

Paper presented at EUPOP 2017, 6th International Conference of the European Popular Culture Association, University of the Arts London, 25.07.-27.07.2017.

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“Where Do They Come From, Where Do They Go?”

Celebrity Show Participants and the Fame Cycle

This paper is a work in progress based on my long-time research in the field of reality TV and my newer interest in celebrity studies. The combination of the different concepts and understandings of celebrity leads to new dynamics in the reality TV genre, so-called celebrity shows. It describes reality shows such as *The Osbournes* or *Keeping Up with the Kardashians* which document the everyday life of celebrities of any kind.

However, reality shows like *Big Brother*, *Pop Idol* and most notably documentary-style reality series such as *Geordie Shore* do not cast but fabricate celebrities within the staging and presentation of the format. Participants become known for appearing on reality TV which for them implies the possibility to achieve a celebrity status – at first within reality TV.

By referring to the concept of the “Fame Cycle” by Ruth Deller (2016), this paper discusses another understanding of celebrity and looks at how reality TV creates and recreates its celebrities. For now, I do not include news, boulevard or other related formats, or social media or online activities.

Celebrity

As a cultural concept, certain aspects of celebrity seem to establish a person as a celebrity. Following Chris Rojek (2001), one basic understanding of celebrity is “the attribution of

glamorous or notorious status to an individual within the public sphere” (10). This ambiguity is amplified in media representations based on the demeanor of celebrities: they are either extraordinary or like everybody else, down-to-earth or pretentious, and so on.

In contrast, a ‘star’ is much more defined by talent, achievements or professional appearances in cultural fields such as film, music or sports, and ‘personality’ largely refers to a public person’s behavior and attitude and can, for example, include politicians or scientists.

Graeme Turner (2010) describes celebrity as a “human pseudo event” (5), meaning a celebrity persona, is planned, fabricated and staged *for* media distribution but also *by means of media* on a cultural, economic, and social level. In this understanding celebrities are self-referential and a commodity of more or less individual features, which circulates in media. Their effectiveness is measured through media visibility or coverage. According to Turner, the precise moment when a public figure becomes a celebrity is “the point at which media interest in their activities is transferred from reporting on their public role to investigating the details of their private lives” (8).

Reality TV and Celebrealities

That is where reality TV comes in. Reality TV in general documents ordinary people and aspects of their ordinary lives that might be entertaining. It follows a “claim to the real” (Holmes/Jermyn 2004: 5) which means the portrayed people and their biographies exist in everyday real life outside the show. But reality TV productions also stage and script certain parts of the stories to produce suspense, crisis, and conflict for entertainment purposes.

Reality TV primarily focuses on the private and intimate details of the participants’ lives to create public interest in it. In reality TV, celebrities mostly oscillate between an authentic self and a staged media-self. They are popular cultural personae who represent roles and create certain media images through their media presence. So, in reality TV, celebrity can be understood as a cultural practice and celebrities as cultural fabrications.

Celebrealities shows by definition present the private lives of people who already are or rather were considered to be celebrities of any kind and whose life is considered worth reporting on. As Palmer-Mehta and Haliliuc (2009) note: „The celebrealities genre moves

away from the everyday person to feature faded or C-list celebrities seeking to jump-start their careers” (n.p.).

I would argue that celebrealty does not necessarily need to involve faded or C-list celebrities. Shows such as *The Osbournes*, *Hogan Knows Best*, or *Gene Simmons Family Jewels* depict the lives of established celebrities who are still known for their previously achieved media fame outside of reality TV. But reality TV can also establish personalities as celebrealities based on the fame they already gained in other public or social areas, because of wealth or business success. Examples are shows like *The Simple Life* with Paris Hilton or *Keeping Up with the Kardashians*.

On a side note, celebrealty personalities then are distinct from “celetoids” (Turner 2004: 25), who are one-time celebrities such as lottery winners or mistresses with a fixed short-term fame span.

In contrast, documentary-style reality series, in particular, MTV shows such as *Geordie Shore*, present the pre-constructed everyday life of people who previously were not famous at all. As Misha Kavka (2012) writes, this recent form of reality TV „uses (largely) unscripted interactions among participants placed in carefully constructed environments and controlled situations. (...) It challenges participants to perform yet rewards them for being themselves. It treats celebrities as ordinary people and ordinary people as celebrities“ (179). This form of celebrification of ordinary people then creates public interest and justifies the social value of accessing private lives.

The Additional Understanding of Celebrealty

All this allows for an additional understanding of ‘celebrealty’ in the context of documentary-style reality series. Once a participant evolved to a reality TV celebrity, subsequent reality shows can be based on her achieved celebrity status. ‘Celebrealty’ then primarily describes reality shows about people who exclusively became known on a reality show and whose celebrity status is maintained and negotiated only within further reality TV appearances.

This understanding emphasizes the celebrity aspect of ‘being known for being known’ and the reality TV aspect of investigating details of the private lives of famous people. In fact, ‘celebrealty’ as well describes the actual person who appears on such shows and who can do so as long as reality shows can use her initially expressed character, behavior, and lifestyle as entertainment material.

The Fame Cycle

This is discussed in the concept of the ‘Fame Cycle’ by Ruth Deller (2016). Its six stages look at competitive celebrity reality shows and career opportunities for participants and their motivations to appear on reality shows such as *I’m a Celebrity... Get Me Out of Here!* which gathers celebrity participants from different stages.

‘Pre-celebrities’ are unknown ordinary contestants in reality shows, ‘proto-celebrities’ have a certain degree of fame in a niche. ‘Promotional celebrities’ are professional media persons trying to boost their career through reality TV appearances, ‘proper celebrities’ are well-known and established and only appear in reality TV as judges, guests or mentors. ‘(Re-)purposed celebrities’ are rebranding themselves, for example, in a new reality TV area or through presenting major life changes. And finally, the ‘post-celebrities’ are of no more public interest but try to restore their fame on reality TV (Deller 2016: 374ff.).

However, the fame cycle does not necessarily end with the ‘post-celebrity’ or begin with the ‘pre-celebrity’. Deller notes: “Not all celebrities will cycle through each stage: some may get stuck on one stage; others may bypass several stages altogether; and some may operate in two stages simultaneously“ (376).

Types of Celebrealty Shows and the Example of Charlotte Crosby

This seems true, especially for celebrealty personalities. So, when starting as a pre-celebrity on a show, they immediately become a promotional celebrity without previously being known to a public outside of television. That is because promoting and performing their self and transferring their private lives into reality TV entertainment is the only contribution a celebrealty person can offer, at least in the beginning.

Now the assumption is that the staged universe of a celebrealty show provides room for constant self-branding of celebrealty personalities. Or even further: certain shows merely build on the self-branding and/or re-branding of celebrealities as an entertainment resource.

It starts with a reality series, in which participants initially become celebrealities due to their expressed and depicted behavior, a prime example is MTV's *Geordie Shore*. Such shows usually change into a celebrealty show after some more seasons and allow for the further use of its participants in different celebrealty shows, for example:

- a participant appears in celebrity versions of competitive reality shows alongside other former and/or current celebrities of all kinds, such as *Celebrity Big Brother*;
- a participant appears in celebrealty shows alongside other and/or former reality show participants, such as *Ex on the Beach* which focus on private issues like dating and relationships;
- a participant gets a personal documentary-style reality show that focuses on distinctive aspects of her character, lifestyle, or biography, for example, *The Charlotte Crosby Experience*;
- a participant appears as a celebrity guest on special episodes of game shows such as *Tipping Point* or *Safeword*;
- a participant becomes a celebrity host or presenter of another type of reality show, for example, *Just Tattoo of Us*.

All these possibilities apply to the career of British reality TV personality Charlotte Crosby. She started as an original cast member of *Geordie Shore* in 2011, then competed on and won *Celebrity Big Brother UK* in 2013. In 2014 she got her personal reality show *The Charlotte Crosby Experience* which had her travelling to foreign countries and cultures. She then was on *Ex on the Beach*, a show where a group of men and women is staying on a tropical island. Bit by bit their ex-partners arrive, in Charlotte's case her former *Geordie Shore* housemate, to either get revenge or win their ex back while also new romances develop. Meanwhile, Charlotte continued as a cast member of *Geordie Shore*. She quit in 2016 and is now the host of MTV's *Just Tattoo of Us*, a show in which couples talk about their relationships and then design tattoos for each other.

Charlotte is a good example to illustrate the spectrum of possible interpretations and designated purposes of celebrealty personalities. Her official online biography describes her

as “uniquely honest” and “highly amusing”, while for example, The Guardian once called the *Geordie Shore* cast “hormone-fuelled fluorescent ninnies” who do not “understand basic social norms” (Heritage 2011). We do not need to consider any of those attributions seriously. Still, these extremes both work for creating a celebrealty image.

Another example would be Charlotte’s *Geordie Shore* housemate Vicky Pattison, who won *I’m a celebrity... Get me out of Here!* in 2015, also starred on *Ex on the Beach*, and then had her own show *Judge Geordie* in which she was giving relationship advice and settling family feuds in the style of a court show.

The Celebrealty Pendulum

While the initial reality show appearance creates the first brand of a celebrealty personality, the follow-up shows are rebranding it or trying to boost the role of the celebrealty to a more serious or complex one. According to the ‘Fame Cycle’, celebrealty personalities, therefore, seem to swing between ‘promotional celebrity’ and ‘repurposed celebrity’ in a *celebrealty pendulum*.

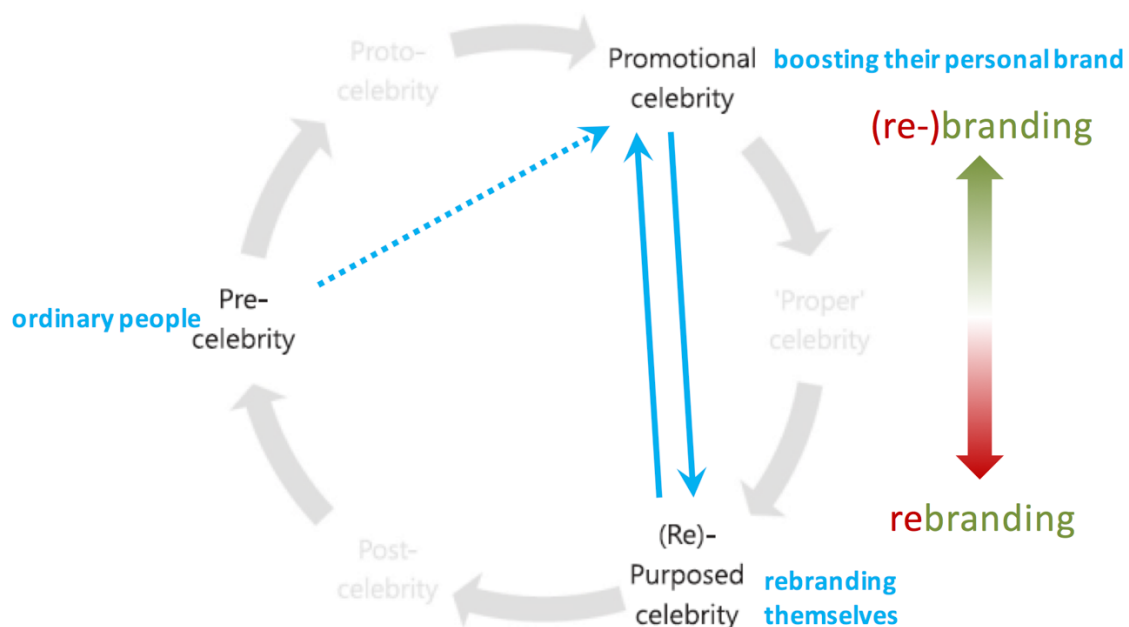


Fig.1 The Celebrealty Pendulum

And they only pass the chance of being proper celebrities which for celebrealities is a liminal state they cannot achieve. Though they might be well-known in the reality TV world, their expertise of being a judge or a host only refers to their experience of being a celebreality. They rarely provide ‘proper’ professional expertise in the way, for example, Heidi Klum does for *Project Runway*.

The pendulum of Charlotte Crosby illustrates her career so far. After rising to fame on *Geordie Shore*, she promoted that fame on *Celebrity Big Brother*, *The Charlotte Crosby Experience* and *Ex on the Beach*. Her concurrent appearance on *Geordie Shore* presented her step-by-step transformation based on other reality show appearances and authenticated her celebrealty personality. After successfully rebranding herself and reshaping her physical appearance she became the host of *Just Tattoo of Us*. This process also produced biography books and weight loss and fitness DVDs which proves that rebranding as well takes place outside of reality TV – but with a perspective to re-address it in an appropriate celebrealty show.

Concluding Thoughts

The promoting, branding, and rebranding mutually unfold between a person’s provided character, lifestyle, and biography and the concept of a reality show. *Geordie Shore* is about sharing living space, partying and on-and-off relationships, such as the one of Charlotte and fellow cast member Gaz Beadle. Such private aspects can become a subject of discussion among participants in follow-up shows like *Celebrity Big Brother*, which are designed for celebrities to confess or gossip about their private lives. The celebrealities stay present and can refresh, re-address or reframe previously established images. The same works for *Ex on the Beach*: Charlotte and Gaz meet again as contestants, and their well-known relationship is renegotiated in a dating game show.

Most careers of celebrealty personalities illustrate “the work of being watched” as Mark Andrejevic calls it. The ‘Fame Cycle’ names many ways for celebrities to enter reality TV and to subsequently get a career boost. However, celebrities like Ozzy Osbourne, Gene Simmons, or Bret Michaels from *Rock of Love* can use reality shows to get back into their original professional area in which they became famous – in this case the music business.

In contrast, the ‘celebreality pendulum’ illustrates, that people who initially rise to fame on reality TV mostly stay in reality TV to maintain their status as a celebreality. There is hardly a way out of reality TV and into rather quality television fame for them. Even if Charlotte Crosby changed her style, lost weight and is now the host of *Just Tattoo of Us*, she is still the *Geordie Shore* loudmouth, yet still authentic and herself.

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