Course Description

This course examines celebrity culture, exploring the differences between stardom and celebrity as cultural, historical and textual phenomena. We will analyze the relationships between motion pictures, television, the internet, print media and the cultures of celebrity and fame they have produced. We will also think about the impact of celebrity culture on everyday social practices, including the use of the internet and other forms of new media. As well as analyzing how media drive this need for fame, we will look at its economic and social rationale, particularly in the contemporary climate where celebrity offers multiple forms of cheap content while catering to and helping feed an attention deficit society.

We will study the history of fame, exploring its links to modern concepts of the self, its popular appeal, and its relationship to fantasies of social mobility and self-creation. We will compare the glamorous and auratic film fame to television’s smaller scale, more familiar iterations of fame, the more “authentic” forms of celebrity found in popular music, and the expansive self-staging and obsessions with fame seen on the internet. We will consider how changes in media, particularly the development of television and the internet, have changed celebrity. What does the ubiquity of celebrity say about our society and the organization of its media industries?

This class will consider how celebrity helps reconfigure ideas of the self, circulating models like “character” and “personality” that present new ways of staging identity that reach their apex with contemporary concerns about self-branding. In examining the increasingly self-aware culture associated with celebrity and mass media, we will explore how celebrity has reconfigured concepts of work, class, consumption, intimacy, privacy and the American dream over the past 100 years.

Required Texts

The following are available from the NYU Book Center:


Robert van Krieken, Celebrity Society (New York: Routledge, 2012)
Course Objectives/Learning Goals

At the end of the class, you should have a deeper and more critical understanding of the following:

- The history of celebrity and the emergence of different forms of fame in premodern, modern, postmodern and digital cultures.
- Key differences between stardom and celebrity.
- How celebrity functions as a discourse on work, talent, social mobility, individuality and attainment.
- Celebrity’s role in shaping definitions of the self and identity, including concepts of performativity, the relationship between private and public self and ideals like personality and character.
- The relationship between consumerism and celebrity culture.
- Celebrity’s role in marketing and branding in an attention-deficit digital economy.
- Be able to think critically about the different forms of celebrity associated with various media and how these intersect in our global, multimedia society.
- Celebrity’s role in the marketing and reception of ideas, cultural commodities, politics and lifestyle.

Course Requirements

You will be evaluated on participation and the following written assignments.

| Participation, Attendance: | 10% |
| Presentation: | 10% |
| Paper 1: | 20% |
| Paper 2: | 30% |
| Final Paper: | 30% |

All assignments should all be typed, double-spaced in an acceptable 12-point font (Times, Palatino) with 1-inch margins.

Each week, two-three students will give brief presentations on the readings (either one reading of your choice or a presentation about the issues the readings bring up). These should also apply the concepts from the readings to examples from celebrity culture, either past or present. Each presentation should conclude with three questions for class discussion.
Participation/Discussion and Attendance Policies

Participation and discussion are required. Although I will give a short lecture each day, this is not a lecture class, so you should come to class having studied the readings and be prepared to contribute to class.

Attendance is mandatory and will be taken at the beginning of class. Non-attendance will severely damage your grade unless you have a well-documented excuse. Please be on time. Lectures will include material not covered in the readings, screenings, video clips, discussion and in-class exercises.

Please limit your phone and internet use to finding materials or examples that advance class discussions.

Plagiarism

As a Gallatin student you belong to an interdisciplinary community of artists and scholars who value honest and open intellectual inquiry. This relationship depends on mutual respect, responsibility, and integrity. Failure to uphold these values will be subject to severe sanction, which may include dismissal from the University. Examples of behaviors that compromise the academic integrity of the Gallatin School include plagiarism, illicit collaboration, doubling or recycling coursework, and cheating. Please consult the Gallatin Bulletin or Gallatin website (http://gallatin.nyu.edu/academics/policies/integrity.html).

Plagiarism includes—but is not limited to:

- Downloading a paper from the internet.
- Copying material from the internet, from a book or some other source and presenting it as your own.
- Asking someone to write a paper for you (or writing one for someone else).
- Collaborating on an assignment in such a way that you and your friend both have the same paper or answers.
- Poor citation protocol.
- Confusion about the way you reference someone else’s ideas.

There will be no tolerance for plagiarism in this class. If you have any questions about what constitutes plagiarism, please speak to me or email me. If in doubt, always cite your source—whether it is a website, a book, an article or something another student said in class.

Late Papers

Late work will only be accepted if you have contacted me in advance and have a valid reason like a religious holiday, sickness, family problems or other unexpected disasters.
Please let me know when you will be able to complete the work and keep in touch with me should any eventuality prevent you from completing work on time.

**Incompletes**

As with late work, incompletes will be given only to students who have contacted me in advance (where possible) and have valid reasons for not completing the course work on time (illness, family problems, unexpected disasters). Students taking incompletes should also contact me to discuss a reasonable schedule for finishing the course. Please consult the Gallatin website for the school’s policy on Incompletes for more information.

**Use of Laptops/Tablets**

Laptops/tablets are permitted in class but **ONLY** for course-related activities like taking notes and looking up relevant examples online. They must **NOT** be used for google chat, IM, email, Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, shopping, game playing, running a business etc.

**Screenings**

Screenings will be used to develop our understanding of how celebrity operates, how its texts are constructed, how it shapes mass media and operates as part of public relations. As celebrity culture moves quickly, the clips listed on the syllabus are subject to change as there will likely be important events we will wish to study in more detail that will occur over the course of the semester.
COURSE SCHEDULE

Week 1, Friday, 9/9: Introduction—Stars, Celebrities, Media and Culture
Readings: Marshall, pp. 1-16, van Krieken, pp. 1-15, Cashmore, Ch. 1

Week 2, Friday, 9/16: The Star System: Movies, Glamour and Modern Fame
Readings: Marshall, pp. 91-107, 153-176, Turner, 1-17, Cashmore, Ch. 2
Screening: Clips from A Girl’s Folly (Maurice Tourneur, World, 1917), The Extra Girl (F. Richard Jones, Sennett, 1923), Bombshell (Victor Fleming, MGM, 1933), Some Like It Hot (Billy Wilder, United Artists, 1959), The Devil is A Woman (Josef von Sternberg, Paramount, 1935).
Selected studio promotional films, fan magazine newsreels and stars’ home movies.

Week 3, Friday, 9/23: Modernity, “Personality” and the Demand for Fame
Screening: Clips from It (Clarence Badger, Paramount, 1927), His Picture In the Papers (John Emerson, Triangle-Arts, 1915) and others TBA.
QUESTIONS FOR PAPER 1 POSTED ON NYU CLASSES

Week 4, Friday, 9/30: The Business of Celebrity: Tabloidism, Public Relations and Digital Media
Readings: Turner 31-55, Cashmore, Ch. 3-5.
Screening: Clips from Josie Cunningham: The Most Hated Woman in Britain and others TBA

Week 5, Friday, 10/7: Television and the Domestication of Fame
Screening: Clips from The Comeback (HBO, 2005-15) and others TBA
PAPER 1 DUE

Week 6, Friday, 10/14: Authenticity? Pop Music Stardom
Screening: Clips from A Hard Day’s Night (Richard Lester, United Artists, 1964), Beyonce, Lemonade, Videos from Taylor Swift, Miley Cyrus, Rihanna and others
Britney: For the Record (MTV, 2008)

Week 7, Friday, 10/21: New Forms of Fame I: Celebrity and Reality TV
Screenings: Clips from The Bachelor (ABC, 2002-present), Lindsay (OWN 2015), Keeping Up with the Kardashians (E!, 2007-present)
QUESTIONS FOR PAPER 2 POSTED ON NYU CLASSES
Week 8, Friday, 10/28: New Media, New Forms of Fame II: The Internet, Viral Media and Self-Promotion
Readings: Marshall, pp. 311-13, 547-550, 634-644, Turner, pp. 70-77
Screening: Assorted youtube videos, social media sites and blogs.

Week 9, Friday, 11/4: Scandal and Gossip
Screenings: Clips from True Tori (Lifetime, 2014-).

Week 10, Friday, 11/11: Celebrity: Attention and Distraction
Readings: van Krieken, pp. 40-61. Others TBA
PAPER TWO DUE

Week 11, Friday, 11/18: Work, Power and Social Mobility: Perversions of “the American Dream”
Screenings: Clips from Josie Cunningham: The Most Hated Woman in Britain, Benefits Street (Channel 4, 2015, UK)
11/25: NO CLASS: THANKSGIVING BREAK

Week 12, Friday, 12/2: Marketing the Self: Celebrity, Tie-Ins and Self-Promotion

Week 13, Friday, 12/9: Celebrity and the Reformulation of Public/Private Spheres
Screenings: TBA
QUESTIONS FOR PAPER 3 POSTED ON NYU CLASSES

Week 14, Friday, 12/16: Identification and Intimacy
Readings: van Krieken, pp. 81-97, Turner, 144, Cashmore, Ch. 4
Screenings: Clips from Britney for the Record (MTV, 2008)

TENTATIVE DUE DATE FOR PAPER 3, 12/19