
The Undead: Life on the D-List

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Abstract

Over the last twenty years the multiplying demands of media outlets have created a demand for new celebrities. In place of the old order of movie stars and aristocrats in 'diaries' is a new breed of soap actors, reality TV stars, models and those simply 'famous for being famous' in gossip columns. These new celebrities, variously described as the D or Z List often comprise ordinary people. The argument here is that the treatment of such people on the D-List is illustrative of the ways in which the media seek to patrol our behaviour and offer lessons about knowing one's place. The distinctions made between real and bogus is connected to the machines of celebrity and the commodification of the self.

Introduction

To be famous for yourself, for what you are without talent for premeditation, means you have come into your rightful inheritance. (Braudy 1997, 7)

This paper will consider the phenomenon of the D-List, a relatively new term used in the UK to describe the life and loves of minor celebrities. I discuss journalists' treatment of D-Listers as part of the work of government – the conduct of conduct. Those on the D-List are evaluated as the products of an enterprise culture that encourages us all to maximise the self as a project.

In discussing the ways in which celebrities can be considered commodities with a certain economic value in the star system, a distinction is made between stars, personalities and the one-dimensional characters of the D-List. Stars are not the subject of discussion here. They are part of what P. David Marshall (1997) calls 'cinema's admiring identification'. Their remoteness on the big screen coupled with their economic power is useful only for comparison. Television's 'sympathetic identification' produces much more psychically manageable 'personalities' who have

their uses and who, to varying degrees, endure as bona fide celebrities. But my focus is on the basic unit of the system, those of the lowest economic value, the interchangeable figures of the D-List.

The D-List is not a precise category. There are no hard and fast rules for those who appear in it. But what I will suggest in the following is that certain characteristics, styles of behaviour, and to a degree, social origin, incline some journalists to promote new celebrities into membership of this struggling band. Perhaps they have been too open or too keen to reach the spotlight. Perhaps they have misunderstood their role in the celebrity pecking order. But whatever their mistake the D-List identifies them all as decidedly second or even third-best.

As the D-List is sometimes composed of people who have emerged from the audience it may be the closest representation of the ordinary as celebrity. An analysis of how such people are treated is therefore revealing about what the media suggest is the correct way for us to behave, both as enterprising individuals and as 'ordinary' people.

I start by considering factors that informed the formation of modern celebrity, to then draw on cultural theorists and some accounts of contestants of reality TV shows to discuss the elements that go into the making of the D-List. The third section provides a case study of the list, which examines extracts from the tabloid press and the work done to make four of its characters. I conclude by asking to what degree the D-List is a celebration of our enterprising and democratic culture, and how it reflects on the media's construction of ordinary people.

The background to the D-List

Several factors have led to the emergence of a different type of celebrity over the past twenty years. While these concern socio-economical developments too complex to fully account for in this limited space, a number of shifts in the media should be pointed to as a backdrop for my focus on the D-list. In the eighties and nineties, firstly, magazines such as *Now*, *Chat* and latterly *heat* have come to dominate the magazine market in the UK¹. Influenced by the picture-led agendas of Spanish cousins such as *Hola* these magazines are dependant on pictures of minor aristocrats, actors and pop stars to fill their pages. As pictures of the 'true' stars are often at a premium or the subject of considerable negotiation editors are grateful for snaps of the less well-known. This mutually beneficial arrangement produces copy as well as that faint aura of fame necessary for continuing life as a minor celebrity.

These changes in magazine culture have arguably been inter-related with a new taste for gossip in newspapers. In UK in the early eighties the gossip column took 'diary' form and was the province of columnists such as Nigel Dempster in the *Daily Mail* and William Hickey in the *Daily Express*. Tittle-tattle on the upcoming nuptials of minor aristos and the occasional movie star hogged the headlines. On occasion the world of television celebrity made inroads but for the most part this was an insular world which envisioned the reader as an aspirant genteel middle-class creature with the nose pressed up against the etched opaque glass of this fabled demi-monde. However, in the late eighties and particularly the nineties gossip about models, footballers and soap actors were nudging the diaries aside. By the mid-nineties Dempster's privileged peek into high society had been replaced by a new fascination with celebrities from a seemingly classless world. The reasons for this switch have partly been attributed to the fading relevance of the aristocracy but also the increasing number of media outlets who require more figures to write about. Leo Braudy has for instance argued that 'the older patterns of colour and class and privilege have thus lost their power...in its place is a new media democracy' (1997, 79).

A more recent context for an at least in some sense new or different kind of celebrity, however, has been set by emergent reality television formats such as *Big Brother*, *Pop Idol* and myriad docu-soaps (detailed if sensationalized accounts of institutions like airports, hotels, and hospitals). Such shows, as noted by a number of cultural commentators (e.g. Dovey 2000, Bonner 2003, Turner 2004, 52-63, Biressi and Nunn 2004) provide increased opportunities for manufacturing a celebrity less contingent on what could be seen as conventional barriers of entry and for catapulting a large number of new micro-celebrities into fame – despite in some cases being ill-prepared for it. Here, it is the television exposure per se that constitutes the basis for an often very short but intensive moment of fame.

A tangential, and I would argue, interconnected development to the new conception of fame expressed through the parameters of reality TV and an extension of celebrity culture in general is the rise of surveillance. CCTV has fed our fascination with celebrities in two ways: in one sense celebrities have been created by surveillance technology – *Big Brother* is the most obvious example but the 'behind the scenes' footage that feature on UK channels such as ITV 2 also create and then sustain the notion of celebrity by a process of monotony. This footage is significant because of the way it fixes the individual's personality in the public's mind. Secondly, celebrities, much like the rest of us, are not always aware of CCTV. Like us their image may be caught by security cameras and then sold on to the newspapers by 'friends' and 'insiders'. The grainy un-doctored tones of CCTV connect with our own experience and remind us of how like us these unprotected celebrities are. The tabloid *Daily Mirror's* '3AM' girls extend the notion that celebrities are both ordinary and distant through a mini-column entitled

'Surveillance' which features the famous parking cars, eating biscuits etc. Several other tabloids encourage us to report any 'sightings' of celebrities in our midst underlining the surveillance imperative to observe the performance of the ordinary.

For, as a result of the above mentioned developments, representations of ordinary people are far more prevalent in popular media than ever before. The new outlets for celebrity seem to provide ever more people for a chance of making it. As Anita Biressi and Heather Nunn have argued, reality TV can be perceived of as a chance for ordinary people to 'triumph over obscurity':

Reality TV is celebrated as a democratization of public culture and the deconstruction of the components of fame that partially constitute the celebrity media subject. (2004, 47)

In contrast to Dempster's well-bred heroes the new generation of celebrities, then, are celebrated as 'classless', having achieved their successes on their own merit. Perhaps the most infamous example of this apparently classless Britain was the party thrown by newly elected Prime Minister Tony Blair in 1998, in which several rock stars such as the defiantly working-class Noel Gallagher were invited. What better testimony to the triumphalist ideology of enterprise than the rise of a meritocratic class for both adulation and emulation?

Making the list

The principal architects of the D-List are gossip columnists in the popular tabloid newspapers. The most brazen expression of celebrity culture and the natural home of the D-List can be found in the *Daily Mirror's* '3 AM Girls', *The Sun's* Victoria Newton, Dominic Mohan's 'Bizarre' column and *The Star's* 'Bitches', now 'The Goss'. With a combined sale of almost six million and a readership of three times that these writers need to produce colourful copy daily to match the public appetite for the celebrity they have created.²

The D-list may not have its own venues and few would be brazen enough to declare themselves members, however readers and viewers of tabloid culture are taught a familiarity with those who have earned the designation; by a process of repetition they recognise the minor figures who have been condemned there and are invited to gaze upon them with a mixture of pity and scorn: the pity may derive from their sense of connection – the public may have been part of the reason they are 'out there', the scorn is for them still striving for fame when – by our agreement with the gossip communists – their moment has gone. We understand the D-Lister as someone who has failed to grasp their true economic value in the system.

In these columns the world of gossip has the fluid character of a garish soap opera. The sets are the doorways, foyers and ragged red carpets where the nearly glamorous strain for attention. The dramas are set in the metropolis away from the mundane world we are rooted in and from which they have escaped. The players know, as we do, that their fate lies in the balance with every passing pseudo-event. It is the very fragility of their fame that makes their failures and successes so palpable to the readers. But although they may have escaped from us at any point their inappropriate behaviour could return them to our black and white world, and the D-list can be defined as a space between the unknown mass of ordinary people and the celebrity.

But how does one find oneself on the D-list? In the first place it helps to be ordinary. As suggested above, representations of the ordinary, through reality TV, are today highly visible in the media (see also Couldry 2003, 102), and reality TV participants are indeed the most obvious candidates for the D-list. While they are legitimately (being featured as contestants etc) on television in their programmes their fame is automatic, or perhaps more accurately, a function of the media coverage of the shows. It is only when the individual challenges this by seeking to enter the world of more acknowledged stardom that they risk the venom of the columnists and the designation of 'D-Lister'.

Another group of potential candidates are described by Chris Rojek as 'the attributed', whose fame derives from their links to stars as partner or employees (2001, 18). In James Monaco's (1978) terms these people are destined for short-term fame as 'quasars'. The tabloid 'love-rat' and ex-bouncer Fran Cosgrove will be discussed later. Ex-royal Butler Paul Burrell, famous for his relationship to Princess Diana, is another example. Finally we should include here the struggling models and failed pop stars that play such a visually significant role in the D-List. The *non plus ultra* here is Jodie March of whom more anon.

In the twenty-first century the papers warn potential 'stars' about what awaits them. Gossip columnist Dominic Mohan writing in the *Sun* described previous *Big Brother* candidates as 'the wannabes who became neverweres'. 'Drugged by the prospect of celebrity they will not have properly considered the long-term consequences of this decision...a misjudgement which could ruin their lives' (Mohan 2004). Mohan will of course play a very willing part in this destruction but at least the rules of the game should be clear: wannabes should not trespass in those places where the legitimately famous roam.

But it would be a mistake to consider the 'neverweres' as 'dupes'. One of the dominant themes that recur in accounts D-Listers give of themselves is self-understanding. Those entering the celebrity game in the 21st century, according to these accounts, understand themselves as commodities. The commodity may well

be happily unencumbered by talent but will understand the central significance of visibility. As Jodie Marsh, pin-up model and frequent gossip column object, wrote of former beau and uber-D-Lister Fran Cosgrove:

'He craved fame and told me he needed publicity for Trap, that he had to be seen in the right places to encourage the idea that he was a celebrity *in his own right*'. (cited in Evison 2004)

To ensure a degree of longevity this visibility should be either rationed out and carefully displayed or be exploited as quickly as possible. But a shrewd understanding of how best to deploy the faded commodity of themselves in the new marketplace of celebrity does not fall naturally to many people. The difference between what the media consider real stars and 'neverweres' is not necessarily talent but how we 'read' them and this in turn is determined by access to the machinery of celebrization. Graeme Turner has written of this highly industrialized system in which the star has personnel who stand between him or herself and the world which lends them prestige as well as for instance access to advice and help on dress code. The existence of intermediaries commands a degree of respect which ensures that one never simply asks questions: negotiations have to take place (2004, 55). The real star may have a PR or press person in the room for the interview and access to a lawyer and may sue if things are not going their way. Due to his or her lower economic value the D-Lister rarely has any more protection than another member of the public (Biressi and Nunn 2004, 54). But by trying to live the life of a star, organising and managing themselves, they risk ridicule by merging the two orders of star and representation. While this may be 'enterprising' it is not what a 'real' star would do.

When covering a new star the media have to proceed with caution. Future value is not always easy to calculate: a wrong word or a bad picture may generate ill-feeling and freeze them out in the future in which they might increase in value (and become correspondingly harder to reach). For example, due to her elementary way with the language Helen from the UK run of *Big Brother 2* was deemed a 'personality' and whisked away for interviews and deals with managers and potential clients. She had to be treated with a degree of caution for writers were uncertain how long she might be popular. The other contestants, as illustrated in this account by a fellow participant, had to settle for designation as 'characters':

...were all lumped together as talent-less wannabees who should be grateful for our fifteen minutes of fame of fame, exit stage left and return to obscurity. (O'Laughlin 2004, 199)

As someone with a potential future in the media, Helen, like other more successful contestants of this show in the UK, such as Craig and Michelle and Jade, was afforded management and advice on her appearances. The celebrity machine found her work and developed her personality to avoid the dread designation D-Lister. But the machine can only exploit a limited range of opportunities or make a certain number of investments and the so-called 'wannabes' will either have to live with their moment or risk going for it with minimal backing. If they want to use their fame to further their careers then they will need the D-List because it keeps them in the public eye. Even, as columnist Mohan sarcastically put it, 'poncing a free invite to the premiere of *Police Academy 72* and falling over while wearing sunglasses' (2001) ensures their name in the paper. To be on the D-List means accepting relegation to character status when you believe you have what it takes to be recognised a 'personality' or 'star' and paid accordingly.

Thus, the making of the D-list can be seen as a precarious negotiation between the media and the individuals concerned, involving a struggle for economic resources as well as access to the celebrity apparatus. Reflecting on this process, one should also consider the way in which it impacts on the self-formation of those who are likely to participate. Once 'out there' as new celebrities individuals find that their public face does not really 'belong to them. As David Giles has noted:

Trying to maintain a consistent sense of 'true self' is made particularly difficult in the early stages of fame when a celebrity finds himself caught up in a dizzying world of social interaction. (2000, 88)

In accordance, some have even felt that their sense of themselves is imperilled by the processes of reality television. Such an account is evident in *Big Brother 2's* Dean O'Loughlin's published report of participating in the show (2004), which provides a telling example of the contradiction possible between the individuals' view of themselves and their edited persona: he was the 'face' of a personality he didn't recognise. The star, as pointed out by Rojek, has a 'me' which is seen by others and a veridical self. He or she is paid to put on that mask and be that 'actor' (2001, 11). However, the newbie talent show winner and reality TV contestant has had no time to deliver such a persona or distance between themselves and how they might be understood. They must be what they have reliably always seemed to be. Those celebrities who are unwise enough to try and prolong the moment and break the unwritten contract with the press risk the designation D-List.

Such a difference between potential D-listers and 'stars' is also evident in the press treatment of the former. While the profile of the reality TV contestant is high the press takes a great interest in the lives of their friends and relations. This feeds into a general interest in the programme as well as providing them with material which can be used to remind the newly famous and his or her public about the 'real

world' from which he or she emerged and which may yet bring them 'back down to earth' (Rojek 2001, 19). To drive home the point pictures of the contestant in a previous incarnation as a clerk/gardener/plumber are provided (usually stripped of colour). Friends and relations are exploited for information. In this way the D-Lister's roots as ordinary are always kept visible.

The gossip columns can and do have fun with the D-Listers because they are now the ones with control. In the early stages they 'threaten the professional survival of the celebrities they expose and at another point contracting to provide them with unparalleled personal visibility' (Turner 2004, 76). But once the legitimate moment of fame on screen has gone the writers who made them can now destroy them. The career trajectory of the ordinary folk who would seek to fraudulently extend their moments of fame and thus risk designation 'D-Lister' is always in the hands of the gossip columns. It is after all a category they have invented for remaindered 'neverweres' who still strain for press attention. Perhaps the venom so often directed at D-listers represents revenge for having to kow-tow to the demands of the micro-managers employed by the properly famous. As noted by Turner, giving 'in to celebrities undermines the root of many journalists professional identities' (Ibid, 48). In place of re-treading PR it is therefore possible to view the D-List as a chance for journalists to really express anger at their uncomfortable status within the celebrity machinery. As one journalist wrote introducing a new series of *'I'm a Celebrity Get Me Out of Here'* to *Sun*-readers: 'May the best-performing chimp win' (Galloway 2004).

Philip Bell and Theo Van Leeuwen believe that when interviewing established stars journalists seek to reduce the gap between 'performance and person' to tantalize the readers (1994, 194-5). Over the past ten years the tabloids have fully embraced this by mixing actor and character in their stories. Established stars can play with their personas and still preserve the mystery beneath. All the D-lister can offer is a reminder of the one part they used to play in an entertainment long forgotten. They are, it could be argued, the replaceable, expendable, interchangeable units of celebrity. As Joshua Gamson reminds us:

Products, brands, flavours, selling tools, commodities, names – these are the common terms used by celebrity-workers for their clients. (1994, 64)

The star measures his or her appearance: even an actor working regularly in a soap is not on screen every episode. They are rationed to gradually develop the character and maintain audience interest. The reality TV stars and others afforded large amounts of coverage on digital channels are there every day without fail for a certain amount of time. The actor, even the presenter, is paid for their skills: they are putting on a performance after all. The ordinary people are paid hardly anything and are just being themselves. As mere characters they have little value or status.

Fran loves Jodie, and Sada loves Nichola...for a little while

Having discussed the background to the D-list and the processes of its construction, in this section I offer an analysis of examples of the role the media play in the formation of four D-list characters in the UK, mainly drawing on a selection of the tabloid press coverage they have received. As we shall see, such an examination provides a telling account of how the D-list can be seen as a cautionary tale of representations of the ordinary.

Fran Cosgrove, firstly, is what was explained above to be a 'quasar' (Monaco 1978), whose career may have reached a high point in 2005 by winning £100,000 in ITV's much-derided *Celebrity Love Island* alongside presenter Jayne Middlemass. Despite being, in the words of one journalist, 'some bloke that his mates would struggle to name' (Andrews 2005), Cosgrove's fame is a text-book example of the way in which contemporary celebrity works and how the D-List can develop it.

Cosgrove began his D-List career as a bodybuilder/minder for Irish boy group *Westlife*. Between 2001 and 2003 Cosgrove 'hosted' a series of special rooms in London clubs such as 'Click' and Propaganda' and then became part-owner of the night club 'Trap.' During this time he had a relationship with Natasha Hamilton of pop group *Atomic Kitten*, which produced a child, and then he had a two-month liaison with model Jodie Marsh. He was photographed with both women often.

In November of 2003 Cosgrove's status was boosted by appearing as a contestant in *I'm A Celebrity Get Me Out Of Here*. As the tabloid *Daily Star's* correspondent Vanessa Feltz put it: 'force him to tell us who in God's name he is' (2004). But his inclusion was a shrewd move by the programme's producers as many of the ITV audience for the show will have been familiar with Cosgrove from the gossip columns of their newspapers. Indeed his well-publicised separation from Hamilton and later Jodie Marsh was earning him notoriety as a 'love rat', selling his stories to the tabloids (one of the few legitimate occupations available to a D-Lister). By the time he entered *Celebrity Love Island* in 2005 Cosgrove was already well-known as part of the world of celebrity – 'famous for being famous.'

Celebrity Love Island was described in the popular press as a new low in reality TV. The producers had hoped that putting together an entire collection of D-List celebrities (models, actors, very minor aristos) on a tropical island and hoping they would copulate might grip a nation in thrall to gossip. The programme can thus be seen as a bold step forward in the tabloidization of television – only an association with gossip columns would have given the viewer any understanding of who many of these people were. In retrospect it seems just that Cosgrove won – he is an ordinary bloke – both a true 'people's champion' and the product of gossip invention.

Thus, the example of Cosgrove shows that while starting a celebrity career on the D-list means subjection to the concomitant derogatory treatment in the press, there is nevertheless at least a small possibility of escaping into a more widespread acceptance or financial success. However, making fame through the D-list also means a greater vulnerability to the 'punishment' of the British tabloid press in the cycle of what Gary Whannel (2002) has called 'celebration, transgression, punishment and redemption' as the readers could, and in the case of Cosgrove in my speculation probably will, at a time that suits the columnists be reminded that he is an imposter in a world of talent, simply a 'former bodyguard/boyfriend' instead of a TV star. And then will come the greatest punishment of all – Cosgrove will turn up at events designated D-list and as he does so his value to potential employers will also diminish.

The second example, Jodie Marsh, is a model who for some journalists has defined the D-List (or even Z-list), exemplified in this account from the *Scotsman*:

'Jodie is now 24. In ten years, maybe ten months no one will remember her. If she's lucky she'll marry someone else on the Z-list.' (Burnie 2003)

Marsh created an identity of sorts by declaring fellow pin-up model Jordan her arch-enemy. Pictures of the two 'pneumatic' babes trading insults were standard in the tabloids in 2002/03. Marsh met Cosgrove in 2002 and soon announced that she was in love and pregnant by him. The mother of Cosgrove's child, Natasha Hamilton, described the pair as a 'match made in heaven. Its sad, really pathetic' (cited in O'Brien 2003). But by now Cosgrove had moved on and declared himself uninterested and an abortion followed. Marsh chose this moment to 'open up' to the very papers that had been so vicious in denouncing her. She is given a 'shoulder to cry on' by the tabloid *The Star's* gossip column, which however with the characteristic glee reserved for the D-listers equally pointed out that 'we have to say she didn't look very sad when she went out with the girls to London's Elysium club...' (The Goss 2003).

Marsh's confession failed to produce the vote of sympathy she had been hoping for – after the story of her abortion was published another tabloid, *The People*, published their reader's letters, of which the following is illustrative example, showing how readers appeared to have taken on the tabloid's distanced stance:

I found your story sickening. It wouldn't surprise me if it turned out that she'd never been pregnant in the first place. All she wants is to make a name for herself in the media. (Rough 2004)

Correspondingly, within weeks the papers were back on the offensive. In the *Sunday Mirror* we read:

‘the 24 year old whose only goal is to wear as little as possible to become the next Jordan, went clubbing again in another revealing outfit. Yawn. Memo to Jodie: Get a life.’ (Kerins 2004)

It is possible to suggest that Marsh has earned D-List censure because she has played her hand too quickly and too openly. Her autobiography ‘Keeping it Real’ (2005) was given short shrift by tabloids bored with her emotional and physical excesses. As opposed to Cosgrove, who could trade on being ‘an ordinary bloke’, Marsh has as yet not been able to establish a viable alternative persona, and is reduced to posing bare-breasted in the *Sunday Sport* and providing ‘expert’ commentary on *Big Brother 6*, while much tabloid discourse around her follow the lines of the examples given above. Perhaps the contrast between their careers also provide a useful pointer to how gendered narratives may weigh in to the construction of celebrity, with particularly limited options available for characterizations of female celebrity (see also Holmes in this issue).

Ex *Big Brother 1* contestants Nichola Holt and Sada Wilkinson represent a different point in the celebrity system, as the two of the most brazen ex-reality TV stars to have attempted to stay famous outside the *Big Brother* house. For this they have earned the undying censure of the gossip columns and the damnation of designation ‘D-lister’. Holt’s single entitled ‘Its only a game’ (a reminder of the phrase the *Big Brother 1* housemates used to chant) was a ‘flop’ and its failure was (and still is) reported with much glee, as if the charts were actually a genuine reflection of talent and a pure mechanism of the market. Her subsequent careers as textile designer and porn star have also been considered a step too far for the ‘gobby skinhead’ (Bitches 2002, 16) Similarly, Wilkinson’s attempt to sell her book, become a Yoga teacher and to write another book have all been joyfully described as failures. But the most damning incitement came when they declared themselves lovers.

In October of 2001 Holt seems to have arranged a photo-opportunity for journalists to see her hand in hand with new partner Wilkinson near her home in Battersea Park. This prompted wry smiles at first. In interviews Sada said ‘Its all about the person but right now the person I’m in love with is Nichola’ (cited in Goulder and Hilton 2001). The story of their blossoming love was told without much comment. However after two months the relationship disintegrated thus ‘proving’ to the gossip columnists that this was never real in the first place: ‘It probably wasn’t that serious anyway, great publicity stunt though ladies’ (Bitches 2001).

Eventually the classic counter-confessional strategy kicked in to allow both to explain that their affair was but ‘an experiment’, again illustrating to journalists that it was an attempt by the two to manipulate the media through their own publicity

stunt. This attempt at gaining visibility without the protection of the intermediaries afforded to celebrities with a higher economic value in the system inevitably back-fired. Once a year both are mentioned when the papers offer the inevitable 'Where are they now?' assessment of previous *Big Brother* contestants. The bitchiness has not dimmed. 'Cut the Crap Silly Sada' is a typical comment (Bitches 2001).

In 2003 Sada was reported as 'seeking inspiration for her second book while working in a London Bistro' (Curtis 2003, 30). When she ended her interview declaring herself happy but 'of course I am open to offers' the phrase was taken as perfect evidence of her sad 'wannabe' desire to return to the world of fame.

Nichola and Sada were punished, it could be argued, because they failed to understand the limited value of their celebrity. While they sought recognition as personalities the press refused to let them be anything more than D-List characters and report everything through this frame. But while this lesson is amusing it is also a warning about any of us reaching beyond ourselves. Reality TV stars, ex-soap actors and failed pop idol candidates are reminded of their roots, the soil from which they sprang. It is made clear that the respectable thing to do once the moment has gone is to return 'quietly' to those roots and manage their inevitable decline with a certain dignity. Biressi and Nunn point out that the most painful accusation for reality TV contestants is that of pretentiousness – an accusation they see as 'primarily a classed charge which calls aspirant working- or lower-middle-class identities to order' (2004, 53).

A return to the humdrum is no shame as long as the former celebrity shows no unhealthy signs of striving for attention again. If the celebrity industry is 'a scene of constant battle for control' then the D-Lister must recognise how little power they have and retire gracefully. Here are lessons for ordinary people about knowing one's place. This is simply expressed in the *Daily Star*, when *Big Brother 1* runner-up Anna Nolan is described as having 'kept respectably quiet' in contrast to Nichola Holt who is 'willing to turn up for the opening of a paper bag' (Morgan 2001).

The only conduct which does approval is that which is concurrent with the one-dimensional character the tabloids have been busy in maintaining. Thus Darren from *Big Brother 1* is applauded for doing advertising for Chicken Tonight because this is consistent and gently mocks his persona; Alex Sibley's obsession with hygiene in *Big Brother 3* also lead to advertising work with Domestos and Brylcreem – these are unpretentious acts 'in character'.

Such advertising also underlines the fleeting economic value of celebrities who are also products of the industrial economy. As Gamson puts it:

...people known for themselves rather than for their achievements are more commercially useful because they can be attached to any number of projects'. (1994, 78)

When we see former *Big Brother 1* winner Craig on television it can produce a different reaction. He, as described in the *Daily Star*, has 'become a proper TV star sticking to what he does best – DIY' (Hughes and Dyke 2002). Similarly, transgender heroine Nadia (winner of *Big Brother 5*) is reduced to her being a 'tart with a heart' but loved for sticking to her character; *Pop Idol* winner Michelle McManus is now a 'roly-poly' good time girl struggling with her weight but exactly what she always was. A stellar example in this context is Jade Goody, reality TV's first self-made millionairess, who suffered damaging copy during the show but has since turned the media around to exploit her 'ordinariness' through sticking to the vacuous, stereotypically working-class character designated for her. While these reality TV stars stay within their visibly designated personalities they can be assured attention and even respect as long as they keep to their place. They underline that in our supposedly classless, meritocratic enterprise culture, anyone can make it as long as they simply 'be' themselves without pretension. The D-List, on the other hand, is for those who have striven and fallen and yet still 'crave' the media's attention with increasingly desperate acts/pictures/confessions. It serves as a reminder that while there is the potential for ordinary people to 'make it', this potential is only offered through a strict framework of limited roles, of which the boundaries are fiercely guarded. The next section will consider, therefore, to what extent the acceleration of the celebrity as ordinary should be seen as an expression of a democratization of public culture.

Contemporary Celebrity as Democratic?

Democratic ideology...constructs the reproachful and instructive example of the successful. It is instructive because, as Samuel Smiles grasped, achieved celebrity provides standards of emulation for the masses. It is reproachful because everyone knows that there is no necessary connection between merit and achievement. (Rojek 2001, 198)

Celebrity is a complex 'semi-fictional text' constructed by the interplay of PR, journalists, consumers and potential celebrities. Indeed, in relation to the quote by Rojek above, the increasing inroads of technology (SMS, internet, interactive television) and access-themed programming encourage us to see celebrity-making as a perfect expression of the democratic processes because we play a part in making people famous by voting for them.

If we take the historical view then, as I have suggested previously, it is certainly true that there are more ordinary people on television in one guise or another than ever before. Bonner estimates that there are as many as 6,560 ordinary people on television every week (2003, 62). And from one point of view, as noted by Turner, the preponderance of the ordinary in for example reality TV 'would certainly seem to constitute a more democratic phenomenon than a celebrity based on social, economic, religious and cultural hierarchies' (2004, 80). But to what extent do these new representations complicate and enrich our understanding of democracy, or are the representations of the ordinary simply there to serve a vast entertainment complex?

The notion of access may be worth exploring in this regard. In the UK in the 1970s the BBC first began to offer limited access to the means of production for people who wanted to make a point about a problem in their area. Channel Four offered similar opportunities in its early years. The access initiative informed programmes such as *Video Diaries* where individuals self-identified as citizens coming to terms with dilemmas in which we saw their identities being formed through the minor conflicts of everyday life (Palmer 2003). Access of this kind still has a life on television's fringes but access has been significantly redefined by the rise of celebrity. Access now means that individuals have more chances than ever before to be famous, to make money for just 'being themselves.' To quote Gamson again:

The private self is no longer the ultimate truth. Instead, what is most true, most real, most trustworthy, is precisely the relentlessly performing public self. (1994, 54)

Rather than profiling a united community of citizens or selves in formation-through-conflict we have individuals who are all keen to play the game of celebrity, to 'fit' in, to sell, to promote. Television here is not about issues that might unite citizens but individuals using the medium as a means to develop the commodity-self as a project like good responsabilized enterprising individuals. Nikolas Rose has argued, further, that this notion of enterprise has become widespread:

the generalization of the enterprise form to all forms of conduct – to the conduct of organizations hitherto seen as being non-economic...constitute the essential characteristics of this style of government. (1995, 275)

Television can be seen as a space for validation: to be on television is to be real, to have one's existence proven. Ordinary people are now invited to see television as an institution that they can use to promote themselves rather than being used by it. For example in amongst this 6,560 people on screen every week we should include

those on talk shows and all types of makeover show. People happily offer themselves as flexible selves to be moulded by the institution. Full scale coverage of your most mundane actions confers a certain glamour upon them; the public vote, however modest, seems to suggest that you have a 'winning personality.' As long as they conform to the stereotypes expected of them and make no attempt to deviate then television is happy to use ordinary people. After all, in a cost-cutting age it makes good economic sense to exploit individuals for profit.

What I have suggested above is that tabloid stories concerning those on the D-list should provide cautionary messages for ordinary people. Sticking to one's allotted role or character is fine: to deviate is to risk the peril of descent. To be on the D-List is to have failed, to have reached beyond yourself. And so despite the rewards, the goody bags, the P.A. fee, the picture in the paper, the whole narrative of those on the D-List is one of striving to leave the list.

Marshall has commented that the celebrity 'is an embodiment of a discursive background on the norms of individuality and personality within a culture' (1997, 65). If we consider how the media define the ordinary we can see how limited these roles are. Those chosen to live onscreen come through the much heralded democratic process of the public vote but what producers seek to establish are a series of characters that will keep viewers and readers hooked. Those chosen for the *X-Factor* or the *Big Brother* house are there because they are part of a formula designed to win viewers. Thus a fuller-figured singer will bring in a sympathy vote while seemingly democratic and 'open', a selection of camp figures in the *Big Brother* house will make the channel look 'progressive'. And of course we will have to have the men counter-balanced by 'babes' for romantic interest. In these formats individuals are there to fulfil roles – for example peace-maker, agitator or back-stabber. Although the coverage appears to be random it is always a selection and designed to develop the drama and support the character. The supporting media then pick up on this to further cement the individual's 'real' identity. Those who transcend the characters made for them become media personalities and gain access to the machinery that measures their appearances and value. The rest remain just characters. No wonder some individuals feel cheated when they leave the show/house – they have had their characters fashioned for them and have little chance to rise above them.

Therefore, what this article suggests, as celebrity can be seen as the public representation of individuality in modern culture, is that, in Marshall's words, 'capitalism retains its hold on society by reducing human activity to private "personalities" and the inner life of the individual' (1997, 242). The individuals appearing on such programmes are merely trying to maximise their value in an enterprise culture where such striving for fame is another highly validated platform for individuality. While on the one hand, the development of

contemporary celebrity may be seen as part of the democratisation of culture, on the other hand, then, an examination of one of its venues suggests that this is far from straightforward.

Notes

¹'Now' has sales of 587,000, 'Chat' 623,099 and 'Heat' 535,676 as of September 2005. Source: ABC Figures.

²*The Sun* was selling 3.361 million, the *Daily Mirror* 1.769 and the *Star* 893, 675 as on September 2005. Source: ABC Figures

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