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## The Dark Rise of Celebrity Culture

We as a society tend to wade through life in oblivion, completely unaware of the influence and greater effects of technological advancements and the evolvement of our planet. These elements bear an almost indestructible adhesion to us as human beings and greatly influences the moulding and shaping of our psyche and personalities. As of recently, one of the biggest factors involved in this influence, would undeniably be the inexterminable force of the media. We are exposed to the media everyday of our lives. We are bombarded with images of seemingly impeccable celebrities with faultless, perfect lives. This constant bombardment of images of perfection does, in fact, affect each of us, if not consciously then subconsciously.

Naturally, a normal average person with everyday problems, exposed to the ideation of perfection through media, will aspire to these celebrities. This creates

influence. We are fascinated by these people, so much so, that some of us treat these celebrities akin to religious icons, gods, if you like.

Is this dark rise of celebrity culture affecting our society positively or negatively? Of course it is not black or white. Nothing is, but in my opinion, the negative effects are as prevalent as the positive. It has been proven that this celebrity culture affects our society, be it through our mental health, our insecurities, our behaviour both in person and via social media, our psyche and our personalities.

Undoubtedly, celebrities are more accessible than ever before - the myriad "real life" stories about celebrities shown on entertainment news programmes and even in the mainstream press, are readily attainable on the Internet. We even have reality T.V. shows that turn normal people into stars and these mass-produced "celebrities" are also given inordinate amounts of media attention. The media are clearly giving the public "what it wants," but in doing so, they are exacerbating the problem.

This media attention does two counterproductive things. First, it reinforces the status and prestige of celebrity in our society, even as it objectifies and trivializes celebrities themselves.

Secondly, overzealous coverage of celebrities decreases the psychological “distance” between fans and celebrities. This reinforces the false and unhealthy notion that the public can really come to know stars, that we can establish real, personal relationships with them.

All you need to do is observe those around you, the innumerable teenage clones of those in 'Jersey Shore' , 'Geordie Shore' , 'The Valleys' and so on. The fake tan, the false eyelashes, the dark thick eyebrows, the heavy makeup and hair extensions is more prevalent than ever. The trend in binge drinking, one night stands, fighting, bitching and aggression is accepted as the 'norm' amongst my generation. Years ago, before all of these reality TV shows of people behaving abominably, this behaviour was frowned upon. Now and with thanks to the exposure of these shallow minded TV programmes, it is perfectly normal amongst the youth. This attitude can be seen replicated everywhere.

The news media can also act like a drug dealer, devoting far too much space to superficial stories about the rich and famous, information that has little real value, but tremendous power to reinforce society's addiction to celebrities. At the same time less and less attention is paid to informing us, as a society, about the

government and the world around us — undercutting a cornerstone of a democratic society.

I think it can be said that the media itself is the source of the uprise of this celebrity culture. It deciphers factors of influence on our society and is a major factor itself in worsening issues such as mental health, particularly among vulnerable youth.

This trend in celebrity culture has a tremendous effect on our self esteem. Each day we are exposed to these images and ideations of perfection, emaciated models with apparently perfect bodies, clear tan skin, long silky hair, muscular men with “six packs” and so on..the list is endless. This can strip us of our inherent confidence, fuelling our obsession with perfectionism and celebrities, forcing us to engage in consumerism. It also increases the demand for celebrity endorsement, contributing to the recent trends and increasingly high rates of eating disorders, self-harm, depression, suicide, plastic surgery, cosmetic procedures etc. The cycle is vicious and the list of possible problems is endless.

As an example, celebrities with eating disorders are well publicised in tabloid media and gossip magazines. Those without eating disorders may also say things

which influence their fans: Kate Moss, for example, said "Nothing tastes as good as skinny feels"- not particularly helpful for those at risk to eating disorders. Research also shows, a relationship between 'celebrity worship' and body image in teenage girls i.e. those who are obsessed with celebrities are more likely to have concerns about how they look. For drugs, it has been suggested that a recent decrease in teenage drug use is due to the squeaky-clean nature of young musicians of today (Tinie Tempah, Ellie Goulding) being tee-total, compared to the openly addicted Pete Doherty and Amy Winehouse in the early noughties. All in all, it is undeniable that celebrity culture holds a great influence amongst us and those most vulnerable in society such as youth.

This uprise of celebrity culture does not solely affect our self esteem and mental health but also our behaviour or 'oversharing' on social media websites. This problem may not be as obvious, but as previously mentioned, we tend to be oblivious to the greater effect of certain aspects of media and celebrities. There is a link between the changing nature of celebrities and how we represent ourselves on social media, such as Facebook. We crave approval. It's an extension of our aspiration to be like our idol. Having an idol is natural when moulding your own identity. It is in rare cases that a celebrity would not have a

Twitter, Instagram or Facebook account accessible to the public. Indeed, our idol and their seemingly perfect life and looks, which we may aspire to, is readily accessible to us at all times.

Take Rihanna for instance. Her Instagram consists of raunchy photos mostly of her rear end, inhaling seemingly illicit substances as well as sexually explicit images of herself and her male partners. Teenagers and children have not developed enough logic and emotional knowledge to distinguish between safe and unsafe with regard to what they share online. Of course as one grows up, a lot of one's behavioural patterns result from a case of "Monkey see Monkey does". Growing up and having every celebrity's Twitter, Facebook and Instagram at your disposal may result in dangerous consequences. Under Rihanna's photos most of the comments include "sexy""pretty" "stunning" and so on. This is the epitome of our insatiable need for approval. So what do we do? We mimic these celebrities' behaviour in the hope of approval, which in internet terms equates to "likes" "shares" "retweets" and "hearts".

'Oversharing' is becoming automatic. The impulse to put a photograph online immediately is commonplace. When we have the opportunity ourselves, be it on

YouTube or Facebook, to share photos of every event and night out, we jump at the chance!

The two pillars of modern celebrity of the past decade, Paris Hilton and Kim Kardashian, both became famous because of sex tapes, intrusions from which they both benefitted commercially. The past decade of reality television has depicted the most intimate, mundane and gratuitous moments of people's lives. The dark side of social networking and sharing is intrusion. And we as a population seem to be becoming increasingly unaware of the consequences of this. The permanency of our actions online are hugely influenced by celebrity culture and the media.

The "Slane Girl" story, as most people have heard about, has recently been plastered through social media. It is the perfect example of the dangerous consequences resulting from this phenomenon of 'oversharing.' The uploader of the explicit images sought out approval. They photographed something that they thought was humorous, something no one else would have, something that would gain attention and 'likes.' One month later and with numerous Gardaí investigations underway, his or her need for approval and 'likes' will suffer serious legal consequences.

As previously mentioned, people's most mundane and intimate moments have been documented online thanks to reality TV or the influence of celebrities. The way in which some of the famous behave and interact via twitter or Facebook has perpetuated the idea that 'oversharing' is and should be normal.

At present talent is not needed to become famous. All one needs to do is to gain the attention of the media. This denotes the dangerous idea that any of us can have our "15 minutes of fame" as Andy Warhol put it, simply by gaining this attention. This ideation is just another contributory factor to the negative impacts celebrity culture has on our society and to the way we project ourselves both online and in person.

The Dark rise of celebrity culture and fame can indeed be considered a weakness, causing many complex problems in our society and in many ways, a weakness resigning us to particular behaviours, self perceptions, mental illnesses and thinking patterns.

In conclusion, I think that a phrase from Tacitus, a Roman historian, epitomising the effect of celebrity culture in 2013 would be appropriate:

"The love of fame is the last weakness which even the wise resign".





# Obesity

Obesity has been described as a global epidemic, one that the developing world is struggling to overcome without much success. Thirty years ago fewer than one in ten people were obese. This figure has soared to one in four adults suffering from obesity in Ireland alone. This is only five percent lower than figures in the U.S.A., a country which thrives on the fast food industry. Obesity has a high financial cost for the tax payer and potentially lethal outcome for the sufferer.

Ireland has had some success in reducing the number of road deaths per annum by an effective 'Road Safety' campaign. (RSA - 'Crashed Lives"). Likewise, we have managed to lower the rate of tobacco related diseases by raising taxes. Obesity however has not yet received the attention it truly merits. Twenty five per cent of Irish children are obese or over weight and this figure will rise unless government intervention occurs.

Tackling Obesity demands an approach that does not merely emphasize or coordinate the population's discrete actions. Those actions' unintended consequences need to be understood. Ineffective interventions need to be stopped and effective ones need to be improved. I don't believe this epidemic will be rectified without government leadership. media is an extremely powerful

influence with regard to its effect on public life. The government can influence media to change accordingly if actions are taken. Yet why is nothing being done?

In June two thousand and eleven the European Parliament voted against proposals to introduce 'traffic light' style food labeling. This system shows a red, green or amber color on the front of food packaging to clearly show consumers how the contents rate in healthy eating criteria. The color is determined by the level of calories, sugar, salt and fat the product contains. Evidence shows that this system is the best way to enable accurate interpretation of nutritional information, readable by a huge variety of ethnicities or socioeconomic classes.

Of course, the food and drinks industry opposed the system using the excuse of "the most expensive lobbying campaigns". Instead, GDA was introduced or 'Guideline Daily Allowance' which, in my opinion is much more difficult to read and understand.

My theory is that the government is less concerned about the health of citizens and instead choose to please manufacturing companies. Even though the government holds immense power over food packaging, contents, labeling and

advertising, they choose to remain oblivious to the soaring figures of obesity. In saying this, the government is not totally to blame. We must not forget other official bodies of the powerful, global food industry. They are the ultimate culprits for this 'Obesity culture', and are now producing more processed, affordable and effectively marketed foods than ever before. The increased supply of cheap, palatable and energy dense foods, paired with better distribution and marketing has led to passive and extreme over consumption.

It is all good and well analyzing these statistics, but ultimately, the Irish society needs solutions. Me, I suggest a ten per cent tax levy on foods high in fat and sugar. I also believe that target campaigns aiming to elicit 'shock' amongst the audience regarding obesity could be very effective and perhaps even yield similar results to that of the 'Crashed Lives' campaign. There is no reason the RSA tactics cannot be applied to the Obesity epidemic. This has become increasingly common recently and actions to prevent more suffering from both the corruption within the food industry and people's attitude towards food must be taken. Urgent action is required.

## **The impact of technology on the lives of young people.**

It is undeniable, the fact that we live in a culture or society saturated by media, immersed in technological advancements that promote non stop communication and instant gratification; whether through mobile phones, tablets, PCs, ipods or gaming consoles. Undoubtedly, technology influences our society, young people especially. Whether these influences are positive or negative, it is arguable.

However, the negative impacts are extremely prominent in relation to the Irish youth at present. Technology is a predominantly negative influence which impacts massively on us, the young people of today, through our mental health and social interactions. Technology has an indestructible power to isolate one from reality, to hinder their communication skills and to perpetuate the concept of 'instant gratification'.

A perfect example of isolation as a result of technology is the use of ipods and MP3 devices. It is an everyday occurrence, the sight of a teenager walking down the street with those white ear phones attached into their ear, like a piece of anatomy. The immersion in music whilst in a public area serves to disconnect one to reality, it preoccupies an individual so that they don't have to deal with the unexpected. If we don't have to face reality by experiencing new things, forming personal relationships and solving problems, how can we ever function

as an adult in society? Moreover, online social interactions and websites have become the substitute for face to face communication. While the internet and social media can foster good feelings of confidence, 'belonging' and social fulfillment, it can antagonistically hinder our ability to socialize in reality. The internet often provides the comfort and confidence which we may lack. By constantly being cut off from personal, real social interaction and experience because of technology, a generation with substandard social skills is being groomed to constitute our future. Technology is a major factor contributing to the resulting feelings of interpersonal isolation, thus negatively influencing young people who are engulfed by technology.

These feelings of isolation are, without a doubt, linked to an array of mental illnesses and eating disorders amongst the most vulnerable in society, the youth. We are constantly bombarded with images and ideations of perfection because of our 24/7 access to the internet and technology. This in turn moulds and shapes our persona, both online and in reality. As Jim Morrison once claimed; "Whoever controls the media controls the mind". A young person's vulnerability results in them being easily influenced by what they read, watch, see and hear. The internet provides immediate access to countless amounts of pictures, blogs, websites, pages and so on, all with holding immense power to influence the

minds of young people. The negative influences are seemingly more prevalent than the positive ones.

We hear about it everyday; suicide, depression, bulleimia, anorexia and various other disorders. Mental health issues are worsening and sadly, they no longer elicit a shock amongst our generation. These are the norm. A report from St. Patrick's hospital, one of the largest private mental healthcare units in the country, in Dublin has emerged with outstanding statistics compared to those a decade ago. Figures have been published stating that ten thousand people per year are hospitalized with depression in Ireland alone, ten per cent being adolescents. As well as this, eating disorders have become a 'trend' amongst children aged between ten and thirteen. For men and boys, these disorders have become "more prevalent than ever", states Dr. Griffin, whom believes that these rates are partly due to technological advancements and immediate internet access.

The internet, as a body of technology is malicious in contributing to these statistics. Websites promoting anorexia called 'pro ana' are trending amongst teenage girls and little is being done to regulate them. Images of idealism and perfection on Facebook, Google, Instagram and Tumblr often plague the mind of

the teenager. These dangerously inaccurate images build up in one's subconsciousness, promoting feelings of inadequacy and self hate. Undoubtedly, this 'perfectionism' is another facet of the larger influence of technology.

Technology itself detracts from the communication abilities of society, especially amongst the youth. Our physical and mental health is badly affected when our communication skills are compromised. Pews Ltd. indicates that those who frequently use technologies such as the internet, spend one hundred minutes less with their family and friends per week compared to non internet users. They also imply that those who spend more time on the internet are more likely to be stressed, lonely and depressed when compared with those who spend less time on the web. It is extremely detrimental to one's health to form and sustain relationships and interactions online. Communication skills are critical for everyone, the use of the internet as a substitute for this undermines the development of these skills. This negativity hinders our progression into adulthood, as well as our capability to interact in reality, face to face.

The advancement of technology plays a major role in perpetuating the concept or mindset of immediate satisfaction. The creation and progression of various



technological devices slowly ingrains this paradigm of instant gratification. We have access to boundless amounts of information at our finger tips, whether it is through smart phones, the internet, PC, 3G and soon to be 4G, we can find the solutions to our problems in a milisecond. We can engage in contact with friends and family who live thousands of miles away and update our social media profiles with any recent event or significant occurrence in our lives. We can keep in touch and interact anywhere at anytime. We grow up as a generation learning that whenever we want pleasure, enjoyment, information or services, it is automatically granted to us within seconds of request. This is the perpetuation of this concept of instant satisfaction or gratification, one which technology strongly promotes.

In conclusion, It is undeniable that technology impacts upon many aspects of the lives of young people, especially in relation to one's persona, demeanour, health and development into adulthood. Technology detaches us from what is happening around us, it obstructs communications and promotes this paradigm of instant gratification whilst hindering our mental health. Beware of technology, for too much emphasis can be detrimental to one's health. Too much is never a good thing, the malevolence of technology can be extremely disconcerting,

depressing and tediously addictive. As a solution, it is best, like everything, to use technology in moderation.