FAME: ITS CHARACTER, ACQUISITION, AND LOSS

Joseph Nathan Cohen
Department of Sociology
City University of New York, Queens College
65-30 Kissena Boulevard
Queens, New York 11367 USA
Email: joseph.cohen@qc.cuny.edu
Web: www.josephnathancohen.info
Twitter: @jncohen
LinkedIn: https://www.linkedin.com/in/jncohen/

FIRST DRAFT
Comments and corrections appreciated
Please send feedback to joseph.cohen@qc.cuny.edu

This paper explores the concepts of "fame" and "celebrity" and reviews recent social scientific research that might shed light on the processes that cause someone to gain or lose fame. It explores the concepts of fame and celebrity, how they are measured, and their evolution through time. It contemplates various explanations for how individuals become famous, including achievement, hype, charisma, status, becoming a symbol, and enterprise development, which often involves the adoption of marketing and consumer product business-like strategies. It discusses how celebrities stay relevant, how they can fade into obscurity, and the effects of cancellation and stigma on their fame.

Keywords: Fame, Celebrity, Sociology of Culture, Content Creation, Creative Enterprise Management

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Biographical Note:
Joseph Cohen is an Associate Professor of Sociology at Queens College in the City University of New York. He is co-Director of the Queens Podcast Lab and a faculty member in Queens College's Program in Data Analytics and Applied Social Research. As part of this project, Cohen runs a sociologist-focused occupational podcast called *The Annex Sociology Podcast*, available on major podcast distribution platforms.

In the future, everyone will be world-famous for 15 minutes

Andy Warhol (?), 1968

This quote is a workhorse quote in the literature on fame. Though it is generally attributed to the famous American pop artist Andy Warhol (1928 – 1987), its authorship is disputed (see Nuwer 2018). Warhol rose to fame in the 1960s as part of the "Pop" art movement (Gopnik 2021), which remixed images or representations of familiar objects to general audiences. It featured recognizable people and things, unlike the abstract work that preceded it as the art world's darlings (e.g., of Jackson Pollock, Willem de Kooning, or Franz Kline) (Miller 1974). Some of Warhol's most famous work portrays consumer brands and celebrities that were familiar to regular people, like his "Brillo Boxes" (left) and "Marilyn Monroe" (right) below in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Andy Warhol's "Brillo Boxes" (left) and Marilyn Monroe (right). [1]

[1] "Brillo Boxes" (left) © 2017 Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York. Reproduction, including downloading of ARS works, is prohibited by copyright laws and international conventions without the express written permission of Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York; "Marilyn Monroe" (right) © Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York. Fair Use. Image exemplifies Warhol's production of content comprised of elements that would be recognizable to mainstream audiences.

In his history of Warhol, Gopnik (2021) writes that the worlds of marketing, media, and fame were not just Warhol's subjects. The artist found ways to stand out among his contemporaries in the Pop movement by embodying his subjects' public behavior:

> *Even early on, Warhol … understood that he could upstage his closest peers by inhabiting Pop's themes instead of just portraying them. Posing as the Great American Commodity, Warhol remained one of his own art's central subjects until the day he died, and his treatment of that subject - himself - always hovered between celebration, critique, and satire.*

In other words, Warhol's rise to fame was not just a matter of him producing great art. He rose to prominence in part by embracing marketing and celebrity culture himself. He became part performance artist, playing the role of pop culture enthusiast and icon.[2] Like many of today's successful creators, he stretched his personal brand across multiple media to enjoy a gainful career as a creator, purveying all sorts of content. He produced, wrote for, and appeared in many films. He published his writing. Warhol was featured in countless photo spreads. He collaborated with famous musicians on album artwork. By the mid-1980s, the acclaimed visual artist hosted a celebrity talk show on MTV called *Andy Warhol's Fifteen Minutes*.

Precisely what is involved in this "Fame Game"? Exactly what was Warhol doing to become famous? What do today's savvy cultural figures do to get and stay in the limelight? This paper reviews ideas on what makes people become and remain famous. It begins with an introduction to the theoretical concepts of "fame" and "celebrity," as they are employed here. Then, it enumerates factors that might play into becoming famous. Its third section discusses how celebrities fade into obscurity and how that fade might be slowed. Finally, we conclude with a summary description of the "Fame Game" – the practical work of establishing and maintaining renown – and what knowledge of this Game might generally tell us about mass communications and culture.

[2] This performative aspect of the art business more generally is described very well in Wohl's (2021) excellent ethnography of 21st-century New York City artists.

Studying Fame

The concepts of "fame" and "celebrity."

Warhol's work was widely understood as both celebrating and mocking fame and celebrity.[3] It is a sentiment that resonates with those who feel that there are "too many celebrities" (Jones 2014, Bromwich 2020) and too many who are "famous for being famous" (Furedi 2010). It reflects views like those of Rojek (2012), who portrays our relationship with celebrities as dysfunctional attachments to privileged (and often talentless) narcissists and laments their lack of talent.[4] A surprising number of scholars have formally registered their opinions of Kim Kardashian's fameworthiness in the peer-reviewed literature.

These views are more evergreen social commentary than new insight. To paraphrase Braudy (1986, p. 5): People have always sought new ways to draw attention to themselves. Sometimes, people's bids for renown may strike us as stupid, grotesque, or morally bankrupt. Whatever a celebrity's claim to fame, any critic can easily deride it as less worthy of exultation than the feats of, say, Alexander the Great or Jesus. There is always a chorus of critics grousing about new cultural movements while clearly idealizing the caliber of content circulating in past generations. I'm sure that if we were to travel back centuries, we would hear people complaining about how everyone loves the funny town drunk, whereas in past days people only admired pious clerics (or something like that).

Instead of expressing opinions on the value or worth of celebrities, our discussion will focus on understanding the personal qualities, practical choices, and social forces involved in becoming and remaining famous. The first step in that process involves developing more opinion-neutral criteria by

[3] A 1979 Newsweek profile captures this spirit: "[Warhol] damns, with excessive praise, the parade of hangers-on, idle rich, and important talent who whore after the camera. What has been surrendered, of course, is a belief that there is some substance deeper than worldly style. Because Warhol takes everything at face value, the old sense of self -- call it soul -- has also been surrendered." (Stevens 1979)

[4] Rojek argues that so many celebrities "have no skills, no talent and are actually value-less in terms of giving the public anything other than sensation." (Quoted in Sigee 2020).

which one might identify "celebrities." Once you have some means to identify celebrities, you can then find them and observe their behavior and the practical environments in which they operate.

The Concepts of Fame and Celebrity

What is fame? Celebrity?

Fame is used here to describe a state of being in which an individual is known to many others (Brim 2009). The word is derived from 13th century Latin "*fama*," whose meaning implies public reputation or renown (Keywords Project 2016). The term ***celebrity*** denotes a person who possesses fame and is thus known to large numbers of other people (Ferris 2010, Van de Rijt *et al.* 2013). This word is believed to have been derived from the Latin "*celebritas*" for a public rite or ceremony, though it has evolved to represent a well-known person (along with a possible insinuation that this renown is for specious reasons) (Keywords Project 2016). Both concepts refer to a situation in which an individual is recognized by and known to a broader community of strangers.[5]

Beyond this primary criterion of being "known" to strangers, there is much room for variation. Some famous people have accomplished remarkable feats or possess extraordinary qualities, while others leave us wondering why they are famous. Some are loved and respected, while others seem to be hated, ridiculed, or even victimized by their celebrity. Some celebrities are known to virtually everyone, while others are barely recognized outside their narrow niches or immediate geographic areas. The tie that binds them all is that they are recognized by, and are known to, a substantial number of people with whom they are not personally acquainted.

[5] There is also a legal concept of a "public figure" (Brim 2009), a meaningful designation in legal matters associated with fame, like defamation. The distinction is not germane to this discussion but is a concept about which students of culture and practicing content creators should be aware. See Hancock (2005) for an extended discussion.

There are several benefits to thinking of fame in these simple and narrow terms. It helps us keep an open mind when searching for different forms of fame and imagining new and different paths to celebrity. It gives us objective yardsticks by which we can identify celebrities and assess fame, and perhaps a method to control our natural inclination both to exaggerate the reach or impact of famous people to whom we have attached personally and to diminish the worth of those whose persona, content, or fans we do not like. However, this kind of explanation is light on details and leaves us with the task of imagining the specifics of fame's character and workings.

A Modern Manifestation of Basic Impulses. On the one hand, fame and celebrity experience constant change. As time passes, different types of people rise to fame for doing other things. In past eras, people might have had difficulty imagining a secular, working-class, female, nonwhite, or LGBT celebrity. They might have needed help grasping how someone could become famous by doing ASMR videos, Minecraft livestreams, or yoga blogs. On the other hand, fame is timeless. Some incarnation of celebrity appears to have existed as far back as ancient societies (Garland 2010). Ancient Rome may have had its celebrities, but the typical Ancient Roman would face challenges trying to make sense of most Instagram influencer accounts.

Fame is not an Internet gimmick nor a product of modern media or media markets. In part, it manifests some fundamental facets of human social behavior. As noted, the phenomena of celebrities and their image management predate modern mass media or capitalism. Likewise, fame and celebrity have clear analogs in everyday life. They seem quite similar to middle or high school popularity, a situation in which some subset of students draws disproportionate attention and affection from others and comes to be known as objects of attention and prestige in their social worlds (Cillessen *et al.* 2011). Some incarnation of or analog to celebrity emerges naturally in longstanding and commonplace environments not heavily mediated by technology or market forces.

Despite this timeless core, the look and behavior of a society's celebrities will change over time. Some of it is the usual displacement of cultural forms over time. Tastes change, new cultural forms displace older ones, and cultural production and distribution tools evolve. Those seeking celebrity must innovate and evolve because creating new things is one important means of drawing attention and "breaking through the clutter" of all the other communications vying for audience attention. Contexts also change so that elements of a celebrity's image or content can gain or lose favor or relevance, thereby pressing society's celebrities to adapt or make room for those who can attain relevance. Finally, technological changes can alter how fame manifests concretely at any time or place, such that the population of the "famous" will change along with changes to the platforms by which communicators can reach audiences. The character of celebrity changes, even if its essence is timeless.

Measuring Fame

Understanding fame by seeing how experts measure it.

One way to probe what is meant by a concept is to look at how researchers measure it. In addition to celebrity-focused research performed across the social sciences, considerable non-academic research on the topic has also been done. Much of this work has been produced for the media, marketing, and entertainment industries. Enlisting a celebrity's participation, endorsement, or likeness for a communications project can cost millions. In higher-stakes deals, firms have enlisted social scientists to assess a person's reputation's reach, character, and overall quality before finalizing such contracts.

The empirical measurement of celebrity has evolved in recent decades. Before the Internet, revenue figures (like record sales, ticket sales, advertisement sales, and charitable donations raised) were the most widely available data to anchor assessments of a celebrity's reputation. The demands of

bookkeeping and financial reporting forced communications enterprises to generate and maintain this data, making it a widely available metric for evaluating a person's ability to draw audiences. For example, some Hollywood actors are believed to be "bankable stars" (like Tom Hanks, Jim Carrey, or Tom Cruise) whose appearance in a movie in and of itself is expected to generate minimum box office.[6] These types of data are blunt instruments because a celebrity's presence or participation in a project is one of many variables that influence the commercial success of the cultural product that features them.

More sophisticated pre-Internet era enterprises often supplemented financial data with custom and off-the-shelf assessments from private researchers. This field of research deployed the standard repertoire of social science research methodology (e.g., focus groups, ethnography, surveys, diary studies) to generate empirical inferences about celebrities' renown and status in larger populations (a field to which sociologists made a considerable contribution, see Jerabek 2017). Firms like Nielsen and Arbitron developed technologies to track audience engagement with mass communications outlets (Buzzard 2002). Specialty research firms devised data products that assessed audiences' engagement with and reaction to celebrities themselves. One famous example is the Q-Score, which asked respondents recognition, familiarity, knowledge, and attitude questions about celebrities than is available today (Finkle 1992, Chalanyova and Mikulas 2017). Figure 2 (below) reproduces a sample Q-score profile for a hypothetical star distributed by a research firm called Marketing Evaluations from Port Washington. The data measure recognition and affect in absolute terms and relative to comparative famous people.

[6] For a more comprehensive – and ultimately critical - examination of the concept of "star power," see De Vany and Walls (1999)

The Q Scores Company The Q Scores Compa

DEAD Q	CELEBRITY NAME (Description)							ALL PERFORMER OF THE PAST AVERAGES					
	ONE OF MY FAVORITES %	VERY GOOD %	GOOD %	FAIR/POOR %	TOTAL FAMILIAR %	POSITIVE Q SCORE %	NEGATIVE Q SCORE %	ONE OF MY FAVORITES %	VERY GOOD %	GOOD %	FAIR/POOR %	TOTAL FAMILIAR %	POSITIV Q SCOR %
TOTAL SAMPLE	22	31	25	13	90	24	14	11	19	23	8	61	17
AGE OF ADULT													
18 - 34	25	27	21	11	83	29	13	7	11	12	6	36	20
35 - 49	22	32	22	10	87	25	12	9	17	23	7	57	15
50 - 64	22	28	31	16	97	23	17	12	22	32	11	77	14
65 AND OVER	19	37	26	16	98	19	16	16	26	29	11	81	18
18 - 49	23	30	21	11	85	27	12	8	14	18	6	47	17
50 AND OVER	20	33	29	16	97	21	16	14	24	30	11	79	16
25 - 54	23	30	22	11	85	27	13	9	15	20	7	51	17
TOTAL MALES	30	29	21	11	90	33	12	12	20	22	9	62	18
18 - 34	40	23	13	7	81	49	8	9	13	11	4	37	25
35 - 49	26	31	21	8	85	30	10	10	18	22	7	57	17
50 AND OVER	27	30	25	15	97	28	16	14	24	28	13	80	17
25 - 54	29	28	19	8	84	35	9	10	17	19	6	52	19
TOTAL FEMALES	15	33	28	15	91	17	16	9	18	24	8	59	15
18 - 34	15	30	25	14	84	18	17	6	10	13	7	35	16
35 - 49	17	34	24	13	88	20	14	8	17	24	8	57	13
50 AND OVER	14	34	32	16	97	15	17	13	24	33	9	79	15
25 - 54	18	32	24	13	87	21	15	8	14	20	7	50	14
ANNUAL INCOME													
UNDER $30,000	22	31	28	12	93	23	13	11	18	21	9	58	17
$30,000 - $59,999	22	34	23	14	93	24	15	12	19	24	8	64	18
$60,000 - $99,999	23	29	21	13	85	27	15	11	19	25	7	62	16
$100,000 AND OVER	21	30	25	13	89	24	14	9	18	23	9	59	15
$75,000 AND OVER	20	30	23	13	86	24	15	10	18	23	8	59	16
NIELSEN COUNTY SIZE													
A	25	29	23	9	86	29	10	11	18	22	7	58	18
B	21	31	25	16	92	23	17	10	19	22	9	61	16
C/D	20	33	26	15	93	21	16	10	18	26	9	63	15
REGION													
NORTH EAST	18	34	23	14	89	20	16	9	18	25	9	61	15
MIDWEST	25	29	29	11	94	27	12	12	19	27	9	67	17
SOUTH	24	32	21	12	89	27	13	11	18	21	8	58	18

Figure 2: Example Q-Score Report for Hypothetical Celebrity[7]

These were sophisticated efforts for their time, but overall, there was considerably less data on audiences' connections to celebrities in the pre-Internet era. Communications enterprises were more pressed to invest their faith in their executives' intuitions, which hopefully had insights into audiences' zeitgeists without access to the rich array of behavioral data that we now employ under similar circumstances. As media and information exchange moved online, new opportunities emerged to measure an individual's capacity to draw attention and inculcate connections using data on people's online behavior, like website clicks, podcast downloads, or followers and engagements on social media platforms. This leap – from self-reports to fine-grained behavioral data — allowed us to see how many people connected to celebrities and not just how many people recollected and admitted to doing so. Moreover, the data could drill down to very narrow details of who was attached to celebrities and which types of content drove people to or away from a star.

[7] Screenshot taken from example product distributed by Marketing Evaluations (qscores.com). Fair use. Exemplifies private commercial/non-academic social science research on fame and celebrity. Retrieved from https://www.qscores.com/dead on September 6, 2022.

These new data have created opportunities to quantify fame and new efforts to develop niches in the celebrity quantification industry.[8] There exists a sizable industry of firms that track our online behavior through the many arrangements to which we agree when we click "accept" on a device, website, app, or online service. The major social media firms openly transmit information on who we know, whose stuff we like, what we watch, and what we say to people. Data analysts can mine this data to see who follows, talks about, or otherwise interacts with a celebrity, providing an empirical basis for assessing how well someone is known, given thought, and liked.

These changes to empirical assessments of fame may occur, but they still retain a similar grasp of their core concepts. The information that these efforts use to measure fame involves some combination of how widely a person is known, how often people engage with them, what is known about them, and how people feel about them. They all try to capture what strangers know about them (or their public persona).

Celebrity Exists in a Field

In general, celebrity exists in a confined cultural space.

For all but the most famous celebrities — like the President of the United States or Tom Hanks — fame exists in a domain or field of attention. If you are a baseball fan, then you probably know of Mike Trout, respect his skill and accomplishments, and might jump at the chance to have him visit your town or meet your kids. You would more readily notice his face on a billboard, click on a story about him, or consider a person or product that he is endorsing. However, if neither you nor anyone else in your world cares about baseball, Trout might as well be Salman Khan and Dilraba Dilmurat (two far, far

[8] One well-publicized effort from the early 2010s was Klout, a tech enterprise that endeavored to quantify renown based on social media activity (e.g., likes, shares, comments, follows, and other engagement metrics) (Rao *et al.* 2015). While Klout did not survive, it stands as an example of many efforts to devise methods of quantifying celebrity through Internet engagement data (see Arora *et al.* 2019).

more famous stars). Celebrity is unlike money in that it is not redeemable everywhere (though it can come close if you are famous enough). It exists primarily among those who know, pay attention to, or otherwise engage with a celebrity and know and care about the topics, interests, or concerns to which a star pertains. So someone like Starling Marte — a pretty good professional baseball player — is likely better known and enjoys more perquisites of fame than someone like Inaki Goikoetxea, reputed to be the greatest jai-alai player of all time (Bach 2014). Marte's accomplishments are understood and appreciated by millions of baseball fans, while Goikoetxea enjoys the esteem of however many hundreds or thousands of Americans know and appreciate jai-alai. A person's celebrity is bound up with the field or domain of attention where the renown was acquired.

So, the fate of an individual's fame can be bound up with the fame of their field. Celebrities can establish positions of prestige and renown in little-known fields and see their general notability rise with the field. Anthony Fauci was well-respected in the world of communicable disease research, but it took COVID-19 to make him a fixture on TV and magazine covers. The reverse can occur, where a celebrity loses attention as interest in their field fades. For example, 1980s comedian Yakov Smirnoff, whose act involved satirizing life in the Soviet Union, lost relevance after communism's fall and the Cold War's end (profiled in Martinez 1993).

This tie between celebrities and the fields can incentivize celebrities to strengthen their areas or prompt them to part with dying or otherwise less promising fields by hitching their stars elsewhere. Donovan and Neumann (2021) describe the process of "fame-bridging" and develop the concept through the story of Anna Nicole Smith, a well-known 1990s plus-sized model who pivoted to reality TV when the cachet of her look faded in the modeling field. Many celebrities use their name as the basis for promoting commercial products. This often happens in the field of sports (e.g., campion boxer George Forman leveraged his renown to sell kitchen products; Kate Hudson (profiled in Petersen 2019) or Jessica Alba (profiled in Scipioni 2021) were Hollywood actresses who have used their notability to help

sell beauty products). When a larger field is fading, or a person sees their prospects dimming in a field, they can often preserve their livelihoods as mass communicators by redirecting their energies towards different fields and hopefully bring some of their fans with them.

Microcelebrities

Technology has given rise to a growing population of small-time celebrities.

This domain-specificity of fame has only increased over time as audiences have fragmented (for a review, see Webster and Ksiazek 2012). Whereas in past decades our universe of celebrities came to us through a more limited universe of large, general outlets (like broadcast TV and radio, national newspapers, and magazines), today's media consumers choose whom to follow from these sources plus an enormous universe of websites, podcasts, YouTube channels, blogs, and social media accounts. Rather than converging around a more limited set of information and entertainment outlets (and the people featured on them), audiences now construct more personalized and individuated media diets, each featuring more idiosyncratic mixes of people. In such an environment, our universe may include more small-time celebrities, and many more celebrities might be sustained on smaller audiences.

Within this environment, a modern variant of the celebrity phenomenon has emerged, widely termed "microcelebrity ."The term, as described by Senft (2013, p. 346), is the commonplace practice of "deploying and maintaining one's online identity as if it were a branded good." The concept contrasts a view of celebrity as a status possessed by those who pursue it professionally. It imparts a sense of regular people becoming small-scale celebrities among those who follow their online social media and creative outlets, as they would a bona fide, unqualified celebrity. Senft quotes a Swedish blogger's quip on Warhol's "Fifteen Minutes of Fame" adage to impart its thrust to this future of small-scale audiences: “In the future, we will all be famous to fifteen people.” (p. 350).

Theorists who engage in this line of discussion often posit that there are qualitative differences between microcelebrity and more conventional conceptions of celebrities. For example, Raun (2018) argues that 'affective labor,' in which they simulate an emotional or affective attachment to audiences, is intrinsic to micro-fame. Senft (2013) similarly argues that it involves blurring the line between audience and personal relations. Jerslev (2016) discusses the need for "authenticity" in new media. There is no shortage of proposed creative imperatives for creators who play to small audiences on new media.

Projecting affect, authenticity, etc., are creative options for those aspiring to fame. Some creators make deliberate decisions to maintain personal distance from fans, even at the cost of popularity; in a sense, they choose to remain "micro" to maintain their autonomy or enjoy creation. If anything, these micro-celebrities operate in an environment in which there are fewer creative constraints of this sort. The mass communications and media technologies that have helped give rise to these microcelebrities have nullified many of the costs that drove yesteryears' mass communicators into audience and revenue maximization. Under the new mass communications technological regime that helped give rise to podcasting (and similar new media), creators do not need to maximize audience draw or revenues to remain in business or even draw much in the way of money or large audiences. In my interviews with podcasters and other content creation entrepreneurs, I found that creators often prioritize their creative prerogatives over getting bigger audiences or making more money. New media give them latitude to approach audiences on their terms.

While we cannot objectively discern whether new content is better than old content, it is clear that the quantity and scope of celebrities available to people has grown exponentially over time. In both Warhol's era and ours, society experienced technological advancements in mass communications that greatly expanded the amount and scope of content available to people. New media gave rise to new media outlets featuring new kinds of content and new people. In Warhol's time, people wrestled with

what seemed like a firehose of unknown and questionable public personalities appearing on FM radio, cable and satellite TV, and cassette and VCR tapes. Today, digital platforms like YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, TikTok, podcasts, and similar startups have given rise to exponentially more outlets featuring exponentially more people to whom audiences can attach. In both eras, technological changes were making it possible to introduce a broadening range of content and people, and people opined that much of the new stuff was not so good.

Becoming Famous

How do people become famous?

> *In great part the history of public fame since the eighteenth century is a history of successive efforts to reach beyond conventions of recognition and create a perceived self that is unprecedented without being unrecognizable.*
>
> Brody (1986, 392)

How do people become famous? It is easy to come up with surface explanations of what propelled celebrities to fame, like an actor's breakthrough role, a singer's first big hit, an athlete's first big win, or a politician's first substantial electoral victory. But what are the ties that bind these different ascents to public renown? Can we generalize about these paths to celebrity?

Many theories explain how people acquire fame. These explanations convey some conception of fame's essence and impart a more detailed sense of what happens when one achieves fame. We will examine six different ways in which people can become famous: achievement, hype, charisma, status, becoming a symbol, and strategic audience development.

Achievement

Becoming famous for doing something extraordinary.

Fame is often seen as a byproduct of ***achievement***: someone is known for doing something impressive or good. Examples of achievement-based fame include someone like Michael Phelps (28-time Olympic medalist), Steve Jobs (who created one of the world's most valuable businesses), Meryl Streep (21 Oscar nominations), or Barack Obama (elected President of the United States). In their respective fields — competitive swimming, entrepreneurship, acting, and politics — they have undoubtedly established themselves as the best of their era. Some people may be less successful but still very accomplished and notable within their fields. Readers who share interests in these fields might know of Katie Ledecky, Steve Case, Tilda Swinton, and Mitch McConnell and also consider them to be celebrities. Smaller-scale and more local spells of fame might accrue to whoever wins all the local swimming tournaments, is elected mayor, owns one of the big businesses in town, or starred in the community play that everyone loved.

The achievement view of celebrity status acquisition is often presented in contrast to "fame for being famous," along with some arguments intimating that people were famous for good reasons in the past but that many new stars are just attention-seekers. Though we might not see, appreciate, or value a celebrity's achievements, it is worth a pause before an immediate conclusion that no talent or achievement exists. Take the example of Kim Kardashian, whom cultural analysts have routinely held up as a paragon of empty celebrity. She is a highly accomplished improv actress who helped create a nationally-ranked television series that drew huge audiences. As an entrepreneur, she has spearheaded the development of many highly successful commercial products and acquired a net worth equal to that of Steve Case. With hundreds of millions of followers on social media, she has effectively built a mass communications enterprise with a circulation that easily dwarfs significant print or broadcast outlets. This is an Alfred Ogilvy-level achievement in the field of communications. From a point of view that appreciates the difficulty of building large communicative enterprises, it is tough to see Ms. Kardashian

as nothing more than an attention-seeking spectacle. The widespread assumption that she is an empty spectacle might be hasty.

Achievement exists to some degree in the eye of the beholder, and any attempt to judge real from non-achieved celebrity seems littered with value judgments. Consider the case of Ted Bundy, one of America's most famous mass murderers. He is a cultural icon some writers, podcasters, and video creators routinely celebrate as among the modern era's leading serial killers. Content that celebrates harmful people and even ranks them as if it were a contest is a major sub-genre in culture markets (and in podcasting). Research suggests that murderers can attach to other celebrity murderers as role models and deliberately seek fame with some orientation towards a field focused on doing harm (Langman 2018), just as an aspiring baseball player wants to emulate Mike Trout. Any activity in which people can be ranked can also be construed as achievement.

To its credit, though, these "fame for being famous" narratives do attune people to the insight that there is more to celebrity than achievement alone. The world's most famous scientist is likely not its best scientist, much as the world's most renowned chef is probably not the world's best cook. So, what else goes into building celebrities?

Hype

Becoming famous through communications campaigns.

To ***hype*** something is to publicize it. It is to spread communications that alert people of something's existence and desirability. The word is likely derived from "hyperbole" and is often used to describe exaggerated or contrived methods of gaining exposure or spreading information. Setting aside judgments about whether fame is exaggerated or merited, those seeking fame can employ techniques designed to deliberately disseminate information and excitement about some object of attention, be it a

product, a person, or something else. To the extent that someone's fame is rooted in these types of strategic promotional communications, their fame could be described as the product of "hype".

Hype involves doing things that help saturate an audience's informational and communicative environment with messages that feature a person to be celebrated. A person can be hyped through paid methods, where money is paid to promote a person's identity through display advertising, print advertising, commercials, paid product placements, promoted social media posts, or social media mentions. Such methods might be contrasted with "earned" exposures or engagements, in which audiences are moved to redistribute one's messages on their platforms. This can involve creating content or events retransmitted by other mass media (e.g., generating press events or stories) or content that gains widespread attention through word-of-mouth or social media shares (e.g., funny or moving videos that people share). People also achieve exposure through joint ventures between two creative enterprises, in which the two effectively trade exposure through a collaborative content product. For example, this strategy is at work when two YouTubers work on a collaborative video and hope it gains followers from your collaborator's audience base.

The challenge in generating fame from hype is that one can purchase or momentarily earn exposure, but not necessarily engagement and attachment. ***Exposure*** occurs when a piece of information presents itself to an audience's sensory field, for example, when a person is featured on a TV show, a social media stream, or a billboard that enters our field of vision but might not capture our attention. ***Engagement*** occurs when an audience member invests attention in and interacts with that information, for example, when they read text, listen to a radio segment, zoom in to get a better look at a picture, or click on a link. ***Attachment*** occurs when an audience member comes to acquire more profound knowledge, interest, or affection for the person being hyped. Exposure can be purchased, but audience reactions like engagement and attachment cannot. Figuring out how to make this conversion from exposure to attachment has been a "holy grail" in media and communications fields (Moe *et al.*

2016). Research on the topic is said to be underdeveloped and often stalled at the point of definitional arguments (Barger *et al.* 2016). Practitioners do not have developed the silver bullet that turns highly-promoted people into beloved stars.

In the ideal, hype provides an initial push in exposure, which propels further cascades of communication about a celebrity and their projects through the social environment of a target audience (Wind and Mahajan 1987, Vasterman 2005). You craft a message intended to draw attention and engagement within a predefined social universe and boost its distribution through mass and social media (through paid promotion and the strategic use of one's communicative platforms), hoping others will redeploy that information. When it is successful, a hyped object of attention is picked up in third-party communicative exchanges, spreading information about the person being propelled to fame. The process sounds simple in the abstract but is challenging to achieve in practice.

Hype can be part of a celebrity's path to fame, but it is neither a necessary nor sufficient condition. Exposure costs money, there is no guarantee that audiences will attach to a person being hyped without that continued investment, and there may come a point at which people cannot or no longer want to buoy someone's public attention.

Charisma

Becoming famous through extreme personal charm

Ferris (2007) describes celebrity as a "surfeit of charisma" in the Weberian sense. The word ***charisma*** is rooted in the Greek *charis* for "charm" or "beauty" (Antonakis *et al.* 2016). For Max Weber, charisma was one of the three reasons people deferred to each other, in addition to tradition and rules. A "traditional" authority is one to which we defer because that is what we have done in the past. "Rational-legal authority" occurs in deference to a rule system upon which a group relies to maintain

order (like the law, the Constitution, or the rules governing a business). “Charismatic authority” accrues to an individual, notwithstanding precedent or the formal rules. For Weber, charisma was:

> *a certain quality of an individual personality whereby [someone] is set apart from ordinary men and treated as endowed with supernatural, super-human, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities. These are regarded as not accessible to the ordinary person … and on the basis of them the individual concerned is treated as a leader.*
>
> Max Weber, excerpted in Healy (2011)

Donald Trump is an example of a charismatic leader. People are – or at least were - drawn to Trump personally rather than to him as a vehicle for celebrating more impersonal institutions like the Republican Party or religious scripture. For social science researchers, it is some set of personal qualities and social relations that somehow get other people to notice, attach, and defer to those we identify as "charismatic leaders."

Researchers in leadership studies have sought to pinpoint precisely what qualities or behaviors lend themselves to charismatic leadership, moving beyond more circular definitions like "being influential" or "being special." Much of this literature has generated lists of personal – often psychological – traits observed among charismatic leaders, like attractiveness, intelligence, extroversion, or agreeability. There appears to be some agreement among leadership researchers that our understanding of charisma has not gone far past making these lists (Antonakis *et al.* 2016, Banks *et al.* 2017).

Often, the concept of charisma is employed as a type of residual category, referring to the *je ne sais quoi* that makes someone attract attention (Turner 2003). It describes the attention but does not offer a clear explanation of charisma’s character or how it works to attract people’s attention and affection. It does not generate much actionable information that an aspiring creator could use to emulate in a search for fame.

Status

Being famous because you are important or powerful.

Milner (2005) portrays celebrity as a large-scale manifestation of humans' natural inclination to create and abide by social status or prestige systems. ***Status systems*** refer to social systems that rank or establish pecking orders within a social community. It denotes a situation in which some subset of a group becomes objects of attention and deference (Sauder, Lynn, and Podolny 2012). Humans appear to have a natural penchant for developing prestige or "popularity" systems that place selected group members at the center of communal attention and influence. Some social scientists posit that our proclivity to establish and abide by status systems is a hardwired facet of human cognition and behavior and perhaps an evolutionary response to the need to defend territory and establish an orderly distribution of resources (Anderson, Hildreth, and Howland 2015; Mazur 2005). This penchant to fall into line and follow the leaders may be engrained into us through evolution.

This is an interesting conception of fame and celebrity, which alerts us to the possibility that renown is attached to people's places in society's pecking order, though the character of this causal relationship is a matter of question. There is a clear coincidence between fame and status – people have used status to gain renown, and those who gain renown might be conferred status. The notion that status acts as a vehicle for acquiring fame might provide us with a good explanation of the attention paid to CEOs, the President, or the Royal Family. It does not explain those whose status materialized after gaining popularity. Extremely popular new media creators – like Joe Rogan or Pew Die Pie – attract attention because they command large audiences instead of gaining status and seeing their followings grow. In these cases, it appears that fame preceded prestige. They receive status by the popularity they've accrued rather than becoming popular because they have achieved high status.

Status is tied to fame, providing a route to celebrity status, but much else is involved.

Becoming a Symbol

Becoming famous by standing as a symbol for an ideal or group.

As noted earlier, many celebrities are reviled. Some stars became famous for heinous acts, like Charles Manson. Others became known as beloved public figures and then engaged in some transgression that spoiled their image and left them reviled, like Bill Cosby, a famous comedian who was exposed as a serial rapist. Still others rise to fame acting as villains or trolls, like the "heel" in professional wrestling (Granelli 2017). Yet, a type of infamy exists for no clear moral transgression. In that same year Cosby fell into infamy, America's most disliked celebrities remained Kim Kardashian and Justin Bieber (McDermott 2015).

The animus directed towards objectively less objectionable people like Bieber or Kardashian may partly be attributed to cultural processes described by Bryson (1996), who argued that people attach cultural objects to social communities and tie their judgments of or affect towards the object and community together. So, for example, a person might attach a piece of content (like publications, TV shows, or music) to a social community (e.g., age, sex, geography, race, class) and have their judgments or feelings on the latter influence those on the former. So it may be that a feminist icon is reviled among communities hostile to or self-define in opposition to feminism. Likewise, a teenager who wishes to project an image of being deep and grown-up may attempt to do so by establishing role distance from the teen pop star of the day. People can dislike or deride celebrities as acts of publicly affirming social values or projecting an identity.

These facets of fame point to Alexander's (2010) conception of celebrity status as a totem or icon. Individuals are taken to embody or personify some more abstract status group, aesthetic, ethic, ideology, cause, or another ideational construct. They anthropomorphize the less tangible ideals with which we regularly grapple when forging identity, contemplating ethics, or dealing with practical

problems. If someone like Justin Bieber or Kim Kardashian as an embodiment of a social ill – of decadence, immorality, shallowness, or whatever – then people will reject the celebrities as a means of affirming their dedication to morality, depth of character, etc., whether to themselves or others. Such a conception of celebrity might argue that, for example, much of Karl Marx's professed fandom was rooted in people's attempts to affirm and identify with the anti-capitalist or socialist ideals for which he stands as a symbol, rather than out of admiration for the content of his writings. Their fandom is not precisely based on love or admiration of their work, but instead, they support these celebrities as part of their support for the larger social cause to which these celebrities came to stand as symbols. So, we might think of a celebrity as a type of figurehead or stand-in for a group. This conception of a person's notability is tied up with whom or what they represent.

This view linking fame to symbolism implies that another possible path to celebrity might involve establishing oneself as a symbol attached to an issue or cause people value. This explanation is interesting because it alerts us that celebrity status is often bound to and driven by an underlying community. However, it is a view that expresses the dynamic from the outside that details little of what is happening from the perspective of the person who is becoming famous. It is somewhat static in that it describes a situation in which a person is given a position of prominence among a community but does not explain the process that puts them in that position.

Audience Development & Communications Enterprise Management

Viewing celebrities as mass communications businesspeople.

Analysts often describe celebrities as if they are themselves consumer products (Nayar 2009). The kernel of truth is that there is a "communications business" element to the practical work of being a celebrity. Content creators often talk and behave as if they are running consumer product businesses

that "sell" digital content featuring themselves. The larger task of content creation, when studied at a closer range or experienced firsthand, often strikes as a practical endeavor that is affected by business-like concerns like supplies, financing, competition, consumer tastes, human resources, the legal and regulatory environment, and the many other similar that influence producers in manufactures, service, or other non-cultural or -informational sectors of the economy.

Celebrities might be understood as person-centered mass communications enterprises. They are ***mass communications enterprises*** in that they are organized projects whose principal task involves creating and disseminating content. They are ***person-centered*** in that the enterprise is built on the audience's attachment to a specific person's involvement, name, or likeness. Celebrities can operate as one-person operations or enlist teams of managers, lawyers, coaches, assistants, and other personnel. They might work as creative or performance subcontractors for media companies (such as when a Hollywood actor performs in a studio movie or a local voice actor gets work as a radio DJ), while others act more like owner-operators of a personal business (like a well-known columnist who starts a Substack newsletter). The tie that binds these particular kinds of mass communications enterprises is that they sell the image or involvement of a specific person to whom audiences attach personally. The person is the brand, and the communications enterprise is viable or capable because audiences connect to that person. This facet comes through in studies of creators of traditional media, like writers (Childress 2019) or visual artists (Wohl 2021), and in early-generation new media, like blogs (Duffy 2017), and it very much resonates with both my interviews and fieldwork in podcasting.

How do these enterprises attract audiences? Many of creators draw heavily on ideas and practices codified by the field of *marketing*, an applied field that studies how companies build relationships with customers (see Hunt 1976, 1992). They will explicitly reference marketing concepts when describing their creative and business processes. They talk about target markets, market niches,

and competitive advantages.[9] Their strategies in audience interaction follow the tenets of relationship marketing, with deliberate efforts to build trust and attachment by being responsive and engaging with a loyal customer base. The logic of consumer product marketing pervades creators' descriptions of their creativity and work. This is not surprising, partly because many of our podcasters were or are marketing and communications professionals and many popular podcasts are part of deliberate communications campaigns by organizations that hire them. Even those who are not trained or do not work as marketers can gain considerable exposure to marketing through a large universe of podcaster-targeted "how to" content. So, it is commonplace that creators see building a following as analogous to building a consumer base, and they turn to the experts on this topic: marketers.

Ultimately, many successful creators see building audiences or followings as akin to a business growing a customer base. They use strategies widely employed across customer-chasing firms from various product markets. The perspective is unsatisfying because it does not offer a silver-bullet strategy for securing fame. It suggests that the job is a slog that requires a continuous stream of ideas and jobs, and what works for one person might not for another. Unfortunately, this may be a more accurate description of the task for some.

Staying Famous

Getting famous is one thing. How do people stay famous?

All glory is fleeting.

George S. Patton

[9] For an interesting exemplification from our open interviews, consider our team's exchange with YouTubers Vanessa Kanbi and Chidi Ashley. See Queens Podcast Lab (2022) “Black Female YouTuber Success Stories” May 11 < https://youtu.be/erlwAD7jdc8>. These creators explicitly discuss how these factors play into their decisions. This is an accessible example of how many creators speak about their creative choices backstage. Also, like Kanbi, many creators come from a marketing background, and, like Ashley, many creators learn about marketing from content creation guidance put out by platforms and the how-to-create community.

Celebrity is a temporary state of being, though it seems possible to orchestrate and protract its existence. It can also be expeditiously crushed, or at least that is what many argue in “cancel culture” debates.

Why does celebrity fade? Why do people stop caring about or paying attention to celebrated people? One reason is that human attention is drawn to novelty, and people stop noticing or otherwise being moved by stimuli to which they are repeatedly exposed. Celebrities (and the qualities or achievements that propelled them into fame) will eventually lose novelty as the public becomes exposed, and perhaps ultimately over-exposed, to them. A song, artistic style, aesthetic look, or narrative style loses "freshness" or the impact of novelty. Celebrities can try to "refresh" or reinvest their identity through new achievements, new content, or the development of unique personal qualities (like a new look, projected trait, a new cause, etc.). Absent such a refresh or contextual change that re-vaults them into relevance, a celebrity, and their achievements fade into history, along with all the other things that we used to like and follow.

Sometimes, the fade can be fast. Some celebrities rise within a context, and lose their relevance as that context changes. For example, Anthony Fauci rose from a respected health expert to a national icon as a reasoned and plain-talking voice on disease control during a pandemic that broke out during a period of particularly hyperbolic politics. Fauci maintains esteem in the communicable disease research and policy community, but he no longer graces the cover of all the national magazines and is no longer a recurrent topic in media discussions. The attention that can accrue to celebrities may be a product of a temporary confluence of factors that make them seem very relevant, and a change in that context can undercut the basis of their relevance in the eyes of many casual observers. Some celebrities lose renown when they lose their high-visibility positions within institutions that command attention. Presidents or corporate CEOs command attention from their powerful offices and lose followings once that position is lost. Athletes can command fame by performing well in sports leagues with large fan bases and lose

followings when their relevance to who wins fades. These are circumstances in which a person's renown is tied to, and contingent on, their ties to an enterprise or institution. Once the position is lost, the celebrity's renown fades. Many celebrities built successful bids for fame through years of building skills, audiences, and reputations. Creating a public personality is often a project or enterprise with one or many people crafting communications, managing images, promoting, and running audience relations. It is built over time, through experimentation and product development. From the outside, it often seems like building a mass communications business. As the famed singer Harry Belafonte told the *Saturday Evening Post* in 1957: "… it has taken me almost all my thirty years to be an 'overnight success'" (Van Holmes 1957).

Interference and Encoding

The fade to obscurity involves the interplay of new information that interferes with old memories.

Seeing one's celebrity grow stale or otherwise lose relevance is part of social forgetting. Those who study forgetting often explain it due to interference and changes in environmental cues (Wixted 2004). *Interference* is a process in which outside information disrupts the storage and retrieval of memories. New information foregrounds itself, and we push what seems like less relevant information into the recesses of background noise. Our minds may attach to and dwell on the details of a virtuosic acting performance right after seeing the movie, but that performance – and our emotional attachment to the performer – may be pushed to the rear of our minds after seeing a hundred more movies. Attention is drawn to novelty, and the new information we crave interferes with our cognizance and recall of old information. Our cognizance of a person can diminish, even to the point of forgetting about them, unless prompted by the environment.

So fame wanes when it ceases to be present in our informational environments. Once the person loses their TV spot, or their song falls out of radio play, or their book is dropped by syllabi, and so forth, they cease to be part of the discussions we overhear, and our attention seeks out the newest thing. We no longer receive information about or reminders of them, and the new objects of our attention push them into the background. Although celebrity does decay, it is not necessarily an immediate fall into oblivion. At any given moment, some stars seem entrenched at the top perches of the culture (Van de Rijt *et al.* 2013), but staying at the tip-top is challenging, and demographic replacement threatens just about any celebrity enterprise. Candia et al. (2019) describe cultural objects' fall from collective consciousness as a two-phase process: a fast fall from active discussion and engagement, followed by a slower decay from the cultural memory.

The first phase occurs as a celebrity's achievement, claim to fame, and identity become less newsworthy, a journalism concept that denotes a story's importance or relevance to a news outlet (Zoch and Supa 2014). These factors include whether an account has new information, whether it can be tied to very recent current events stories, has an unexpected twist, or feels like information with weighty societal consequences. The more a celebrity receives public exposure without genuinely novel achievements or content, the less newsworthy each new story involving them becomes. Absent something to refresh public interest in a star, coverage will eventually dwindle as someone becomes "old news."

However, during this period of attention, an individual or object can run up a significant inscription into the culture, creating opportunities for new people to receive fresh exposure to a celebrity, their content, or other items involving them. Information about a star is posted to the newspapers and blog posts, made the subject of YouTube videos and Saturday Night Live skits, or chronicled on Wikipedia or in scholarly literature. Links to these items are embedded in web pages, cataloged on databases, and pushed to new consumers through search algorithms. This leaves

celebrities and their associated content to be found in organic searches or stumbled upon while Internet surfing, where they can reverberate until the links come down and the algorithms determine that no one will be interested in it. Eventually, just about everyone is relegated to the deep archives, if at all, with a dim hope of eventually being mined up by some historical dissertation.

Candia et al.'s model, implies that a person's continued resonance in the culture is strongly shaped by the breadth and depth of a celebrating event's cultural inscription. Celebrities who find a way to inscribe their moments or spells of fame into broader narratives or content associated with a wider and more enduring medium may be more continually re-discovered and followed by new generations of followers and stay relevant to an audience.

Cancellation

"Cancellation" can teach us about fame and celebrity.

Celebrities are said to be "canceled" when they experience a rapid loss of followers or are cut off from mass communications platforms in response to some perceived transgression. It happens when a famous person says or does something that causes so much offense that people take active measures to purge the celebrity of their own and others' informational diets. Here, the phenomenon is pertinent to our discussion of celebrities' fade into obscurity, representing an attempt to fast-track the process. A brief contemplation of how it happens offers additional clues about how the fade from fame works more generally.

Stigma and Spoiled Identities

The process of cancellation involves spoiling the target's identity. For celebrities who trade on their identity, this threatens their tenure with fame.

The concept of "cancellation" is widely believed to have taken root in our culture from black Twitter. Clark (2020) claims it springs from "*reading* another individual—giving them a dressing down that uses colorful and descriptive language and an incisive ability to articulate appraisal of another's character."[10] In other words, it involves a public articulation of what a critic perceives as their target's true self, as opposed to the public image they are trying to project. This consists in attaching new descriptors to a famous person's identity. Sometimes, these new descriptors can spoil a person's reputation among audiences, prompting them to unfollow or boycott their work, thus causing a loss of fame.

This process is reminiscent of concepts of stigma and social identity famously advanced by Goffman (1963). Goffman describes *stigma* as a socially recognized sign "designed to expose something unusual and bad about the moral status of the signifier." In other words, it is a label that presses people to view an individual as bad or ill. When people call out Paula Deen's slave planation-themed party as "racist" (see Gupta 2013), JK Rowling's tweets as "transphobic" (Stack 2019, see Gardner 2020), or Kanye West's public praise of Hitler and Nazism as "anti-Semitic" (see Paybarah 2022), they are attaching celebrities (and possibly their fans) to concepts or social movements that at least some others see as malevolent or harmful. Some stigmas are more strongly and universally condemned, resulting in a rapid loss of followings and platform access. Few people wanted to book or buy tickets for someone accused of heinous crimes. However, other stigmas exist as such within the minds of small groups, but the attachment of that stigma causes lost audiences and opportunities among them and those who wish to avoid conflict. Affixing the label of "TERF" to JK Rowling or "Alt-Right" to Joe Rogan (e.g., Romano 2022) attaches the brand to bigger political conflicts, leads some communities to see them as part of a malevolent force that works against their group, and puts off those who do not want to engage or be

[10] Italics are added to denote that it is a definition.

attached to these politics or politics of any kind. It can far easier to keep audiences when they view you as unproblematic, unless being problematic is your chief value proposition.

One way that “cancellation” destroys fame comes by *spoiling their identities*, a concept from Goffman (1963) describing a situation in which the attachment of these stigmatized labels causes a recognized discrepancy between the "virtual and actual identity." Audiences can attach to celebrities' public personas, and the ruinous effects of moral transgressions can be influenced by whether it spoils the credibility or illusion of the persona. For example, the moral transgression of an extramarital affair will do far more harm to a celebrity whose reputation is built on a wholesome image (like Tiger Woods) than one whose image is not wholesome (like Donald Trump). In the former case, the illusion upon which a celebrity's fan base is built has been shaken, whereas, in the latter, the potentially stigmatizing information does not prompt a significant reevaluation of what people knew of the celebrity.

Prompting Active Unfollowing

Cancellation involves active efforts to remove a celebrity’s cultural inscription.

Celebrities develop lines of access to our attention streams during their ascent and peak moments. We gain an affection for them. We follow them on social media. We stock our homes and hard drives with their work or reminders of them. We see their work recalled when featured in TV retrospectives of the year or decade in which they were famous. As discussed above, these things inscribe a celebrity into the collective memory by creating new chances that we will recall and remember them.

Over time, these inscriptions will erode naturally. People stop watching the reruns. They clean out the bookshelf, throw away the old DVDs, cancel subscriptions, and unfollow and unsubscribe social media accounts that no longer interest them. It generally happens more slowly, and celebrities are often purged from their audiences' information diets. "Cancellation" can expedite this process by moving people to invest their attention, energy, and time by linking the creator to a moral problem. This

association may push people to make an active choice to forego the products of larger projects in which you collaborate, even if they find pleasure in facets of your collaborators' work.

The Fame Game

So how does the Fame Game work, then?

This paper sought to understand the character and causes of fame and celebrity. *Fame* is attained when strangers come to know and pay attention to a person. A person gains *celebrity* status when they become famous. Stars can range from world-famous household names to the "micro-celebrity" who are only known to niche audiences, but in all cases, they are mass communicators organized around a person's identity.

There are no surefire methods for becoming famous, and the best-resourced, - connected, and - experienced communications professionals routinely fail in efforts to develop and sell public personalities. Instead, research on fame and celebrity has observed and contemplated multiple routes to fame or practical strategies that can be employed in one's bid for fame—people often ascent to fame through *achievement*, a rare and socially-valued accomplishment. Though achievement can propel a person into public attention, these moments rarely convert into a sustained run at fame in and of themselves. We discussed *hype*, which involves saturating people's informational environments through paid impressions or the continuous generation of attention-grabbing viral content. Although hype can spread word of a celebrity, it need not sow interest or attachment. Some stars have attained fame through *charisma and* personal qualities that attract people. The main issue with this explanation is that we have needed help to pinpoint precisely what makes someone charismatic, such that this concept often serves as a residual explanation of fame. People can achieve celebrity status by gaining high-status roles in society, but status can also be gained by acquiring followings. Fame is often

intertwined with notions of *status*, where someone sits on a social pecking order. People can gain fame by becoming symbols that stand as personifications of ideas, groups, or movements, though this strategy can backfire if audiences do not want to associate themselves with what you represent. Finally, celebrities build followings and brand as a business might do, attracting customers by sating their needs and offering good value propositions. What works for one person under one set of circumstances might not reproduce elsewhere. The techniques mentioned above represent possible elements of a successful bid for fame, but there are no surefire methods.

We discussed how fame is more like a momentary state than a permanent status. People lose interest in celebrities[11] as soon as the novelty wears off. Contexts change, new objects of attention emerge, and people lose interest and forget. Celebrities can try to refresh their public image or body of work to retain relevance, but very few keep a long-term hold at the center of attention. Eventually, fame fades, but the final fade to obscurity can be delayed if the celebrity becomes inscribed into the culture while they are at their height.

Ultimately, there are many paths in and out of fame, and the strong links between novelty, attention, and forgetting imply that those who vie for fame must constantly develop new ideas and strategies. While there's no single, surefire path to sustained fame, aspiring mass communicators might find the various journeys taken by others to be generative when devising their strategies. Perhaps the central conclusion to draw from this discussion is that building a mass communications enterprise – whether centered on a celebrity or something else – is a complex endeavor worthy of study. There is no easy formula: the Fame Game, like any sport, involves the complex interaction of strategic players, and what works for one individual depends in part on the context in which the Game unfolds and the choices made by other players. We can examine the fields in which these "games" play out and learn to make better decisions by observing what worked or failed for others when making their bids for audiences.

[11] Or at least their present incarnation

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