



Teaching Media Quarterly

ISSN: 2573-0126

Volume 8, No. 1, 2020: Teaching Celebrity

pubs.lib.umn.edu/tmq

Stars as Texts: Analyzing Celebrities Across Platforms

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Stars as Texts: Analyzing Celebrities Across Platforms

Caitlin E. Lawson, University of Michigan

Overview

Whether we like it or not, celebrity culture fills our media landscape. Most of us will never meet the celebrities it is built around, but we often feel like we know them as we see them post photos of their pets on Instagram and share charming anecdotes on late-night talk shows. As intimately connected and knowledgeable as we may feel toward the celebrities we follow, for most of us, celebrities are just a collection of texts – red carpet photos, interview snippets, favorite scenes they act in or songs they sing, and quippy posts on social media. In this two-day lesson plan, students will use critical theory and the concepts of intertextuality to analyze celebrities as sets of texts. Assigned readings include three scholarly articles that establish approaches to and examples of critical work analyzing celebrity texts and discourses.

The first lesson consists of two parts: reflection and an introductory lecture on critical celebrity studies. The second lesson is more interactive and includes a brief review of the class reading followed by an in-class activity. For the in-class activity, students work in pairs or small groups to analyze one of three pre-selected texts related to a particular celebrity. Then together the class works to make sense of the similarities and differences in the celebrity's persona as presented across these different texts and draw conclusions about their persona's implications vis-à-vis race, gender, sexuality, and/or class.

Overall, these lessons provide students an opportunity to engage in collaborative textual analysis, practice utilizing insights from critical theory to analyze texts, and think critically about celebrity culture. As long as students are familiar with the basic tenets of critical race, feminist, queer, and/or Marxist theories, this lesson is highly adaptable and can be shaped to fit the goals of many different courses. Also included in the teaching materials is a group project essay prompt that mirrors the in-class activity. It can be used alone or alongside these lessons.

Rationale

Celebrity culture is an increasingly dominant force within popular media cultures, and social media has shifted the way celebrity persona management works and reinforced the importance of thinking through the ways in which users, celebrity and non-celebrity alike, curate particular versions of themselves across media platforms. Celebrity personas are fundamentally intertextual, and analyzing them provides an opportunity for students to draw connections between texts and make sense of contradictions. Celebrity personas are also carefully crafted, and studying them can provide insight into cultural values around class, race, gender, sexuality, etc. as they inflect and shape expectations about what constitutes a desirable, marketable identity. Moreover, students are typically intrigued by celebrity culture and find the lesson useful in making sense of their everyday media consumption.

The purpose of these lessons is threefold. First, they introduce students to critical celebrity studies. Not only will students learn history and tenets related to the study of celebrity, they will also practice textual/critical discourse analysis. Second, the lessons reinforce the definition of “intertextuality” and provide an opportunity for students to think and analyze intertextually. Many students are comfortable analyzing texts in isolation, but this lesson broadens students’ understanding of textual analysis as they make sense of multiple texts and grapple with their similarities and differences. And finally, these lessons reinforce the importance of critical theory and encourage students to consider the ideological implications of popular culture.

The lecture and activities within these lessons provide students historical background on the study of celebrity while also reflecting more recent scholarship on the subject. Scholars such as Gamson (1994), Marshall (2014), and Turner (2010) have considered the history and power of celebrity from multiple angles that inform the construction of this lesson. Gamson (1994) provides a history of the development of celebrity culture from the Golden Age of Hollywood to PR-based management that is common today. His insights on the role of celebrity interviews in crafting personas are central to the historical context provided during the lecture portion of Day One. Marshall’s (2014) work on the intersection of celebrity and power informs the integration of critical theory into the lessons. Turner’s (2010) delineation of historical approaches to studying celebrity provides a methodological blueprint for the in-class activity. Further, scholars like Marwick and boyd (2011) have explored how social media transforms celebrity culture by providing celebrities a seemingly more authentic mode of self-presentation and allowing for everyday fan interaction. Their typology of celebrity practices on Twitter shapes the integration of social media analysis into this activity.

Key terms:

- **Celebrity:** There are myriad definitions of celebrity, but this lesson will utilize two:
 - Celebrity as a way that people are represented and discussed, e.g. as a set of texts and discourses (Turner 2013).
 - Celebrity as a performative practice that involves gaining and maintaining popularity and attention for a particular self-presentation (Marwick and boyd 2011).
- **Intertextuality:** “The fundamental and inescapable interdependence of all textual meaning upon the structures of meaning proposed by other texts” (Gray 2006, p. 2-3).

General Timeline

These two 50-minute lessons were designed as part of unit on textual analysis in an undergraduate qualitative methods of media analysis lecture course. During the first unit, students learn a basic history of qualitative media studies, how to formulate a qualitative research project, and how to use critical theory to make sense of media texts and audiences. By the time this first unit is finished, students have a baseline understanding of Marxist, critical race, feminist, and queer theories, which this activity will draw on. The second unit of the

course, of which these lessons are a part, focuses on textual analysis. During this unit, students learn how to make sense of media texts - not just words, but images, sound, and video. Among other concepts and methods, students learn the basics of semiotic, narrative, and discourse analysis as well as the importance of a text's sociohistorical context and intertextuality (Gray 2004). The third and final unit of the class focuses on audience analysis, and students learn principles of conducting interviews and participant observation in a media studies context.

While these lessons were designed with a qualitative methods lecture course in mind, they are easily adaptable to a variety of media studies courses. As long as students have a general understanding of critical theory and intertextuality before coming to the lesson, I have found it to be a very useful and engaging way for students to use critical theory to make sense of a set of texts, a skillset that is central to a media studies education. Further, I have also adapted this lesson into a midterm group project for an upper-level seminar on celebrity studies. I keep the lessons more or less intact and use them as a way for students to practice the assignment before they choose their own celebrity and set of texts to analyze for their paper. The prompt for this assignment is included in the teaching materials.

Lesson Plan

Day One: An Introduction to Critical Celebrity Studies

Learning Objectives

- Reflect on assumptions about celebrity.
- Learn some history about the development of celebrity culture in the United States.
- Introduce different approaches to studying celebrity.
- Understand the basics of two approaches to studying celebrity: celebrity as a representation and celebrity as a cultural formation.
- Emphasize the importance of intertextuality and identity to the study of celebrity culture.

Before Class

Students will read:

- Turner, Graeme. "Approaching celebrity studies." *Celebrity studies* 1, no. 1 (2010): 11-20.
- Van Den Bulck, Hilde, and Nathalie Claessens. "Guess who Tiger is having sex with now? Celebrity sex and the framing of the moral high ground." *Celebrity Studies* 4, no. 1 (2013): 46-57.

In Class

Opportunity for reflection. 10 minutes

Ask students to individually define the term “celebrity.” Then give them several minutes to talk to peers sitting next to them before asking several volunteers to share their responses. In my experience, most students respond by emphasizing that celebrities are people we pay a lot of attention to or who are well known. The goal here is to get students thinking about what that attention means: it means that there is a proliferation of texts regarding celebrities, and those texts are really the only ways that we “know” these celebrities. These lessons will not be focusing on celebrity as something that is innate, although that is one way to understand it. Instead, students will consider the ways that texts represent celebrities and the ways that celebrities present themselves in certain texts in order to cultivate and sell a particular identity. Those bodies of texts and that identity can also have important implications in terms of race, gender, class, sexuality, etc. as the attention we pay to celebrities demonstrates some type of value of their particular performances of identity.

Lecture on readings and historical context. 40 minutes

A Brief History of Celebrity

The lecture begins with a brief history of celebrity culture in the United States in order to help students understand why celebrity personas function the way that they do today. Much of this information is drawn from Joshua Gamson’s (1994) book, *Claims to Fame*.

- The Paramount Decision in 1940 ended the vertical integration of the Hollywood studios and also shifted how celebrity management worked. Prior to the regulation of the studios in the 1940s, the studios effectively owned their workers, including their actors. This meant that one actor would be contracted with a single studio, who had in-house publicity teams that managed their persona. However, the Supreme Court decided that this practice, alongside vertical integration, gave the studios too much power, so stars moved from studio to individual management and competition increased. This shift gave stars more control of their personas.
- Coupled with the advent of television and the proliferation of outlets that focused on celebrity culture, in the 60+ years since the end of the studio system, celebrity culture has changed in some key ways.
 - There is increased scientific, strategic targeting of niche markets with particular celebrities.
 - There is a further alignment of PR and journalism. PR professionals provide news for journalists – up to 45%, according to one study Gamson cites!
 - There are also more outlets for celebrity publicity including magazines and television.
- Because of these shifts, it became increasingly clear that celebrities are products: selling themselves to producers, industry professionals who would hire them, to audiences, and targeted to niche markets.

- One way that celebrity products are shaped, honed, and manufactured is through interviews, which have become a key means of image control. Most often shaped by the celebrity's publicists, interviews aid in the systematic construction of the persona as a commodity to be sold to different markets. But over the past few decades, celebrity news outlets and, by extension, audiences, have become more aware of the targeted construction of celebrity personas.
- One explanation Gamson offers to explain why audiences consume celebrity culture despite the fact that we know it is constructed is that we enjoy the feeling that, if we just got the right technology or the right information, we would be able to see behind the construction and know the "real" celebrity, their authentic self. He also suggests that we may get pleasure in knowing that celebrities are fake, and we can revel in their construction.

These tensions between construction and realness, between the manufactured and the authentic, are crucial to understanding celebrities' draw and also the role that interviews and social media can play in their construction. And it raises the question: what can we learn about identity categories like race, sexuality, gender, and class by studying how celebrities shape and market a particular persona at a given historical moment?

Now the lesson transitions to considering different ways to analyze celebrity.

Ways to Study Celebrity

Turner provides a brief history of celebrity studies and outlines four ways to approach and analyze celebrity. They are:

- Celebrity as a representation: A semiotically rich body of texts and discourses
- Celebrity as a discursive effect: Celebritization is transformative and can be empowering or exploitative
- Celebrity as an industry: Celebrity is the objectified, commodified outcome of this discursive effect. Analyses focus on the ways in which celebrity is produced and marketed
- Celebrity as a cultural formation: Has a social function and participates in the field of expectations that many have of everyday life. Analyses work to understand social and cultural implications

These lessons foreground the first and fourth approaches. First, they encourage students to analyze celebrity as a representation that is made up of a variety of texts that come together to create a celebrity persona. They also incorporate the fourth mode of analysis by considering the sociocultural implications of that celebrity representation as students consider the ways that celebrities perform their identities, and how audiences respond to those performances in ways that challenge, shape, and/or reinforce shared norms and values.

Celebrity as a Representation: Celebrity and Intertextuality

To apply the first approach, it is crucial to understand the concept of intertextuality and how it applies to celebrity culture. Jonathan Gray's (2012) theorization of intertextuality and paratexts provides a helpful framework.

Close readings of singular texts are good for deeply understanding how one media object makes meaning, but they are less useful for thinking about a media object's social meanings and uses.

- Discussion question to stimulate reflection: Why did you choose to go see the last film you saw in a theater? Likely answers will be film trailers, social media posts, film reviews, or an actor/actress/director of interest. Emphasize that a close reading of the film does not help us to understand, for example, why audiences might be interested in seeing it. To answer those types of questions – to get at the broader context of a film – we must look at other texts that surround it.

Paratexts are texts that surround a “main” text of interest. For example, some paratexts for *Captain America: Civil War* would be: the original comics where the storyline came from; all other films that feature these characters; trailers; reviews; interviews with the cast and crew; toys; etc. The Marvel universe is massive and encompasses literally thousands of texts and paratexts. Gray's main question is: how do paratexts relate to texts?

First, Gray explains that texts *intertextually* create meaning. This means that texts do not exist in a vacuum. Previous and subsequent texts inflect, frame, constrain, and guide our interpretations. This is particularly crucial for us in this class, because celebrities are, in many ways, just a bundle of texts that shape one another's meanings. Celebrities are fundamentally intertextual.

To summarize, celebrities can function *as* paratexts. Their celebrity personas can shape our understandings of the films they are in, the music they create, the tweets they tweet, etc. Further, their personas are shaped *through* paratexts: the interviews they give, the films they star in, their performances, etc. What can be identified as a paratext depends on what the researcher is focusing on as the main text of analysis.

The big takeaway regarding celebrities and intertextuality is that texts make meaning together. Celebrity personas only take on meaning through the various texts that make up their representation, and their personas can shape our understandings of other texts to which they are a part.

Celebrity as a Cultural Formation: Celebrity, Identity, and Social Norms

It is also important to consider the ideological implications of celebrities, their identities, and the stories that circulate about them across texts. Celebrities perform different ways of being and doing gender, race, sexuality, class, and ability (Butler 2006). These performances and the ways that news outlets and audiences frame and respond to them can challenge, shape, and/or reinforce norms and values around those identities. One example to illustrate these points is celebrity gossip about Tiger Woods's extramarital affair.

Begin by providing students background on the scandal. A trailer from a CNN documentary about it will help provide basic information:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AmRN9e8gH7A>

- Rumors that Woods had cheated on his wife broke in *The National Enquirer*. Woods tried to get ahead of the story's publication and told his wife, Elin, before the tabloid hit stands and assured her there was nothing to worry about. However, Elin was unconvinced and, on Thanksgiving night in 2009, took Woods's cell phone and found text messages from several women, including Rachel Uchitel. Elin then texted Rachel pretending to be her husband and, upon receiving confirmation of the affair, became angry. She threw the cell phone at Woods and chased him out of their home with a golf club. He drove away, only to careen into a neighbor's yard and hit a tree.

Van Den Bulck and Claessens (2013) provide an in-depth analysis of news coverage of and audiences' responses to the infidelity scandal.

- The authors explain that they set up this study because sex is a way for audiences to attempt to see the intimate, private, "real" celebrity behind their public mask. Moreover, the ways that these stories are framed in the news and discussed by audiences can provide insight into ideological norms around gender and sexuality.
- Methods: The authors sampled a subset of 17 articles on adultery from a content analysis and qualitatively analyzed the articles and reader comments.
- Results & conclusions: While most of the articles tended to be non-judgmental, audience reactions *were* judgmental. Overwhelmingly audience comments confirmed and reinforced the wrongness of adultery.
 - The authors identified four frames in the articles: neutral, women's fault, addiction, or flawed personality. Comments either adopted the frame presented in the article or developed a counter-frame. These counter-frames could be defended or strengthened in interactions with other readers.
 - They identified seven frames through which audiences negotiated adultery in their comments: as an addiction, as a personality flaw, as a sin, as a societal phenomenon, part of human nature, sign of masculinity, the woman's fault, and neutral.
 - Overall, the media frames were mostly neutral, whereas the audience frames often voraciously defended conservative monogamous and heteronormative ideas about relationships.

This case study demonstrates how celebrity culture can function as a discursive space where audiences negotiate ideas about identity and behavior. The next lesson will provide students an opportunity to look across texts that represent celebrity personas and analyze the messages those texts contain regarding identity and social norms.

Day Two: Celebrity Personas and Social Media

Learning Objectives

- Understand how social media have transformed celebrity representation and celebrities' performances of their identity
- Apply intertextuality and critical theory to an analysis of a celebrity persona

Before Class

Students will read:

- Marwick, Alice, and Danah Boyd. "To see and be seen: Celebrity practice on Twitter." *Convergence* 17, no. 2 (2011): 139-158.

In Class

Lecture on Celebrities and Social Media: 15 minutes

Today's lesson focuses on considering the role social media plays in constructing celebrity identities and provides students an opportunity to apply the concepts learned in the previous lesson.

- Marwick & boyd (2011) begin by defining celebrity not as "a set of intrinsic personal characteristics or external labels" but as a "performative practice" (p. 140). With this definition in mind, they move on to examine how social media is transforming celebrities' performative practices and, in turn, the management of celebrity personas.
- In light of this, they present the following research question: How is celebrity practiced on Twitter? Their method for answering this research question centers on an analysis of 2-3 months of 20 verified Twitter accounts of well-known celebrities
- The first thing they discuss in their literature review is the idea that, with social media, celebrities are addressing multiple audiences on the same platform. Their review of prior scholarship raises several questions. What do "we" as fans, or just the general public, see on Twitter? Are celebrity performative practices on social media truly more personal and unfiltered? How can we make sense of the multiple audiences celebrities must address on social media and how that shapes their performance of self on various social media platforms?
- From their analysis, they identify four themes in celebrity performative practices on Twitter.
 - Public recognition and fan maintenance: Celebrities perform connection and availability, both to their fans and by performing connection to other celebrities. This practice also functions as a way to give back to fans – retweeting something they say, replying to fans' messages, etc. – and manage their popularity and address gossip/rumors directly. Typically this practice adheres to public norms of appearance, and they find that this is can be used to reinforce appearances and back up already established celebrity personas.
 - Affiliation: Celebrities form links between fans and self, fans and each other. They do so by using the same type of speech/slang/etc. as their fan community,

- commiserating about relatable issues, or linking to or retweeting something they think their fans would like. Overall, this practice serves to emphasize a sense of community of which the celebrity is a part.
- Intimacy: Celebrities often provide personal information that gives followers a feeling of insider knowledge. The level of intimacy celebrities practice varies by account. This is not an entirely new practice and is similar to what we see in celebrity interviews. Marwick & boyd emphasize that it is important to consider that managed self-presentation is going on via social media, but caution us not to discount a sense of intimacy out of hand as following someone closely on social media can create an actual feeling of knowing them; moreover, social media allows for possibility of actual interaction.
 - Authenticity and sincerity: Celebrity practices that provide audiences (at least the feeling of) a glimpse at celebrities' inner selves. Social media comes with a greater expectation of authenticity than an interview because it is a less vetted social situation, which promotes the sense that that celebrity performances are more off the cuff and less managed. Marwick & boyd determined authenticity through: mistakes, contradictions of managed persona (controversy, etc.), and direct interactions with fans.
 - Marwick & boyd then demonstrate their findings via three case studies – Mariah Carey, Miley Cyrus, and Perez Hilton. As long as students have read the article, I have not found that going over these case studies at length is especially helpful, and they are quite outdated at this point. I would suggest skipping over them, and you can even suggest that students do not read this portion of the article if you are concerned about the length of the readings.

Small group activity: 15 minutes in groups, 10 minutes sharing out with full class discussion.

Before class: Choosing texts for students to analyze

I would encourage the instructor to select a celebrity and a set of texts that fits into the larger goals of the course. As long as the celebrity has been interviewed, has starred in some text (a video, TV show, film, etc.), and is active on social media (preferably Twitter considering Marwick & boyd's article, although Instagram also works well), they will be a suitable case study for this activity. I would also encourage the instructor to decenter white, male, cisgender, heterosexual, and/or able-bodied celebrities. In the past, successful celebrity examples have been Miley Cyrus and Cardi B. I have included two interview options (one late night and one magazine) and one music video for Cardi B here. Choosing recent social media posts can help keep this activity up to date.

During class: Logistics

I have done this activity with everything from 8 students to 120 students. It is flexible as students will divide themselves into (or you may pre-select) groups of 2-3. If the instructor allows students to divide themselves, split the class into three sections and have students pair up with the student or students next to them. Then, each section will be assigned a particular text or set of texts to analyze. Students will fill out the worksheet at the end of this section,

which will help them apply the terms and concepts they have learned to an analysis of a celebrity's persona.

After the small groups have completed the worksheet, they will share with the class. Create three lists on the board, one for each text. Have groups share out:

- One aspect of the text/piece of evidence they found noteworthy
- How that piece of evidence shapes a particular understanding of the star as a celebrity/shapes her celebrity persona. What does the text contribute to what we think of her?
- What does that aspect of her persona say about the role her race, gender, sexuality, or class plays in her celebrity identity, and what ideological messages might it send?

Then have the students turn to the second page of the worksheet and think about the differences and similarities across texts using the questions provided.

Conclusions: 10 minutes

Finally, have students share their observations from the final set of worksheet questions. The goal is to guide students to see that:

- Celebrity personas have some level of consistency across platforms. This helps to shape the idea that the celebrity is cohesive and authentic.
- However, different platforms highlight different aspects of that persona in ways that play to the strengths of each platform. For example, in the case of Cardi B, a music video may showcase a celebrity's talent and emphasize her wealth and status, while a late-night interview might ironically focus on her wealth and status by contrasting it with her sarcastic and casual personality.
- Through intertextuality, the similarities and differences between the texts that represent the celebrity help to create a particular understanding of her celebrity persona as raced, gendered, classed, etc.

Teaching materials

On the following pages are the worksheet for the in-class activity, a suggested music video and two choices of interview for groups to analyze, and an essay prompt to expand the activity into a larger assignment.

Worksheet: Cardi B | Analyzing a Celebrity as a Text

My group analyzed: Social Media Music Video Interview

<p>What is particularly notable in this text? (repeated themes, things that are out of the ordinary, etc.)</p>	<p>How would I describe Cardi B here? What makes me say this (i.e. what evidence do I have for those descriptions)?</p>	<p>Which aspects of her identity (race, class, gender, sexuality, etc.) does this text highlight? How does the text frame that aspect of her identity (funny, attractive, strange, etc.)?</p>
<p>Which concepts from Gamson and/or Marwick and boyd can help me explain what I see?</p>		<p>Anything else of note, or any questions?</p>

Use the following space to take notes as other groups discuss their texts:

Social Media	Music Video	Interview

What themes are repeated across different texts/platforms?

What does the repetition of that theme tell us about how Cardi B and her team are marketing her(self)?

What themes were present in only one or two texts/platforms?

What was unique or different about each text/platform?

What might these differences tell us about the way Cardi B and her team are using one particular outlet or platform to shape and market her persona?

Think about how aspects of Cardi B's identity are framed and marketed across platforms. What do these frames and marketing tactics say about:

- Race
- Gender
- Class
- Sexuality

Sample texts re: Cardi B for groups to analyze

Music video: "[Bodak Yellow](#)" (June 2017)

Interview option #1: [December 2017 interview with Jimmy Fallon](#)

Interview option #2: Excerpts and images from October 2018 [W Magazine interview](#)

"But today, Cardi's face was makeup free, and her short tousled black wig a touch askew. She was dressed in a striped T-shirt halter dress and appeared delicate and tinier than her enhanced Jessica Rabbit-like curves might suggest. Save for occasional gurgling sounds and the car seat leaning against a wall, there was little sign of Kulture; a diaphanous curtain divided the public space from the bedroom where Cardi's grandmother was minding the baby. While Cardi and Offset have teased the appearance of their daughter in videos showing them FaceTiming with her from a club or whispering to her in bed, their own pictures of the tot had yet to surface. Still, she was very much the topic of conversation. "Four weeks after giving birth, I was supposed to start rehearsals for a fall tour with [Bruno Mars](#), and I couldn't even squat down," Cardi said, explaining why she [decided to drop out](#). "People don't really talk about what you go through after pregnancy. Like, they don't tell you that you get stitches down there or that your first two weeks you're constipated. Or that you get contractions because of breastfeeding. I wasn't expecting that. When Kulture was born, I felt like I was a kid again; everything was making me cry, and I needed a lot of love. I be feeling like, Do babies know who's they mom? I feel like babies love whoever is giving them the milk, and I want to give the milk the whole time. I want her to *know* me." She paused to let this sink in. "I feel better now, but sometimes I just feel so vulnerable, like I'm not ready for the world yet. It's weird."

She and Offset plan to raise Kulture in Atlanta, his home base, where he has a house and they keep their matching Lamborghinis, plus Cardi's new Lamborghini SUV, though the New York City girl that she is, Cardi has never learned to drive. "When I got married with my dude, we still had a lot of doubts, because our relationship is not like everybody's," she said. "He was always traveling, and I was always traveling. We're artists. So I used to see him, like, twice a week, and, you know, he's known for having different women, and I'm known for, like, not taking shit from guys. But we really loved each other, and we was scared to lose each other." As she tells it, they had talked about marriage, and one day, in the middle of an argument, she suggested they go ahead and do it. "And he's like, 'You're playing around.' And I said, 'I'm for real.'" So they got the license and had a secret ceremony in Offset's bedroom, dressed in sweatsuits. And yet, without a ring, it didn't feel real, she recalled, and anyhow, it had been her dream "for a guy to get on his knees and ask me to marry him. And he was just like, 'I will never get on my knees. Fuck outta here.'" But he did, surprising her onstage during a concert in Philadelphia a few weeks later, with the eight-carat teardrop diamond that now adorns a hand bedecked in rhinestone-encrusted nail extensions.

The baby wasn't planned, and Cardi asked Offset what she should do. "You think my career's going to be over?" she wanted to know. "And he kept saying, 'I don't know how you don't see

it, but you so hot right now, nothing could get in your way. You just have to work hard and put out a poppin' album. I think you should keep the baby.' " Offset has had three other children with three different women, and, as Cardi is the first to tell you, Internet trolls are hungry to feed her worries with rumors of his infidelity. "Every single day there's rumors about me and my dude. And it almost drives me crazy, because I start to believe them. I don't have no proof. I don't have receipts. But I just got to know my man. We practically on the phone 24 hours a day. If I can't find him, I'm going to find his friend. Somebody going to answer the phone. But I cannot be feeling insecure, to a point that I would drive my dude away, because these people want that to happen."

[...]

I asked if she feared losing street cred once she became a mother. "You don't lose street cred," she said, "but people want an illusion that female artists are available. They fantasize less when they know they actually somebody's wife. And then imagine having a baby." Cardi, however, continues to be outspoken about her sexuality. On her anniversary, in September, she complained on camera about not getting any action (though not in those words) as the shot panned to Offset asleep on the bed. A week later, she captioned another Instagram post, of her performance at the French lingerie brand Etam's runway show in Paris: "Your lingerie collection was sooo sexy i wanna fuck my man in all the pieces!" And yet, according to Cardi, she's begun censoring herself in ways she'd never considered before. "I can't rap about certain things, because I don't want to insult my husband. And when I want to do a music video, I can't use a male model and do crazy things." The same goes for Offset, though: "He knows better than to do certain things in music videos. I'll beat his ass."

Midterm Group Project Prompt: Analyzing a Celebrity Persona

DESCRIPTION

For this project, your group will analyze the ways in which a celebrity (and, implicitly, his or her image management team) markets themselves by constructing a particular persona. Your goal will be to construct a theoretically-informed argument that assesses the sociocultural implications of a celebrity's persona re: race, gender, sexuality, and/or class.

METHODS

To do this, each group member will choose one of the following media objects to analyze:

<i>Traditional Celebrity</i>	<i>Online Celebrity</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A celebrity's social media account (must be official) • A key media text in which the celebrity is featured (e.g. a film, television show, music video, etc.) • An interview with the celebrity (e.g. a late-night talk show interview, an interview in a magazine, etc.) 	<p>This is more open-ended, depending on which online celebrity you choose. You may choose multiple social media accounts, an interview (if available), merchandise, etc. If your group wants to analyze an online celebrity, I will brainstorm with you to choose your three sets of media objects.</p>

ANALYSIS

To conduct your analyses, ask yourselves: How is the celebrity's persona constructed through each medium in relation to one or more of the categories of identity we're discussing in this class? Is the celebrity's persona consistent across media, or does it differ? How might we make sense of those similarities and differences, and what are their sociocultural implications?

STRUCTURE

The structure of the paper will break down as follows:

- Collaborative: Introduction [with research question(s) and thesis] and methods section: 1-2 pages
- Individual: Analyses of celebrity persona on each medium: 3-4 pages each
- Collaborative: Conclusion that synthesizes the individual arguments to provide a holistic argument: 1-2 pages

The final page length will be ~12 pages.

EVALUATION

Papers will be evaluated based on the overall synthesis and coherence of the argument and presentation. While each individual piece is important to your score, most crucial will be the collaborative sections in which you introduce and draw together your analyses and conclusions.

Students will also complete confidential peer evaluations of their fellow group members, which will be taken into consideration when calculating individual grades.

Author biography

Caitlin E. Lawson is the Howard R. Marsh Postdoctoral Fellow at the University of Michigan's Department of Communication Studies. Her research focuses on digital media, celebrity culture, and identity. Her current book project explores the ways online communities mobilize discussions of celebrity culture to debate and define feminist politics. She received a BA in Literary and Cultural Studies from the University of Oklahoma and a MA in Film Studies from the University of Central Oklahoma. She can be reached at lawsonc@umich.edu

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