

THE CHANGING NATURE OF CELEBRITY FROM ENTERTAINER TO ENTREPRENEUR:
OPRAH WINFREY AS TASTEMAKER

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ABSTRACT

Amidst the celebrity-saturated entertainment industry, there are real cultural implications for the kind of American society we inhabit. Within today's crop of high profile celebrities are a select group who supercede traditional notions of celebrity. These "larger than life" individuals, whose status extends through multi-media empires, are not simply entertainers but tastemakers. Instead of contributing to culture through mere artistic expression, these celebrities are defined by their power and influence in the public sphere. Because of their entrepreneurial spirit and resulting influence, they transcend traditional boundaries of celebrities as entertainers and extend their power throughout all facets of the public sphere.

Since their sphere of influence is so vast, these celebrity entrepreneurs control American understandings of popular culture. As they promote products and lifestyles, these powerful individuals prescribe American taste. Indeed, public sphere consumption has created this "new celebrity," and the future of American taste is in question. Tracing this progression from celebrity as entertainer to celebrity as

entrepreneur speaks to an ultimate understanding of the role of celebrity and American taste.

The Olsen twins, Jennifer Lopez, Martha Stewart, and P. Diddy all serve as tastemakers in current American popular culture. These celebrity entrepreneurs make a business of branding themselves as an extension of their products and ways of life. People aspire to be like them, and buy into their images as a means of prescribing to their taste. Oprah Winfrey functions as the quintessential celebrity entrepreneur, and subsequently as the quintessential tastemaker. Oprah displays a titanic influence over public opinion. Through analysis of Oprah's marketing power with her "Favorite Things" show, the beef trial, the making of Dr. Phil, and her book club, I have shown Oprah to be an arbiter of taste.

I WOULD LIKE TO THANK ALL THOSE WHO HELPED ME ALONG THE WAY.

To my mother, Nancy Miller. Without her the sun would not shine.

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My roommates, for tolerating my madness and loving me just the same.

All my friends. You truly are my family.

I dedicate this thesis to the memory of my father.

He would have been proud of me.

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Chapter 1. Introduction

Celebrities dominate contemporary American popular culture; their images saturate the media. In fact, it is nearly impossible for the average American to avoid some form of exposure to celebrity happenings. Literally millions of issues of *US Weekly* and *People* magazine are sold each week, chronicling the ups and downs of Hollywood's hottest stars. Paparazzi photographers are paid thousands for just one shot of a high profile celebrity taking their dog for a walk, grabbing a cup of coffee, or engaging in other banal aspects of daily life. Movie studios rake in billions of dollars each weekend as new movies open across the country. References to celebrities dominate daily conversation and experience. When Jennifer Aniston of "Friends" cut her hair in a shaggy bob, hair salons across the country flooded with women asking for "the Rachel," referring to the character Aniston plays on the show. Celebrity endorsements of products and ways of life overwhelm the advertising industry and help sell billions in goods and services. Celebrities even play a role in political affairs, rallying against war or supporting certain candidates. And despite political upheaval and economic downturn, news reports are almost always flooded with updates on celebrity sightings or activities. "Television personalities, popular musicians, movie stars, fashion models, athletes, and other entertainers have become a commonly shared

experience, especially in the United States.” (Cowen 4) Indeed, the American public is consumed by celebrity.

Amidst the celebrity-saturated entertainment industry, there are real cultural implications for the kind of American society we inhabit. Within today’s crop of high profile celebrities are a select group who supercede traditional notions of celebrity. These “larger than life” individuals whose status extends through multi-media empires are not simply entertainers but tastemakers. Instead of contributing to culture through mere artistic expression, these celebrities are defined by their power and influence in the public sphere. Because of their entrepreneurial spirit and resulting influence, they transcend traditional boundaries of celebrities as entertainers and extend their power throughout all facets of the public sphere. Since their sphere of influence is so vast, these celebrity entrepreneurs control American understandings of popular culture. As they promote products and lifestyles, these powerful individuals prescribe American taste. Indeed, public sphere consumption has created this “new celebrity,” and the future of American taste is in question. Tracing this progression from celebrity as entertainer to celebrity as entrepreneur is consequential to an ultimate understanding of the role of celebrity and American taste.

There has always been a notion of celebrity as long as there has been a public eye. Americans are consumed with issues of fame and notoriety. With the advent of the

mass-media, the notion of celebrity status changes irrevocably. Fame compounds with the ubiquitous quality of communication such that the notion of celebrity is increasingly based on visual allure. In modern day popular culture, celebrity is traditionally understood in regards to entertainment. As such, celebrity is generally confined to the realm of entertainment in which men and women become popular for accomplishing some form of artistic expression. Celebrities customarily contribute to American culture by producing movies, novels, television shows, photographs, and generally comprising the artistic sector of the public sphere. Yet celebrity does not always remain strictly within the realm of entertainment.

Although traditional notions of celebrity as entertainer pervade American popular culture, there has been a distinct shift towards entrepreneurship. Today in the age of globalization, celebrity takes on new meaning in respect to production and consumption. Celebrities today sign multi-million dollar endorsement deals to advertise consumer products ranging from cosmetics to phone service. This shift in the notion of celebrity is characterized by an association of status, economic power, and influence in the public sphere. No longer are celebrities simply ubiquitous entertainers. Rather, celebrity today is often equated with multi-million dollar empires and brand name marketability. Often, celebrities embark on commercial ventures, garnering profits which exceed those of traditional artistic endeavors. There is a sense that the

“real” money is in endorsements, and the artistic ventures associated with traditional celebrity are simply a means to become popular enough to win advertising contracts. In essence, celebrity as entrepreneur is about marketing and the ability of a star to produce and the public to consume.

. . . fame is artificially producible and produced, well-knownness a salable and sold commodity, achievement divorceable and divorced from renown. The separation of notoriety from greatness, however, is taken as an indicator not of decline-of-civilization dangers but of unmined commercial opportunities . . . (Gamson 57-58)

Celebrities fall into various categories of entrepreneurship depending on what products they endorse, how dutifully they brand themselves, and how vast their empires stretch. I have delineated four levels of celebrity in terms of their commercial ventures. Firstly, there are celebrities who refuse to endorse any products. These celebrities often explain their refusal to endorse as a means of maintaining their artistic integrity. Indeed, these types of celebrities often look to other celebrities who accept endorsement deals as “selling out.” These celebrities are simply entertainers in the barest sense of the word. They focus solely on their craft, accepting monetary rewards only for their artistic endeavors. In this day and age, however, they are few and far between. In fact, even celebrities who decline American endorsement deals often sign overseas advertising contracts where the American public is unaware of their commercial pursuits.

At the second level are celebrities who lend their name and face for an endorsement deal. These celebrities accept monetary reimbursement for endorsements. However, level two celebrities are not specifically associated with the products they endorse. Despite the fact that salaries from movies, television, or singing extend into the billions, celebrities today tend to sign deals to endorse products. Everyone from Jerry Seinfeld for American Express to Sharon Stone for AOL can be seen in television commercials or in print ads. While a celebrity might become intimately known as the spokesperson for that product, still the celebrities themselves are not involved in the creation, development, or branding of that product. The celebrity might benefit from the exposure the given advertisement campaign lends to them, in much the same way as the product benefits from the celebrity endorsement. But ultimately, the branding of the product and the branding of the celebrity are disparate. In telephone service, Catherine Zeta Jones was easily identifiable as the Voice Stream spokeswoman. Candice Bergen was intimately known for her Sprint commercials, while David Arquette and Alyssa Milano are recognized for their 1-800-COLLECT commercials.

An auxiliary component to level two celebrities is those individuals who choose to lend their name and popularity to promote social or environmental causes. Even celebrities who choose not to promote commercial products use their celebrity status

for philanthropic purposes. Given the commercial focus of this investigation into entrepreneurship, I will not pursue this angle.

There is a new trend in celebrity endorsement, however, which lends itself to the third level of my definition. Instead of simply promoting a certain product, celebrities today are producing, designing, and creating products for distribution. These celebrities endorse their product lines in an attempt to generate name brand extension. As opposed to simply endorsing products, third level celebrities make a claim of authenticity by asserting their creative control over their products. Rapper 50 cent and Reebok have entered into a long-term partnership that has begun with the launch of a collection of athletic footwear called the "G-Unit Collection by Rbk." (G-Unit refers to 50 cent's rap group.) Instead of simply signing 50 cent to endorse a line of sneakers, Reebok follows current trends and signs the rapper to help design his own sneaker line. There is no reason to believe that this rapper has the authority to help design sneakers; he is not a professional athlete nor does he have any publicized experience in fashion design. Yet because of the magnitude of his star power and his associated name brand marketability, 50 cent has the authority to sell and design whatever he pleases. Recently 50 cent stated, "My Reebok G-Unit sneaker blew out of the stores just like I hoped it would. The word has hit the streets, I rap about the shoe in my new video 'Stunt 101,' and the fans are definitely feeling it."

(<http://www.reebok.com/us/news/Reebok+and+50+Cent+Announce+the+Successful+Launch+of+New+%22G-Unit+Collection+by+RBK%22+Footwear.htm>)

50 cent's statement demonstrates the concerted effort to brand the sneakers as an extension of the rapper's already marketable name. 50 cent is not just the face of the Rbk sneakers, he is embodied in them. Fans that purchase the sneakers aren't just imitating 50 cent's footwear apparel; they are given an opportunity to emulate the rapper lifestyle. He lends a level of "street credibility" to the Reebok name, thereby branding the shoes as his own. 50 cent is able to leverage the shoe's appeal by rapping about them in his videos and enforcing the notion that the sneaker represents an attainable aspect of the "gangsta rap" mentality.

In the same vein, a recent hip hop industry trend has artists and producers marketing their own hip-hop energy drinks. Rapper Nelly markets "Pimp Juice" while rapper and actor Ice-T is promoting "Liquid Ice," a lightly carbonated energy drink. Finally, hip-hop producer Russell Simmons has released DefCon3, known for its blue hue. (*People* 30) Similarly to 50 cent, these hip-hop figures lend "street credibility" to their products, thereby enforcing the idea that the rapper lifestyle can be purchased and attained. They derive the authority to market such products based on their name brand appeal, despite dubious levels of authenticity in their involvement in the development process.

Following in the footsteps of the formidable Olsen twins, whom I will discuss later, the newest teenage acting/singing sensation Hilary Duff now has a fashion line available online and in Canada. The fashion line, called “Stuff by Duff” targets the “tween” audience, the 25 million young American consumers in the 8- to 14-year-old age group.

(<http://www.marketresearch.com/product/display.asp?productid=820456&SID=76471111-286523223-362619920&view=abs&kw=tween>) Tweens comprise a subgroup with the largest buying power in the United States. As such, marketing to tweens is highly profitable, especially if, like Duff, you are teenaged actress/singer with a hit television show, a budding movie career, and have just released your debut CD.

Tweens are kids who aspire to be like teens. They exhibit increasingly sophisticated tastes, especially in apparel and food, and require a highly nuanced approach from marketers. . . . Tweens are most heavily influenced by other tweens and teens but still often shop and buy with their parents as part of a family unit.

(<http://www.marketresearch.com/product/display.asp?productid=820456&SID=76471111-286523223-362619920&view=abs&kw=tween>)

Showing self-consciousness over Duff’s image, her web site markets the clothing to reflect Hilary’s own “hip, casual style.” Indeed, the description claims, “Hilary believes that you can look and feel great without showing a lot of skin or spending a lot of money.” (<http://www.hbc.com/zellers/stuffbyduff/default.asp>)

Essentially, third level celebrities are attempting to establish themselves as entrepreneurs. There are varying degrees of success in such ventures. Some celebrities are clearly inauthentic participants, simply trying to extend their brand name likeability and garner more profits from their independently owned products. Pop musician Britney Spears' restaurant venture, "NYLA", failed miserably after only a few months in business as compared to celebrity entrepreneur Jennifer Lopez, whose restaurant "Madre's" is a rising success. However, there are other celebrities who seem to be in the preliminary or intermediary stages of establishing themselves as entrepreneurs, such as Hilary Duff. Usually, the independent variable is the level of authenticity involved in the business venture. Because third level celebrities exhibit many of the qualities of true celebrity entrepreneurs, they will be treated more thoroughly in chapter three along with fourth level celebrity entrepreneurs.

The fourth level of celebrity describes the celebrity as entrepreneur. These figures go far beyond simply endorsing products and claiming creative control of their product launches in an attempt to be entrepreneurial. Indeed, fourth level celebrity entrepreneurs are well-established business moguls. They preside over self-made empires; their influence seems limitless. I have established the following criteria with which to measure the celebrity as entrepreneur. While many enterprising celebrities exhibit some of the criteria, the celebrity as entrepreneur exhibits all of the qualities

listed below. These criteria will be explained and applied in further detail in Chapter

Three:

1. Begins career as celebrity entertainer
2. Multiple product lines comprise a full fledged empire
3. Name brand extension of image and product
4. Individual as corporation
5. Celebrity status enhances appeal
6. Overt element of business savvy
7. Quality product
8. Blurred line between public and private self
9. Likeability
10. Wide audience appeal
11. Authenticity/Authority
12. A sense of self-making.
13. Minority
14. Exhibits a talent for finding a niche
15. Function as tastemakers given their influence over public opinion

Brief assessment of the modern celebrity as entrepreneur environment illuminates an understanding of the aforementioned criteria. Specific application of the criteria in regards to the following examples of celebrity entrepreneurs is found in Chapter Three.

Now 17, Mary Kate and Ashley Olsen are actors, producers, owners of a fashion line, and stand as potentially emblematic of the future of celebrity culture. These young entrepreneurs typify the notion of celebrity as entrepreneur. Self-made millionaires, they were the youngest producers in Hollywood history at age four, and by age six they were worth \$10 million each.

(<http://www.eonline.com/On/ItsGoodtoBe/Episodes/OlsenTwins/>) Additionally, they control a brand that moved approximately \$1.2 billion worth of clothing, fragrances, videos, and books in 2003.

(<http://www.forbes.com/finance/lists/53/2003/LIR.jhtml?passListId=53&passYear=2003&passListType=Person&uniqueId=7A1F&datatype=Person>) The Olsen twins stand to take full control of their multi-billion dollar production company when they turn 18. They are on the cusp of financial immortality, and were even included at number 83 on the Forbes power ranking of top 100 celebrities. Celebrity rankings are conceived using combined earnings with other media metrics such as: web mentions on Google; press clips compiled by LexisNexis; TV/radio mentions compiled by Factiva; and how

many times a celebrity's face appeared on the cover of any of 16 major consumer magazines. (http://www.forbes.com/free_forbes/2003/0707/077.html) The Olsen twins possess a massive and devoted fan base amongst tween consumers. Indeed, they are idolized by the tween generation. Because of their financial success, power, and fans, they have the ability to shape future public opinion. As such, they function as arbiters of taste in American popular culture.

Jennifer Lopez has experienced unprecedented multi-genre success as a dancer, musician, actress, and now as the head of a clothing and perfume line. She serves as the model for female celebrities seeking to expand their repertoire to include entrepreneurial ventures. Lopez has sold over 20 million albums worldwide as well as receiving countless awards. She commands multi-million dollar paychecks for her movie roles. Her clothing line, J-LO by Jennifer Lopez in addition to licensed projects is expected to do \$175 million retail this year alone. Sweetface Fashion Company was created in April 2001 as Jennifer Lopez and Andy Hilfiger united to develop a fashion collection under her creative direction. The company worked to develop fashion and lifestyle product extensions under the Jennifer Lopez name, and has expanded at a dramatic rate to include juniors as well as plus size. The company has collaborated with The Lancaster Group to create Glow by J-LO and Still by Jennifer Lopez, two outrageously successful women's fragrances. In fall 2002 J-LO by Jennifer Lopez

became available in Canada and Central and South America. It is now available in Australia and Japan. “As Jennifer Lopez continues to set new standards in entertainment, she will continue to power Sweetface Fashion Company as a world leader expanding her fashion authority with virtually limitless opportunities.” (www.jenniferlopez.com) Jennifer Lopez is the consummate celebrity entrepreneur. She herself is a brand, and she is highly skilled and marketing to her audience.

Jennifer Lopez made it clear from the start that the clothing, and its licensed products, would reflect her personal style by being sexy, fun, and fashionable. From its initial launch, the J-LO by Jennifer Lopez collection has been successful, not only with Jennifer Lopez's growing fan base, but for all women who love stylish clothing. J-LO by Jennifer Lopez has emerged as a mixed media lifestyle apparel brand targeted for the Y generation, ages 12 to 25; but, as evidenced by her music and movies, her appeal reaches beyond this target group, to women of all ages, who love the J-LO brand. (www.jenniferlopez.com)

Another example of celebrity as entrepreneur include notorious hip hop producer and recording artist Sean “P. Diddy” Combs, who stands poised at the helm of a multi-million dollar empire. Combs runs the Bad Boy Entertainment record label, Sean Jean fashion line, and a Manhattan restaurant, as well as multiple social outreach programs. Though his business ventures began out of his own home, he has expanded not only into a multifaceted company, but into a multi-million dollar business. Bad Boy ventures now include: Notorious Entertainment; the Sean John clothing line, which was nominated by the Council of Fashion Designers of America for the

prestigious Perry Ellis Menswear Award in both 2000 and 2001; Justin Combs Music Publishing; Bad Boy Marketing; Bad Boy Productions; Daddy's House Studios; Daddy's House Social Programs; Bad Boy Technologies (P-Diddy.com and BadBoyOnline.com); Bad Boy Films and Bad Boy Books. (<http://www.p-diddy.com/pd/index.html>) Combs raised \$2 million for the children of Harlem last April 2003 when he ran the New York City marathon. Citing Oprah Winfrey's previous marathon run as inspiration, Combs raised money through celebrity donations and eventually beat Winfrey's time. Combs is further expanding his public presence into the motion picture industry. He has appeared in the award-winning *Monster's Ball* as well as small parts in other films such as *Made*. Additionally, Combs stars in a Broadway version of "Raisin in the Sun," which opened March, 2004.

Combs' influence transcends the hip hop community as hip hop culture increasingly expands into the mainstream. "With the roots of his talent stemming from rap and hip-hop but reaching way beyond those parameters, Sean has torn down the barricades that continue to segregate music and society." (<http://www.p-diddy.com/pd/index.html>) Indeed, Combs is one of the most influential figures in music, but also in the entertainment industry as a whole. Combs is a regular presence at all the most popular celebrity events, notorious for spending thousands on one of his exclusive parties. He maintains an image as one of the most successful and

sophisticated black men in the entertainment industry. It is important to note that his image of a cultivated black man is entirely self-made, since Combs grew up poor in Mount Vernon, NY. Combs is the embodiment of the self-made man and the celebrity as entrepreneur.

Domestic goddess Martha Stewart also represents this category of celebrity as entrepreneur, despite recent legal troubles. Stewart made a multi-million dollar name for herself as an expert on home decorating, weddings, and other aspects of “gracious living.” She built an empire on advising average women about cooking, cleaning, decorating, and all other household tasks. As founder and CEO of her company, Stewart’s empire includes cooking and decorating books, a magazine, and a syndicated television show, *Martha Stewart Living*, as well as a lucrative line of towels, linens, and other household accessories with *Kmart*. “Sensing the need for a role model for traditional values, Stewart has branded what she calls ‘inspired information.’ Her style is relentlessly upbeat as she targets a specific audience and receives, in return, a very high income and public adulation.” (Rein 13) Stewart took her company public in 1999, with Martha Stewart Living Omnimedia, Inc. (MSO). Her corporation spans publishing, television, merchandising, Internet/direct commerce, and provides products in eight core areas: home, cooking and entertaining, gardening, crafts, holidays, housekeeping, weddings, and child care.

(<http://www.achievement.org/autodoc/page/ste0bio-1>) Although Stewart was forced to step down as CEO of her company due to her insider trading scandal, she still personifies the notion of celebrity as entrepreneur. Indeed, Stewart's influence lies directly in her ability to influence people. According to one source, "She already had more influence on how Americans eat, entertain, and decorate their homes and gardens than any one person in our history."

(<http://www.achievement.org/autodoc/page/ste0bio-1>) Of course, Stewart's recent conviction for insider trading certainly taints a characterization of her public image. However, the marketing principles used in the construction of the Martha image still apply. Indeed, the Stewart trial and subsequent conviction would be an interesting study into the notion of manufactured celebrity and scandal. It will be interesting to observe changes in Stewart's fame and reputation throughout the course of the scandal.

Famous for being famous, but also famous for capitalizing from her brand name, Stewart joins the Olsen twins, Jennifer Lopez, and Sean Combs as representative of a new genre of celebrity. As enterprising celebrities, these individuals fit the criteria for the celebrity as entrepreneur. These entrepreneurial figures signify the age of the "new celebrity," whose name brandedness renders celebrities capable of building multi-media empires. These types of celebrities are unique in the extent of their fortune, but also in the extent of their influence on public opinion. The ability of this

type of celebrity to expand their empires with simple name brand extension is uncanny and seemingly effortless. In today's celebrity as entrepreneur environment, fame is manufactured along with taste.

However, no celebrity better exemplifies the power and influence of her status than Oprah Winfrey. Born into poverty, Winfrey truly epitomizes the American Dream. Her life represents a journey up from poverty through hard work and determination. Through her own business savvy and natural talent, Oprah has elevated herself to become one of the wealthiest and most influential celebrities of modern times. Her influence extends beyond the realm of her television show, *The Oprah Winfrey Show*, into areas such as publishing, music, film, philanthropy, education, health and fitness, and social awareness. Oprah is a multi-faceted marketing genius. Indeed, the Oprah name is a brand in and of itself. With Oprah's endorsement, any product will sell, any social cause will be adopted, and any way of life will be followed. Her ability to influence the shaping of the American cultural motif is unparalleled. As such, Oprah epitomizes the notion of celebrity as entrepreneur.

My hypothesis is that the celebrity as entrepreneur heralds a new level of popular culture such that American taste is largely defined by consumption and dictated by celebrity. Oprah Winfrey fully embodies all of the criteria required of celebrity entrepreneurs. Her intense power over public opinion combined with her

influence as an entrepreneur renders her the ultimate tastemaker. The state of American popular culture is reflected in the notion that celebrities are arbiters of taste. Oprah's influential role as a tastemaker in American popular culture illuminates the idea of prescribing homogenized consumer culture to the masses. Particular attention will be paid to Oprah's role as a tastemaker in American popular culture through, the beef cattle trial in which she defended her right to free speech, the making of Dr. Phil, and her Book Club. I intend to demonstrate Oprah's inordinate power over American popular culture as representative of the new breed of entrepreneurial celebrities. I expect my research to open up a discussion of the social and cultural ramifications of celebrities as tastemakers.

Chapter 2. Defining Celebrity as Entertainer

“In the future, everyone will be famous for fifteen minutes.” (Andy Warhol)

There have always been various notions of celebrity that circulate prominently in the public sphere. In fact, celebrities themselves are a ubiquitous component of culture. “Through TV advertisements, restaurant openings, charity balls, trade shows, and sports events, our lives are celebrity-saturated.” (Rein x) The prevalence of celebrities within American popular culture speaks to cultural implications of the composition of the public sphere. “In the public sphere, a cluster of individuals are given greater presence and a wider scope of activity and agency than are those who make up the rest of the population.” (Marshall ix)

Celebrity is by now old news, but it says a great deal about modern America that no society has ever had as many celebrities as ours or has revered them as intensely. Not only are celebrities the protagonists of our news, the subjects of our daily discourse and the repositories of our values, but they have also embedded themselves so deeply in our consciousness that many individuals profess feeling closer to, and more passionate about, them than about their own primary relationships.” (Gabler 7)

Joshua Gamson rationalizes the study of celebrities by simply acknowledging their presence in the public sphere. “They [celebrities] occupy a large space in many Americans’ daily lives, and that space has been for the most part unexplored.”

(Gamson 6) Indeed, celebrities dominate daily discourse. It stands to reason then, that academics should seek to understand the origins of celebrity and understand the widespread phenomenon. Arguably, celebrities are a driving force within popular culture. “Stardom is an indisputably vital force in our popular culture.” (Fowles xi) Because celebrities exist so wholly in the scope of the public eye, the study of celebrity belongs to theorists from a wide array of opposing disciplines. Despite divergent viewpoints on the significance or meaning of stardom, all attempts to encapsulate celebrity seem to share an implicit acknowledgement of the impact celebrity plays on popular culture.

Studies encompass a wide variety of approaches, ranging from the history of fame discourse to the film star’s role as a marketable commodity in the political economic model of exchange and value. Joshua Gamson notes that celebrity research addresses stars as textual phenomena, as a status group, and more generally on the culture of celebrity. (6) Indeed, the academic arena dedicated to understanding the celebrity phenomenon is deeply layered. However, Gamson also notes that celebrity theory is generally understudied in academia today. “The territory as a whole, however – audience interpretations, in particular, but also the relationships between discourse, production, and audiences – has been tremendously underexamined.” (Gamson 3) As

such, there is room for further analysis amongst current celebrity thought. There is also much debate on the most effective approach to studying celebrity.

This literature review lays a landscape of current theoretical perspectives on the notion of celebrity. Given the divergent approaches to understanding celebrity, it is imperative to establish my own working definition. This work identifies key components of the most traditional definitions as well as presents conflicting approaches. Using elements of existing approaches, I broadly define celebrity in terms of: history and manufacturing of fame, well-knownness, advent of mass media technologies, and public vs. private self. These components substantiate the premise of the transition from celebrity entertainer to entrepreneur. Broad analysis of current thought on these components enables a discussion of the new celebrity entrepreneur. My research into the celebrity entrepreneur is thus situated within a framework of current thought on the traditional understandings of celebrity.

The shift to celebrity as entrepreneur does not imply a replacement of the celebrity entertainer. The celebrity entertainer still pervades popular culture. Celebrity entrepreneurs continue to function as entertainers. The assertion that there is a new breed of celebrity is not mutually exclusive from celebrity entertainers. For example, Jennifer Lopez is primarily an entertainer. She acts, sings, and dances, to entertain the audience, regardless of her entrepreneurial activities. She is first and foremost an

entertainer. However, as an entrepreneur as well as an entertainer, she fits the model as a new breed of celebrity entrepreneur. This categorization as an entertainer and entrepreneur lends her inordinate influence over public opinion. With her dual roles, Lopez enjoys near super-human status. To enable a discussion on celebrity entrepreneurs such as Lopez, traditional understandings of celebrity as entertainer are assessed devoid of commercial elements.

Fame

The notion of fame is deep rooted in American society. Before there was celebrity, there was an understanding of fame in terms of individuals who exhibited greatness. The idea of fame is therefore central to my understanding of celebrity as it historicizes celebrity within a framework of a civilization in which certain individuals are always well known. Leo Braudy, considered one of the foremost theorists on the nature of fame, charts the historical discourse of fame in *The Frenzy of Renown*.

In great part the history of fame is the history of the changing way by which individuals have sought to bring themselves to the attention of others and, not incidentally, have thereby gained power over them. But few self-assertions, especially those staged in public, are ever wholly original. From the beginning fame has required publicity. (Braudy 3)

Thus, the desire to be famous is neither original nor specific to today's perception of the celebrity. The "urge to be unique," as Braudy puts it, is part of the

history of Western civilization. Gamson credits Braudy's depiction of fame as he attempts to trace the roots of current understandings of celebrity. "As Leo Braudy amply demonstrates in his history of fame discourse, the ambition to stand out from the crowd, to be known by those not known to one, to make an impact on time, is not at all new." (Gamson 16) Before mass communication, however, greatness was not so easily publicized. Boorstin details how men like Pharaohs and Augustus advertised themselves through the monuments they built. However, this type of self promotion took years to create and was not seen on a grand scale throughout the world. (46) "Two centuries ago when a great man appeared, people looked for God's purpose in him; today we look for his press agent." (Boorstin 45) However, with the advent of mass communication technologies, greatness is circulated continuously and instantaneously. Publicity enables individuals to present, promote, and increase their fame at a previously impossible level.

The emphasis on publicity in achieving fame is particularly central to an understanding of celebrity today. In order to be famous, there must be an audience watching. Publicity is the vehicle through which individuals are able to introduce and sustain their fame. However, as Braudy mentions, the publicity machine devalues the selectiveness of fame, as more and more individuals are able to emerge in the public eye.

Through the technology of image reproduction and information reproduction, our relation to the increasing number of faces we see every day becomes more and more transitory, and 'famous' seems as devalued a term as 'tragic.' If these are famous, we may wonder, then what is fame? . . . fame gives and fame takes away. In part it celebrates uniqueness, and in part it requires that uniqueness be exemplary and reproducible. (Braudy 5)

Originally, fame was considered a result of an inherent greatness, deriving from deep within an individual who was destined to be something special. "Contemporary culture has conferred on certain individuals we call celebrities or stars the public stage and renown. The recognition and public fame are part of the act of celebrating their importance and significance." (Marshall x) Discourse from early in the twentieth century enforces this notion of inherent greatness, such that fame is a direct result of greatness. Boorstin further enforces the point that fame and greatness were inextricably linked for most of history. "Of course, there never was a time when 'fame' was precisely the same thing as 'greatness.' But, until very recently, famous men and great men were pretty nearly the same group." (Boorstin 36)

Indeed, famous individuals today are popular for their perceived talent, which garners them "super-human" status. Gamson points to this shift in the emphasis of celebrity. "The theme of the discovery of greatness, earlier termed a greatness of character, was translated into the discovery of a combination of 'talent,' 'star quality,' and 'personality.'" (31) Today, while talent is appreciated, it is implicitly understood

that the publicity machine drives fame. Image marketing is considered as much a part of star quality as ability. Gamson reasons that these two qualities of fame, as greatness and as artificial production, coexist rather than replace one another historically.

“Contrary to ahistorical popular mythology, the stories have actually *coexisted* for more than a century, usually in odd but harmonious combinations . . . however, the balance between them has shifted dramatically.” (16) My approach does not trace the shift in fame, but rather acknowledges the modern duality of fame as greatness juxtaposed with fame as artificial production. Thorough analysis of the publicity machine in terms of artificial production through mass media communications is found later in the section on the advent of mass media technologies.

“Well-knownness” and the “human pseudo-event”

Because celebrity is such a dominant aspect of popular culture, individuals grapple with a way to specifically define what qualities celebrity entails. A majority of celebrity theorists point to the work of noted historian Daniel Boorstin as the premier definition of celebrity. “Boorstin’s persuasive take on fame has soundly dominated the bits of mainstream intellectual writing on celebrity that have since appeared . . .”

(Gamson 9) In *The Image*, Boorstin discusses the celebrity as a “human pseudo-event.”

He writes,

The celebrity is a person who is known for his well-knownness. . . He is neither good nor bad, great nor petty. He is the human pseudo-event. . . The hero was distinguished by his achievement; the celebrity by his image or trademark. The hero created himself; the celebrity is created by the media. The hero was a big man; the celebrity is a big name. (Boorstin 47, 57, 61)

Because Boorstin's definition of "well-knownness" is so widespread and so concise, I have chosen to incorporate it into my own understanding of celebrity. Indeed, Boorstin is typically used as a base point for other celebrity theorists to build their own definitions. Joshua Gamson questions the cultural implications of Boorstin's "well-knownness" saying, "The phenomenon itself is a sign of cultural emptiness and groundlessness. Recently able to manufacture fame, we 'have willingly been misled' into mistaking the signs of greatness for its presence, confusing 'the Big Name with the Big Man.'" (Gamson 9) Gamson's analysis speaks to the relative meaninglessness of manufactured fame and the impending implications for a culture which celebrates manufactured individuals.

So obsessed is our culture with the media star, that new terms like 'superstar' and 'mega star' have been coined in order to put in place a new and expanding hierarchy: those who are truly and specially 'gifted' (the super and mega) now exist on a plane above the semi-gifted who continue to enter the ranks of stardom at an exponential (and, some would say, indiscriminate) rate. (Ndalianis vii)

Boorstin's "well-knownness" inherently implies the element of manufactured celebrity. Being universally known necessarily suggests the instrument of the mass

media to circulate and reproduce images. My use of Boorstin's approach is consciously informed by this implicit mention of the publicity machine. Given the focus of this study in the current entrepreneurial celebrity in the modern media environment, my interpretation of celebrity incorporates the mass media element in manufacturing celebrity.

Along with the manufacturing of celebrity, Boorstin's use of the "human pseudo-event" to describe celebrity also implies meaninglessness to the star in contemporary society. Indeed, Boorstin's depicts stars today as simply famous for being famous, and eliminates the potential of being known for any particular talent. Celebrities do not have a ". . . strong character, but a definable, publicizable personality: a figure which can become a nationally-advertised trademark. . . The qualities which now commonly make a man or woman into a 'nationally advertised' brand are in fact a new category of human emptiness." (Boorstin 162, 58) In line with Gamson's argument above, theorists such as Richard Dyer and Paul McDonald interpret Boorstin's "pseudo-event" in terms of the implied association of a star as devoid of meaning. Dyer states,

Out of this emphasis on manufacture, there develops an account of the star system as 'pure' manipulation. That is, both stardom and particular stars are seen as owing their existence solely to the machinery of their production. Not only are they not a phenomenon of consumption (in the sense of demand); they do not even have substance or meaning. (13)

Following Boorstin's estimation that a star is only known for being well-known, Dyer raises objections to the star phenomenon as simply manipulation. He notes that not all manipulation works, as many stars who utilize promotion and publicity to their fullest do not succeed. (14) Additionally, Dyer criticizes Boorstin's model for not examining the content of star images.

Indeed, [his] argument rests upon the idea that there is no content to star images, only surface differences of appearance. But differences of appearances are not, in a visual medium, necessarily superficial, and stars need also to be seen in the context of their roles. . . Examination of stars' images reveals complexity, contradiction and difference. (Dyer 14)

Finally, Dyer critiques Boorstin's insinuation that society is a vacuous entity comprised of easily influenced individuals. Boorstin, rather simplistically, implies that individuals have no free will and are empty bodies through which to be manipulated.

Dyer states,

Boorstin . . . treats society as a vast mechanism in which human consciousness plays no part except to be used. Manipulation arguments . . . depend upon a behavioural concept of human beings. That is, media 'input' has a given 'effect' (in this case, passive acceptance) on the human subject without the intervention of that subject's mind or consciousness. (14)

Indeed, Dyer points out numerous flaws in Boorstin's interpretation of celebrity as the "human pseudo-event." My approach to celebrity integrates Dyer's valid objections to the notion of manipulation. In my view, there are certainly problems with

Boorstin's approach. I don't consider society to be a vacuous mechanism for manipulation, nor do I think celebrity is so simple as to understand it only within the parameters of being "well-known." However, Boorstin's approach still serves the purposes of this investigation into the celebrity entrepreneur given the implications of the manufacturing of fame as well as the widespread nature of the theory. My interpretation of celebrity therefore incorporates Boorstin in light of Dyer's objections to the simplicity of the manipulation model.

The scope of my understanding of celebrity encompasses all individuals who are well-known within the public sphere, particularly pertaining to the realm of entertainment. Many theorists, notably Dyer and McDonald, chiefly consider celebrity in terms of the film star within the star system. Dyer considers stardom inexorably tied to the cinema. However, in her introduction to the anthology *Stars in Our Eyes*, Angela Ndaliansis notes that understandings of the star system have evolved since Dyer's 1986 work on the film star. She writes, ". . . the star system has become a more invasive and complex phenomenon within contemporary society, extending its impact beyond the cinema and disseminating multiple star signs through powerful new media forms such as the Internet." (ix) Thus, Ndaliansis and other theorists have expanded the boundaries through which they examine stardom beyond the film star to include ". . . new celebrities who have captured the media's and the public' fascination." (Ndaliansis ix)

Advent of Mass Media

With the advent of the mass-media, the notion of celebrity status changes irrevocably. Fame compounds with the ubiquitous quality of communication such that the notion of celebrity is increasingly based on visual allure, as well as all the information available in the vast resources of the media.

The star phenomenon consists of everything that is publicly available about stars. . . Further, a star's image is also what people say or write about him or her, as critics or commentators, the way the image is used in other contexts such as advertisements, novels, pop songs, and finally the way the star can become part of the coinage of everyday speech. (Dyer 2-3)

My interpretation of celebrity is therefore framed within the context of media manipulation and manufactured image within the modern media environment. One way to focus on image construction in the modern media environment is to assess a theory of hyperreality, such that the media environment is hyper-mediated and hyper-visual. In a hyperreal environment, it is unclear what is real and what is appearance. (Parry-Giles 6) In other words, clichéd efforts to get at the “real” celebrity are futile in this age of hyper-mediated image construction. Instead, effort to uncover celebrity should remain fixated on the “hyperreal,” those images set forth by the celebrity themselves through various media channels. “Contemporary society is saturated by media signs, and representations that seek to glorify – and thus make economically

viable – a diverse range of media personae.” (Ndalianis vii) In the modern, hypermediated environment, nothing is real and everything is real, rendering all of it an illusion. Thus celebrity is manufactured along with fame. Gamson recalls renowned theorist Jean Baudrillard’s work on simulacra and the hyperreal to inform this argument of the modern hypermediated environment. “This is not only a pop-critical argument but one that draws on theoretical writings of poststructuralist literary criticism.” (Gamson 7)

The advent of mass media communications factors heavily on the origins of celebrity. As the corporate media expanded, the dissemination of images was more abundant. “. . . there has been an explosion in the number of channels for disseminating the celebrity’s image.” (Rein ix) In order to achieve fame, an individual must command the media environment by controlling the dissemination of their image. Given recent technological advances, an individual has even more opportunities to make themselves known through publicity.

Thanks to modern communication technology, society’s capacity to create visibility has grown a thousandfold. Television, radio, film, cable, magazines, billboards, satellite dish receivers, and now the computer all help make possible worldwide image transmission, as well as the targeting of very narrow markets. Inspired by the modern concepts of product distribution, enabled by transportation and sophisticated communication and marketing tools, we have developed the ability to create, in Daniel Boorstin’s terminology *well-knownness*—and to blanket the world with it. (Rein 7)

Notions of celebrity do not entirely evolve with the advent of mass media communications. Gamson stresses that the characteristics of contemporary fame are not simply new products of modern 'mass culture.' (16) Gamson cautions against depicting celebrity as a "before and after" dichotomy based on the advent of mass media technologies. The influx of publicity and image reproduction speaks to the idea of manufactured fame. Gamson focuses on two opposing notions of celebrity and fame. Firstly, he considers the notion that fame is deserved and earned because of an individual's achievement or abilities. Secondly, he points to the idea that fame is merely a result of publicity. ". . . the publicity machine focuses attention on the worthy and unworthy alike, churning out so many admired commodities called celebrities, famous because they have been made to be." (16) Other theorists tend to point towards this definition of manufactured fame as well. Neal Gabler notes that the only prerequisite for celebrity is publicity. (7)

While notions of fame morph as image reproduction develops, the basic characteristics of fame can be traced throughout history.

It is often assumed, and sometimes argued, that the characteristics of contemporary fame are new, products of modern 'mass culture' alone. A focused glance at history forces an immediate recognition that the basic celebrity motifs of modern America were composed long ago before the development of mass-cultural technologies. Beginning in earnest in the seventeenth century, tensions arose between interior and exterior selves, between public and private lives, and between egalitarian and aristocratic interests. (16)

However, the increase in mass communications certainly does affect the manufactured nature of celebrity, as images are reproduced and circulated constantly as part of the powerful publicity machine. “. . . the publicity machine focuses attention on the worthy and unworthy alike, churning out many admired commodities called celebrities, famous because they have been made to be.” (Gamson 16) Indeed, celebrities utilize the media to bolster their fame as well as their status in society. Celebrities have unique access to the media, which bestows upon them inordinate influence over popular culture. Celebrity access to the media engenders a great deal of status and power for the star. Understandings of celebrity are incomplete without acknowledgement of the power and status intrinsic to celebrity. P. David Marshall characterizes celebrity as,

The concept of the celebrity is best defined as a *system* for valorizing meaning and communication. As a system, the condition of celebrity status is convertible to a wide variety of domains and conditions within contemporary culture. Thus, the power of celebrity status appears in business, politics, and artistic communities and operates as a way of providing distinctions and definitions of success within those domains. Celebrity status also confers on the person a certain discursive power: within society, the celebrity is a voice above others, a voice that is channeled into the media systems as being legitimately significant.” (x)

No longer do individuals have to exhibit greatness to achieve fame or command power. Rather, media manipulation enables stars to promote themselves simply as being famous. Gamson quotes Charles Marowitz from “The Angel of Publicity” on the topic of media manipulation as opposed to achieving greatness.

. . . Today, in this streamlines age of labor-saving devices, we know there are quicker methods with which to achieve notoriety. With the refinements of hype, the ultimate 20th century invention, it is now possible to purchase fame through media manipulation, to acquire it by dogged self-promotion or simply by association. (40)

Additionally, the advent of the mass media initiates an unprecedented shared intimacy between the common man and the public figure. “Bigots, forgers, criminals, whores, balladeers, and thinkers have been objects of public attention since Greek and Roman times.” (Rojek 19) Rojek bestows these types of pre-mass media public figures with a “pre-figurative” celebrity status, such that they were items of public discourse with honorific or notorious status. “But they did not carry the illusion of intimacy, the sense of being an exalted confrere, that is part of celebrity status in the age of mass-media.” (19) Contrarily, today’s celebrities enjoy a more evenly distributed level of fame or notoriety.

. . . the celebrity of the present age is ubiquitous, and possesses *élan vital* for a ravenous public audience. Unlike pre-figurative celebrity, the celebrity in contemporary society is accessible through internet sites, biographies, newspaper interviews, TV profiles, radio documentaries, and film biographies. The veridical self is a site of perpetual public excavation. (Rojek 19)

This notion of the veridical self leads to a discussion of the blurring of the line between public and private self.

Public vs. Private Self

Central to most theoretical discussions on the nature of celebrity is a distinction between the public and private self. The blurring of the line between public and private self for the overexposed celebrity informs my later analysis of the celebrity entrepreneur. As such, my understanding of celebrity uses existing theory on the distinction between public and private self. In *Stars*, Richard Dyer discusses the dichotomy between public and private self and argues that the celebrity image is never real, but always constructed. In essence, stars as we discuss them are not real people and matter only because of what they signify. The fact that they are actually real people matters only in terms of what they signify, since we encounter them solely as they are found in media texts. (Dyer 2) Chris Rojek continues this discussion of celebrity in terms of the dichotomy between public and private self. He writes of the tension between the “veridical” or true self and the public self as seen by others. “Celebrity construction and presentation involve an imaginary public face.” (25) Indeed, Rojek states, “The audience’s connection with celebrities . . . is dominated by imaginary relationships. The physical and cultural remoteness of the object from the spectator

means that audience relationships carry a high propensity of fantasy and desire.” (26)

The relatively universal academic perception seems to be that celebrities maintain only imaginary bonds with their audience. “Audiences are continually offered, and gladly accept, tidbits of the ‘private’ selves of public figures, are approached by and seek out celebrities as first-name familiars; yet audience-celebrity relationships are of course not reciprocal or close at all.” (Gamson 172)

Other theorists build upon assertions of the tension between the public and private selves by claiming there is a blurring of the line between entertainment and reality in the celebrity-dominated public sphere. In *Life the Movie*, Neal Gabler bases his theory on Boorstin’s ideas about celebrity image by characterizing life as a movie in which the line is blurred between entertainment and real life. Using Boorstin’s “pseudo-event,” Gabler depicts the news as a constant stream of mini movies that dominate the national conversation. For Gabler, the prevalence of celebrities in popular culture as well as the characterization of life as a movie speaks to cultural ramifications of the constantly blurred line between celebrity’s public and private selves.

How we appear is no less real than how we have manufactured that appearance, or than the 'we' that is doing the manufacturing. Appearances are a kind of reality, just as manufacture and individual persons are. However, manufacture and the person . . . are generally thought to be more real than appearance in this culture. Stars are obviously a case of appearance – all we know of them is what we see and hear before us. Yet the whole media construction of stars encourages us to think in terms of 'really' – what is [Joan] Crawford really like? Which biography, which word-of-mouth story, which moment in which film discloses her as she really was? (Dyer 2)

Gamson notes, "Celebrity personas are in a practical sense constructed such that distinctions between fact and fiction break down, the blend of truths and fictions settling dilemmas in the production setting." (172) Further, Gamson explains that the production setting has changed throughout the century with advances in the mass media. Fabrication activities such as the fictional creation of celebrity images have given way to blurring activities, such as the manipulation of those images. (172) Gamson's characterization of the changes in the production setting speaks to the notion that celebrity today is more mass-produced and accessible to the audience. Essentially, these media technology shifts have paved the way for audiences to feel more connected with the celebrity, thus perceive less of a distinction between the celebrity's private self and their public image. "The production setting encourages, furthermore, a dwelling on the superficial: an economy of tidbits, an emphasis on the available and controllable trivial pieces of celebrity information." (Gamson 172) Although the

current production setting enables the perception that the audience is closer to the celebrity, still the division between public and private self is applicable.

The celebrity image remains the tangible entity, not the celebrity's innermost person. Despite countless television programs devoted to exposing the celebrity's true person, for example the popular *E: True Hollywood Story*, there is usually a sharp line between what the celebrity wants to be shared with the audience and what they want to keep personal.

Indeed, in the 1990s and the first decade of this century this phenomenon has made itself felt quite dramatically in television show like *E!* and *Entertainment Tonight* that highlight details – from the mundane to the outrageous – that inform the routine private and public lives of media personalities. (Ndalianis ix-x)

Magazine spreads of a celebrity's home environment, such as the *In Style* magazine monthly section "At Home With," are still publicity pieces meant to craft that celebrity's public image. A celebrity's image is truly manufactured, conscientiously carved and drafted for public consumption. "Celebrities take on their own middle-range reality in which selves are simultaneously spontaneous and simulated and staged, doled out in bits and pieces that are simultaneously composed and authentic." (Gamson 172) The manufacturing of fame and the subsequent blurring of the public and private celebrity self speaks to notions of authenticity.

Given the significant role celebrity plays in popular culture, it would stand to reason that there are social implications. If millions of individuals consume inauthentic nations of celebrity on a daily basis, perhaps this speaks to the inauthentic nature of today's culture. However, as Gamson notes, the celebrity audience does not primarily concern itself with questions of authenticity. Indeed, celebrity watching is a leisure pastime, despite the potential cultural implications of such a large and influential pastime. "Rather than dwelling on either the inauthentic or the real, audiences simply go about the business of gossip without an overall concern for questions of authenticity." (Gamson 173)

Celebrity also carries negative connotations in terms of the superficiality of celebrity culture. Marshall notes,

In another sense, the celebrity is viewed in the most antipathetic manner. The sign of the celebrity is ridiculed and derided because it represents the center of false value. The success expressed in the celebrity posture is seen as success without the requisite association with work. (xi)

Marshall uses the example of famous pop star Madonna, who is constantly criticized for her inability to actually sing well. Indeed, fans and critics alike disparaged Madonna's voice as "electronically enhanced." (Marshall xi) Another more contemporary example is Britney Spears, who is similarly criticized for her lack of vocal talents. Like Madonna, Britney is disparaged for the electronic enhancement of

her voice in the studio, whereas live in concert she is thought to have a very poor singing voice. Celebrities such as Madonna and Britney Spears are often part of a growing group of celebrities who are “famous for being famous.” Indeed, Britney Spears’ public stunts such as her recent Las Vegas marriage or her increasingly sexualized public demeanor render her more popular in the public eye. Yet Britney’s actual talent as a pop star, the derivation of her celebrity status in the first place, is increasingly challenged. Keeping to definition, celebrities are supposed to be individuals of greatness. And yet, today’s version of fame often focuses on public popularity as opposed to talent.

This characterization of Madonna and Britney Spears as talentless celebrities undeserving of their perceived greatness is disputable. Certainly, these stars are known for their dancing, creativity, and ability to market themselves successfully. More specifically is the notion of authorship in terms of songwriting. In a *Slate Magazine* article Kevin Canfield describes the implications of pop singers as songwriters. He states, “Pop singers used to be mere entertainers; songwriting was largely the domain of professionals who rarely performed. Today, they want us to believe they’re auteurs—singers who are also capable of writing their own songs.” (Canfield <http://slate.msn.com/id/2097974/>) Indeed, pop singer/songwriting is one the rise, as performers attempt to position themselves as legitimate artists. Indeed, Canfield notes

that Madonna is perhaps the origin of the singer/songwriter phenomenon. “Madonna may be credited, to a certain extent, with fueling the new growth of today's new "self-contained" acts, as they're known in the industry. After she arrived on the music scene in 1983 with an eponymous debut record that she had written herself, pop stars as auteurs started to become the rule, not the exception.” (Canfield <http://slate.msn.com/id/2097974/>) Although Madonna is criticized for the legitimacy of her singing voice, she is certainly lauded for her songwriting, amongst other talents. Even Britney Spears is assuming a role of authorship, as she is credited with writing/co-writing seven of the 13 songs on 2003's *In the Zone*. Further investigation into the role of authenticity and celebrity is found in Chapter Three.

Conclusion

My approach to celebrity incorporates elements from existing theories which are pertinent to an investigation of the celebrity entrepreneur. A reflective analysis of the history of fame is important because it historicizes the notion of celebrity. Celebrity is not an entirely new phenomenon. There have always been individuals who are known for greatness. Connotations of fame have shifted in emphasis from narratives of greatness towards narratives of artificiality. Due to the advent of mass media communications, the notion of manufactured fame through the publicity machine dominates perception of celebrity. Daniel Boorstin's understanding of celebrity as

someone who is known for being well-known informs my analysis of celebrity, as it is a widely accepted approach as well as implies the association of manufactured fame. Boorstin's emphasis on celebrity as the "human pseudo-event" implies that stars are devoid of meaning and that society is easily manipulated by the media. While there is some truth to this implication, my approach allows for theoretical criticism of Boorstin's simplistic rendering of a vacuous society of meaningless stars.

My interpretation is also informed by an analysis of the modern media environment. The advent of mass media technologies alters the landscape of celebrity, such that the dissemination of images is more frequent and more pervasive. Manufacturing fame takes on all new levels of significance with technological innovations. In the modern media environment, an individual can achieve and sustain fame through self-promotion and publicity. Today, celebrities have unique access to the media which grants them a great deal of status and power in popular culture. Celebrities can manipulate their own image in the media using this power and influence to their advantage. My inclusion of theory concerning the distinction between public and private self is consequential to a later exploration of the celebrity entrepreneur. Traditionally, there is tension between the veridical and public self. A dramatic increase in celebrity exposure in the mass media further convolutes the issue. Today there is a significant blurring of the line between public and private self, such

that there is overlap between the celebrity as private individual and the celebrity's manufactured image. Finally, my interpretation is informed by an assessment of the perceived superficiality of celebrity culture as it relates to the authenticity of stars. I focus on authenticity because it significantly relates to my discussion of the celebrity entrepreneur.

Using this approach to defining celebrity, I am able to conduct an analysis of the new celebrity entrepreneur with an implicit understanding of the meaning of celebrity. The shift to celebrity as entrepreneur does not imply a replacement of the celebrity entertainer. Rather, the celebrity entertainer co-exists with the celebrity entrepreneur, sometimes embodied within the same individual. The investigation into celebrity entrepreneur takes into account the commercial aspects of publicity such as marketing and branding, thereby extending my interpretation of celebrity as a whole.

Chapter 3. Celebrity as Entrepreneur

Entrepreneurship is not an entirely new component of celebrity, as famous individuals have historically exhibited entrepreneurial tendencies. Rather, the relative magnitude and scope of entrepreneurial celebrities has changed. Today, celebrities are constantly engaging in commercial ventures, ranging from endorsing products to commanding full fledged corporate empires. The celebrity as entrepreneur is defined using established criteria and exemplified through contemporary celebrity entrepreneurs. Defining celebrity as entrepreneur also requires thorough assessment of all four levels of celebrity engagement in commercial activities using popular culture celebrity examples. First, the modern day culture of entrepreneurship is described, along with the ethos of the self-made man. Analysis of the celebrity as entrepreneur also necessitates a concentrated discussion on the marketing and branding of celebrity.

Entrepreneurship

The spirit of entrepreneurship in the United States is flourishing. Over the last few decades, United States new business development has exploded with prosperity and intensity. Deregulation in the late 1970's made way for a wave of entrepreneurship through the economy. In 1985, 662,000 businesses were started or one for every 350

people. (Ibid) Recent problems in the economy have increased corporate job loss and subsequently contributed to a rise in entrepreneurship.

The new economic face of America includes large numbers of very capable unemployed, or underemployed, managers for whom the chances of regaining a position to match the one they were let go from are slim. . . The need for productive channels for these managers to be able to make their contribution is clear: entrepreneurship is that channel for many. (Lambing and Kuehl 5)

Defining entrepreneurship is complicated, as every economist, academic, or businessman has a different understanding of its exact notion. The word *entrepreneur* derives from the French for ‘between’ and ‘to take.’ As such, an entrepreneur is someone who takes a position between a supplier and a customer, “one who ‘takes’ the risk, literally, that it will succeed. (Lambing and Kuehl 10) Academics struggle with a way to define entrepreneurship which will broadly cover economic and cultural approaches to thinking about entrepreneurship. Berger and the authors of *The Culture of Entrepreneurship* loosely agree that the many definitions of entrepreneurship, “. . . gravitated around two conceptualizations: the first tends to identify entrepreneurship with small-business activities and the second with a cluster of behavior patterns and psychological propensities such as innovation, decision making and risk taking.” (7) However, Berger, et al acknowledge a number of holes in this definition of entrepreneurship. Although there is no agreement over the superlative definition,

Jeffrey A. Timmons seems to encompass many different understandings with his definition. He states,

Entrepreneurship is a human, creative act that builds something of value from practically nothing. It is the pursuit of opportunity regardless of resources, or lack of resources at hand. It requires a vision. It also requires a willingness to take calculated risks. (48)

Characterizing the typical entrepreneur is also difficult, given the range of personalities, backgrounds, and business interests. There is no consensus on the ideal or prototypical entrepreneur. However, it is useful to generally depict the typical entrepreneur to bolster a discussion on the celebrity as entrepreneur. “Entrepreneurs stake their claim to success by energizing ideas, pushing ahead relentlessly, and motivating people around them to see things differently and move in new directions.” (Rue and Abarbanel 52) Identifying communal entrepreneurial traits is helpful to an understanding of the business acumen of the celebrity entrepreneur. Lambing and Kuehl identify a series of traits which characterize the typical entrepreneur. They include: a passion for the business, tenacity despite failure, confidence, self-determination, management of risk, changes are opportunities, a tolerance for ambiguity, initiative and a need for achievement, detail-orientation and perfectionism, perception of passing time, creativity, and the big picture. (12-15) Some believe entrepreneurship can be taught while others maintain that it is an inborn personality

type and can not be replicated. A *Business Week* article argues along the middle of the road and states, “. . . the nuts and bolts of entrepreneurship can [probably] be studied and learned, the soul of an entrepreneur is something else altogether. An entrepreneur can be a professional manager, but not every manager can be an entrepreneur.” (ONeal 105)

Although entrepreneurship is traditionally studied by economists, it is also important to view it in terms of culture. In the foreword to *The Culture of Entrepreneurship*, Robert B. Hawkins, Jr. emphasizes the cultural significance of the entrepreneurial society.

The study of entrepreneurship has heretofore been dominated by economists. It is not to denigrate their many achievements to say that when it comes to entrepreneurship, economics doesn't give us the whole picture. Indeed, many economists intentionally ignore what some think is the most important element of entrepreneurship: the influence of social forces such as morals, norms, and values. These form the framework within which individuals can pursue entrepreneurial opportunities. Contrary to what some think, capitalism is not evil or amoral. In its proper form it encourages such virtues as hard work, cooperation, resolve, deferral of gratification, and openness to new thinking. (vii)

Brigitte Berger identifies two approaches to studying entrepreneurship that have traditionally divided the social sciences. She points to,

. . . the economists, who on the whole are inclined to see entrepreneurship as a variable dependent upon economic factors and largely independent of culture, and scholars from other disciplines, who tend to see entrepreneurship as a variable deeply embedded in culture, both produced by and productive of it at the same time. (Berger 3)

Berger notes that economists tend to see entrepreneurial activities as dependent upon, “. . . availability of capital, access to markets, labor supply, raw materials, and technology.” (3) This type of understanding neglects the cultural environment within which entrepreneurial activities takes place. Berger makes room for a cultural interpretation of entrepreneurship in her assessment. She states,

In contrast, anthropologists, historians, psychologists, and sociologists emphasize in varying and often contradictory terms the influence of noneconomic factors such as social norms and beliefs, psychological motivations for achievement, the legitimacy of entrepreneurship, questions of social ‘marginality,’ and the ‘internal fit’ between any and all of these in the rise of modern entrepreneurship. (3-4)

This emphasis on the cultural factors pertaining to modern entrepreneurship illuminates a discussion of the celebrity as entrepreneur. Berger and Hawkins’ focus on capitalism and the social forces surrounding the rise of entrepreneurship informs a discussion on the celebrity as entrepreneur because it helps characterize the cultural environment within which celebrity entrepreneurship exists. Characterizing entrepreneurship as deeply embedded in culture emphasizes the social implications of an entrepreneurial society. With the spirit of entrepreneurship flourishing in the United

States, it leads to a discussion of the cultural fabric of such a society. Therefore as the number of celebrity entrepreneurs rises, studying entrepreneurship in the context of celebrity yields important insight into today's popular culture.

“Self-Made Man” Ethos and the American Dream

The spirit of entrepreneurship in the United States at least partially derives from the “self-made man” philosophy. The ethos of the self-made man is integral to the lasting cultural philosophy of the American Dream. The spirit of entrepreneurial success is embedded in the classic American rags-to-riches story. Perhaps first made popular in Horatio Alger's *Ragged Dick* (1868), the rags-to-riches mantra defines the promise of success through hard work and determination found so readily throughout American history and literature.

The ethos of the self-made man is an important historical element of the spirit of American entrepreneurialism. H.W. Brands argues for the persistence of the self-made man mantra, which has enabled the enterprising individual to emerge as such a leader in American society. Jeffrey Louis Decker traces three shifts in the language of self-made success: a nineteenth-century, producer-oriented emphasis on virtuous “character” to an early twentieth-century consumer-driven interest in psychological “personality” to a late-twentieth-century media-manufactured focus on the celebrity

“image.” (Decker xiv) For the purposes of this work, only the late-twentieth-century language of the celebrity “image” will factor into a discussion of the entrepreneurial celebrity. However, it is interesting to note the shifts in language when discussing the current media-manufactured focus on self-made success. As discussed earlier, Decker suggests that corporate restructuring after World War II rendered the businessman insignificant in the public eye. However, the rise of the corporate media altered the landscape for the self-made man. Decker states, “The expanding corporate media, however, found a new market for the self-made man: celebritydom.” (xxix) Indeed, the expansion of the corporate media placed a significant new emphasis on image, and enabled entrepreneurial self-making to come into the forefront of the public eye.

If, in the modern period, narratives of the self-made man *shifted* from a quasi-religious exploration of the inner soul (character) to a psychoanalytic examination of outward behavior (personality), image-based self-making *collapses* the distinction between inner self and outer appearance. As we move from an industrial to an information age, the figure of the self-made man is no longer principally the site of a utilitarian calling, behavior modification, or even economic production but, increasingly, of body image and consumer desire. (Decker xxix)

Decker’s analysis of the shifts in narratives of the self-made man not only historicizes the path of entrepreneurship in the United States, but illuminates an understanding of celebrity in terms of entrepreneurship and self-making. “The proliferation of the electronic media after World War II found a way to resurrect and

repackage the idea of self-making by manufacturing and marketing the enterprising image through the charismatic figure of the celebrity.” (Decker 107) Decker’s notion that image-based self-making collapses the distinction between inner self and outer appearance speaks to modern day understandings of celebrity and the distinction between public and private self. While traditional celebrity as entertainer theory emphasizes the split between public and private self, Decker acknowledges that current image-centered self-making breaks down the distinction between public and private self. Celebrity entrepreneurs are unique in that there is little or no distinction between their public celebrity image and their private lives. Entrepreneurship is a way of life for these high-profile celebrities. Not only do they maintain a public celebrity image, but they function as working executives. The shift to celebrity as entrepreneur is largely based on this collapse of the boundaries between inner self and outer appearance. “In an era of infomercials and the celebrity, narratives of self-made success foreground the body rather than the soul and, in doing so, collapse the distinctions between image and reality, private and public selves.” (Decker 112) Before further assessing the shift to celebrity as entrepreneur, it is important to describe the modern culture of consumerism in which the celebrity as entrepreneur functions. In addition to the collapse of the boundaries between public and private self, marketing of celebrity is the other essential defining factor of the celebrity as entrepreneur. Therefore, assessment

of the culture of consumerism is essential to a subsequent discussion of the marketing of celebrity.

Given the spirit of entrepreneurship as well as the self-made man ethos as part of the cultural fabric of the United States, it is no surprise that celebrity members of the entertainment industry would adopt this enterprising lifestyle. Already “famous” and therefore excessively in the public eye, the image-focused modern media environment is the ideal realm for self-making. The Olsen twins, Jennifer Lopez, Sean Combs, and Martha Stewart all take advantage of the image-focused media and utilize their celebrity power to assist their entrepreneurial paths.

In an age of celebrity, the entrepreneur’s uplift saga is not intended simply to be put in the service of maintaining a form of America’s national identity. The story itself has become the individual’s way to wealth. After all, what else is celebrity but the commodification of the self? (Decker 124)

The Commercial Value of Celebrity

The marketing of celebrity and the manufacturing of fame are infinitely pertinent to the notion of celebrity as entrepreneur. Irvin Rein writes extensively on “visibility marketing” in terms of a celebrity’s ability to market themselves through various media channels. Rein notes that traditional theoretical definitions of celebrity fail to illuminate the central aspect of commercial value. Joshua Gamson also writes on

the marketing of celebrity in terms of the celebrity as a commodity, as well as discusses the meaning of fame in American life.

Traditional definitions that tend to emphasize the ephemeral and transitory nature of celebrity fail to illuminate the core essence of celebrity: its commercial value. The operative question for modern times is: Can the celebrity sell newspapers, perfume, Volvo turbos, or Weider workout equipment, or generate attendance at the charity ball and draw media attention to a pet political cause? (Rein 14)

Rein goes further and defines celebrity himself as, “. . . a person whose name has attention-getting, interest-riveting, and profit-generating value.” (Rein 15) Rein explores the role of celebrities meeting the needs of institutions for representatives and advocates. “To the extent that that they can adopt, create, or flaunt some well-known (and, one hopes, dramatic) personality as *their* celebrity, they can more successfully achieve their goals. In such cases the celebrity becomes an icon for the entire institution.” (Rein 18) Rein furthers the argument by giving examples of celebrity as icon for institution. For examples, “Lancome cosmetics sell better because Isabella Rossellini and her qualities mingle with the perceived quality of the product. Universities seeking funds tout the names of their Nobel Prize winners or celebrated graduates to give donors a sense of the exciting and prestigious.” (Rein 18)

American advertising culture today is characterized by an influx of celebrity endorsers, paid to sell products and ways of life to the consumer-hungry public.

Gamson notes that the link between celebrity and selling is not new in American culture.

Fame as a sales device has been evident within advertising early on, primarily through endorsements. Beginning in the 1950's, however, celebrity began commonly represented not only as useful to selling and business but as a business itself, created by selling. (Gamson 45)

Rein's theory of "visibility marketing" is more focused on achieving visibility for everyday people in terms of the ability of the common man to achieve celebrity/visibility with marketing tactics. However, aspects of his visibility theory are relevant to a discussion of the celebrity as entrepreneur in terms of characterizing the culture of high visibility and in regards to the manufacturing of celebrity. Primarily, Rein emphasizes that technology is the key aspect of visibility marketing. "The effects of entertainment and technology on celebrities are clear: the ascendancy of visibility marketing coincided with the flooding of the marketplace with highly visible people." (Rein 8) Rein notes that due to the creation of new technologies, the celebrity industry is changing as traditional marketing is replaced with new strategies. "The creation of new technology is expanding the programming opportunities that lead to high visibility." (Rein 10)

This emphasis on the notion that the increase in mass media communications created an environment in which self-making was more popular and more image-based speaks to the marketing of the celebrity as entrepreneur.

Well-knownness has evolved into celebrity, and in today's society that means power and money – not just to its possessor, but also to businesses, institutions, political parties, causes, entrepreneurs, and charities. High visibility has become a marketable commodity that has attained tremendous commercial value around the world. (Rein 11)

Indeed, in order to achieve fame, an individual must be able market their image. “To be marketed successfully, individuals need to obtain control of their images and make decisions based on a thorough understanding of all the aspects operating in the marketing of a person in the celebrity industry.” (Rein 11)

In the theory of visibility marketing, there is also emphasis on the notion of the manufacturing of fame as opposed to natural ascendancy.

Today, the highly visible permeate our media, our economy, our very lifestyles. *They are manufactured, just as cars, clothes, and computers are.* Moreover, an entire industry has evolved whose existence depends upon producing and profiting from highly visible persons. (Rein 8-9)

Rein notes that society has not recognized the celebrity industry as a marketing-oriented entity. He offers a number of reasons for this, mostly regarding the celebrity industry's desire to be invisible, despite the marketing of visibility which it proffers. Most pertinent to a discussion of the celebrity as entrepreneur are the observations of

the character of the celebrity industry. Rein states that the celebrity industry is, “. . . a lean and mean product-based business that is groundbreaking in its manufacturing and marketing of a concept – high visibility – using a mixture of traditional and nontraditional strategies and tools.” (10)

Criteria for Assessing Fourth Level Celebrity Entrepreneurs

The commercial value of celebrity yields opportunity to assess fourth level celebrity entrepreneurs. Each criterion will be treated with examples from celebrity entrepreneurs in current popular culture.

1. Begins career as celebrity entertainer

The celebrity as entrepreneur must begin their career as a traditional entertainer. An entrepreneurial individual who begins as a businessman, Ralph Lauren for example, can not qualify as a celebrity entrepreneur. Lauren began as a fashion designer, and while he now heads a massively successful brand, he is not considered a celebrity entrepreneur. Celebrity entrepreneurs always begin as actors, musicians, talk show hosts and eventually work up to become entrepreneurial. The Olsen twins, who began their careers as infant actors, therefore qualify in this category.

2. Multiple product lines comprise a full fledged empire

Celebrity entrepreneurs always control multiple product lines which in turn comprise a full fledged empire. While it is certainly entrepreneurial to see a celebrity develop and market one product, such as rapper Eve's apparel line, "Fetish," producing one line of clothing does not qualify her as a celebrity entrepreneur. Jennifer Lopez' multiple product lines, consisting of numerous clothing lines, swimwear, as well as perfume, qualify as an empire.

3. Name brand extension of image and product

Celebrity entrepreneurs already have name brand appeal in the marketplace, as do most celebrities who endorse products. However, celebrity entrepreneurs are unique for their ability to market themselves along with their products. In a consummate name brand extension, their products are synonymous with their image and vice versa. Celebrity entrepreneurs market themselves as the brand, and therefore anything associated with them is incorporated in the branding. Martha Stewart exemplifies the notion of name brand extension. Her various products including *Martha Stewart Living* Magazine as well as her television show and assorted home living advice books are all synonymous with Martha Stewart's individual image as the diva of domesticity. Her

empire functions within an all encompassing name brand extension, such that the Martha Stewart image and associated products convey the same message.

4. Individual as corporation

Celebrity entrepreneurs embody a sense of industry. Given their multi-product empires and the name brand extension of their image and products, they function as veritable corporations. Jennifer Lopez has a fully established image as a businesswoman in charge of all elements of production. She is an owner of not only her name brand image but of all the elements of her empire, all products, and all personnel. Indeed, Jennifer Lopez is an industry in and of herself. As such, she functions as a corporation.

5. Celebrity status enhances appeal

The associated celebrity status of celebrity entrepreneurs enhances their appeal. In essence, associated status functions as free advertising. When the Olsen twins appear at a celebrity function, the Kid's Choice Nickelodeon Awards, for example, fans observe their attire and in turn are motivated to purchase items from the Olsen clothing line. Although the Olsen twins usually appear in the latest designer fashions, viewers still aspire to look and act like the girls. Thus, purchasing items from the Olsen

fashion, accessory, and beauty products line enables fans to emulate the twins.

Similarly, photos of the Olsen twins in magazines as well as articles written about them function as free advertising.

6. Overt element of business savvy

Celebrity entrepreneurs display an overt element of business savvy in all their negotiations and ventures. Celebrity entrepreneurs are not simply puppets who sit as figureheads to sign checks as staff members make all the decisions. Rather, celebrity entrepreneurs are intimately involved in all aspects of the business process and make executive decisions on future business prospects. P. Diddy displays inordinate business savvy in each of his ventures, whether it be planning the menu of his Manhattan eatery “Justin’s,” or contributing to fashion ideas for the new “Sean Jean” line. P. Diddy is the integral element of his business dealings, making calculated moves to most benefit his interests.

7. Quality product

Integral to the celebrity entrepreneur is a quality product. Celebrity entrepreneurs never settle for less than the best. They stand behind their goods with pride and confidence. Martha Stewart’s line of Kmart linens and home goods

guaranteed quality and consistency. Although the line was mass produced and affordably priced, Stewart ensured quality first.

8. Blurred line between public and private self

The line between public and private self is blurred for most celebrities, as their personal lives somehow seem fodder for public entertainment. However, for the celebrity entrepreneur, the line is even hazier. Given that their business is as much their job as the artistic endeavors of simple celebrityhood, the line is permanently hazy. Celebrity entrepreneurs certainly have separate public and private selves, but their celebrity is irrevocably intertwined with their private role as executives. Jennifer Lopez is J-LO the singer, the actress, the diva, the public idol and figure, but she is also the owner of her own fashion and fragrance lines. Given her role as entrepreneur, it is more difficult for someone like Lopez to extricate her private self from her public one. Entrepreneurial celebrities make their image their business.

9. Likeability

A celebrity's likeability factor is underrated in the modern entrepreneurial environment. Likeability is related to a celebrity's wide level of appeal. The public must consider a celebrity approachable and tangible in order to bolster them to a level

of entrepreneurial superiority. Martha Stewart holds perhaps the lowest level of likeability of all the celebrity entrepreneur examples. Even before her recent insider trading conviction, which drastically damaged her likeability level, Stewart was often considered cold and unfeeling. Although Stewart attempted to project an image of warmth as the guru of domesticity, audiences often perceived her as condescending. Still, Stewart commanded enough likeability with her fan base to qualify her as a celebrity entrepreneur.

10. Wide audience appeal

Celebrity entrepreneurs must command mass appeal which crosses racial, class, and gender lines. Universal appeal and wide following are important to the success of a celebrity entrepreneur. Celebrity entrepreneurs qualify on varying levels of this criterion. The Olsen twins exhibit perhaps the narrowest audience appeal. Their primary target market is the “tween” demographic, young adults aged 8-14, who idolize the twins and young males who consider them a sex symbol. However, the Olsen twins, who are only 17 years old and are currently investing in more adult business ventures such as major motion pictures, are likely to expand their audience appeal. Jennifer Lopez is a good example of a celebrity entrepreneur who commands very broad appeal. As a Latina woman who sings hip-hop, Lopez attracts Hispanic,

black, and white audiences alike. She appeals to men and women, as well as low income class people from the type of neighborhoods where she group up to the extremely wealthy circles she populates today.

11. Authenticity/Authority

Authenticity is perhaps the single most valuable criterion to define the celebrity entrepreneur. An individual must display authority to produce as well as authenticity of product. Celebrity entrepreneurs must be integral elements of their business pursuits. They should be intimately associated with the creation, development, and marketing of their product lines. Individuals must be perceived as authentic contributors to their products, or else their audience will not enable them the type of success required for celebrity entrepreneurs. Additionally, it must be apparent that the celebrity possesses the authority to produce within their particular industry. Usually, that authority derives from their already associated celebrity status. For Jennifer Lopez, her authority to produce a fashion line came not only from her already powerful star status, but also from her image as a fashion icon. Audiences perceive a level of authenticity to the J-LO apparel line because of her role as a risk-taking fashion icon. Lopez is attributed authority in the fashion world given her own iconic status. The level of authenticity/authority a celebrity exhibits is perhaps one of the defining factors in

qualifying someone as a third or fourth level celebrity. Many celebrities could put out a fashion line if they possessed enough star appeal and power. However, only those celebrities who reflect authenticity and authority in their venture qualify as celebrity entrepreneurs and reap the full benefits of such a classification.

12. A sense of self-making.

Celebrity entrepreneurs are a product of self-made success. Individuals who began their empires based on family fortune or previous wealth do not classify as celebrity entrepreneurs. While a celebrity entrepreneur does not necessarily have to come from poverty, it is important that they amassed their wealth on their own through hard work and determination, as embodied in the “self-made man” ethos in the United States. Self-making and coming from meager roots adds a sense of authenticity to the brand name image of the celebrity entrepreneur. Additionally, self-made success increases audience loyalty since people relate to the “rags-to-riches” myth. P. Diddy embodies the self-made man ethos given his rise to success beginning with his first paper route up to his position as the head of a multi-million dollar enterprise.

13. Minority

Celebrity entrepreneurs are often minorities. Although being a minority is not a requisite quality of entrepreneurship, celebrities can often use their minority status as an advantage in terms of generating a core audience. As a successful black man, P. Diddy appeals to other black individuals. He is considered a role model, someone who came from a poor upbringing and leveraged his talents to emerge as one of the wealthiest and most successful celebrity businessmen. His racial designation did not make him successful. However, part of his appeal lies in his loyal base audience of other black individuals who aspire to P. Diddy's success.

14. Exhibits a talent for finding a niche

Celebrity entrepreneurs are notable for finding a niche within which to market themselves and their products. They can be considered the "early adopters" in that they are the first to plug an industry hole in some way. Celebrity entrepreneurs have a keen understanding of the marketplace and are able to leverage themselves in a successful trajectory. Martha Stewart demonstrated the ability to find a niche as she established herself as the first full fledged diva of domesticity. Stewart made a business of advising

average women on the best ways to keep a home, and continued to maintain an image of the foremost authority on the subject.

15. Function as tastemakers given their influence over public opinion

Given the magnitude of their celebrity status and their brand name marketability, celebrity entrepreneurs possess massive influence over public opinion. As such, they serve as tastemakers capable of shaping public perceptions. A true celebrity entrepreneur wields enormous power to prescribe taste. Martha Stewart shaped American taste in terms of what American housewives should aspire to be. Jennifer Lopez shapes contemporary women's fashion taste, as well as what the consummate Hollywood performer should be. P. Diddy functions similarly to Lopez, in his ability to prescribe men's fashion taste. As a music producer, P. Diddy is also significant in terms of his ability to make hip-hop music a part of the mainstream musical aesthetic. "In the mid-nineties, multitasking figures like Puff Daddy helped make it [hip-hop] a brand." (Frere-Jones 78) Finally, the Olsen twins shape "tween" taste in terms of fashion as well as a youth lifestyle.

Levels of Celebrity: Deeper Analysis

A few mini-case studies will help to illuminate the distinction between level four celebrity entrepreneurs and the other levels of celebrity. These examples help illuminate the modern celebrity environment in which I have classified different types of entrepreneurial ventures.

Level one celebrities who refuse to endorse any commercial products based on artistic integrity are difficult to find. Celebrities often take commercial deals early in their career when they are struggling to find work, and this convolutes the process of identifying endorsement-free celebrities today. Given that so many stars find advertising work overseas to avoid American exposure, it is nearly impossible to be certain whether or not a celebrity has actually endorsed a product in their career. In particular, celebrities often travel to Japan to film commercials, where they are rewarded extensively by Japanese advertising agencies who are thrilled to have a Hollywood star endorse their products. Japanese advertisers Dentsu and Hakuhodo pay in the range of \$1 million to \$3 million per advertisement. However, these advertisements are usually considered “beneath” high profile celebrities, and contracts usually specify that the ads will never be seen in the United States. (<http://www.forbes-global.com/2001/03/14/0314celebjapan.html>)

Stars such as Meg Ryan, Brad Pitt, and Demi Moore were paid large sums for appearing in Japanese commercials endorsing face cream, blue jeans and protein

drinks. In the mid-1990s, Arnold Schwarzenegger received more than \$3 million for a vitamin-drink ad that ran for a year. Harrison Ford was also paid a few million for appearing in Kirin beer commercials and print ads. However, Julia Roberts and Michelle Pfeiffer have apparently both refused multi-million dollar deals by Hakuodo. (<http://www.forbes-global.com/2001/03/14/0314celebjapan.html>)

Pepsi Cola advertisements are an excellent means through which to illuminate level two celebrity endorsement. Over the last few years, Britney served as the Pepsi spokeswoman along with Faith Hill and Beyonce Knowles. These women each scored the highly coveted role as celebrity endorsers for Pepsi and filmed high profile advertisements. This type of endorsement does not qualify a celebrity as entrepreneur, despite the lucrative nature of a Pepsi endorsement deal. Although Britney Spears acts with entrepreneurial intentions by scoring the deal and promoting her image as the Pepsi spokeswoman, the connection to Pepsi is not specifically associated with branding the Spears name. Britney and Pepsi share a mutually beneficial relationship whereby Britney receives free press and subsequent popularity through the Pepsi connotation while Pepsi sales benefit from the Britney name recognition. Britney is shown enjoying Pepsi during the advertisements and the viewer receives the impression that Britney drinks Pepsi all the time. (Coincidentally, Spear was spotted drinking Coke on numerous occasions, and criticized heavily for her disloyalty to

Pepsi.) However, Britney is not associated with the Pepsi brand in an entrepreneurial way. She is simply loaning her face and her name brand recognition. Pepsi and Britney are not branded together; in this sense they are mutually exclusive. Britney has no involvement in the actual Pepsi product, and therefore she is solely an endorser.

There are dozens of celebrities who endorse or own a line of products who do not qualify as the new breed of celebrity as entrepreneur. While they exhibit entrepreneurial tendencies, they do not as of yet typify the celebrity as entrepreneur. Perhaps the best example of the third level celebrity who contradicts criticism of the inauthentic wannabe entrepreneur is No Doubt lead singer Gwen Stefani, who has designed a line of LeSportsac bags under the name "L.A.M.B." or "Love Angel Music Baby." Stefani is a well-established musician, having sold over 25 million records as well as made a name for herself as somewhat of a fashion icon. Recently she completed work on the motion picture "The Aviator," where she plays Jean Harlow. Stefani actually designs the bags herself and is apparently an integral part of the entire process. "Gwen is involved in every detail, from the zipper pulls to the lining material," says LeSportsac CEO Timothy Schifter. "Every 10 days or so, she and the designers are at her house going over ideas. She doesn't let anything go out that she doesn't love to death."

(<http://www.eonline.com/Gossip/Answer/Archive2004/040410b.html>)

Although countless celebrities make such claims as to the authenticity of their involvement in the development of the product, Stefani's involvement is perceived as believable. Perhaps this is partially because the handbag seems to reflect Stefani herself, who serves as the resident pop/punk princess of rock and roll. Indeed, the bags are punk and pop at the same time, quirky yet glam high fashion combined with punk attitude. Because Stefani is considered a member of the elite high fashion crew in Hollywood, she is considered a credible arbiter of fashionable taste. Although there is no public indication that Stefani has design talent, she is considered an authentic designer because her name brand image is associated with high fashion. Therefore, Stefani lends a good deal of authenticity to LeSportsac. Stefani appeals to a wide range of consumers, as she is popular in punk rock circles, hip hop audiences, pop rock, as well as individuals who follow Stefani's style as a public figure. Additionally, Stefani is perpetually seen carrying L.A.M.B. handbags, a further indication that she played an integral role in their creation given her obvious pride over them. It seems she herself is embodied in the bag. Perhaps most important to the nature of Stefani's entrepreneurship is the success of the handbags. Apparently retailers can't keep the shelves stocked. LeSportsac is a privately held company, so sales figures of the L.A.M.B. line aren't released. However, according to Schifter, Stefani's bags are doing

very well. In fact, LeSportsac just announced an unprecedented third season for L.A.M.B. (<http://www.eonline.com/Gossip/Answer/Archive2004/040410b.html>)

Perfume Wars

Some third level celebrities are less successful than Stefani in terms of marketing their level of authentic involvement in the development of their products. Third level celebrities are frequently criticized for their contrived attempt to establish authenticity.

Most "celebrity-designed" labels have practically nothing to do with their frontpeople. Instead, a company first creates a line of potions or little skirts, then it approaches a star to endorse 'em and put a famous name on the label. What's the extent of the celebrity "creative" input? The star gets to say, "I like that one, but throw out the other one because it makes me look fat." (<http://www.eonline.com/Gossip/Answer/Archive2004/040410b.html>)

Despite criticisms of authenticity, it seems celebrities can easily just release a line of clothing, cosmetics, or perfume depending upon the strength of their celebrity status and appeal. Recently, there has been a wave of celebrities inking deals with beauty brands. Since January of 2004, Scarlett Johansson has signed with Calvin Klein Cosmetics, Tommy Hilfiger Toiletries has picked up Beyoncé Knowles for a development gig (tentatively titled True Star) and Elaine Irwin-Mellencamp has signed a spokesperson deal with Almay. Reportedly, Estée Lauder Cosmetics is

working with Ashley Judd on a spokeswoman deal for its new BeautyBank division and Sarah Jessica Parker may be looking for a fragrance deal, possibly with Coty Inc. (Naughton www.britneyspears.com/news-item.php?item=040312)

In an attempt to follow in the footsteps of true celebrity entrepreneurs such as Jennifer Lopez, Jessica Simpson and Britney Spears are releasing their own fragrances. Not only are Simpson and Spears seeking to take advantage of the profit margin entrepreneurship promises, they are also seeking to validate their celebrity status. However, the authenticity of these commercial ventures is limited in both cases. Assessing the marketing strategies of Lopez, Simpson, and Britney Spears for their perfume releases is an excellent point of analysis for understanding the distinction of fourth level celebrity entrepreneurs.

Analyzing Jennifer Lopez's fragrance, GLOW, exhibits the inordinate level of self-consciousness with which she understand her own image in relation to the marketing of her products. Lopez's strategy emphasizes positioning of the product and framing the target audience. It takes a unique business savvy to understand the needs of the audience/consumer and incorporate the celebrity image into that realm. When asked how the fragrance represents her on the Jennifer Lopez fragrance web site, Lopez responds,

It's very much about me, because it represents everything I've ever loved since I was very young -- fresh, clean, simple, sensual things . . . People might have expected a Jennifer Lopez fragrance to be more musky, more overtly sexy, but GLOW by J-LO is much more the real me, rather than the two-dimensional image you see on screen or in a magazine.”
(<http://www.jenniferlopezfragrances.com/>)

This response describing GLOW demonstrates Lopez's business savvy, as she clearly understands her audience and therefore her market. Firstly, Lopez promotes the product as “. . . very much about me.” She establishes the authenticity of the product, but also her role in its development. Lopez clearly comprehends the significance of establishing her input in the design and development of the product. With her description, she positions herself as a vital contributor to the GLOW product. One does not get the impression that an ambiguous perfume distributor approached Lopez and asked her to select from a variety of scents and then utilized her brand name appeal. Rather, Lopez frames the product as an extension of herself, and the audience receives the message as such.

GLOW is perceived as the essence of Jennifer Lopez, the product of her creative and artistic input, as well, as her business efforts. Lopez recognizes the draw of promoting a product as “the real me.” People want to know the “real” sides of celebrities, particularly a celebrity who is as high profile as Jennifer Lopez. By acknowledging that the scent is less sexy and more refreshing than what people might

primarily associate with J-LO, Lopez shows her intimate understanding of her own celebrity image as well as the power to craft her image through branding. By referencing her prefigured “two-dimensional” magazine image, Lopez displays an acute awareness of the public’s skepticism surrounding her overexposed celebrity image. She knows people are dying to know the “real” Jennifer Lopez. With GLOW, Lopez entices people to purchase a fragrance that represents the “real” Jennifer Lopez and therefore to become closer to her. While all the talk about the “real” Jennifer Lopez is primarily marketing lingo, as the essence of an individual is hardly encapsulated in a mass produced fragrance, Lopez is able to frame the product exactly so. People want to buy GLOW because J-LO herself not only designed it, but wears it as her own. By smelling like Jennifer Lopez, fans can become her. Lopez smartly capitalizes on her celebrity appeal, turning the product into an extension of the J-LO name, authenticating her role in its development, and thereby turning fans into consumers.

Recently, business media highlighted hip-hop’s influence over fashion in recent segments on CNN's “The Biz” and CNBC's “Power Lunch.” Both shows discussed the J-LO brand and how it defines a fashionable, contemporary hip-hop style to women.

Jennifer Lopez and her J-LO collections have become the prototype for a successful fashion business with a celebrity in the role of Creative Director. Celebrities from Gwen Stefani to Eminem are trying their hand at fashion design. As the J-LO fashions and fragrance, Glow by J. Lo, continue to grow, more and more people are hoping to follow in Jennifer Lopez's footsteps. Once again, she leads the pack as her creativity and business-sense allow her amazing success in all she does. (www.jenniferlopez.com)

There is an important difference between Jennifer Lopez as the name brand behind her fragrance and Jessica Simpson as simply the model and endorser behind the new line of Desert cosmetics. Simpson loans her face, her name, and her associated celebrity appeal to the cosmetics line. While the company claims Simpson played an important role in the creation of food-scented line, others insist she had little to do with it. "Jessica reviewed lab samples, gave feedback and involved herself as often as possible," says Randi Shinder, president of Dlish Fragrances and Simpson's partner. "She is not just a face for Dessert Beauty but a true owner." (<http://www.eonline.com/Gossip/Answer/Archive2004/040410b.html>) Yet another source stated, "Jessica Simpson had precious little to do with the Dessert line. They came to her with a completed line and said, 'Do you like A or B better?'" (<http://www.eonline.com/Gossip/Answer/Archive2004/040410b.html>) Regardless of speculation over Simpson's true level of involvement, the marketing of the line shows little foresight into establishing Simpson as an authentic entrepreneur. Advertisements simply display Simpson in provocative positions, enjoying the fragrance. The level of

self-consciousness in the Lopez advertisement is missing here. There is no attempt to establish Simpson's role in creating the product. Simpson here simply functions as a level two celebrity endorser, though she attempts to position herself as a level three celebrity who is producing her own product line through name brand extension.

In keeping with recent celebrity trends, Britney Spears recently signed a deal with Elizabeth Arden to back a new perfume line. As the face of Pepsi, Britney Spears is simply using her celebrity appeal to sell something. As the face of her own perfume line, it seems she is attempting to establish her credentials as an artist and businesswoman. Spears will attempt to extend the realm of her celebrity empire. The perfume line is an effort to brand herself and extend her selling power. The problem lies in the public's perception of Spears' role in the construction of the perfume line. "I love perfume and cosmetics and am so excited to develop my own line with Elizabeth Arden," Spears told Women's Wear Daily. (Naughton www.britneyspears.com/news-item.php?item=040312) While this statement doesn't particularly reflect Spears' authority to sell perfume, Arden spokespeople are already attempting to frame Spears' role authentically. In an interview, Arden president Paul West emphasized that, ". . . the songstress is personally involved with all aspects of the fragrance's creative process, including the development of the juice, packaging and marketing." (Naughton [75](http://www.britneyspears.com/news-</p></div><div data-bbox=)

item.php?item=040312) He said, “Britney is an ideal partner on many counts,” he said. “She is an incredibly talented young woman whose career is still very much on the upswing — witness the fact that she’s selling out upcoming concert dates in hours, and has a number-one single right now. Britney has huge appeal both in the U.S. and abroad. She’s very ambitious — and she’s applying her considerable drive into making this the best brand it can be. We’re very excited to be working with her.” (Naughton www.britneyspears.com/news-item.php?item=040312)

All of these statements detailing Britney’s contribution to the project as well as her celebrity appeal are important components of entrepreneurship. However, Britney’s involvement is still perceived as inauthentic. Lopez’s involvement is implicit in a review of her product. She perpetuates her image of an active businesswoman. Initial marketing efforts by Arden to position Spears in a similar vein are at present lacking. Perhaps future marketing will tell a different story. The perfume will sell based on Spears’ name brand appeal. She does have a brand. However, there is a difference between name brand appeal and the ultimate branding of an individual.

Chapter 4. Oprah Winfrey as Tastemaker

There is an elite cadre of famous people who are recognized immediately, the world over, by their first names alone. Among them, however, there's only one that we all know intimately. Oprah is not just another famous entertainer. She's a friend to the world and a role model for all people, of any gender, of any race, of any group. Her warmth as a human being inspires and influences the millions worldwide who watch her daily yet never meet her in person. (Lowe xi)

Lowe encapsulates the Oprah mystique. Oprah is simultaneously one of the most influential people in the world as well as an apparent "friend to the world." Yet it is not simply Oprah's warmth which influences people worldwide. As one of the richest and most powerful celebrities, Oprah is surely one of the savviest entrepreneurs. Her status as an entrepreneurial power-celebrity and her influence over public opinion combine to render Oprah one of the most powerful women in the world. "Oprah Winfrey arguably has more influence on the culture than any university president, politician, or religious leader, except perhaps the Pope." (O'Shaughnessy 209) A detailed analysis of Oprah Winfrey's life and career reveals insight into the idea of a celebrity's role as a tastemaker in American popular culture. Assessment of Winfrey's influence over American public opinion illuminates an understanding of the entrepreneurial celebrity's ability to shape American taste.

Janet Lowe's comprehensive book, *Oprah Winfrey Speaks*, is the fourth in a series of books on the most successful contemporary Americans. Earlier subjects

included Warren Buffet, one of the world's most successful investors; Jack Welch, chairman of General Electric; and Bill Gates, chairman of Microsoft Corporation. Oprah is seemingly an interesting choice amongst these famous entrepreneurs. Indeed, this grouping of entrepreneurial giants signifies the arrival of the new celebrity as entrepreneur. Oprah's role as an entrepreneur is what defines her celebrity status and her subsequent influence over public opinion. Lowe acknowledges Oprah's entrepreneurial achievement and states, "Winfrey may at first seem out of place among these men, but in truth, she fits right in. She rose from humble roots to the absolute top of her profession. Like Buffet, Welch, and Gates, she restructured and redefined a job and even an industry in her own image." (xvi)

The Power of Oprah's Celebrity

Oprah's public influence extends throughout all realms of the public sphere. She is influential in business, philanthropy, fitness, public policy, and almost every other aspect of American culture. "The influence of Oprah Winfrey is so vast it's scary. Single-handedly, she waves her magic wand over the products of American culture – books, diets, personalities – and turns them into gold." (James E1) Perhaps most intellectually provocative is Oprah's role as a tastemaker in American popular culture. Because of the power associated with the Oprah brand name, Winfrey has the

ability to shape public opinion. The core audience of devoted fans who flock to her Chicago studios for a chance to see Winfrey in person only represents a spackling of the influence Oprah holds over the entire American population. In a 1996 *TIME Magazine* article, writer Fran Lebowitz states, “Oprah is probably the greatest media influence on the adult population. She is almost a religion.” (65)

In a Slate magazine article on Winfrey, writer Seth Stevenson likens Oprah’s influence over public opinion to that of Alan Greenspan, Chairman of the Federal Reserve Board. “If Oprah Winfrey were a top government official -- and a fair bit of America probably wishes she were – she would be Alan Greenspan. When Greenspan speaks, he roils financial markets. When Oprah speaks, she roils – well everything else.” (<http://slate.msn.com/id/1851/>) Oprah is indeed an arbiter of taste; she prescribes culture to the masses. The modern media environment enables the celebrity as entrepreneur to dictate the future of American popular culture. Oprah as entrepreneur is the future of American taste.

President . . . may have political power; Microsoft founder Bill Gates may have economic influence; but Oprah Winfrey spends more time on television both listening and talking to ordinary and extraordinary people, and that gives her a larger audience than either the world’s top political leader or its dominant industrialists. (Lowe 1)

Oprah herself acknowledges that television endows her with enormous influence and power over popular thought. This self-reflexive quality contributes even

more to her power, as it reflects awareness about her role as an opinion maker as well as an understanding of her own parameters. Oprah is conscious of her level of influence, and this consciousness makes her infinitely more powerful. On the *Larry King Live* show in December 2003, a caller asked Oprah if she would ever consider running for public office. Oprah declined the possibility, saying,

. . . No. I would not, because. . . vibing on the tube all around the world, this is the best forum in the world. I think all the senators wish they had that for themselves . . . So I just believe, for example, what I'm trying to do in terms of raising awareness and getting people to change the way they look at AIDS in the world, I can do a much more profound job sitting here on the *Larry King* show and using my own show than I can trying to be, you know, in politics. I just feel like it's the best forum in the world for reaching people . . .
(<http://www.cnn.com/TRANSCRIPTS/0312/09/lkl.00.html>)

Oprah's self-reflective acknowledgement of her ability to reach people beyond the reach of any politician qualifies Oprah as an agenda-setter. In most any realm of the public sphere, she chooses the topic of discussion and the public responds. In particular, her philanthropic agenda-setting typifies the enormity of her sphere of influence. When Oprah decided to adopt the cause of South African children with AIDS, she dedicated a number of show segments, as well as articles in *O Magazine*, air-time during interviews, as well as a primetime special devoted to the cause. She publicized her various charity efforts dedicated to helping the South African children. Due to her publicity efforts as well as the magnitude of her public influence, millions

of Americans joined Oprah in her efforts to help these children. Despite the thousands of worthy causes, Oprah's causes always carry more weight and induce more public interest. People earnestly believe in the value of Oprah's decisions and the authenticity of her efforts. However, Oprah's role as an entrepreneur certainly clouds some of her decisions, since she is above all a businesswoman at the helm of an empire. The negative side of being a celebrity entrepreneur is discussed later in regards to the making of Dr. Phil.

Oprah's commentary on her powerful television platform speaks to her conscious understanding of the power she wields in American popular culture. Oprah is not being arrogant by stating that politicians don't have as much ability to influence public opinion as she herself does. Rather, Oprah is simply aware of her own ability to shape perceptions. She consciously wields her power and uses her influence at times she deems appropriate or worthwhile. As such, Oprah's role as a tastemaker is significant for analysis. Because Oprah does possess so much power, it remains dependent upon her own agenda what causes or activities she chooses to endorse, and subsequently what the American public will adopt.

Television Star

Though Oprah's current celebrity status encompasses diverse realms of the public sphere, her stardom emerged because of her role as a television host of a daytime talk show. "Her [Oprah's] status as celebrity is connected to her continual presence on her eponymous daily nationally syndicated talk show." (Marshall 131) Television is the platform through which Oprah originally achieved fame and through which she continues to shape public opinion through her choice of show topics and commentaries. "The television celebrity embodies the characteristics of familiarity and mass acceptability." (Marshall 119) Television enables a sense of familiarity between viewer and star which is not present with film or radio. "The capacity of familiarity is instrumental in the development of the television celebrity. As a host, Oprah plays with the roles of public advocate and channeling device for others." (Marshall 136)

Winfrey saw television's power to blend public and private; while it links strangers and conveys information over public airwaves, TV is most often viewed in the privacy of our homes. Like a family member, it sits down to meals with us and talks to us in the lonely afternoons. Grasping this paradox, Oprah exhorts viewers to improve their lives and the world. She makes people care because she cares. That is Winfrey's genius, and will be her legacy, as the changes she has wrought in the talk show continue to permeate our culture and shape our lives. (Tannen
<http://www.time.com/time/time100/artists/profile/winfrey.html>)

Oprah's appeal is rooted in her deep connection to the studio audience. It is Oprah's intimate relationship to her live audience and subsequently her home viewing

audience which forms the foundation of her celebrity status. Indeed, Oprah's connection to her audience is what renders her a tangible celebrity friend, as mentioned later. The vehicle of television enables a personality to achieve an unprecedented level of intimacy, unachievable by film stars on the silver screen.

In the show's structure, the solidarity between the studio audience and Oprah Winfrey is ritualistically established through the applause that punctuates commercial messages, through the close proximity of Oprah to her audience, through Oprah's periodic displays of emotional empathy with individuals, and through audience members' periodic provision of anthemic statements of support for Oprah and her point of view. (Marshall 135)

The Oprah Image: Tangible Celebrity Friend

Celebrity theory emphasizes the tension between the 'veridical' or true self and the public self. (Rojek 11) "Celebrity construction and presentation involve an imaginary public face." (25) And yet, we perceive that Oprah's public face is not imaginary. Indeed, Oprah's public face appears to her audience and even the most casual observer of popular culture as the real Oprah. Her familiarity and apparent "realness" render her the most tangible, the most personal of celebrities. She is simultaneously a friend, a guide, a role model, and an icon. "Oprah is one of the very few celebrities who owes her fame not to her superhuman qualities (beauty, athletic ability) but to her human frailties. Oprah has said, 'One of my greatest assets is knowing I'm no different from the viewer.'" (Stevenson <http://slate.msn.com/id/1851/>)

Oprah seems to defy traditional notions of celebrity. Indeed, Rojek states, “The audience’s connection with celebrities . . . is dominated by imaginary relationships. The physical and cultural remoteness of the object from the spectator means that audience relationships carry a high propensity of fantasy and desire.” (26) Oprah defies this relatively universal academic perception that celebrities maintain only imaginary bonds with their audience. Oprah Winfrey is infinitely unique in that there is no split between her public and private self. She has made her career based upon her open, non-private nature. Perhaps it is the lack of a veridical self which explains Oprah’s magnitude of appeal and influence. The Oprah example follows Decker’s assertion that image-based self-making collapses the distinction between inner self and outer appearance. Because there is little or no distinction between Oprah’s public and private self, she serves as the quintessential example of the modern celebrity entrepreneur.

Because Oprah has such a loyal and devoted fan base, the construction of her celebrity is inexorably linked to that relationship with the audience. “In the construction of the celebrity sign of Oprah Winfrey, the audience is centrally engaged in the expression of support for her popular sentiment.” (Marshall 134) Oprah generates intimacy amongst her studio audience. She establishes a rapport with the entire audience, chatting with audience members on and off camera. She often holds hands with audience members, either to calm their excitement or to console them

during a particularly moving segment. Additionally, she often provides them with gifts or samples during a show. Oprah has the distinct ability to make her viewing public feel as though she is simply like everyone else. As Oprah listens to a guest speak or learns about a particular issue, she identifies with the audience, experiencing with them, not above them. “Oprah remains their [the audience’s] ally. She also represents their channel and avenue to public discourse. In a reciprocal relationship, Oprah Winfrey symbolically represents empowerment.” (Marshall 134) Indeed, viewers identify with Oprah and feel empowered by her personal achievements, her confident persona, by her very existence. Oprah admits her shortcomings. She laments her struggles with weight loss. She intimates to her studio audience and the rest of the world about her history of abuse and breaks down on national television. She allows herself to be filmed with no makeup. Oprah is the voice of everywoman.

Race and Gender

Oprah’s influence is remarkable given her minority status as a black woman, born out of wedlock and into poverty in the South in the 1950’s. Her story does not read fully without acknowledgement of her class mobility, as well as her race and gender. Her entrepreneurial success is accentuated with the acknowledgement of the adversity she has faced. She serves as a role model to black women everywhere.

However, Oprah herself recognizes the social danger in labeling her success a victory for all black women. “If other people perceive me to be representative of black people in this country, it is a false perception. The fact that I sit where I sit today, you can’t deny there have been some major advances. But I’m still just one black woman.”

(Lowe 30) However, her ability to massively shape public opinion is all the more astounding given that she garners such mainstream appeal as a black woman. Oprah is considered one of the leading figures in what Leon E. Wynter calls, “the browning of mainstream commercial culture” in America. (Kakutani 6) In a book review of Wynter’s *Pop Culture, Big Business and the End of White America*, Michiko Kakutani details Wynter’s stance that, “. . . old definitions of race are being marginalized and that American pop culture is increasingly becoming ‘transracial.’” (6) Wynter’s evidence for the so-called browning of mainstream culture include such phenomena as Brandy playing Cinderella with Whitney Houston as her Fairy Godmother, Eddie Murphy succeeding Rex Harrison in the role of Doctor Doolittle, and the 1999 Pepsi commercial featuring a little white girl who can channel Aretha Franklin’s voice. (Kakutani 6)

While Oprah contributes to the “browning of mainstream commercial culture,” she herself transcends racial boundaries. She is able to move back and forth over racial lines depending upon how she wants to frame a situation. Sometimes Oprah positions

herself as a black woman coming from nothing, fighting discrimination, and persevering. Oprah recalls this narrative and makes a claim to her race when it suits her purposes. When touting Toni Morrison's latest novel or hailing Nelson Mandela, Oprah appeals to the audience as a black woman. Oprah is always marked by her skin color; she will always be a black woman. However, in many other situations she transcends race, appealing to the audience as the universal woman with no racial designation. As a marketing giant, a businesswoman, even as the tangible celebrity friend, Oprah is not overtly marked by race. Although she constantly refers to her race as well as her background, Oprah still somehow transcends boundaries and escapes labels. Similarly, basketball player Michael Jordan, was known simply as "Michael Jordan," and not as a "black athlete." Jordan transcended racial boundaries and served as the universal athlete. Oprah is so much "larger than life," she is at many times a colorless entity, a universal force. Oprah's inordinate power in popular culture mitigates her race. She has the agency to move back and forth across racial lines, thereby accentuating her universality.

The Self-Made Woman: Celebrity Entrepreneur

A brief biography follows so as to illuminate the most notable events throughout Winfrey's trajectory towards celebrity entrepreneurship. Born on January

29th, 1954 in Kosciusko, Mississippi, Oprah experienced deep poverty and abuse. After a turbulent childhood, in 1973 Winfrey became the youngest person to anchor the news at Nashville, Tenn.'s WTVF-TV while still a sophomore at Tennessee State University. In 1976 she took a job at Baltimore, MD's WJZ-TV, co-anchoring the six o'clock news. Her emotional style of delivery led to a demotion, and she accepted a position hosting a morning talk show, *People Are Talking*. In 1984 Winfrey moved to the Midwest to host WLS-TV's *A.M. Chicago*. She boosted the third-rated talk show to number one in just one month. In 1985 she appeared in Steven Spielberg's *The Color Purple*, receiving both Oscar and Golden Globe nominations. Subsequently she renamed her program *The Oprah Winfrey Show* and brought on King World Productions as a distributor. In 1986 Winfrey established Harpo. After three months of national syndication, *The Oprah Winfrey Show* tops the rankings in its time period in every one of the country's biggest cities. The show earned \$115 million in its first two seasons. In 1991, she testified before the U.S. Senate judiciary committee to establish a countywide database of convicted child abusers called the National Child Protection Act. Two years later, President Bill Clinton signed the "Oprah Bill" into law. Winfrey appears on the Forbes rich list for the first time, with an estimated net worth of \$340 million. *The Oprah Winfrey Show* grosses about \$280 million. In 1996 she began Oprah's Book Club, where she selects a book and discussed it during a show. All 46

titles she chooses over a six-year period have become bestsellers. In 1998 Winfrey co-founded Oxygen Media, an Internet and cable business, with CarseyWerner-Mandabach. Microsoft billionaire Paul Allen later invests \$100 million. While Viacom's King World syndicates her nationally televised *The Oprah Winfrey Show*, Harpo Films produces *Beloved* for Disney. The year 2000 saw the debut issue of Winfrey's magazine, *O, the Oprah Magazine*, sells out its entire run of 1.1 million copies, forcing its partner, Hearst, to print another 500,000 copies. In 2002 Harpo television series creation *Dr. Phil* aired, featuring "life strategist" Phil McGraw. In 2003, Winfrey's net worth exceeded \$1 billion and she graces the cover of Forbes' "The World's Richest People" special issue.

Oprah Winfrey serves as the quintessential example of the American Dream. Born into poverty in rural Mississippi, she was later raised in the inner city of Milwaukee before becoming a television personality and media mogul. Rampant personal problems such as abuse, dieting, and family politics have plagued Oprah throughout her career. Indeed, it was often her openness about these personal problems that incited such a loyal fan base. Through the years, Oprah has catapulted herself to international stardom through hard work, determination, and calculated business savvy. Oprah exhibits all the categorical traits of the prototypical entrepreneur. "A daunting work ethic, excellent time management, amazing business acumen, and a massive dose

of showmanship made her the number one television talk show host worldwide.”

(Lowe xii)

In 1993 Oprah was awarded the Horatio Alger Award as someone who overcame great adversity to become a leader in her field. (Lowe xiii) The Horatio Alger Association bestows the Horatio Alger Award on truly outstanding Americans who,

. . . demonstrate individual initiative and a commitment to excellence—as exemplified by remarkable achievements accomplished through honesty, hard work, self-reliance, and perseverance. All Members have a strong commitment to assisting those less fortunate than themselves and a loyalty and devotion to American ideals and the American free enterprise system.
(<http://www.horatioalger.com/geninf/index.cfm>)

What better way to embody the spirit of self-made success and the American Dream than to be given a prize dedicated to the so-called originator of the rags-to-riches myth. As supervising producer and host of *The Oprah Winfrey Show* Oprah draws a daily audience of millions of viewers around the world. Oprah is the chairman of Harpo, Inc., Harpo Productions, Inc., Harpo Studios, Inc., Harpo Films, Inc., Harpo Print, LLC and Harpo Video, Inc. According to Lowe, Oprah’s greatest business talent, “. . . has been identifying, hiring, and holding on to people who could create the media empire that Oprah wants.” (60) Indeed, Oprah is known for treating her staff well and rewarding them generously. “Oprah knows how important her staff is, and she lets

them know she knows in ways that touch their lives and hearts.” (Rue and Abarbanel 183) Oprah’s leadership style has been described as “confident and personable,” typical of the classic entrepreneur.

As an entrepreneur, Oprah has not been devoid of business problems. Initially some of her show topics were thought to be sleazy, and she was often labeled just another daytime talk show host eager to exploit people. Additionally, Harpo, Inc. has experienced multiple layers of corporate restructuring, as staff have come and gone, sometimes unhappily. However, Oprah’s business problems are never extreme or ultimately damaging, and rather render her relatively average in terms of her management style. She told *Fortune* Magazine last year, “If I lost control of the business, I’d lose myself – or at least the ability to be myself.” (Day 1) As such, Oprah maintains creative control over all of her enterprises, remaining an intimate contributor to all of her ventures, and thereby exhibiting authenticity.

Two Entrepreneurial Comparisons

Often people make the comparison between Oprah and Martha Stewart given their roles as powerful entrepreneurial women dedicated to reaching their audience and making a difference of sorts. Despite Stewart’s recent legal troubles, the comparison is still effective. While Winfrey and Stewart both enjoy soaring success in both profits

and audience devotion, it is Oprah who emerges as the clear favorite amongst the two. While Stewart fashioned a commanding empire, she was often perceived as unfriendly and domineering. Despite the possibility that their personalities were simply different, Stewart's image is still an intriguing point of analysis. Stewart's audience often felt intimidated by the domestic diva, feeling as though Stewart would cringe if she got sight of their kitchens and linen closets. Stewart maintained an image of domestic perfection and she marketed herself as such. No fan of Oprah would mind if Oprah decided to drop over for a visit, however. Indeed, Oprah is crafted as a friendly gal pal, often admitting her distaste for performing the mundane tasks Stewart made a living on promoting. This discordance in the images of these two women speaks to the nature of their pitch to their audience. Rein notes that Stewart targeted a specific elite audience, while Oprah's audience is that much larger. Although Stewart's message was targeted at the typical American housewife, her message only resounded with an elite sort of audience. Although Stewart tapped into a less wealthy market with her Kmart line, her popularity was usually maintained within the elite audience. Consumers purchased her Kmart line, but the Kmart branding did not render Stewart tangible to a broader audience. Winfrey, however, appeals to perhaps the largest cross section of the American public than any other celebrity. Interestingly, Oprah appeals to the white, middle class Americans despite the fact that she is black and from humble beginnings.

Yes her brand name appeal has to do with her tangible celebrity friend, girlfriend to the world image, but the packaging is not enough on its own. It is the direct marketing that goes into effect when Oprah extends her empire

In his essay, *The Celebrity as Entrepreneur*, H.W. Brands contrasts Winfrey's success with Ted Turner, another celebrity whose name brand appeal shapes all his business endeavors. ". . . whether as Captain Outrageous, the big chief of the Atlanta Braves, Mr. Jane Fonda or the billionaire who bailed out the U.N., Turner appreciated that in the media business there is no such thing as overexposure." (292) Indeed, Turner's life history through hardship to become a billionaire media mogul shares common threads with Oprah's success story. The owner of Turner Broadcasting System and founder of CNN has involved himself in dozens of charitable foundations over the years. He has spread his empire both vertically and horizontally, using his name brand appeal to fund philanthropic events as well as assorted business ventures. Winfrey has on the whole experienced more universal success in her business ventures. Indeed, Oprah seems to have a magical touch in terms of business activities. Whether it be the Book Club, Dr. Phil, or any number of Oprah's other ventures, everything Oprah touches turns profitable. The Oprah name carries with it enormous status. Turner has actually experienced a number of business failures, such as a poorly conceived takeover bid for the CBS network.

(<http://abcnews.go.com/reference/bios/turner.html>) Despite obvious biographical differences in Winfrey and Turner's stories, Brands points out a key difference in the packaging of the name brandedness with which each of these celebrities market themselves. Brands renders Turner's formidable success almost elementary when considered in relation to Winfrey.

But compared to Oprah Winfrey, Turner was a tyro. The foundation of Turner's success was the media product he delivered, most notably the programming of his networks; his celebrity was always incidental to that. By contrast, Winfrey's celebrity *was* her product; the media was simply the packaging. Winfrey was hardly the first person to become rich for being famous; her contribution to modern capitalism lay in neither her fame nor her wealth but in the entrepreneurial instincts she brought to the conversion of the former into the latter. She was a star; she became an industry." (292)

The Branding and Marketing of Celebrity

Oprah herself is a carefully constructed brand name, a product herself.

Marketing expert John Grace, director of New York-based Interbrand says of Oprah, "She's a very important brand in our culture. Her presence as a brand is embodied by trust, human-to-human connections and realness. Her audience has come to believe Oprah is real and she is telling the truth." (Laker E3) Oprah's brand name appeal is inexorably linked to her image as tangible celebrity friend. Given this image, her audience implicitly trusts her taste. As such Oprah chooses not to specifically endorse products with her brand name, although entities such as the book club and Dr. Phil

function as types of products, which will be discussed later. Still, Oprah refrains from endorsing any consumer products. Endorsement deals would seem to belittle the relationship she shares with her audience. She does, however, use the vehicle of *O Magazine* to show her predilection for certain products. Her marketing power is perhaps unparalleled in modern popular culture.

The Oprah Book Club made unknown writers into very rich celebrity authors. Passing mention of personal favorite products, like the Philosophy cosmetics line, turn them into household names. If you put her on ice skates, marketers speculate, she could probably sell a million hockey sticks. (Day 1)

Oprah also holds a “Favorite Things” show every holiday season in which she publicizes her favorite consumer items from that year, as well as distributes one of each item to her entire audience. As with everything Oprah touches, items on her favorite things list skyrocket in sales immediately following the broadcast.

It's the power of celebrity writ large as an Oprah product endorsement is sure to provide holiday success to manufacturers and marketers. . . a few hundred free products given to the Oprah show audience will flock huge amounts of word of mouth advertising as audience members tell everybody about the products and where they got them. (Davidson
http://peterthink.blogs.com/thinking/2003/11/oprahs_favorite.html)

Oprah’s “Favorite Things” show is simply a brand extension of the Oprah name itself. Although none of the products are specifically sponsored or endorsed by Oprah in a commercial sense, her seal of approval is worth more than any endorsement deal.

Oprah's designation of the best products of the season carries more weight than any other consumer recommendation. Because she holds so much power over public opinion, she is able to prescribe consumer taste to millions of Americans with one show. Indeed, Oprah is cognizant of her own marketing authority, which contributes to her decision not to endorse products in any other facet than this yearly show and through *O Magazine*. Any more endorsements might jeopardize her perceived authenticity. Instead, Oprah positions the "Favorite Things" show as her holiday shopping advice hour, and smartly avoids any traces acknowledgement of the marketing bonanza her recommendation confers.

Oprah is smart to do this show only twice a year. That protects both the power of it and her audience's tolerance for it. If she did it more often it would feel more like product placement and simply celebrity endorsement. She does do a similar list in her monthly magazine however that context is more tolerant of new product lists. (Davidson
http://peterthink.blogs.com/thinking/2003/11/oprahs_favorite.html)

Even Oprah's personal trainer, Bob Greene, capitalizes on the name brandedness and popularity of the Oprah Winfrey name. He was recently hired by McDonalds to promote their new Go-Active Meal, which is designed to encourage healthier eating. Greene is an exercise physiologist and personal trainer as well as a proponent of healthy living. He is a frequent guest on the *Oprah Winfrey Show*, a regular contributor and editor to *O Magazine*, and writes a weekly column on health

and fitness for Oprah.com. Along with Oprah, Greene is also a bestselling co-author of two healthy living books. Greene functions as an extension of the Oprah celebrity name. His recent merger with McDonalds is significant because of his continued association with the Oprah name. While Oprah herself is not specifically endorsing McDonalds, Greene's new partnership still functions within the Oprah media empire. "Mr. Greene's appointment is McDonald's latest attempt to recast itself as a purveyor of healthy food in the face of criticism that fast-food companies have contributed to the increasing number of obese people." (Day 4) As a celebrity endorser, Greene will promote a healthy lifestyle of exercise along with the meal. Pam Murtaugh, a management consultant based in Wisconsin notes that using Mr. Greene, ". . . shows a commitment to participate in and promote healthy lifestyles. But it's also not focusing on the foods, which is excellent. It's a really counter-couch-potato and counter-drive-through message, which can be very useful to them." (Day 4) The McDonalds' web site states, "Together, McDonalds and Greene will promote the importance of being physically active and choosing a healthy diet based on the sound principles of balance, variety and moderation."

(http://164.109.33.187/usa/eat/health/fitness_expert_bob.html)

Because Oprah's struggles and eventual success with weight loss is such a publicly documented event, Oprah's personal trainer carries clout in American popular

culture. Interestingly, Bob Greene will always be known as Oprah Winfrey's personal trainer. As such, Greene's foray into product endorsement represents another element to Oprah's role as an entrepreneur. The Oprah brand name is simply further extended into the realm of fast food through an Oprah subsidiary such as Greene.

The Beef Trial: Epitome of Public Influence

Oprah's Beef Trial in Amarillo, Texas in 1998 represents one of the most poignant instances of Oprah's influence over American popular opinion. An April 1996 Oprah show on mad cow disease featured commentary by Howard Lyman, head of the Humane Society's "Eating with Conscience" campaign, who revealed that some American cattle were being fed ground-up meat made from dead livestock. This practice, thought to have instigated the spread of bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE) or mad cow disease, in Britain was subsequently banned by the Food and Drug Administration. After learning of the risks of mad cow disease during the show segment, Oprah stated, "It has just stopped me cold from eating another burger." (Verhovek A10) Subsequently, beef prices fell drastically and the cattle industry suffered millions of dollars in cattle losses. The day after the program was broadcast, cattle futures prices dropped more than 10 percent, from 62 cents a pound to 55 cents; they took weeks to recover. (Verhovek A10) Some beef traders even referred to the

two week plummet in cattle prices as the “Oprah Crash” of 1996. (Lowe 136) Cattle ranchers accused Oprah of causing the American public’s distaste for beef and sued her for \$12 million in damages and losses. The trial was considered the first major test of the constitutionality of laws that “. . . subject to civil liability anyone who knowingly spreads false information about agricultural products.” (Verhovek A10) Oprah was sued under the Texas statute, the False Disparagement of Perishable Food Products Act of 1995. Oprah’s lawyers, however, countered that the beef crisis was a result of drought and high feed prices. (Stevenson <http://slate.msn.com/id/1851/>) Some experts insisted that Oprah’s statement was incidental given that meat prices were all ready in decline. (Lowe 136)

Ultimately, the federal judge ruled in favor of Oprah, such that the group of Texas beef producers could not use the Texas food-defamation statute as a basis for their lawsuit. In order to win, the plaintiffs would have had to prove Oprah intended malice towards the beef industry when she made her comment about hamburgers. Indeed, Oprah would have had to have made a malicious comment about the contamination of the American beef supply, which she never did. The ruling is of importance to an assessment of Oprah’s role as a celebrity because it speaks to the inordinate range of her power on American popular opinion. With one comment on her negative perception of eating hamburgers, Oprah initiated hysteria over the American

cattle industry and the potential for mad cow disease outbreak. Although Oprah did not actually defame the cattle industry, her celebrity status is so influential that she rendered millions of dollars of losses for the industry. In a 1998 article on Oprah's status and influence over American culture, *New York Times* writer Caryn James commented, "The current lawsuit by Texas ranchers, claiming that a remark by her sent cattle prices plummeting, is only the most recent and bizarre tribute to her perceived power." (E1)

The beef trial is a significant point of analysis for Oprah's ability to position herself successfully. Instead of allowing the trial to damage the success of her show, Oprah decided to take the show on the road to Amarillo. While some might have cowered behind the stigma of the trial, Oprah opened her life even further for public perusal. By taking the show with her to Amarillo, Oprah not only proved her staying power, but also invited the world to share the experience along with her. Broadcasting from Amarillo was an astute business decision, since it garnered Oprah support in Amarillo amongst local residents as well as enhanced her support around the country. Oprah perpetuated her image as tangible celebrity friend by further reducing the line between her public and private self. And so Oprah's fan base grew in Amarillo, as thousands lined up for tickets and to demonstrate their solidarity. Despite the fact that the trial took place in the heart of cattle country, Amarillo citizens gathered outside of

the courthouse pledging their support. In a *New York Times* article covering the trial, Sam Howe Verhovek predicted, “For Ms. Winfrey, who taped her program from Amarillo’s Little Theater during the trial and managed to generate both sympathy and a public relations bonanza out of the lawsuit, the jury’s decision is likely to add to her luster as one of the nation’s richest, best-known and most charismatic television personalities.” (A10) Indeed, Oprah made the best of the situation in Amarillo and emerged successful. Oprah is quoted as saying about the experience in Amarillo, “We took what was given to us. It was a big fat old lemon. And we didn’t make lemonade out of it, we made a lemon pound cake.” (Lowe 141)

Oprah’s stand against the cattle ranchers of Amarillo, TX represents a major battle for free speech rights in America. In essence, the contested libel laws in the beef trial were thought to jeopardize free speech about American food products. Critics of the laws maintain that, “. . . they are a serious infringement on free-speech protections and are driven by business interests intent on silencing journalists and others who question the safety of the American food supply.” (Verhovek A10) When Oprah exited the courthouse after winning the case she announced, “Free speech not only lives, it rocks!” (Brands 302) Her victorious declaration in the name of free speech not only shaped the event for viewers, but solidified Oprah’s role as an arbiter of public opinion in American popular culture. Although there were risks in taking her show on the road

during a long and exhausting trial, Oprah felt she had an obligation to defend free speech. Instead of settling out of court, Oprah faced a very public and possibly damaging trial because she believed strongly in her right to speak her mind. (Lowe 137) Oprah made reference to race relations and free speech during the trial. “I come from a people who struggled and died to use their voice in this country,” she said, “and I refuse to be muzzled.” (Verhovek A10) Oprah’s reference to her color not only historicizes the beef trial in terms of a black woman on trial in the largely white Texas panhandle, but further secures her role as a champion of free speech in American society.

Although free speech is widely debated in every facet of American policy, it was Oprah Winfrey who epitomized the struggle for free speech. Oprah made the fight for free speech tangible to the American public. Oprah was targeted because of her celebrity status and because she maintains such power over American popular opinion. However, there is a viable claim that Oprah’s celebrity status influenced the outcome of the trial. Defense attorney Joe Coyne stated, “You’d have to be blind to say [jurors] weren’t influenced by one of the 25 most influential Americans.” (Associated Press) Still, experts seem to agree that the cattle ranchers’ claim was ultimately, as Oprah had the right to her opinion, regardless of her ability to shape American popular opinion. Despite her power, Oprah has as much right to free speech as any American citizen, no

more and no less. The trial and her subsequent victory remind the American public that first and foremost, Oprah is just like any American citizen. She is not impermeable; she can be sued for speaking her mind. But she will rise to the occasion and fight a battle for free speech using founding principles through which American life is based. Although her reputation as a friend to the American people persists indefinitely, the beef trial rendered Oprah more real than ever before. In doing so, it rendered her celebrity status an unparalleled level of power over public opinion. As such, the beef trial bestowed the Oprah brand name with unprecedented credibility and influence. A *Time* magazine article covering the outcome of the trial proclaimed, “The winner Oprah. She’s the most powerful woman in the United States, Laws be damned.” (75)

The Making of Dr. Phil and the Formula for Success

In 2001, Oprah and Harpo Productions announced the creation of a syndicated series, *Dr. Phil*, featuring life strategist Dr. Phil McGraw, Ph.D., who appeared as a regular guest on The Oprah Winfrey Show from 1998 through 2002. The show, which has ranked number two since its debut on September 16, 2002, is produced by Paramount Domestic Television and distributed in national syndication by King World Productions and globally by CBS Broadcast International.

(http://www.oprah.com/about/press/about_press_bio.jhtml) The ratings Dr. Phil’s show

received in its first four days were the highest of any similar show since Oprah made her debut in 1986. (Stanley 1) While he does not appear as a regular guest on the *Oprah Winfrey Show* any longer due to his responsibilities at his own show, Dr. Phil does provide strategic guidance to millions of Americans through his monthly column in *O, the Oprah Magazine*. Additionally, Dr. Phil has written three number one *New York Times* bestsellers on life strategies as well as a new book about weight loss solutions that has also topped bestseller lists.

(http://www.drphil.com/about/about_landing.jhtml)

Dr. Phil is known for his “tell it like it is” brand of advice, such that he often reduces people to tears with a few sharp, tactless recommendations for improving their situations. “His advice is sensible, but his show is entertaining mainly because he acts as the audience’s id, uttering the tactless judgments that most people keep to themselves.” (Stanley 1) Indeed, in his first week as a host of his own daytime talk show, Dr. Phil made a verbally abusive mother cry as well as advised a lawyer suing a fast-food chain for making his daughter fat that his case was absurd. (Stanley 1) In one instance, Dr. Phil made Cathy, a mom who yelled at her son while driving, watch a videotape of herself screaming and froze it at the moment she yelled, “Shut up, Vincent.” Dr. Phil then replayed her words 11 times at the highest possible volume as she covered her face and sobbed. Alessandra Stanley likens the experience as, “. . . a

moment of counseling that came close to the aversion therapy scene in ‘A Clockwork Orange.’” (1) Dr. Phil and his fans consider his direct, tactless advice refreshing and devoid of superficiality and artifice. “Dispensing blunt, Texas-dipped advice . . . Dr. McGraw holds himself up as a beacon of candor and common sense, an antidote to what he describes as a prevailing culture of self-pity and psychobabble.” (Stanley 1)

Though he initially appears ruthless, Oprah saw great potential in Phil’s brand of direct counseling. Oprah met Dr. Phil McGraw during the beef trial when Dr. Phil served as her personal counselor. Throughout the trial, Dr. Phil provided Oprah with his characteristic “tell it like it is” brand of advice. Pleased with the directness of his approach, Oprah convinced Dr. Phil to write a book and appear as a guest on her show. Over the next year, Oprah continued to promote Dr. Phil as a “tough-love” self-help guru. As always, Oprah personalized the marketing of Dr. Phil, explaining to her audience how she herself had benefited from his techniques. As with every business endeavor involving Oprah, Dr. Phil was a resounding success story. Indeed, Dr. Phil has shot to unparalleled guru-like status. His multiple books are all bestsellers and his cable self-help show, owned by Harpo Studios, is also experiencing remarkable success, second only to the *Oprah Winfrey Show* in daytime television. In an interview with Larry King, Oprah refers to Dr. Phil as the second best business decision she ever

made. She cites owning herself and her show as the best business decision of her life.

(<http://www.cnn.com/TRANSCRIPTS/0312/09/lk1.00.html>)

Perhaps most significant about Oprah's role in Dr. Phil's success is her conscious effort to package and market him to the general public. Oprah discussed her audience's initial discomfort with Dr. Phil's confrontational style in her recent interview with Larry King.

You know, the very first time that we did him on our show, I got a lot of calls, e-mails from people saying, how can you dare let him stand up there and say that and talk like that to people? And I said, you know, the next time we do him on the show, I said to the producers, I can help the audience to understand who he is and what he's trying to say. So I said to Phil, you know what? You just have to tell it like it is, and I'll say to the audience, that's what you're doing. You're Mr. Tell it like it is. And that's how we made it palatable to people to accept. He's a guy who's going to tell you like it is. And I'd say, oh, that's what Phil did to me. He just told me like it was.

(<http://www.cnn.com/TRANSCRIPTS/0312/09/lk1.00.html>)

Oprah's acknowledgement that she helped to make Dr. Phil "palatable" is inordinately consequential in terms of understanding Oprah's ability to market for the public opinion. The shaping of Dr. Phil into a cultural phenomenon was entirely a result of Winfrey's powers of persuasion over the public. Through her audience response, Oprah recognized a deficiency in Dr. Phil's appeal, a hardness to his character and his style of self-help psychology. Instead of asking Dr. Phil to change his style to fit the needs of an audience put off by his harshness, Oprah instead decided what her

audience and in turn the general public needed. Oprah was attracted to Dr. Phil's "tell it like it is" style of self-help. Oprah decided to use her formidable powers of influence by instructing her public that they should take Dr. Phil for what he was. And the audience responded.

The making of Dr. Phil also demonstrates the negative side of entrepreneurship in terms of authenticity. In a sense, Oprah's acknowledgement that Dr. Phil was the second best business decision of her life cheapens the good intentions with which she supposedly decided to share him with the rest of the world. Given that the *Oprah Winfrey Show* benefited from having Dr. Phil as a regular guest and that Harpo, Inc. owns the *Dr. Phil Show*, it follows that Oprah "used" Dr. Phil to keep ratings up as well as make a profit. While Oprah functions under the guise that she was doing her audience a favor by exposing Dr. Phil's life strategies, a predominant element of the making of Dr. Phil is motivated by turning a profit. Oprah promoted Dr. Phil because he was marketable, hence, able to make money. Given her tremendous business savvy, Oprah recognized that Dr. Phil would be very popular, as well as very profitable. This focus on Dr. Phil's profit potential does not necessarily render Oprah's marketing of Dr. Phil wholly inauthentic or simply profit-driven. However, as an entrepreneur, Oprah must focus on the business side of her endeavors. Perhaps one of the disadvantages of celebrity entrepreneurs is that that every choice resembles a business

decision, thereby lessening the authenticity of the action. People become products. Oprah and Dr. Phil engaged in a mutually dependent relationship whereby each one took conscious advantage of the other. Oprah made Dr. Phil, but simultaneously capitalized on his success. Dr. Phil took full advantage of the name brandedness Oprah afforded him and was able to follow in her footsteps of fame.

Dr. Phil is a particularly significant point of analysis in terms of his potential for following in Oprah's footsteps as a tastemaker. Dr. Phil, however, has the potential to be a dangerous arbiter of public opinion and subsequently represents the risks to American popular culture. Dr. Phil's rapidly increasing celebrity status is rendering him similar to Oprah in terms of his ability to shape public perceptions. Although Dr. Phil's influence hardly compares in terms of the magnitude of Winfrey's celebrity sway, still he carries a significant following. Therefore the decisions he makes affect a massive audience. He is accountable for his personal life and for his business decisions, much as any public figure. However, because he has positioned himself as an "expert" dedicated to improving the quality of peoples' lives, he is particularly responsible for his actions.

Dr. Phil's recent decision to endorse a line of nutritional supplements has taken him in a divergent direction from his mentor, Oprah, who famously does not

specifically endorse any consumer products. Given the magnitude of her sway over public opinion, Oprah is careful to keep a tight rein over her name.

Throughout her 18-year career as a daytime talk show host, with the enormous influence she wields in the marketplace, she has turned down numerous requests to license consumer products . . . But other than with products she controls herself, like *O Magazine*, she has not licensed her name nor has she received a dollar from the book publishers she has made lost of money for.
(Day 1)

In sharp contrast to Oprah, Dr. Phil is using his name and image for a line of nutritional supplements, under a licensing deal with CSA Nutraceuticals, which includes vitamins, energy bars, and meal-replacement drinks. Under the brand name “Shape Up,” the line is being stocked at stores like Wal-Mart, Walgreens, and Target.

(Day 1) “Of course, celebrity licensing and endorsement deals have long been a mainstay of consumer marketing, but few talk-show hosts have so closely associated the products they endorse with the content of their television programs.” (Day 1)

Because Dr. Phil has dedicated his entire second season as well as a new book towards helping America lose weight, the endorsement of a line of nutritional supplements is particularly controversial. Dr. Phil has said that he does not consider the endorsement deal a commercial venture, since he is donating the proceeds to charity. Indeed, he insists that the endorsement of the Shape Up line is part of his personal desire to help America lose weight. However, a percentage of the profits of his deal with CSA

Neutraceuticals are given to the Dr. Phil Foundation, a Dallas charity that is dedicated to epidemics like childhood obesity. “While he would not disclose the specifics on that share, he expects the foundation to earn at least \$1 million from the products in the first year. He added that he pays the foundation’s administration and staffing costs out of his own pocket.” (Day 1) While the proceeds are certainly going to charity and not into Phil’s own pocket, it is interesting that the endorsement deal is benefiting his own charity which does carry his name brand. While the Shape Up endorsement deal is not specifically a name brand extension, it does seem to fall very neatly within Dr. Phil’s personal campaign to help America lose weight.

Although the cover of his weight-loss book and the package design of the Shape Up products have a striking resemblance – both carry a full-length image of Dr. McGraw flashing a toothy grin and a red-and-white color scheme – neither product is explicitly used to promote the other. There is no mention of the products in the book, nor does he mention the Shape Up line on his program or his Web site. He will not appear in radio, print or television commercials to promote the products, and his contract prohibits CSA from buying commercial space for Shape Up products before, during or after the *Dr. Phil Show*. (Day 1)

Thus, Dr. Phil has taken specific measures to distance himself from the Shape Up line and to reduce public scrutiny. Still, his decision to endorse these products presents potential ramifications as to the legitimacy of his public role as a doctor seeking to help individuals live more fulfilling lives.

Dr. Phil's endorsement of the Shape Up line carries deep implications as to the consequences of a celebrity's influence over public opinion. Apparently Dr. Phil spoke with Oprah regarding his decision to endorse the nutritional supplements, though the content of that conversation is private. (Day 1) On Larry King, Oprah said this about Dr. Phil's decision to use his celebrity to promote these products.

Well, this is what I think. I think that anybody who has the ability to, you know, reach an audience, be that you or I, I've been asked by every single person and manufacturer in this country to endorse products or to, you know, use my name. And I made the choice that I would do a magazine, because that is how I felt I could best use my voice. And Phil owns himself, own his name, owns the right to do whatever he chooses to do.
(<http://www.cnn.com/TRANSCRIPTS/0312/09/lkl.00.html>)

In regards to Oprah, Dr. Phil stated, "I've learned a tremendous amount from Oprah. I don't substitute anybody else's judgment for my own. Oprah has her plan and strategy, and I have my plan and strategy." (Day 1) Clearly, this endorsement deal represents a dramatic departure from the model Oprah imposes. Indeed, Dr. Phil's decision to sign onto the Shape Up line is perhaps the first major business decision to conflict with the example set by his mentor. There is no reason to believe there is tension between the two public figures, especially considering Oprah owns the *Dr. Phil Show* and is likely the final word on all business-related decisions. Still, the difference in business tactics is telling in terms of entrepreneurial styles. Relatively new as an increasingly entrepreneurial high profile public figure, Dr. Phil has already broken

paths with the woman who established his success. Brad Adgate, senior vice president for research at Horizon Media, a media consulting group comments, “He knows that he’s got a popular following, and he’s taking advantage of that to further create an image of himself as a brand. He’s only been on for [two] years. He’s already surpassed people that have been on for 10, 15 years.” (Day 1) While Phil’s fast success is remarkable, it still begs the question of whether endorsing such products is the most authentic means towards maintaining that success. Because Dr. Phil carries such influence over popular thought, it follows that this particular business decision could harm the public he purports to help.

Dr. Phil, while certainly no Oprah, is certainly accumulating a vast following and subsequently substantial public influence. Endorsing products from the Shape Up line is controversial given the divisive quality of weight loss healthcare products. Critics argue over the potential health hazards of using such products, as well as the validity of someone like Phil, who is known to the public as a ‘doctor,’ in endorsing them.

Dr. McGraw’s licensing deal with Shape Up crosses another barrier, one that has been regarded as sacred: Unlike books or videos, the products can directly affect viewers’ health. And because Dr. McGraw carries the honorific ‘doctor’ – though he is a clinical psychologist and not a physician – his critics say that consumers are more likely to trust his recommendations. (Day 1)

As such, Dr. Phil’s Shape Up endorsement potentially serves as an example of an abuse of celebrity power. Given Dr. Phil’s growing ability to shape public opinion,

especially given his perceived status as a “doctor,” individuals are likely to follow his lead.

The implications of Dr. Phil’s endorsement deal speak to the notion of celebrity responsibility. When an individual holds power over public thought, such as Dr. Phil, there is a question as to whether or not that individual has a social obligation to refrain from influencing people to partake in potentially damaging or controversial activities. As a self-proclaimed life-strategist, Dr. Phil presents himself as a reliable source. His audience believes that Dr. Phil’s advice is sound and responsible. Even individuals who are not fans, per se, still perceive Dr. Phil’s advice to be responsible because he is associated with the “doctor” label. Doctors denote medical expertise, and while Dr. Phil has a doctorate in psychology, he is certainly not medically qualified to prescribe nutritional supplements. “The licensing question is amplified because Dr. McGraw’s success is built to a large degree on his personal appeal and credibility, far more so than most daytime talk show host.” (Day 1) Sherri Day uses the example of notorious talk show host Jerry Springer, who is known for having rowdy and violent guests, to illustrate this point. While Dr. Phil’s holds himself as a credible source, Jerry Springer certainly makes no claims to the credibility or responsibility of his life choices. As such, viewers might hesitate before buying a health product endorsed by Springer. Yet the choices Dr. Phil makes about endorsing products, particularly weight loss products

when he is simultaneously deep amidst a campaign to help American lose weight, is controversial. Because Dr. Phil holds himself as a pinnacle of life-strategy, it would follow that he has an obligation to prescribe only safe and non-controversial advice. Yet the endorsement of the Shape Up line contradicts the notion of celebrity responsibility given questions over the safety and or desirability of nutritional supplements. Sid Good, the president of Good Marketing, a consumer products consultant in Cleveland states, “It’s always different when you step into the medical field. There are a different set of assumptions that we make as consumers in terms of what our expectations are and the appropriateness of who’s giving us the advice.” (Day 1)

Oprah’s Book Club

Oprah's Book Club, a reading club featured on *The Oprah Winfrey Show*, launched on September 17, 1996 with great success. Oprah selects works of fiction and invites the author and selected viewers to join her for a televised follow-up discussion. In April 2002, Oprah discontinued the book club until June 2003, when she re-launched it with a new format featuring great books that have stood the test of time. The book that “brought the book club back” was John Steinbeck's *East of Eden*, which became the 47th selection to skyrocket to the top of bestseller lists. The new book club

discussions, held three to five times a year, consist of Oprah and other enthusiastic readers traveling to different locations that are somehow connected to the book or author. (http://www.oprah.com/about/press/about_press_obcfaq.jhtml)

Oprah's Book Club is a powerful presence in the publishing world. As such, being selected for the book club virtually guarantees that a book will be a bestseller. An Oprah Book Club selection is coveted amongst publishing and authors' circles alike. ". . . publishers and authors welcome [a selection] as the most potent marketing send-off in the business." (Corcoran 6) Indeed, all of Oprah's past book club selections have been bestsellers. Most bookstores have a separate "Oprah's Book Club" section of the store. A *New York Times* editorial written after Oprah temporarily suspended the book club stated, "The force she wielded in publishing was as much a measure of her sincerity, the passion with which she spoke of books, as it was of her show's popularity." (26) In addition, when Oprah recommended books by her fitness trainer and personal chef, these books also skyrocketed to bestseller status. Marketers even refer to this as the "Oprah Effect." (Stevenson <http://slate.msn.com/id/1851/>)

Publishers campaigned for titles to be chosen nearly as heavily as film studios do for Oscar nominations, and compared (too often) an Oprah nod to winning the lottery. . . . When Oprah talks, the industry listens – something you can't always even say about the *New York Review of Books*. (Smokler <http://www.alternet.org/story.html?StoryID=12806>)

Oprah's Book Club is also credited for achieving social advances. Because Oprah often selects female, minority authors, she creates opportunities for authors who might not ordinarily have voices. A *New York Times* editorial stated, "Any survey of Ms. Winfrey's book choices over the past six years makes it perfectly clear that she has given many writers, particularly women of color, access to an audience few writers could ever dream of." (26) Not only is Oprah's Book Club remarkable in terms of marketability and audience accessibility, but the book club also gives Oprah some responsibility for inciting America to read. The American Library Association credits Oprah with, ". . . singlehandedly expanding the size of the reading public." (Lowe 23) Oprah herself points to the gratification at getting Americans to read. In a 1996 *Entertainment Weekly* article she states, "The best thing about it is the thousands of letters from people who hadn't picked up a book in 20 years. Some literally made me weep." (36)

Oprah has extended the book club one step further by taking it online. In an effort to create the largest book club in the world, viewers are now given the chance to join Oprah's Book Club online at Oprah.com. Currently there are nearly 200,000 official members who are offered in-depth study guides, expert question and answer sessions, and weekly e-mails from Oprah herself. Online Book Club members can also correspond with other readers from their local area or around the world. The site also

features merchandise in Oprah's Book Club Boutique, an online store offering Oprah's Book Club logo t-shirts, hats, and bags, the profits of which benefit Oprah's Angel Network. (http://www.oprah.com/about/press/about_press_obcfaq.jhtml)

Taking the book club online represents a further enhancement of the cultural value of Oprah's Book Club. By making the book club attainable to all individuals with computer access, Oprah democratizes membership in her book club by making it even more accessible. Oprah.com is visited by 2 million fans a month, thus the effects increased membership are potentially extreme.

(<http://www.forbes.com/maserati/billionaires2004/LIRO0ZT.html?passListId=10&passYear=2004&passListType=Person&uniqueId=O0ZT&datatype=Person>) In a March 12, 2004 New York Times article, Caryn James likens Oprah's online book club to a Literature 101 class. "It's cute as can be, yet beyond the chatty tone this elaborate, playful online book club is a wonder, the equivalent of a course in one of the 20th century's great novels." (www.nytimes.com/2004/03/12/books/12JAME.html)

Indeed, the online book club features, with its interactive family trees and quizzes, functions more as an educational tool than as a medium for people to simply chat about literature, as book clubs previously were stereotyped. There is even a weekly forum in which a college professor answers reader questions.

Oprah as Middlebrow: The Franzen Controversy

In late September of 2001, Oprah chose Jonathan Franzen's novel, *The Corrections*, as her 45th book club selection. One of the most critically acclaimed and best selling novels of the year, *The Corrections* tells the story of a dysfunctional family's struggles to relate to one another. In November it would win the National Book Award for Fiction.

The novel is already on the New York Times bestseller list, it is being widely advertised and extravagantly displayed in large bookstores. But Oprah's endorsement means that now sales will multiply, publicity will intensify and the financial rewards will greatly increase. (Jefferson 35)

While most authors would celebrate an Oprah's Book Club selection, given the colossal book sales the designation confers, Franzen was less than thrilled. In numerous interviews after his novel was selected, Franzen expressed ambivalence over the selection. "Mr. Franzen publicly disparaged Oprah Winfrey's literary taste, suggesting at one point that appearing on her show was out of keeping with his place in 'the high-art literary tradition' and might turn off some readers." (Kirkpatrick 1) Additionally, Franzen expressed his dismay at having the Oprah's Book Club seal on the jacket of his novel, thereby irrevocably associating it with corporate ownership. While Oprah did not revoke her selection of Franzen's work, she withdrew the

invitation to appear on her show and Franzen became the first author to be formally uninvited to appear on her show. (Kirkpatrick 4)

Franzen may have believed he would draw the support of the literary world who similarly believed in the high-art literary tradition, but he was sorely mistaken. Subsequently, a veritable firestorm emerged in the literary community over Franzen's dismay at being chosen by Oprah. ". . . he [Franzen] found that he may have inadvertently damaged his own reputation in the literary world. . . instead of rallying to Mr. Franzen, most of the literary world took her side, deriding him as arrogant and ungrateful." (Kirkpatrick 1)

The Franzen situation stirred up a number of controversies within the literary community and in popular culture as a whole. Primarily, it speaks to the conflict over whether a high-art literary tradition still exists, calling into question old conflicts over low, middle, and highbrow distinctions. In an interview with National Public Radio, Franzen said his selection, ". . . heightens this sense of split that I feel. I feel like I'm solidly in the high-art literary tradition, but I like to read entertaining books and this maybe helps bridge that gap, but it also heightens these feelings of being misunderstood." (Kirkpatrick 4) Franzen's ambivalence speaks to his apparent perception that Oprah books appeal to middlebrow taste, while *The Corrections* falls in a category of his self-proclaimed "high-art literary tradition." Franzen insinuates that

being read by a mass audience will place his work out of the high art literary tradition. For Franzen, mainstream is equivalent to middlebrow, which in turn signifies mediocrity.

Andre Dubus III, a former Oprah's Book Club selection and National Book Club Award winner reacted with disdain to Franzen's implied categorization of Oprah's taste as distinctly middlebrow.

It is so elitist it offends me deeply," he said. "The assumption that high art is not for the masses, that they won't understand it and don't deserve it – I find that reprehensible. Is that a judgement on the audience? Or on the books in whose company his would be?" (Kirkpatrick 1)

Even defenders of high-art literary tradition found issue with Franzen. Critic Harold Bloom said he would be "honored" to be selected as an Oprah's Book Club choice. "It does seem a little invidious of him to want to have it both ways, to want the benefits of it and not jeopardize his high aesthetic standing." (Kirkpatrick 1)

Franzen further insulted Oprah's taste in book selection in an interview with Powell's bookstore in Portland, Oregon. Franzen said, "She's picked some good books, but she's picked enough schmaltzy, one-dimensional ones that I cringe, myself, even though I think she's really smart and she's really fighting the good fight." (Kirkpatrick 4) Franzen also suggested that male readers might be turned off of his novel in light of the Oprah seal of approval, given that Oprah's readership mainly consists of women.

Franzen's statements imply that Oprah's literary taste is distinctly middlebrow.

"Lurking behind Mr. Franzen's rejection of Ms. Winfrey' is an elemental distrust of readers, except for the ones he designates." (Klinkenborg 16)

After hearing of Franzen's comments which seemingly disparaged her mainstream taste, Oprah rescinded the invitation to appear on her show. In a statement to Publishers Weekly, Winfrey stated, "Jonathan Franzen will not be on the *Oprah Winfrey Show* because he is seemingly uncomfortable and conflicted about being chosen as a book club selection. It is never my intention to make anyone uncomfortable or cause anyone conflict." (Kirkpatrick 4) Subsequently, Franzen spoke out over his regretted comments, noting that some had appeared out of context. He lamented, "I said things that ended up hurting Oprah Winfrey's feelings and far too late it was pointed out to me that this was happening. I feel bad for a number of reasons, because I really don't like to hurt people, and I feel bad because the person being hurt is actually a really good person for American writing and reading." (Kirkpatrick 4) Still Franzen's apology did not make up for the insinuations he made regarding Oprah's middlebrow taste.

Another compelling issue that arose out of the Franzen controversy is the notion of corporate ownership and the Oprah's Book Club seal of approval. Franzen told *The Portland Oregonian*, "The first weekend after I heard I considered turning it

down. I see this as my book, my creation, and I didn't want that logo of corporate ownership on it." (Kirkpatrick 4) This trepidation speaks to the fact that publishers reprint Oprah's Book Club selections with a logo designating it as a selection. Franzen stated, "I stayed up worrying about it for a couple of nights, because of this rather stringent tradition in American publishing that there is no advertising on the cover of hardcover fiction." (Kirkpatrick 4) Verlyn Klinkenborg criticizes Franzen's apparent need to designate his own audience. He writes, "In fact, what marks Mr. Franzen as commentator on his own career – as opposed to the excellent novelist he can sometimes be – is a desire to play all the parts in the cycle of literary production and consumption himself." (16)

Ultimately, his publisher, Farrar, Straus & Giroux left editions without the Oprah seal in print. Yet numerous critics point out that the literary world is so full of corporate ownership that the idea that a novel stands on its own artistic merits is preposterous. ". . . the world of publishing is already tainted and has been for some time. Even the toniest publishing houses are owned by megaconglomerates now. Even artistically pure writers are eager to have their agents negotiate book advances as ruthlessly and profitably as Hollywood agents do. . ." (Jefferson 35) Indeed, Franzen's novel is irreparably branded with the name of his publishing house, Farrar, Straus & Giroux. Additionally, his novel would later be branded with the seal of approval of the

National Book Award. These seals are types of corporate ownership in their own right. Yet the Oprah seal apparently conveys so much more about the status of American taste.

The question over the Oprah seal of approval is an issue of corporate ownership. This recalls the idea that Oprah is indeed a brand name. The implied association of that brand name, at least according to Franzen, is one of mainstream readership and ultimately, mainstream taste. Forgetting distinctions between middlebrow and high-art, there still remains an issue of taste. Oprah does possess a mainstream audience; therefore she does prescribe culture to the masses. The Oprah seal of approval stirs up a controversy over mainstream readership as opposed to a selective, culturally superior audience, an audience with more refined taste perhaps?

While millions of Americans snatch up the most recent Oprah's Book Club novel because it is what Oprah has recommended, others are embarrassed to be reading an Oprah book. In her *New York Times* article, Monica Corcoran refers to the Oprah seal as "a scarlet O." (6) Corcoran notes that many people come looking for *The Corrections*, but refrain from purchasing it when they discover the Oprah seal on the front. The problem appears to lie in reading a book that appeals to a mainstream audience. Many readers, like Franzen, would choose to believe *The Corrections* is above mainstream readership, enclosed in its own category of selective intellectualism.

Corcoran concludes, “What seems to irk some readers about the Oprah endorsement is the implication that they are plowing through the same book as the vast daytime viewership for Ms. Winfrey’s show.” (6) Many *Corrections* readers fancy themselves “above” those individuals who watch the *Oprah Winfrey Show*, thereby prescribing to Oprah’s brand of mainstream taste.

At bottom, the disdain for the Oprah seal of approval speaks to underlying implications of Oprah as a tastemaker. Given that Oprah appeals to a mainstream audience, her taste is subsequently considered mainstream and therefore mediocre. She is often criticized for recommending sentimental books that solely appeal to her vastly female audience. Yet most of Oprah’s selections are by renowned, talented authors. “In fact, Ms. Winfrey has largely endorsed the type of novels critics praise, not commercial fiction. From Wally Lamb to Sue Miller to Isabel Allende, she has won huge new readership for midlist or obscure authors.” (Corcoran 6) Oprah is a tastemaker for mass culture given her mainstream audience. Although she often selects critically renowned novels, her taste is forever branded as part of the mainstream. As perhaps the most powerful influence on public opinion, Oprah’s cultural recommendations carry deep implications for the future of American taste.

Despite all the hullabaloo surrounding Franzen’s rejection of the book club seal of approval and Oprah’s subsequent rescinding of the offer to appear on her show,

Franzen's book has sold remarkably well given the inordinate publicity. Indeed, the Winfrey endorsement translates into significantly increased book sales for *The Corrections*. Farrar, Straus & Giroux published 90,000 copies before the Oprah's Book Club selection. Afterwards, it printed 680,000 more. According to Laurie Brown, vice president for marketing at the publishing house, 500,000 of those are directly attributable to Oprah's endorsement. (Corcoran 6) A month later Franzen did indeed win the National Book Award for Fiction, despite the overwhelming criticism in the literary world over his disparaging remarks about the low-brow nature of Oprah's Book Club. In his acceptance speech, Franzen actually thanked Winfrey "... for her enthusiasm and advocacy." (Smith 29)

It appears Franzen's rejection of perceived middlebrow culture translated into additional book sale dollars because of the controversy, as well as in spite of it. Franzen's book would not have done nearly as well if there hadn't been such media buzz surrounding the Oprah controversy. However the book was already topping bestseller lists before the Oprah controversy, so due credit should be given to the novel in its own right. Still, Franzen capitalized on the media backlash of his disdain for Oprah's corporate seal of approval. This fact in and of itself seems notable in terms of the implications for popular culture itself. There seems to be a convoluted understanding in popular culture today surrounding the notion of art for arts sake. With

all the corporate sponsorship in the literary community and in the greater artistic community as a whole, there is question as to whether any work can truly stand on its own. Cultural production is tainted by corporate ownership, and artistic ideals become diminished. Given the firestorm surrounding *The Corrections*, the novel can never truly stand alone. While it is Franzen's prerogative to reject corporate branding, the pretentiousness of his claim to belong to a "high-art literary tradition" beyond Oprah's mainstream audience forever brands him a cultural snob as well as the first author to refuse Oprah. Regardless of the outcome, the controversy speaks to the inordinate power Oprah wields over popular culture today.

Chapter 5. Conclusion

As a broad and as yet understudied subject, celebrity is a vast arena of unexplored research. Theoretical treatment of celebrity becomes more important today as the opportunities to market oneself increase. With the rise of the Internet, ubiquitous communication enables immediate transmission of images. Email programs such as MSN Hotmail feature pop-up entertainment news flashes throughout the day, enabling average individuals to absorb tidbits of celebrity happenings. Fan pages and web blogs dedicated to celebrities are a rising phenomenon. Celebrities are becoming more pervasive with the instantaneous opportunities to manufacture fame. Traditional literature on celebrity thought emphasizes the history of fame, well-knownness, advent of mass media technologies, and the tension between public and private self. All of these components are important to my analysis of the traditional notions of the celebrity entertainer. However, thorough assessment of the manufacturing of fame in regards to marketing is consequential to understanding of the current climate of entrepreneurship prevalent in today's popular culture.

It is not enough to simply regard the celebrity as a star who enjoys notoriety. It is not enough to simply acknowledge the publicity machine which enables the manufacturing of fame. In the current environment of rampant celebrity endorsements, study of the specific commercial ventures celebrities take is integral to comprehending

the role celebrity plays in popular culture. The trend towards entrepreneurship is rising quickly, and its implications are limitless. This thesis contributes to the existing body of literature by identifying the shift in notions of celebrity from entertainer to entrepreneur. While celebrity entertainers have not been replaced, the new celebrity entrepreneur is an encompassing force on popular culture.

Today the highly visible permeate our media, our economy, our very lifestyles. *They are manufactured, just as cars, clothes, and computers are.* Moreover, an entire industry has evolved whose existence depends upon producing and profiting from highly visible persons. . . . Celebrity has married business – information and entertainment channels can now transmit images at a rate and capacity never before known or understood – resulting in opportunities for aspirants who want to use their name as a brand and as a marketing tool. (Rein 2, 9)

The role of business and branding is integral to an understanding of the meaning of celebrity. Although the celebrity's traditional role as a star in the public sphere is vital, analysis is incomplete without acknowledgement of the marketing of celebrity. With the trappings of fame and visibility come the demands of the business world to sell goods and services. Celebrities are used as essential elements in the process of consumerism. Indeed, the celebrity functions in the business world to sell products, services, ways of life, and ultimately, themselves. The business of entertainment overlaps with the business world as a whole, as celebrity endorsements drive the market. Given the culture of consumerism today in which the dominant

mantra speaks of capitalism and bargaining power, the celebrity stands as a notable figurehead in the process. “Moreover, the celebrity as public individual who participate openly as a marketable commodity serves as a powerful type of legitimation of the political economic model of exchange and value – the basis of capitalism – and extends that model to include the individual.” (Marshall x)

The search for high visibility is a reflection of the pressures of a crowded and competitive marketplace. A name can give a product greater recognition and credibility to attract and retain new business. The rush in most businesses and professions to create a brand distinction around a name will increase as companies discover the power of visibility and its ability to create free news coverage and dedicated customers. (Rein 2-3)

Given the current celebrity culture of entrepreneurship, research into celebrity today must acknowledge the role of marketing. Defining celebrity is incomplete without considering the elements of production and consumption. The celebrity functions to promote products as well as promote their image. As such, the celebrity is a commodity in their own right. Since the advent of mass media technologies, celebrity has morphed from simply being about entertainment towards being about selling a product. Fame is manufactured through the ever escalating publicity machine. Even the most serious film actor is a part of a mass media vehicle. Celebrity is about the politics of the industry, most specifically the desire to sell. The movie must be publicized. The

production studio must earn a profit. The serious actor is paid a large sum of money for appearing in the film. All of this is made possible through marketing.

In light of today's emphasis on marketing in the celebrity arena, I have traced four levels of celebrity based upon involvement in commercial ventures.

Commercialism is everywhere as celebrity endorsements pervade the public sphere. A billboard advertisement of Queen Latifah for CoverGirl Cosmetics sits atop the highway. Heather Graham leaps from the pages of fashion magazines as the sexy image of Sky Vodka. Simon Cowell, of American Idol fame, stars as, himself, in the latest Coke television commercial campaign. Certainly, Queen Latifah appears to have very nice skin. Her makeup always looks professional. Perhaps she even uses CoverGirl cosmetics, though high profile celebrities likely use more expensive designer label products. But Queen Latifah's image is not intimately tied to CoverGirl; the connection to CoverGirl is not specifically associated with branding Latifah's name. Similarly, Heather Graham's name brand appeal is mutually exclusive from the branding of Sky Vodka, despite the mutual advantages Graham and the vodka company share as result of their relationship. While Simon Cowell is constantly seen drinking Coke during American Idol broadcasts, as the company also sponsors the show, Cowell is simply a vehicle for the soda company's marketing effort. The Coke brand is not equal to the Simon Cowell brand. These celebrities simply loan their

image to different brands for monetary reimbursement. As such, these brands benefit from the celebrity's name brand appeal. Celebrity endorsement will continue to flourish. However, the landscape of celebrity's commercial ventures will continue to shift towards entrepreneurialism.

The narrative of celebrity endorsement in American popular culture is changing. I have identified a new narrative in the realm of celebrity and commercialism. Today, celebrity commercial ventures are increasingly characterized by entrepreneurship. Celebrities are not simply lending their image, but are making a claim of authenticity in their involvement in the product. For many celebrities today, it is not enough to simply pose for an advertisement. Rather, increasing numbers of celebrities are asserting their influence in the design and development of products that are branded as their own. A new celebrity constantly emerges with a fashion or cosmetics line, or announces they are launching a production studio. Rapper/actress Eve recently released her fashion line, "Fetish," which includes clothing and handbags designed with a hip-hop flair to mimic Eve's own style. Like so many actress/singers in Hollywood following the model set by Jennifer Lopez, Eve is trying to position herself as the next celebrity entrepreneur. Celebrities today are attempting a name brand extension to render themselves in line with their products. These celebrities have varying levels of success depending on the authenticity of their entrepreneurial claims.

The rise of entrepreneurial celebrities speaks to the shifting emphasis on marketing in the entertainment industry as well as the increasing impact of commercialism in artistic life.

While countless celebrities engage in entrepreneurial activities, they do not as yet qualify as celebrity entrepreneurs. Their celebrity status usually gives them the authority to market a brand and usually ensures a successful outcome, but their efforts are not necessarily authentic. I have delineated a set of criteria with which to identify and define the celebrity entrepreneur. Using these criteria, I have established a set of qualities which celebrity entrepreneurs embody. By identifying celebrity entrepreneurs based on these criteria, I have established a set of standards with which to understand how the celebrity entrepreneur functions within the modern media environment.

This new celebrity entrepreneur has significant implications for the future of American taste. Celebrities generally hold an inherent level of status and power in American society based upon their well-knownness. “. . . celebrity is a primary contemporary means to power, privilege, and mobility.” (Gamson 186) Celebrities are able to manufacture their fame through their unique access to the media. As such, celebrities are able to shape their own image. As a celebrity’s fame increases, they are more privy to the innerworkings of manipulation and are able to fine tune their public image. Of course, expose programs such as *E! Celebrities Uncensored* limits their

ability to shape their image as well as their privacy. Still, celebrity status renders stars a good deal of power to leverage their public image.

Celebrity entrepreneurs are unique in the level of status and power their social and economic position confers. Celebrity entrepreneurs are not only traditional entertainers with all the advantages attributed to that role, but they are financial moguls with all the power that bestows. As executive officers in their own corporations, celebrity entrepreneurs have financial bargaining power and tremendous social clout. The celebrity entrepreneur functions in dual roles in society, simultaneously enjoying the status and power each position awards. The glamorization of celebrity through the media as well as the exaltation of the successful business leader imparts a deifying effect on celebrity entrepreneurs. Indeed, celebrity entrepreneurs, almost always known by first name or moniker only, function at a near God-like status in current society. Their duality has enhanced their social status to the point where they are considered role models, despite the scandals which often characterize their lives. Because of their unique access to the media as well as their financial power, celebrity entrepreneurs are raised to a role/status they do not necessarily deserve.

Given the inordinate power a celebrity entrepreneur possesses over the media and over society as a whole, they are capable of shaping the cultural public opinion. As such, celebrity entrepreneurs function as tastemakers. The Olsen twins, Jennifer Lopez,

Martha Stewart, and P. Diddy all serve as tastemakers in current American popular culture. They can influence public perception, trends, likes, dislikes, taste in music, fashion, or domesticity. These celebrity entrepreneurs make a business of branding themselves as an extension of their products and way of life. People aspire to be like them, and buy into their images as a means of prescribing to their taste. Oprah Winfrey functions as the quintessential celebrity entrepreneur, and subsequently as the quintessential tastemaker. Oprah displays a titanic influence over public opinion. She shapes perception and ultimately taste. Through analysis of Oprah's marketing power with her "Favorite Things" show, the beef trial, the making of Dr. Phil, and her book club, I have shown Oprah to be an arbiter of taste.

Oprah goes above and beyond all the other examples of celebrity entrepreneur due to her level of influence over the American public. Oprah personifies each of the criteria for which the celebrity entrepreneurs embody. She is the myth of self-making; she is the ultimate authority. She is the consummate celebrity entrepreneur. What distinguishes her from the pack is that Oprah is a brand without owning brands. She uses the vehicle of her magazine to publicize her preferences for certain products or philosophies. However, she does not choose to profit from her name brand appeal in terms of endorsing products or creating her own. There is no Oprah fashion line, nor is there an Oprah-made handbag. Instead, she markets only her name as it is associated

with her business creations and the products of culture. Dr. Phil, the book club, fitness – these are the brands which Oprah markets. The Oprah seal of approval is an association like no other in popular culture. Perhaps it is her refusal to endorse specific products which further renders her so accessible to her audience. She is perceived as all the more genuine because her interests seem to lie in helping people. Her ventures usually seem pure and non-commercial, despite the fact that Oprah profits substantially from every business venture through Harpo. Oprah makes each venture about the audience and diminishes the business side of things. The audience truly believes Oprah is on their side, and therefore adopts anything she chooses to prescribe. “Winfrey stands as a beacon, not only in the worlds of media and entertainment but also in the larger realm of public discourse.” (Tannen
<http://www.time.com/time/time100/artists/profile/winfrey.html>)

Social and Cultural Ramifications

There are social and cultural ramifications of celebrity entrepreneurs as tastemakers. Celebrity entrepreneurship confers a level of influence that these individuals do not necessarily deserve. With inordinate power over public opinion, celebrity entrepreneurs are really agenda-setters. This role introduces the question of standards of behavior. Traditional celebrity entertainers do not usually function within

a framework of behavior rules. In general, celebrities behave as they wish, often getting into trouble with the law, drugs, or exhibiting some form of recklessness. These types of behavior are often attributed to the power and freedom celebrity status entails. The question emerges as to whether or not celebrity entrepreneurs should function under a more rigid set of standards for behavior given their roles as veritable tastemakers. As is, a number of the celebrity entrepreneur examples have experienced scandal. Martha Stewart was recently convicted of conspiracy and obstruction of justice. In 2001 P. Diddy faced bribery and assault charges for a 1999 nightclub incident in which then-girlfriend Jennifer Lopez was initially implicated. For her part, Lopez is essentially scandal free in the legal sense. However, her endless string of marriages renders her at least questionable in terms of her very public failed love life. The Olsen twins are scandal free as of yet, and it appears they take great pains to remain well-behaved. Perhaps they are following in Oprah's footsteps, as Oprah has remained reputable for many years, despite early career scandals as well as excessive slandering in publications such as the *National Enquirer*. Perhaps the power afforded to celebrity entrepreneurs leads them to a point where they feel omnipotent, even more so than traditional celebrity entertainers. Given the predominance of scandal amongst current celebrity entrepreneurs, it stands to reason that there ought to be different standard for individuals with so much influence. Future research could include

celebrity and scandal as this might inform the investigation even further in terms of status and power.

An additional ramification of celebrity tastemaking speaks to the kind of taste that is being prescribed. Oprah's audience is decidedly mainstream. It follows that her taste is mainstream as well. The audience character as well as the corporate branding Oprah's recommendations implies work to define cultural taste. When Oprah prescribes something, it is immediately popular. And in American culture, popular tends to connote low art. Popular culture's biggest tastemaker prescribes a mainstream homogenized brand of taste. Culture and commerce are inexorably tied. Oprah serves to further enforce this bond through her commercialized, popular recommendations. Oprah's role as a tastemaker in mainstream America speaks to the quality of American taste as a whole.

Avenues for Future Research

Given the recent rise of celebrity entrepreneurs, there are multiple avenues for future research. Further research into the history and theory of tastemaking would enlighten my argument. In the past, cultural critics such as H.L. Mencken or *The New Yorker* Magazine as a whole served as the tastemakers in American society. However,

today the future of tastemaking lies in the new breed of celebrity entrepreneurs like Oprah Winfrey.

. . . in today's highly commercialized society, where distinctions between high culture and low have become blurred, celebrities often hold as much sway as critics, at least in determining popular success. . . But does the rise of the celebrity taste maker, who functions more as a booster than as judge, mean the decline of the serious critic? (Dobrzynski 7)

Tracing the shift from cultural critics to celebrity entrepreneurs would historicize an argument of taste, as well as carry implications for the changing nature of American taste. Celebrity entrepreneurs prescribe a sort of homogenized, mainstream taste to their massive audiences while cultural critics in the past prescribed distinctive, intellectual taste to an elite audience. This shift in the nature of taste speaks to a dulling of taste in American popular culture, which ultimately implies a dulling of American culture itself.

John Seabrook assesses the issue of the numbing of America culture in his book, *Nobrow*. Seabrook notes that former taste distinctions between highbrow and lowbrow have been eradicated by the marketing of culture. Seabrook points to the fusion of high and low brow classifications towards a culture of Nobrow where, for example, Roseanne Barr guest edits *The New Yorker*. Seabrook points to the dulling of American taste as a result of the endless commercialism which drives "Buzz," or hype. Seabrook argues that in today's culture, taste is decided based on what is popular, not

necessarily of high quality. (26) Further research along Seabrook's notion of Nobrow would explicitly inform the analysis of the celebrity entrepreneur as tastemaker. The "culture of marketing and the marketing of culture," Seabrook's sub-heading, speaks directly to the implications of the celebrity entrepreneur as tastemaker. Additionally, the relationship between consumer culture and celebrity, as well as the transformation of American commercialism could be further explored to inform this analysis.

The Future of Tastemaking?

The future of celebrity entrepreneurs is unlimited. As of now, there is no indication that the rise in entrepreneurship will stop. As the Olsen twins make their debut as feature film stars, Jennifer Lopez continues to add more products to the J-LO brand, and P. Diddy makes his foray onto Broadway. Oprah has just released a new magazine, *O Home*, tactically released right after the fall of Martha Stewart and the subsequent vacancy in the realm of home decorating. It is impossible to tell how long Oprah will remain an arbiter of taste. For now she seems to be at the top of her game. The future of celebrity entrepreneurship will likely be dominated by other celebrity entrepreneurs. Indeed, the future quite possibly lies in the tween market, as celebrities like Hilary Duff take an early entrepreneurial start in establishing themselves as a brand. Following in the steps of the prolific Olsen twins, Duff is well on her way to

becoming the next celebrity entrepreneur. Given the buying potential of the tween market, young stars like Duff and the Olsen twins have the best chance of making celebrity entrepreneurship a lifetime achievement. In a global sense, perhaps new celebrities who are not nationally, but internationally based also have a chance of becoming the future of celebrity entrepreneurship. Given the effects of globalization, the international community keeps a close watch over Hollywood. American celebrity affects the international way of life as the commercialization of celebrity is central to international understandings of the United States as well as entertainment as a whole. It stands to reason that international stars might follow the model and rise up as the newest breed of celebrity entrepreneurs.

Looking beyond to other types of celebrities with influence in the public sphere helps map out the future study of celebrity entrepreneurs as well as helps predict the future of tastemaking. One area of study might focus on the rise of the sports celebrity entrepreneur. This work concentrated solely on the realm of entertainment celebrity. However, studying the sports celebrity entrepreneur lends itself to rich analysis of the culture of marketing as well as tastemaking. One such example of sports celebrity entrepreneur would be George Foreman, who already markets the George Foreman grill, menswear, as well as a collection of faith-based CD's. Additionally, the specific rise of women entrepreneurs might be an interesting avenue to explore. Finally, an

investigation into the celebrity entertainer who moves into the political realm would prove to be illuminating. The implications of power and status for a celebrity such as Arnold Schwarzenegger would supplement understanding of the influence of the celebrity entrepreneur and take discussions of tastemaking into all new directions. As celebrities become more powerful in all realms of the public sphere, American taste is increasingly dictated by the most influential among them.

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