversations publicly visible. This requires celebrity practitioners to navigate skillfully the performative friendships, feuds, and negotiations with others, all in front of their fans and the mainstream media. Twitter also disrupts the expectation of parasociality between the famous person and the fan. The study of celebrity culture has primarily focused on fans as separate from celebrities, but the ability of famous people to read and reply to fans has given rise to new sets of practices and interactions. Celebrity practitioners must harness this ability to maintain ongoing affiliations and connections with their fans, rather than seem uncaring or unavailable. Thus, Twitter creates a new expectation of intimacy. Rather than handing off fan management to an agent or fan club, celebrity practitioners must expend emotional labor maintaining a network of affective ties with their followers. Thus, even the famous must learn the techniques used by 'regular people' to gain status and attention online. Twitter demonstrates the transformation of 'celebrity' from a personal quality linked to fame to a set of practices that circulate through modern social media.

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## Biographies

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**danah Boyd** is a senior researcher at Microsoft Research and a research affiliate at Harvard's Berkman Center for Internet and Society. Her research focuses on youth engagement with social media. She is a co-author of *Hanging Out, Messing Around, and Geeking Out: Kids Living and Learning with New Media* (2009).