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**Representations of Success, Failure  
and Death in Celebrity Culture**

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**PhD Media and Cultural Studies**

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**June 2012**

**STATEMENT**

I hereby declare that this thesis has not been and will not be submitted in whole or in part to another university for the award of any other degree.

Signature.....

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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**UNIVERSITY OF SUSSEX**

**HANNA KYLLÖNEN: PhD MEDIA AND CULTURAL STUDIES**

**REPRESENTATIONS OF SUCCESS, FAILURE AND DEATH IN CELEBRITY CULTURE**

**SUMMARY**

Celebrity is one of the most central shaping and distorting forces in our society. My PhD thesis interrogates the nature of fame in contemporary culture that actively promotes individuality, image, consumerist lifestyles, and the constructed nature of the self. Celebrity culture is marked by a confusion of realms between public and private, talent and manufacture, and image and the 'real self.' The thesis examines representations of success, failure and death in celebrity culture during the period between the death of Diana, Princess of Wales in 1997 and the end of year 2010. The thesis provides an analysis based on feminist thought through reading individual celebrities' narratives. The emphasis is on looking at fame as a process of success and failure, as represented in auto/biographies and the media. The thesis considers how media representations change the perception of celebrities and also how celebrities themselves affect these representations through confessional discourse, autobiographies, self-promotion, and image construction. Therefore, the thesis will analyse how success, failure and death are represented through individual celebrities' narratives, using case studies to examine both confessional and biographical/autobiographical discourses and media discourses. The emphasis is on tabloid media and an examination of the continuities between success, failure and death, revealing how representations of celebrity rely on narrative, sensationalism and the personal realm instead of facts, objectivity and the public sphere. The thesis pays particular attention to the analysis of the gendered nature of celebrity autobiographies with the aim of revealing how modern celebrity autobiographies confuse traditional gender boundaries. There is a new, decidedly negative side to celebrity culture, particularly evident in the media's emphasis on failure, scandal and death, reactions to which often take a nasty, bullying tone. The methods used by celebrities to deal with fame are varied and compelling and may offer us insights into how lives are negotiated in contemporary society.

## **Contents**

1. Introduction.....	7
2. Surveying the Critical Field.....	14
2.1. Celebrity and Stardom .....	14
2.1.1. Definitions and Categorisations.....	14
2.1.2. Explaining Stardom and Celebrity.....	18
2.1.3. Society, Lifestyle and Contemporary Fame .....	24
2.1.4. Success and Failure.....	28
2.1.5. Conclusion on Celebrity Culture .....	30
2.2. Critical Understandings of Auto/biography.....	32
2.2.1. Historical Dimensions of Autobiography.....	32
2.2.2. Defining Auto/biography.....	35
2.2.3. Gender, Feminism and Autobiography .....	39
2.2.4. The Self and the 'Real' Person in Autobiography.....	42
2.2.5. Conclusion on Autobiography.....	46
3. Jordan and Katie: The Work of Autobiography.....	48
3.1. Introduction .....	48
3.2. Being Jordan: The Construction of an Image.....	49
3.3. Image Change: From Jordan to Katie Price .....	56
3.4. Masks and the Performative Gender: Looking for the 'Real' Jordan .....	61
3.5. The End of Jordan and Peter – Divorce and Brand Failure .....	67
3.6. Conclusion: Failure and Redemption.....	75
4. Masculine Confessional in Celebrity Auto/biographies: Robbie Williams and Russell Brand .....	78
4.1. Introduction .....	78
4.2. Masculine Masquerade and Gender Performance .....	81
4.3. The Trouble with Fame: Confessing Addiction and Depression .....	90
4.4. Being 'Drama Queens' – Male Stars and Mental Illness.....	95
4.5. Autobiography and Biography – Differences and Similarities.....	99
4.6. Conclusion: Blurring Gender Boundaries.....	105
5. Class, Gender and Reality TV Celebrity: Jade Goody and Kerry Katona.....	108
5.1. Introduction .....	108

5.2. From 'Chav' to Celebrity: Class and Gender in Narratives of Betterment .....	111
5.3. 'Authenticity', Construction of the Self and the Confessional .....	120
5.4. Mental Illness, Bodily Representations and the Gendered Narratives of Breakdown .....	127
5.5. Autobiography as a PR Response to Scandal and Crisis .....	132
5.6. Conclusion: Tradition, 'Authenticity' and Gender .....	137
6. Representations of Death and Dying in Celebrity Culture.....	139
6.1. Introduction .....	139
6.2. Part One: Representing Death and Dying .....	142
6.2.1. 'Death Diary,' Reality TV and Counter-Narrative .....	142
6.2.2. Debating Death – The Elevation of Jade Goody.....	156
6.3. Part Two: Representations of Unexpected Death .....	167
6.3.1. Introduction .....	167
6.3.2. Death as Career Success .....	168
6.3.3. Celebrity Deaths as Dramatisation of Social Concern.....	170
6.3.4. Reporting Death: Tabloid Newspapers and Voyeurism .....	172
6.3.5. Constructing Immortality .....	175
6.4. Conclusion: Death and Counter-Narrative .....	178
7. Conclusion.....	181
8. Bibliography .....	188
8.1. Academic Sources.....	188
8.2. Audiovisual sources .....	196
8.3. Auto/biography.....	196
8.4. Newspaper and magazine articles and websites.....	197

## **1. Introduction**

Celebrity is one of the most central shaping and distorting forces in society. This thesis interrogates the nature of fame in contemporary culture. Celebrities have become the ultimate commodities. When in the past fame could be achieved through talent, heroic deeds, skills, hard work and charisma, now fame is seemingly achievable for all. Anyone can be famous, regardless of talent or skill, outside the media event from which they initially emerged. Today, most celebrities are not conventional stars whose mediated personas are closely linked to their work. The meanings surrounding celebrities are only loosely attached to their initial break into the media. As a result, true stardom is generally reserved for those with talent, skills or presence. For the purposes of this thesis, it is thus necessary to read celebrities in the light of the complex net that represents celebrity culture today.

Celebrity culture is marked by a confusion of realms between public and private, talent and manufacture, and image and the 'real self.' The thesis looks at the phenomenon of celebrity through an examination of the processes of success and failure and their discursive representation in auto/biographies and the media. An analysis of auto/biographies is supplemented by an examination of stories in British newspapers. Documentaries and reality TV shows are used to a minor extent to illustrate specific points. In addition to an analysis of success and failure, the thesis will also examine narratives surrounding celebrity deaths. The thesis will provide an analysis based on an examination of gendered representations through reading individual celebrities' narratives. My research will interrogate the nature of contemporary fame during the period between the death of Diana, Princess of Wales, in 1997 and the end of year 2010. As existing research often concentrates on specific aspects of success or failure, or more general aspects of celebrity culture, I will be arguing that success and failure form a continuous narrative as elevation and descent occupy a common discursive space. I will analyse how success, failure and death are represented, using case studies to examine the tension between confessional biographical/autobiographical discourses and media discourses. The celebrities for the case studies have been chosen mainly on the basis of their position within the hierarchy of fame, using Chris Rojek's (2001) classification of celebrities. The celebrities in this thesis are either achieved or attributed celebrities. Rojek argues that 'achieved celebrity derives from the perceived accomplishments of the individual. [...] In the public realm they are recognised as individuals who possess rare talent or skills' (Rojek, 2001: 18). In this thesis pop star Robbie Williams, comedian and actor Russell Brand, actor Heath Ledger, and pop star Michael Jackson represent achieved celebrities. They are celebrities by reason of their artistic or creative achievements. Attributed celebrity is the result of the 'concentrated



representation of an individual as noteworthy or exceptional by cultural intermediaries' (Rojek, 2001: 18). Their celebrity status or 'occupation' is often difficult to pin down and they are sometimes described as being 'famous for being famous.' Jordan/Katie Price, Jade Goody and Kerry Katona represent attributed celebrities in this thesis. Achieved celebrities are often more readily described as 'stars' rather than 'celebrities', implying a more valued status within the hierarchy of fame. In contemporary celebrity culture, attributed celebrities are often the result of appearing in reality TV shows and their fame is largely maintained through confessional practices such as autobiographies, interviews and reality TV shows. All the celebrities chosen are in some way controversial, thus providing different insights into the study of the auto/biographical narrative.

The emphasis of this thesis is on revealing how representations of celebrity rely on narrative, sensationalism and the personal realm, instead of fact, objectivity and the public sphere. The aim is to trace the patterns that dominate celebrity culture today in order to examine how success and failure are represented in auto/biographical discourses and how these discourses differ from those represented in the media. There is a new, negative emphasis on reporting on celebrities. This is particularly evident in the media's emphasis on failure and the increased and disturbing interest in celebrity deaths and scandals, reactions to which are often characterised by tones of vengeance and retribution. Celebrity confessional products are designed to sell the celebrity's image, so it is essential to look at celebrity culture through the prism of commodification, examining the recurring debates about manipulation and artifice in opposition to 'authenticity' and the 'real self.' There is a tension between the auto/biography's claim to promote the 'authentic' and its status as a commodity. The analysis will also pay attention to the criticism towards celebrity culture, rising at regular intervals, usually in relation to scandals, deaths or vindictive treatment of celebrities by the public and the media, identified by increased tabloidisation of the media, commodification of life, and relentless voyeurism.

Particular attention to the analysis of celebrity auto/biographies offers a new and previously unexamined approach to celebrity culture. What unites the chapters is the central insistence upon gender as the lens through which autobiography and biography are examined. Wanko argues that in auto/biographical discourse, 'female celebrities encounter representational difficulties that do not arise for male subjects' (2003: 18). In opposition to this I will argue that male stars do encounter representational difficulties arising from the feminine nature of contemporary autobiographies. Male auto/biographies need to find a balance between the feminine requirements of the confession and the masculine requirements of constructing a saleable masculine persona. The emphasis of study will be on the representations of gender in auto/biography with the aim of revealing how modern celebrity

autobiographies confuse gender boundaries, play with gender through the performative and sometimes replay traditional narratives of gender and gender roles. The purpose of the thesis is therefore to examine what is revealed when we focus on the gendered aspects of male and female celebrities' confessionals. Historically male autobiographies were regarded as objective, rational and straightforward whereas female autobiographies were seen as subjective, emotional and domestic. Using the autobiography as a tool for examining both the gender confusion and gender differences at work in celebrity culture, the thesis will aim to show that contemporary, commodified fame consists of a play with gender roles and relations. Both feminism and autobiography theory show that the self is a construct, and that there is no unitary subject – an idea also promoted by celebrity culture. It must be made clear that traditional understandings of gender still exist alongside the performative aspects of gender. Some historically-based differences between masculine and feminine in the representation of contemporary celebrities still exist, especially between 'talented' male stars and 'famous for being famous' female celebrities. Another central theme of the thesis is to examine how auto/biographies provide a counter-narrative to media reporting, offering celebrities a chance to 'tell their side of the story.' Auto/biography is one of the few relatively controllable means for a celebrity (and their management and PR teams) to respond to allegations against them or to correct false stories in the media. Auto/biographies work as vehicles for public relations and are often used strategically for the purpose of gaining public sympathy.

The 'real person' behind a constructed image is in question both in autobiography and the celebrity culture. In the past autobiographies were written by men and women who had 'lived' – older people with years of life behind them. Currently, celebrities publish new autobiographies when they are still very young and new autobiographies are often written every couple of years. This brings to fore the commercial motive behind writing autobiographies and the fact that nowadays celebrities need to publish autobiographies to maintain their fame. Due to the commercial motive behind autobiographies, omissions are made, events are made up, images are polished to be presented in the best possible light, and autobiographies are used to justify past transgressions.

The thesis will analyse the concept of 'authenticity' as auto/biographies' central claim is that they represent the 'real' and the 'authentic'. Being perceived as pretentious or false has destroyed many celebrity careers, therefore auto/biographies work to establish the 'authenticity' of the subject. However, as this thesis will argue, this 'authenticity' is a construction and a performance aimed at selling the celebrity through the claim the he or she is 'really' what he or she appears to be. Autobiographies are always connected to and embedded in culture. Narrators take up models of identity that are culturally available.

Autobiographies are also performative texts with a purpose of creating a drama of the self. As cultural and commercial objects, autobiographies are designed to be entertaining, and thus saleable. As Kuhn puts it, 'in writing lives, (self) representation entails various degrees of (self) invention; in writing we create ourselves' (1990: 4). The emphasis in auto/biographies is on demonstrating the success (often achieved through failure) of the celebrity in question. While studying autobiography offers few certainties or solid answers (much like celebrity culture itself), its analysis leads us to engage with the important issues of gender relations, identity, and the self in capitalist consumer society.

The methods used by celebrities to deal with fame are varied and compelling, and their stories may offer us discursive insight into how lives are negotiated in contemporary society. Judging from the number of stories in circulation at any one time, contemporary Britain appears to be obsessed with celebrity. But in contrast to an earlier period, it seems that today audiences prefer celebrities that seem like real people. Ordinary people seem interested in hearing about celebrities' ordinary problems and day-to-day dilemmas. Auto/biographies are particularly suitable for the purpose of making celebrities appear ordinary. Piers Morgan suggests: 'What we look for is authenticity, honesty, soul-searching confessionals, scandals and downfalls. There has been a shift away from distant, cosseted stars towards celebrities who exist by revealing their emotions and turmoil, people who tell it like it is instead of hiding behind public façades' (2007: 358). The increased curiosity and voyeurism is often problematic for the celebrities in question, prompting them to turn to confessional discourses to respond to allegations. On the other hand, celebrities often push the boundaries of acceptance too far and require the confessional to justify or to explain their actions. Alongside the discourse of star as ordinary then exists a narrative of extraordinariness. This complexity makes celebrity culture interesting – and ultimately worthy of study.

The thesis consists of a critical review of main scholarly theories on celebrity culture and auto/biography in Chapter 2, followed by four chapters constructed around case studies. The first case study in Chapter 3: 'Jordan and Katie: The Work of Autobiography' is based on an analysis of glamour model and reality TV star Jordan's different personas as constructed in her four autobiographies. Jordan is known for her dual image as 'raunchy' and provocative glamour model Jordan and as a mother and business woman Katie Price. The examination of her autobiographies reveals the construction of her different personas for the purpose of profiting from her dual image. The chapter uses theories of 'Do-Me' feminism, performative gender, masks and masquerade and narcissism to analyse Jordan's changing image as represented discursively within her autobiographies. Jordan always attracts attention from both the broadsheet and the tabloid newspapers; therefore, the

chapter also examines autobiography as a response to press stories, especially in relation to Jordan's 'failure' after her marriage to former husband Peter Andre broke down. This chapter sets the scene for an analysis of autobiography as a counter-narrative, a subject to which the thesis will return in the chapters that follow. Jordan and her management use autobiography to 'talk back' to the media and to construct representations that show Jordan in the best possible light. The chapter reveals the constructed nature of the celebrity self and image, which in the case of Jordan is closely related to commodification. The chapter shows how Jordan's image is constructed around a performance of gender and how she consciously constructs herself as a brand through self-promotional practices.

Chapter 4: 'Masculine Confessional in Celebrity Auto/biographies: Robbie Williams and Russell Brand' analyses achieved celebrity deriving from talent, looking at the central myth of celebrity culture which promises that fame has the capacity to solve existing problems and change lives for the better, even when the opposite often seems to happen. Both Williams and Brand have experienced the downsides of fame through addictions to drugs and alcohol, and suffered from depression. Brand's two autobiographies and two authorised biographies written about Williams map the process of success and failure in their lives. This chapter examines how fame often becomes destructive, but as the auto/biographies examined show, for male stars the downsides of fame work to create a myth of the creative genius, which is then used to sell these celebrities as fallible and transgressive. The chapter examines how, due to the confessional requirements of auto/biographies, these texts are feminine in tone, and at the same time render the two stars feminine. The chapter shows how Williams and Brand come to be represented as neurotic and insecure – features traditionally associated with femininity. This neurosis is seen to lead to addictions and mental illness. However, masculinity is reasserted through humour, irony and transgressive behaviour. Male stars' weaknesses and failures sometimes turn into addictions and macho posturing, which may be thought of as a reassertion of masculinity. The chapter thus offers an analysis of masculinity within the feminine genre of auto/biography examining how male stars' confessionals blur gender boundaries because their auto/biographies are discursively constructed as feminine. Following on from Chapter 3, this chapter analyses how theories of roles, masks, performative gender and masquerade apply to male stars. The chapter also connects contemporary male auto/biographies to Enlightenment notions of individual and genius as well as examining the differences and similarities between autobiographies and (authorised) biographies.

Chapter 5: 'Class, Gender and Reality TV Celebrity: Jade Goody and Kerry Katona' examines the sense of 'incompleteness' evident in celebrity autobiographies, which are required to adhere to the script of 'an unfinished human-being.' The chapter analyses Katona's

autobiography and Goody's two autobiographies through a prism of class. Female, working-class celebrities' autobiographies are seen to be more traditional in their representation of gender because gender is connected to class. This chapter argues that representations of female working-class celebrities are intimately linked with their femininity articulated through narratives of class, mental illness, crisis, breakdown and scandal. Goody and Katona's autobiographies construct a 'rags to riches' narrative by narrating their rise from 'chav' to celebrity. Autobiographies give access to public discourse to those who would normally be excluded. As already seen in Chapter 3: 'Jordan and Katie: The Work of Autobiography', autobiography has the potential to work as a counter-narrative to negative press stories. This chapter picks up that theme in relation to crisis, breakdown and scandal discourses. The chapter also shows how for reality TV celebrities the notion of 'authenticity' becomes a central part of the narrative construction of the self in autobiographies. This chapter examines how 'authenticity' is threatened by incidents of scandal and transgression, forcing celebrities to use autobiographies to excuse their behaviour. This chapter therefore analyses the classed representations of Goody and Katona, constructed narratively in their autobiographies, mapping their rise to fame, the scandals and crises that lead to continuous failures and public condemnation and the gendered and classed autobiographical discourses that work to re-instate their fame.

Due to the widespread media commentary on recent celebrity deaths it became necessary to move away from the case studies in previous chapters to take a more thematic look at celebrity death discourses as these often articulate success and failure, generally reversing the process of newspaper reporting as the media are seen to produce their own counter-discourse in a similar manner to auto/biographies. Chapter 6: 'Representations of Death and Dying' examines the deaths of reality TV star Jade Goody from cervical cancer in 2009, actor Heath Ledger and pop star Michael Jackson from an overdose of prescription drugs, in 2008 and 2009 respectively. As previous chapters show, auto/biographies often act as a counter-narrative to false or negative stories in the press. This chapter examines how, in the case of high-profile deaths, newspapers construct a counter-narrative to their own, previously published stories, representing dead celebrities as icons and saints, constructing them as immortal and emphasising their legacy instead of previous negative, hurtful or false narratives constructed around controversial stars. The press often contribute to celebrities' downfall but celebrity deaths are followed by an instant elevation of a previously derided star. The chapter analyses 'bad death' through the slow decline of Jade Goody recorded in her 'death diary' and in a reality TV show *Jade's Progress*. An examination of Goody's diary and reality TV show moves on from auto/biographies to analyse how diaries and reality TV shows form a confessional narrative similar to autobiographies, attempting to establish themselves as the site of 'truth.' In addition, the chapter analyses how Goody was

constructed in the press during her cancer battle and after her death. The second part of the chapter analyses the 'tragic deaths' of Heath Ledger and Michael Jackson through the newspaper discourse surrounding their deaths and the elevation of these stars. Their deaths illustrate how death fits in with the understanding of celebrity as a secular religion. Jackson's death managed to erase previous accusations of child molestation that nearly destroyed his career, illustrating how a positive and affectionate counter-narrative in the press can wipe away past transgressions. Ledger had faced accusations of drug use which were now pushed to the background in favour of his talent as an actor and the legacy of his films. Both stars' deaths worked as a dramatisation of social concern in the press, warning about the abuse of prescription drugs. Ledger and Jackson illustrate how death often becomes a stars' biggest commercial success and how renewed media attention re-constructs the star's image in death.

## **2. Surveying the Critical Field**

Film studies have written about stardom since the seventies but the last decade has seen an increase in the number of theories relating to celebrity culture. Many have been concerned with creating taxonomies of fame or developing hierarchies and definitions of celebrity. Commodification, lifestyle and the psychology and social aspects of fame have received attention from theorists, and reality TV has emphatically changed the way many look at contemporary celebrity culture. A further development has been a marked increase in celebrity autobiographies. Even though autobiography is a popular literary genre, it has received little attention from theorists writing about celebrity culture. The first part of this chapter reviews some of the literature on celebrity and stardom, the emphasis being on the major theories I have drawn upon in the analysis that follows. The second part offers a critical overview of literature on autobiography with an emphasis on more recent theories.

### **2.1. Celebrity and Stardom**

#### **2.1.1. Definitions and Categorisations**

Daniel Boorstin (1961) formulated a significant and early hierarchy of celebrity culture, making a separation between heroes and celebrities. Once talent, achievement and greatness were needed for fame, but now celebrities are known for their well-knownness. According to Boorstin, 'we have willingly been misled into believing that fame – well-knownness – is still a hallmark of greatness' (1961: 47). He sees celebrity as pure manipulation, a commodity without substance, or as he calls it, a 'pseudo-event' – a concept that is useful for the study of modern famous for being famous celebrities. Celebrities are in existence only because they are promoted and manufactured by the culture industries. Therefore, for Boorstin, celebrities cannot be divided into categories since they are meaningless constructions that promote artifice and consumerism. Even a celebrity's fall is no longer tragic because, Boorstin claims, the fallen celebrity is only returned to his 'proper' anonymous position in society. Boorstin emphasises the respected status of heroes and the importance of achievement. There are no heroes anymore because heroes cannot be manufactured. 'While the folklore of hero-worship, the zestful search for heroes, and the pleasure and reverence for heroes remain, the heroes themselves dissolve' (Boorstin, 1961: 48). Celebrities on the other hand, are routinely fabricated by the culture industries, made into names using their personalities to generate discourses in the media. Boorstin states that celebrity is a contemporary development, whereas in the past we had 'real' heroes who achieved fame through heroic actions.

Boorstin's arguments can, to an extent, be applied in today's celebrity culture where it seems that no talent or achievements are needed for fame and where ordinary people are routinely elevated to celebrity status. It is surprising how persuasive some of his arguments are today. Yet there are limitations to his critique. He fails to see what happens after the celebrity commodity has been created, or after a person has achieved fame. Today, celebrity culture is very much a part of an achievement culture, and it is still important to be seen doing something. The celebrities that do not work to stay famous are often ridiculed and seen as the epitome of manufactured, meaningless celebrity whilst Boorstin claims that celebrities do not need to justify their rise to fame. I argue that due to the competitiveness and intensity of celebrity culture these days some kind of justification is needed if a celebrity is to stay famous and avoid punishment by the public for being meaningless. If you desire lasting fame, you need to justify why you deserve the benefits that fame bestows upon you. If you do not try to do this, you will quickly disappear from the limelight, and someone more 'worthy' will step into your shoes. Celebrities' efforts can be as simple as staying on the covers of the tabloid newspapers or magazines through events in the personal sphere, as long as they are seen doing something. According to Boorstin 'anyone can become a celebrity, if only he can get into the news and stay there' (1961: 60). This is certainly true today – just how long this fame lasts is a different matter. The hype created by the media also influences how celebrities are perceived. Pseudo-events are then those celebrities that exist through promotion or media appearances without actually doing any projects or having any kind of 'job' in the media. Their fleeting fame is often based on appearing in high-profile events and association with 'real' celebrities.

Boorstin's account remains influential, but in the decades since he put forward his argument the landscape of celebrity has changed enormously. Entire new media genres have emerged to feed the public hunger for celebrity, and to tackle these and their implications we must turn to more recent scholarship. Unlike Boorstin, Chris Rojek (2001) divides celebrity into specific categories and acknowledges the cultural and economic power of celebrities. He also emphasises celebrity's dependence on the public recognition of celebrity status, defining celebrity as 'an attribution of glamorous or notorious status to an individual in the public sphere' (Rojek, 2001: 10). In his account, glamour is associated with favourable public recognition; notoriety is the upshot of unfavourable public recognition. Rojek offers a more nuanced account of fame than Boorstin does, claiming that 'celebrity status can be divided into three categories: ascribed, achieved and attributed' (Rojek, 2001:7). Ascribed celebrity stems from the person's biological inheritance. The royals are an example of ascribed celebrity. Achieved celebrity is fame won through accomplishments, talent or skills. Attributed celebrity results from the media representation of an individual as noteworthy or exceptional. Rojek believes that in current societies there seems to be a need



to construct a public face that conceals the true, 'real' individual behind a façade. Celebrity status magnifies the split between a 'public face' and the 'real self.' Rojek develops his categories further by introducing the term *celetoid* referring to 'any form of compressed, concentrated attributed celebrity' (2001: 20). Unlike earlier authors' taxonomies, Rojek's category of the *celetoid* addresses the often fleeting and arbitrary nature of fame today. His account acknowledges that fame no longer rests purely on achievement or the personal attributes of the person. Celebrity culture has become more fluid and unstable in ways which complicate how celebrities are categorised and understood.

Unlike many previous authors, King (2003) emphasises the complexity of contemporary star discourses. Identity is a performance and the self is constructed. This corresponds closely to the way the celebrity self in autobiography is perceived and represented. During the classic Hollywood studio era, stars often had a constructed persona, which was reflected both in on-screen performances and private lives. King suggests that such a cohesive persona is no longer possible as hype, persona management, and sensationalism increase the value of the private and the personal. Paradoxically celebrity culture also promotes what is alleged to be the 'true' and the 'authentic.' The emphasis on the confessional has 'turned stars into characters in the drama of their own biographies' (King, 2003: 51). Character and the 'real' person of the star become so intertwined that private life cannot be distinguished from performance. King's views offer insights into looking at the calculated existence of contemporary celebrities in which it is increasingly difficult to differentiate the private and the public when more and more celebrities engage in intimate confessionals through reality TV, autobiographies and interviews.

Marshall (1997) incorporates previous insights such as Boorstin's (1961) concept of the hero into his understanding of celebrity. He sees celebrity as incorporating various forms of public individuality such as hero, star, famous and notorious. All these descriptions exist in popular culture and circulate in the media. His view of celebrity is thus more profound than that of Boorstin and he offers more categories of fame than Rojek (2001). Marshall (1997) analyses celebrity as a text and a sign, because looking at celebrity in this manner provides, he suggests, some of the conceptual tools for understanding the meaning of celebrity in contemporary culture. As a sign, celebrity represents something other than itself. Marshall believes that celebrities oscillate between different categories of celebrity. Fame can fade as heroic figures turn into notorious figures or fallen stars following the sensationalist treatment by the media. Therefore, he argues that it is important to read celebrities inter-textually. 'An air of inauthenticity describes the current meaning of celebrity. It has become a term that announces a vulgar sense of notoriety' (Marshall, 1997: 5). Marshall demonstrates how celebrity signs are constructed in different media related to the

celebrity's actual work or talent, and the media that seek to exploit the fame of celebrities outside the culture industry from which they originally emerged. 'The celebrity exists above the real world, in the realm of symbols that gain and lose values like commodities on the stock market' (Marshall, 1997: 6). Marshall's approach can offer us insights into how contemporary celebrities can be read through various sites. Marshall emphasises the centrality of celebrities in offering a discursive avenue for the discussion of issues that are outside the bounds of public debate. For Marshall, there are differences in the way celebrities from different culture industries are represented, an approach which is useful for the study of autobiography as a site of celebrity discourses. It is true that there exists a certain hierarchy of stardom and Marshall rightfully separates celebrities emerging from different media. However, since Marshall published his book, new categories of celebrity have emerged. The most obvious change has been the rise in the number of 'ordinary' people achieving fame through their appearances on reality TV shows.

Unlike Marshall, other writers such as Turner (2004), Andrews and Jackson (2001) and Giles (2000) see the whole celebrity culture as interconnected in the way celebrities are described. Turner (2004) insists that the precise moment of becoming a celebrity occurs when interest in the private life becomes more central than the public role or occupation. Andrews and Jackson (2001) also describe how, as fame fades, hierarchies of celebrity become blurred. People who were previously famous often get sucked back into the vortex of celebrity culture but end up being described as belonging to a different category. Music stars, athletes and actors often find themselves labelled as 'reality TV stars' after appearing on a reality TV show. Therefore, Andrews and Jackson emphasise the instability of celebrity categories, especially since the scale and scope of celebrity culture has increased and come to reach all areas of life. The process of constructing, elevating and bringing down celebrities is linked to the sensationalist nature of celebrity culture and the tabloidisation of the media. In a similar way Giles (2000) emphasises how all famous people are treated as celebrities by the media. There are no meaningful distinctions between how different categories of celebrity are publicised. Holmes (2004), writing about reality TV, and *Big Brother* in particular, investigates how these programmes complicate existing categories of fame. Celebrities on television are often described as personalities, but *Big Brother* evictions with screaming crowds automatically put the evicted housemates in the category of celebrity. As Holmes points out, the distinction between stars as extraordinary and television personalities as ordinary is not clear anymore. *Big Brother* housemates become celebrities the moment they enter the house and evicted housemates are called either stars or celebrities even though, according to older hierarchies of music stars, film stars and television personalities, they would not necessarily be either.

### **2.1.2. Explaining Stardom and Celebrity**

Rojek (2001) explains that in academic accounts there are generally three main approaches to understanding celebrity: subjectivism, structuralism and post-structuralism. Subjectivist accounts emphasise personal characteristics. As Rojek puts it, these accounts explain celebrity through 'natural talent'. Some people are perceived to be in the possession of talent which makes these people special and unique, and separates them from ordinary people. As a result, as Andrews and Jackson (2001) argue, the illusion of intimacy between talented stars and ordinary audiences encourages audiences to look up to celebrities. Gamson (1994) describes how early celebrity discourses emphasised talent, star quality and personality. The concept of star quality implies that celebrity stems from individual qualities of the person. Star quality therefore cannot be created artificially. Magical terms were often used to describe celebrity, in early Hollywood in particular, Gamson claims. Stars were seen as having natural charisma that merited their fame. Weber introduced the concept of charisma implying the special or unique qualities of an individual. 'Charismatic authority then is based on supernatural, miraculous qualities' (Rojek 2001: 32). These definitions, according to Rojek (2001) apply to the modern concept of celebrity. Biographical narratives in particular emphasise the extraordinariness of celebrities. This is more evident in the case of dead celebrities who are represented as larger than life.

Structuralist accounts of celebrity examine celebrity as an embodiment of rules and values embedded in society by rejecting the notion of natural uniqueness. Structuralism is concerned with 'uncovering the common cultural principles underlying specific and historically variable cultures and myths' (Strinati, 1995: 85). Media audiences are unaware of the power of the underlying structure of influence and absorb cultural myths in an unconscious manner. The culture industry thesis, as developed by Adorno and Horkheimer (1979), explains entertainment as a type of social control. The culture industry's aim is to extend the rule of capital, and its products are interchangeable. Celebrities are seen as epitomising heroic individualism and upward mobility, when in fact they are standardised and interchangeable. According to this account, celebrities' lives are calculated clichés because they are commodities reproducing capitalism.

Structuralist accounts based on the political economy of celebrity tend to be rather fatalistic and overlook the desire of the audience. It could of course be said that the individualistic capitalist lifestyles cause us to look up to celebrity as we have become socially isolated from each other. Capitalism and its emphasis on individuality, identity and lifestyle, also promoted by celebrity culture, produce alienation. As Turner (2004) describes it, the public demand for material on celebrities means that the media must provide access to celebrity

discourse. The celebrity industry cannot operate like a manufacturing industry by producing standardised, interchangeable products. Celebrity is built on the construction and promotion of individuality. Structuralist accounts see celebrities as a part of a capitalist machine. However, celebrity culture seems to rely on the recognition of an individual celebrity as an identifiable physical person, whose image has been constructed historically through his/her work, appearances in the media, and the circulation of his/her image through time. Interestingly, DeCordova emphasises the importance of image that 'accrues psychological and semiotic depth over time' (Turner 2004: 37).

A more historical approach within structuralism looks at celebrities through governmentality (Rojek, 2001). The work of French philosopher Foucault (1977, 1998) has been influential in these approaches. He introduces the concept of discourse. For Foucault, 'discourses are particular ways of organising knowledge in the context of serving specific types of power relationships' (Strinati, 1995: 227). Foucault (1977, 1998) does not offer an in depth model, therefore it is questionable how well his work fits in with the structuralist tradition although many theorists class him as a structuralist. Theories based on the post-feminist appreciation of Foucault often see him as post-structuralist. Foucault does not concentrate on examining oppression and control but looks instead at regimes of control. Discourse is related to social organisation of thought within societies. Discourses of power are communicative practices deeply embedded in wider social and cultural practices, which help to construct specific frameworks of thinking. 'Different discourses exist at the same time and because they use symbolic devices and rhetoric to achieve their hold over social practice, they can be challenged' (Rojek, 2001: 36). Celebrities work as discursive vehicles that embody the values that are seen as important in society. As Marshall puts it, in contemporary culture celebrity represents both individuality and collective identity: 'It is the capacity of these public figures to embody the collective in the individual, which identifies their cultural signs as powerful' (1997: 241). Therefore, celebrities can be seen as representations of talent, hard work, 'authenticity' or self-discipline. At the same time, the achievement of fame can be seen as the result of 'a lucky break.' Both discourses can and do co-exist in tension with each other. The media play a crucial role in the construction of these discourses. Marshall argues that 'celebrity is a social construction used by the media to govern the population' (Rojek, 2001: 37). Government is accomplished by providing morality tales and role models. According to Marshall (1997) celebrities are manifestations of the organisation of culture in terms of democracy and capitalism.

'Post-structuralism concentrates on celebrity image and the codes of representation through which this image is reproduced and consumed' (Rojek, 2001: 44). Most contemporary celebrity theorists use an approach that could be seen as post-structuralist although there

appears to be some overlap between different approaches. One of the most important exponents of the post-structuralist approach is Dyer (1986, 1998, 1991), who examines the representation of film stars at specific historical, cultural and socio-economic contexts. Dyer's work has been ground-breaking in its proposition that film stars work like signs: a semiotic system embedded with cultural meanings to be actively read and interpreted by audiences. Dyer uses the structuralist concept of ideology to argue that we read stars as texts that are ideologically saturated and discursively constructed (Turner, 2004). 'Stars are examples of the way people live their relation to production in capitalist society' (Dyer, 1986: 6). Stars are ideological representations of individuality and personhood in society. The media use the individual and employ representational strategies to build on the image. Stars' importance is based on the influence they have in defining ordinary people's belief systems and behaviour. Dyer's work is central to the determination of ideological messages carried by stars. His concern with contextualising the star discourses within their societal conditions reveals that stars cannot be represented or read as cohesive thought systems. Instead, they need to be analysed as complex and multi-faceted discourses.

For Dyer (1986) stars are socially grounded in the historical period from which they emerge. Their meanings do not stem only from their performances; therefore it is not enough to solely examine the manufacture and cultivation of a specific star's image but also the ideological and discursive context within which the star persona develops. Dyer's arguments move us beyond regarding stars simply as commodities. His work offers a depth model for studying stardom, which is an approach that has influenced the case studies analysed within this thesis. In *Heavenly Bodies* (1986) Dyer illustrates the social significance of stars through case studies and confronts the question of control in terms of stars as commodities of the film industry. Especially in the context of the autobiography, it is important to think about how much control stars have over their own images and how much of the image is fictional. Autobiography encourages the belief that celebrities are in control of their own representation within the pages of the autobiography. The question of control has become even more controversial in contemporary celebrity culture as the increase in direct manufacture of celebrities has attracted so much criticism. The approach of this thesis is closest to the post-structuralist approach, looking at celebrity texts as a part of larger societal values and meanings. Like Dyer, I will look at a variety of issues such as gender and class, but also examine the myths of charisma and genius, closely related to the subjectivist account of celebrity, and the concept of commodity in relation to structuralism.

The question of the 'real' person behind the image, which Dyer (1986) highlights, is still relevant in today's celebrity culture where discourses concentrate so much on the private lives and the 'real' selves of celebrities. There are often clear tensions between

manufacture, image and celebrity agency, which was perhaps not so obvious with the stars Dyer writes about. Dyer (1998) looks at stardom through the spectrum of production and consumption. He debates the question of whether stars are exceptional human beings or ordinary, everyday people 'just like us.' It seems that both discourses have existed side by side and it is difficult to determine which one seems more central. One could go as far as to argue that celebrities are neither like us nor exceptional but something in between. Dyer refers to this as the central conflict in celebrity culture. In general, Dyer's (1986) case studies tend to make generalisations in terms of work, sexuality, gender and ethnicity but still work to illustrate how stars act out specific ideas about the individual and the capitalist society. This idea of the individual remains problematic because stars embody the central dichotomies of capitalism that relate to private and public, and individual and society. The dialectic between the private and the public is particularly complex in contemporary celebrity culture as the result of the most private matters such as divorce, addiction and even death being public property.

Stars are embodiments of social categories in which people are placed and through which they make sense of their lives. Today, one central narrative is the working class boy/girl made good, illustrated by many celebrities such as Robbie Williams and Jade Goody. Dyer (1991) shows how the ideas of the real, the private and the 'authentic' are emphasised in celebrity culture. In his essay *A Star is Born and the Construction of Authenticity* (1991) Dyer relates 'authenticity' with 'star quality' and image. According to Dyer, a film star's 'authenticity' is validated by the impression of him or her seeming to be himself or herself, and as a result, this 'authenticity' of the star creates his or her star quality and secures his or her status as a star. 'It is the star's really seeming to be what he/she is supposed to be that secures his/her status, "star quality" or charisma. "Authenticity" is both a quality necessary to the star phenomenon to make it work, and also the quality that guarantees the "authenticity" of the other particular values a star embodies' (Dyer, 1991: 133). Celebrity is based on manipulation, but audiences still look for 'authenticity' as a guarantor of star quality. Dyer shows how the paradoxes of stardom (private/public, individual/society) make the whole star system unstable. These days, speed of change in celebrity culture seems more dramatic as compared to the period Dyer writes about. New celebrities emerge and has-beens drop out of the media in rapid succession. However, one of the most important and relevant aspects of Dyer's work is that it illustrates an element that is still central in today's celebrity culture; the continuous search for the 'reality' behind the image.

The media are increasingly using practices that indicate lack of control on the part of the celebrity, and lack of privacy. It seems that the glimpses of the 'real' are central to the way in which celebrities are judged. The image of a star is often broken by the excess of lifestyle

or unhappiness with a star status. The tragedies of stardom, Dyer (1998) indicates, may conflict with the intended, promoted image. Dyer understands the instability and changing nature of stardom. However, nowadays it may be increasingly difficult to make such wide and clear assumptions given the pervasiveness and scope of celebrity culture filled with so many different types of celebrities and so many 'meaningless' celebrities.<sup>1</sup> Perhaps contemporary celebrities cannot so easily resolve or articulate clear ideological tensions in a society marked by multiple societal values and ideals. Re-invention of the self and image is a central feature of celebrity culture whereas in the past celebrities and stars often had a solid image that they cultivated throughout their career.

Contemporary studies of stardom and celebrity are frequently indebted to Dyer. Yet whereas many commentators believe that there are continuities between past and present representations of celebrity and stardom, Geraghty (2000) believes that the concept of a star has changed meaning as a result of the proliferation of celebrity during the 1990s. Geraghty examines how understandings of film stardom can be related to the broader context of celebrity. Stars exist outside their work as actors, and therefore Geraghty sees stars as complex personas made up of far more than the texts in which they appear. Because stars are also known for their personal lives, Geraghty claims that stardom has lost its original meaning. Famous people are celebrities whether they are sports stars, music stars, film stars, or those who have achieved their 'fifteen minutes' of fame. There is a duality between the star as a performer and the star as a person, Geraghty argues. In contemporary culture, the media concentrate on the reporting of the private lives of stars, revelling in excess, lavish lifestyles, scandals and love affairs, whereas in the past the worst excesses were often concealed in order to protect the star image. 'Film stardom has to be seen in the context of the drive in the media to create and exploit the status of being famous across the whole range of entertainment formats' (Geraghty, 2000: 188). As personal lives have become more central, talent has lost its significance. Geraghty's suggestion that stardom is now more trivial may be true but arguably talent and skill still form a part of the discourse of stardom/celebrity. It is true that some celebrities are seen as talentless or manufactured, but film stars, for example, are often described in terms of talent. Lifestyle has, however, become more important than work, as gossip, confessional discourses and sensationalism dominate representations. Yet comparing the representations of the self-promoting glamour model Jordan and her pop star ex-husband Peter Andre to the representations of the actor couple Angelina Jolie and Brad Pitt, suggests that perhaps Geraghty greatly simplifies the issue, and in doing so, simplifies the nature of

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<sup>1</sup> Who would be an image of today's attitude to sexuality, for example?

current celebrity culture. Jolie and Pitt are still very often associated with their work (or charity work), whereas Jordan and Peter Andre are mainly known for their lifestyle. Self-promotion thus becomes a central issue in the way in which certain celebrities are represented. It is too hasty to conclude that there are no longer hierarchies between different types of stars/celebrities.

King (2003) too believes that modern film stardom is changing in response to celebrity culture. He claims that the 'reported unease of stars in the glare of publicity, despite the fact that they now enjoy historically unprecedented rewards and long term financial security, is an expression of the recent developments that guarantee that their names no longer automatically turn into a certain quality of personality' (King, 2003: 52). Stardom has separated from achievement. Unlike Geraghty (2000), who thinks that film stardom is trying to establish itself as separate from celebrity, King (2003) claims that such separation is not possible, as persona management has become central to how any famous person presents him/herself in public. Therefore, the star as an actor and the star as a celebrity have become so intertwined that there is no difference between the two. Confirming this view, MacDonald (2003b) examines how star identities have been integrated into commercial culture. Stars are marketable commodities outside their work and both official and unofficial discourses about them circulate in various forms. Representations of film stars change from official to unofficial in exactly the same manner as those of other celebrities.

Gamson (1994) adds another dimension by arguing that talent and achievements have been replaced by hype and publicity. He combines the study of celebrities as texts with the study of the production of celebrities by publicity. Gamson reveals the complexity of celebrity as a cultural form and his study is significant in what it attempts to reveal about the workings of the 'celebrity industry' and the relationships between industry, celebrities and audiences. The emphasis on talent and star quality, according to Gamson, has been replaced by the notion of celebrities as commodities. Even though star quality is no longer important, Gamson does think a discourse is reproduced that aims to reveal the 'real' person behind the image. This often manifests itself as an emphasis on ordinariness. By using the discourse of ordinariness the media attempt to diffuse the notion that celebrities are nothing but artificial images. Alongside the discourse of manufacture, there are narratives that centralise hard work as the reason behind the achievement of fame. These narratives concentrate on the merited nature of fame, claiming that whatever celebrities have they deserve, because they have become famous through their own hard work and effort, even though they may not have any notable talent.



### 2.1.3. Society, Lifestyle and Contemporary Fame

The last ten years have seen an expansion in academic work on celebrity and as we have seen, many theorists see contemporary celebrity as something that differs from the celebrity of previous decades. The rise of a capitalist, consumer society is often blamed for the rise of a celebrity culture where celebrities are treated as commodities. There have been significant changes in the media's treatment of celebrities and many writers refer to the tabloidisation of culture, the importance of publicity, promotion and advertising, the growth of sensationalism, and an emphasis on the private lives of celebrities. All these developments have contributed to the way in which contemporary celebrities are treated. Moreover, consumerist lifestyles and the possibility of creating one's own public face and lifestyle have influenced celebrity culture, which is based on the promotion of individualism. 'Today's celebrities are highly visible in the media, their private lives attract more attention than their professional lives, and their celebrity status does not necessarily depend on talent or achievements' (Turner, 2004: 1). What seems to be central is the pervasiveness of current celebrity culture.

Some celebrity studies scholars claim that there has been a decisive break in the representation of celebrities. This break is most often placed in the late 1990s. The first turning point for celebrity culture, according to Biressi and Nunn (2005) was the rise to power of New Labour. 'During the 1997 elections, celebrities achieved prominence as exemplars of a new meritocratic and essential modern social realm' (Biressi and Nunn, 2005: 144). New Labour actively sought the endorsement of celebrities from various fields who came to be seen as people with influence and social power. They became worthy of discussion in the media and beyond as powerful mediators of the new populist government. Furthermore, the death of Diana, Princess of Wales, later in 1997, has been seen as a clear turning point. Turner (2004) argues that before the death of Princess Diana, it may have been possible to dismiss the 1990s explosion of celebrity content, the arrival of mass market for celebrity gossip, and even the particular form of celebrity that Diana enjoyed, as relatively ephemeral cultural shifts.

Holmes (2005) mentions a different development that is often seen as the beginning of the modern celebrity culture – the rise of reality TV shows and the representation of ordinary people. In 2000, Britain broadcast the first series of *Big Brother*, which Gritten (2003) mentions as the point from when talent and achievements of celebrities lost their meaning. Turner (2004) explains that because *Big Brother* creates its own celebrities, it raises general interest in celebrities and their appeal. The housemates are the epitome of fabricated celebrity and *Big Brother* has eroded the distinction between a private citizen and

celebrity, according to Biressi and Nunn (2005). The latter demonstrate how reality TV helped to foster the rise of the ordinary person as a celebrity, and in the process, allowed the representation of celebrity as ordinary. The new brand of celebrities expanded the social realm but at the same time voyeurism became more central. As the new media stars did not possess any talent or skill, which might make them famous, image and appearance became paramount. However, Biressi and Nunn emphasise that the centrality of 'authenticity' and the 'real self' has not disappeared in the wake of reality TV but has become even more important as it is now more difficult to distinguish performance and the 'real' identity. Holmes (2004, 2006) emphasises the importance of the audience in modern celebrity culture. Because the audience are the ultimate judges, Holmes agrees with Biressi and Nunn's (2005) position, stating that 'authenticity' and the 'real' become central in reality TV because these formats work to deconstruct a façade or a public face of a person. The notion of 'authenticity' is highly traditional in discourses about celebrity; therefore, Holmes (2005) argues that there is no clear discursive break in the representation of celebrities that would have influenced the birth of a contemporary celebrity culture that is significantly different from the celebrity culture of the past. The notion of 'authenticity' is central to autobiographical representations and therefore informs the analysis in this thesis. Holmes points out that the modern developments are not seismic shifts in fame suddenly emerging as a dominant discursive formation in the late 1990s. Holmes correctly argues (2005) that contemporary fame may be more fleeting and more manufactured than ever before but the methodological approach employed by Dyer (1998, 1986, 1991) among others, is still useful. What is clear is that the meaning of celebrity is more ambiguous, incorporating several conflicting discourses circulating simultaneously.

Because fame has always been seen in the context of Western ideas of individualism, it has been portrayed as intimately intertwined with the construction of social and cultural identity (Holmes, 2005). Celebrities are the role models for the construction of the self in capitalist society. In traditional societies identity was fixed and stable; individuals did not undergo identity crises or radically modify their identity. Kellner (1992) argues that today's identities are fluid, multiple, changing, personal, and self-reflexive. Identities can be changed and created. Kellner claims that as the result of the changing concept of identities as unstable, anxiety increases in current societies. Identity is manufactured, artificially constructed and continuously promoted, but it is also fragile and fragmented. In contemporary celebrity culture, celebrities set the standards that people compare themselves to. Additionally, celebrities compete amongst themselves for success in many areas of life. These struggles are all reported in the media, encouraging people to be competitive and individualistic. However, there is also an ironic streak in celebrity culture today. People do not necessarily

compare themselves to celebrities all the time – they can also judge and ridicule their trivial, excessive lifestyles or blatant self-promotion.

Giddens (1991) proposes that in modern culture, life politics has become increasingly important. People ask themselves who to be, how to behave and what to do, reflecting on their lives through self-observation, which heightens their awareness of their own thoughts, feelings and bodily sensations. The society and the people living in it are constantly changing because awareness creates knowledge. The idea that each person is a unique individual is at the core of modern thinking and also at the centre of celebrity culture. As this thesis will show, it also informs autobiographical writing. Giddens introduces the term reflexive restructuring, which refers to a continuous monitoring of the process of constructing a self in public. The reflexivity of the self is pervasive and forms a continuous narrative as people construct the right kind of public face that works in the various phases of their lives. Importantly, reflexive restructuring extends to the body and requires regimes of diet and exercise. Giddens suggests that the moral thread of reflexive restructuring is 'authenticity,' being true to oneself. Interestingly, Giddens claims that 'authenticity' means disentangling the true self from the false self. In terms of celebrity culture today, it is often claimed that it is impossible for celebrities to distinguish a true, 'real' self from the public face. Rojek comments that reflexive restructuring is 'what celebrities do all the time' (2001: 192). The media report every change in celebrities' lives; Giddens (1991) calls these changes life passages. These are also recounted in autobiographies. However, reflexive restructuring creates a clear friction between the veridical or true self of the celebrity and the public face, which is often consciously manufactured. In terms of reflexive restructuring, a person's first loyalty is to herself. Celebrities manifest the individualism fostered by the reflexive restructuring which ordinary people are also required to adopt.

MacDonald (2003a) examines the terms 'public' and 'private' through shifts in media discourse about celebrity. Historically, public was seen as external to the person whereas private occupied an internal, emotional space. MacDonald claims that 'implicit in these constructed binaries is another set of oppositions: performance versus authenticity' (2003a: 79). For celebrities, performance is a central aspect of being in public because gossip magazines and tabloids are determined to probe into the private lives of celebrities where they expect to find the 'authentic' person. The assumptions of difference between the private and the public, and performance and 'authenticity,' are not secure. Like Giddens' (1991) reflexive restructuring, MacDonald believes that performance becomes a process in the construction of the self and identity in public. The media's continuing fascination with the 'authentic' is sustained by the commodification of celebrities. 'The media continuously search for slippages in the public performance and claim to allow a "behind the scenes"

look into their private worlds' (MacDonald, 2003a: 89). Many of the discourses employed in discussing celebrities reinforce their commodity value, featuring their glamorous lifestyles, speculating about their relationships and wealth, and condemning their excessive lifestyles. MacDonald illustrates how the publicist, the celebrities, and the media participate in the construction of a commodified 'third space' between the public and the private. These instances of 'authenticity' are highly regulated and carefully constructed in order to create an illusion of revelation. Current celebrity culture relies on regulated access to celebrities more than ever before. MacDonald claims that 'even unflattering paparazzi photographs or gossip column coverage can result from the celebrity's own consent to media interest' (2003a: 89). When the control of the managed performance breaks down, the media revel in the fall of the celebrity. Scandalous information about well-known people has become a marketable commodity. As this thesis will show, now even illness and death can be packaged and sold as commodities. According to MacDonald reality TV has made the performance of ordinary people a recurring theme of debate. The representation of the self in reality TV blurs the boundaries of public and private, and the boundary between 'authenticity' and performance becomes the central point of debate. In contemporary celebrity culture, the notions of the public and the private, stardom and ordinariness are no longer divided in discourse.

Following Boorstin (1961) Gamson (1994) refers to current celebrities as the ultimate commodities as well-knownness has become commercially valuable. Like MacDonald (2003a), Gamson (1994) sees the centrality of the publicity machine, and claims that celebrities are commodities whose lives are turned into storylines that are often more dramatic than the reality. As this thesis will show, due to the tendency to dramatise events and the selectiveness of the confessional, autobiographies will offer narratives with saleable storylines. Gamson published his study in 1994, so it seems clear that the processes underpinning contemporary celebrity culture have been developing for some time. Focusing on narrative rather than the truth allows the celebrities, the publicists and the media greater control over journalistic output, Gamson claims. The commercial enterprises that seek to profit from celebrities exploit audiences' involvement with celebrities by mixing fact and fiction. Image management has become an important feature of celebrity culture but celebrities' humanness complicates the process of constructing cohesive narratives. For Gamson, the celebrity commodity is sold by using the concepts of personality and individuality. Today, these are usually divorced both from talent and achievement. Even though Gamson stresses the controlled nature of the trade on celebrity, he points out that tabloids could be described as a relatively uncontrolled form of celebrity journalism because they are sometimes acting in opposition to publicists.

#### **2.1.4. Success and Failure**

The modern self, according to Holmes and Redmond (2006) is a construction, and modern individuals measure self-worth through acts of consumption. The desire for fame is based on the material, economic and psychological rewards celebrity seems to offer. Holmes and Redmond stress that celebrity status has become the most blatant manifestation of success in Western culture. However, as Holmes and Redmond remind us, in addition to stories of success, more negative discourses are integral to the cultural circulation of fame. Redmond argues that 'the reporting of the suffering and damage caused by fame has become a dominant discursive formation that shapes our subjectivity and identity and sets frameworks for how power and individual success are measured' (2006: 35). He goes on to argue that in today's narcissistic culture, the confessional has become a central device of celebrity culture, which anchors the celebrity to 'authenticity.' 'Celebrity confessionals show up stardom and celebrification as faulty enterprises that can damage or destroy those subjected to them' (Redmond, 2006: 42).

Giles also (2000) examines the relationship between the nature of fame and the desire for it in contemporary achievement-based culture. Desire for fame is not always connected to a particular talent, skill or craft. A new development seems to be that nowadays fame is demanded for its own sake. The discourses surrounding fame promote creativity, the myth of the gift, fame's potential to solve problems, and the sexiness of fame. As the thesis will illustrate, for the celebrities studied some of the above were often a motivation behind the pursuit of fame. The contemporary value systems rest on consumerism, which makes the financial and material benefits of celebrity desirable. However, Giles points out that fame brings problems because the hyped existence is hard to live up to. The downfalls include a loss of privacy, a loss of friendships, alienation, and the creation of new, superficial social relationships. Fame can create isolation even if one is surrounded by people because people no longer respect the celebrity for the person they are but for their status as a celebrity. 'Many celebrities like to promote themselves as ordinary, but there are others who succumb to delusions of grandeur, describing themselves as powerful and god-like' (Giles, 2000: 102-104). As Giles sees it, it is essential to look at both success and failure and the interconnections between these. The connection between success and failure is relatively under researched as theorists tend to concentrate on failures of fame without properly seeing how success leads to failure, and how after failure success can be achieved again.

Rojek (2001) also notes that celebrity culture works through elevation and descent. Celebrities are elevated above others and then brought down to earth. Elevation refers to the social and cultural processes involved in raising the celebrity above the public. In

capitalist societies wealth and luxury become associated with the special, elevated status of celebrities. Elevation creates both envy and approval. The luxuries of celebrity lives turn into excess, at which point, downfall becomes a matter of public speculation and desire. 'The mass media that build up celebrities are often unable to resist engineering their downfall' (Rojek, 2001: 79). Celebrities may lose their image and their public self as a result of a scandal. However, the fallen celebrity can achieve redemption through the act of confession of guilt and an apology. Descent often inevitably follows elevation, a process that will become clear in the case studies that follow.

Even though celebrities generally stress the ordinariness of their lives, it is clear that to some extent celebrities live outside conventional, ordinary life as experienced by ordinary people. Rojek reminds us that 'in the midst of their wealth, political access and sexual possibilities, celebrities often complain about the burdens of their celebrity status' (2001: 148). These complaints, according to Rojek, include being stalked by the paparazzi and being pestered by fans and strangers. He further claims that the incidences of marital tension, divorce, family discord, mental illness and mortality are higher among celebrities than the average population. Rojek introduces the concepts of achievement fatigue and achievement mirage to describe the personal costs of celebrity. 'Achievement fatigue is the psychological condition in which the individual who has attained a desired public face and the recognition that accompanies it, experiences fame as a burden. Achievement mirage refers to the recognition that achieved celebrity is shallow and false' (Rojek, 2001: 149). Achievement mirage produces an alienation from the benefits of celebrity culture as fame stops being satisfactory. Rojek also argues that celebrity is bound up with transgression because celebrity separates the individual from ordinary social life. As choice and flexibility of lifestyles enlarges, celebrities come to have more money, more property and more social and sexual opportunities than ordinary people. This is part of the attractiveness of celebrity status. However, it can also become problematic as celebrities start to feel trapped by the falseness of celebrity culture. Rojek thinks that celebrity is based on a constructed public face that necessarily alters the 'real' self. It is rarely possible not to be influenced by fame.

The most extreme form of failure is described by Hinerman (1997) who argues that scandal has become a central aspect of celebrity culture. Hinerman sees scandal as the dominant narrative in tabloid press and television. The private lives of celebrities, their secrets and lies are routinely splashed across tabloid headlines, forming a continuous narrative of revelation. The failures of celebrities are seen as more interesting than their successes; their private lives as more central than their public lives. Hinerman remarks how difficult it has become to discuss the modern nature of media stardom without taking into account the representations of scandal. 'Contemporary stardom is a system of circulation of popular,

recognisable image-systems, which reflect cultural values and attitudes' (Hinerman, 1997: 145). Cultural values are reflected in the representations of fallen celebrities as they articulate the boundaries of acceptable behaviour. Scandals violate the moral boundaries of a culture and stars are used to tell morality tales. Stars are seen as the epitome of the ideology of 'authenticity.' The public/private dichotomy of 'authenticity' introduces the notion of morality into stardom. As stars act out the morals and values, image becomes important. Stars attempt to manage their images in a frenzy of media attention. According to Hinerman, scandals reveal the immoral nature of stardom, and work to disrupt the carefully built celebrity image in public. Tabloids, according to Hinerman, are crucial for explaining the contradiction between image and 'authenticity.' 'By promising to reveal the gap between the private and public worlds of the star, the tabloid becomes the guarantor of public morality' (Hinerman, 1997: 149). For the tabloids to fulfil that function there must be a truth to be discovered. The thesis will examine the manner in which newspapers are central in the process of success and failure because their main function seems to be to build up and bring down celebrities. The star is first elevated above others as a role model and speculated about. This creates a certain image that will be altered as a result of a scandal. Hinerman suggests that keeping one's image as a mass of contradictions, which appear irresolvable, is a way of avoiding career-ending scandals and the ultimate form of postmodern marketing. When the truth behind the image is impossible to find, stars find it easier to bounce back from scandal.

### **2.1.5. Conclusion on Celebrity Culture**

As should be clear by now, there exists a diversity of analytical perspectives on the issues related to fame, celebrity and culture. Historically, fame has been seen to derive from talent, charisma and achievements. Contemporary celebrity culture, however, offers a different story. Today many famous people are merely famous for being famous, and apparently everybody can become a celebrity. The rise of reality TV, the tabloidisation of culture and the increasing influence of the paparazzi have shifted the way celebrity is portrayed. There is a highly critical account which criticises celebrity culture by comparing it to the heroism of the past, when people achieved fame through achievements and heroic deeds. Film studies have concentrated on the interplay between the ordinary and the extraordinary aspects in lives of the stars emphasising the search for the 'real person' behind the image. The concept of 'authenticity' is important, as the aim is to find out whether the celebrity really is as he or she seems to be. More recent studies on celebrity and stardom examine the representations of celebrities and stars in specific historical, cultural and socio-economic contexts. As this thesis examines contemporary celebrity auto/biographies, consideration of

the concepts of 'authenticity' and the 'real' are central. The thesis will investigate to what extent can auto/biographies represent the 'authentic'- a central claim of auto/biographies being the representation of the 'real' person behind the commercial media image.

Contemporary celebrity culture sees celebrities as commodities. Their personal lives become an economic asset, something that can be sold for profit through arranged photoshoots, confessional interviews, autobiographies and paparazzi shots taken in unguarded moments. The emphasis on lifestyle links celebrity culture with consumerism. The general tendency towards commodification within celebrity culture is frequently criticised and it is often thought that celebrity is devalued, trivial, exploitative and manufactured. The fact that many celebrities are becoming increasingly self-promotional emphasises the commercial nature of celebrity culture. I will examine auto/biographies as commodities designed to sell the persona of the celebrity in question and link auto/biographies to representations in other media. Auto/biographies are also a part of the overall self-promotion of a celebrity, offering them an avenue to 'tell their side of the story.' The thesis will pay particular attention to celebrities as commodities and constructed personas.

It has been noted that celebrity culture has intensified after the death of Diana, Princess of Wales. Paradoxically, it was her death that caused many critics to predict the 'death of celebrity.' This thesis will take her death as the starting point and examine celebrity culture between her death and the end of year 2010. After Princess Diana's death, celebrities no longer seem to have a private life, and they are constantly criticised and ridiculed in the media – every transgression is reported. Fame follows the process of elevation and descent and the media play an important role in elevating people into stardom and also engineering their downfall. As this thesis will show, auto/biography offers an opportunity to explain failures and justify actions. Fame is a process whereby success and failure follow each other or sometimes get intertwined. The discourses that explain celebrity are contradictory, as fame can be seen as either deserved or arbitrary. Famous people can be seen as talented and charismatic or famous for nothing in particular. Fame has become a phenomenon that is increasingly difficult to pin down to any taxonomies, hierarchies or divisions. Boundaries are blurring, making this an intriguing moment to explore celebrity culture.



## 2.2. Critical Understandings of Auto/biography

Autobiography is currently a flourishing literary genre with celebrities increasingly offering the mainstay of autobiographical and confessional output. The tradition of autobiographical writing, however, has a long history, dating back to year 100 A.D. The production of meaning in auto/biographical form is a considerable force in shaping and reshaping cultural memory and it could be said that the opening up of private lives of public figures critically advances culture and scholarship, but it is important to also question the dominant ideologies of self, identity and private lives that this literary genre reveals and employs.

### 2.2.1. Historical Dimensions of Autobiography

Autobiographical works are rare in antiquity before Roman and Christian eras. In the West, autobiographical writing became more prominent with Christianity as a means of communicating the self to God. According to Anderson (2001) St. Augustine's *Confessions* (circa A.D. 398-400) is often seen as the origin of modern Western autobiography, although autobiographical writing already existed by then. Anderson further suggests that *Confessions* set up a model for later autobiographical texts. It has now become common to distinguish between 'modern' and 'pre-modern' autobiographies (Evans, 1999). Christianity's emphasis on confession of sins legitimised self-examination as systematic and necessary (Gusdorf, 1980). Gusdorf (1980) sees autobiography as relatively late phenomenon in Western culture, emerging at the point when Christianity was crafted onto Classical traditions. Moreover, Gusdorf argues that autobiography is a tool used by the Western man to promote himself as worthy of attention.

The appearance of autobiography implies a new spiritual revolution: the artist and the model coincide; the historian tackles himself as object. That is, he considers himself a great person, worthy of men's remembrance even though in fact he is only a more or less obscure intellectual. Here a new social area that turns classes about and readjusts values comes to play. Montaigne had certain prominence, but was descended from a family of merchants; Rousseau, no more than a common citizen of Geneva, was a kind of literary adventurer; yet both of them, in spite of their lowly station on the stage of the world, considered their destiny worthy of being given by way of example. Our interest is turned from public to private history (Gusdorf, 1980: 32).

Seventeenth century England witnessed an increase in autobiographies due to the breakdown of state censorship during the Civil War and the democratised access to print culture (Anderson, 2001). 'Rousseau's *Confessions*<sup>2</sup> (1791) ushered in, through his prodigiously sustained and obsessional self-writing, a new model of secular autobiography for the Romantic era' (Anderson, 2001: 43). The Romantic era, in its exaltation of genius, increased the taste for autobiography. As Gusdorf puts it, 'the virtue of individuality was completed by the virtue of sincerity' (1980: 34). Fame and heroism emerged as the central purpose and content of autobiographies. The heroism of understanding and telling all, reinforced by psychoanalysis, gained increasing value in the autobiographies of this period (Gusdorf, 1980). It was Renaissance individualism that brought autobiographical writing to the fore. The Renaissance concept of autobiography as a secular genre emphasised the unique, complex individual (Jelinek, 2003). This individual was determinedly male and traces of this individualist discourse can still be seen both in modern autobiography and in celebrity culture, as I will discuss later. The individual is closely linked to fame, as to be known for himself, as an individual self, was an important goal to achieve for the Renaissance man.

'Protestant cultures [...] have arguably always had a closer affinity with auto/biographical form' (Evans, 1999: 13), because in the absence of the religious confession, Protestantism places a heavier burden of responsibility on the individual. Evans suggests that this symbolic order creates a need for confession in other forms. The advances in printing, increased economic stability and capitalist enterprise, and advances in education changed the literary landscape. As a result, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, the genre of autobiography saw some significant changes. The new qualities that emerged include the development of self-consciousness and the increasingly problematic negotiation of the boundaries between the public and the private (Evans, 1999). According to Evans parallel to these changes in the context of autobiography are two changes in the cultural and economic landscape; 'the emergence of mass media and individually famous figures within popular culture, and changes in the definition of gender and racial boundaries' (1999: 12). Autobiography has been considered a legitimate genre worthy of formal study only after World War II (Jelinek, 2003). In this sense autobiography theory is similar to celebrity studies, as for a long time it was not seen as worthy of academic attention due to its emphasis on the self, personality, the personal and the intimate.

Capitalism has undoubtedly influenced autobiographical writing as it has provided the context in which writers have lived and worked. Evans suggests that 'within the form of

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<sup>2</sup> Published in 1791.

politics which has “naturalised” capitalism, the function of auto/biography is therefore one of allowing and organising the problematic human diversity of the real world’ (1999: 140-141). Historically biographies demonstrate the moral worth of their subjects, providing estimation firmly rooted within early twentieth-century constructs of ‘good’ and ‘bad’. The collapse of this discourse, Evans argues, ‘shifted the ground for auto/biographers away from the demonstration of moral qualities towards the discussion and explanation of individual difference’ (1999: 140-141). Autobiographies have become more revealing, and the current expectation is to reveal all. ‘In the new climate of auto/biography of revelation, it is important for some auto/biographers to maintain their distance from those works which have achieved notoriety through revelation. The “high” and “low” autobiography regard each other with disdain or contempt’ (Evans, 1999: 141). Due to this divide, autobiographies written by celebrities are often regarded with contempt by critics of popular culture and literary theorists, and placed at the ‘low’ end of literary scale. The hierarchies of celebrity and stardom apply here. Film star autobiographies often gain more merit than those of reality TV stars or other ‘meaningless’ celebrities.

However, on a more positive note, Garber argues:

In a literary era dominated by postmodernism, it is interesting to look at celebrity autobiographies, for in a way no literary form could be less postmodern. These are books that aspire to the condition of the well-made novel, full of ‘explanations’ for why characters act as they do. [...] What is sought, what is seductive, in celebrity autobiography is a narrative, a coherent, consistent story – a true life story – what we might think of as an antithesis of the postmodern. [...] Rather than merely [...] selecting from among available facts, the modern biographer will add speculation to the story (Garber: 1996: 16-21).

Much like in the media, speculation has become a central feature of celebrity biography, adding to its lowly status in contemporary literary hierarchy. In a sense, due to the unreliability of facts in celebrity biography (unauthorised biographies in particular), autobiography has come to be seen as the more ‘truthful’ of the two. According to Anderson, ‘vocation would seem to be the key to authorship and it is also the way in which “serious” autobiography, written by the few who are capable of sustained self-reflection, is to be distinguished from its popular counterpart’ (2001: 8). Popular autobiographies by celebrities are often seen as lacking integrity and as debasing the self by commodifying it (Anderson, 2001). In themselves, autobiographies do not commodify the self of a celebrity as they are already commodified by the media and the commercial process of image construction. But autobiography consolidates celebrity commodification. For this reason, it is difficult to

regard celebrity autobiographies as literary since the commercial motive overwhelms any literary merit.

In the last decade of the twentieth century, a further democratisation of autobiography occurred. The lives of the famous still form the centre of the autobiographical output and these autobiographies also chronicle the interactions of the famous with each other. At the same time, however, increasingly detailed and revelatory accounts of ordinary and less well-known individuals have emerged. The 1980s and the 1990s witnessed a marked increase in the interest in autobiographical narratives, in particular with the advent of reality TV and the rise in personal web pages. More recently the emergence social media has created new opportunities for narrating the self. Currently, auto/biography is a leading and a best-selling literary genre and there is an enormous amount of information available about other people's lives and deaths.

### **2.2.2. Defining Auto/biography**

Philippe Lejeune formulated the most well-known definition of autobiography in the 1970s. According to Lejeune, autobiography is a 'retrospective prose narrative written by a real person concerning his own existence, where the focus is his individual life, in particular the story of his personality' (1989: 4). Lejeune's main argument posits that in order for there to be an autobiography, the author, the narrator, and the protagonist must be identical. 'The entire existence of the person we call the author is summed up by his name, the only mark in the text of an unquestionable world-beyond-the-text, referring to a real person, which requires that we thus attribute to him, in the final analysis, the responsibility for the production of the whole written text' (Lejeune, 1989: 11). For Lejeune then, the name of the author proves the existence of the person of the author who is unquestionably the producer of the text. The author writes and publishes, and is thus defined both as a socially responsible person and the producer of a discourse. The commercial motive of autobiographical writing is linked to the name that can be promoted as the author of the text.

In this way, Lejeune formulates what he describes as an Autobiographical Pact. This definition now seems limited as autobiographies are rarely written by what Lejeune describes as the 'real person,' i.e. the author as the protagonist and the narrator. The name on the cover no longer guarantees the identity of the author – instead it often merely implies the name of the protagonist. The protagonist is usually also the narrator who conveys in speech his or her story to the author. In celebrity autobiographies, the celebrity often tells his/her story to the ghost writer who acts as the author of the text. However,

some things haven't changed since Lejeune formulated his definition; the focus of autobiographies is still on personalities, i.e. an image of a person. For example, Jordan's autobiographies closely maintain Jordan 'the brand.' As her brand is closely related to her personality, this is what her autobiographies attempt to portray. As this thesis will show, this creation is partly fictionalised. 'When Lejeune certifies the existence of protagonist-narrator-authors as persons, he is only validating autobiographers' conventional posture of truth telling, leaving open the possibility that they may not be telling the truth' (Eakin, 1999: 5).

Rejecting Lejeune's straightforward argument, in his collection *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical* (1980) James Olney describes autobiography as an inherently paradoxical genre. Anybody who can write a sentence or speak to a tape recorder or to a ghost writer can 'write' an autobiography. However, Olney questions the motivation of so many people to write an autobiography in order to offer it for public consumption. Olney sees autobiography as elusive: 'One never knows where or how to take hold of autobiography; there are simply no general rules available to a critic' (1980: 3). This will complicate the study of the autobiographies studied in this thesis. Even though they may seem to be straightforward life stories and promotional tools for celebrities, contemporary autobiographies offer us layers of meanings in relation to commodification, gender, the confessional and image construction. I agree with Olney's proposition that autobiographies are the least 'literary' form of writing, practised by people who would neither imagine nor admit that they were 'writers.' Now celebrities from all industries 'write' their autobiographies without claiming to be writers or indeed the authors of their autobiographies.

The purpose of an autobiography is to tell the story of the self. According to Evans (1999), it is essential for auto/biographies to tell something approaching to the 'truth' of the individual. In the light of current celebrity autobiographies, however, the 'truth' is increasingly elusive as conflicting stories are played out in the media and in the pages of celebrity autobiographies. As this thesis will argue, there is a tendency in autobiographical writing to present the best possible image of the celebrity in question whereas the media often make revelations that have been omitted from the autobiographies. Jelinek describes autobiography as a 'conscious shaping of the selected events of one's life into a coherent whole' (2003: 24). Modern autobiographies are certainly selective in terms of selecting the events that will be most revealing and thus commercially saleable. I will argue that although autobiographies often claim to be the 'tell-all' of a celebrity's life they rarely tell everything. As will become clear, the purpose is to present a positive image that will maintain the celebrity's constructed image, gain sympathy, and to make money. Serialised

autobiographies aim to leave the reader wanting more, as there is always more to tell.<sup>3</sup> These kinds of autobiographies resemble diaries, documenting life as it happens but in book form.

Expanding the concept of autobiography by comparing it to biography, Blaise argues that 'autobiography is the opposite of biography. Biography is an act of literary reconstruction, a celebration of, and identification with achievement' (1996: 201). According to Blaise, biographies tend to take a celebratory stance towards their subjects, and these subjects' lives are seen as worthy of being memorialised in a biography. Biography thus deals with achievement, and although biographies often reveal the salacious gossip surrounding individuals, the overall emphasis is often positive or attempts to be objective. I disagree with Blaise's judgement of the differences between the autobiography and the biography. As this thesis will demonstrate, there are currently more similarities than differences between the two. Both are subjective in their approach and place emphasis on the positive aspects of the celebrity's character as well as recording the negative aspects of their lives and their failures. Following Blaise, it could be said that biographies' focus is on success whereas autobiographies increasingly centre on failure and justification for failures. However, my discussion will show how success and failure form a continuous narrative within both autobiographies and biographies. Blaise argues that 'biography's identification with achievement causes the biographer to struggle with questions of tact, delicacy and ethics' (1996: 201) and continues by describing that these are questions, which the autobiographers cannot even for a moment consider. 'Tactlessness and indelicacy, humiliation and embarrassment are precious constructive tools' (Blaise, 1996: 201). This is certainly true of celebrity autobiographies where lives are deconstructed in detail, including struggles and humiliations suffered. Indeed, failures often form the basis from which the successes represented in autobiographies stem. The common narrative of autobiography records the downfalls and failures through which the celebrity struggles in order to achieve success and fulfilment. These failures can vary from addictions to mental and physical illnesses, to miscarriages, scandals and cheating husbands or wives. Dealing with fame and the media also forms a central part of the discourse in most celebrity autobiographies. However, it will become clear that the points above also apply to many biographies.

Bell and Yalom (1990) suggest that the boundaries between autobiography and biography are not always as distinct as their definitions imply. 'Biography is generally defined as the story of a person's life written by another and the autobiography as the story of a person's

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<sup>3</sup> Currently celebrity culture encourages celebrities to release new autobiographies at regular intervals.

life written by oneself,' Bell and Yalom (1990: 3) explain. The biography's objectivity can be questioned, as it is influenced by the biographer's views and opinions to a larger extent than previously thought and, as a result, closely resembles autobiographies. This particularly true today as many celebrity autobiographies are entirely written by ghost writers or 'in association with' a writer. Eakin claims that autobiographical discourse tends to 'promote an illusion of disarming simplicity when it comes to self and self-experience' (1999: ix). I agree with his statement as what is often promoted as a story of a celebrity's life as written by himself or herself, is also a promotional tool devised with the purpose of presenting an image that builds on or confirms the image represented in the media. The claim that the autobiography is a representation of a 'real' self is then questionable. The self represented in autobiography cannot be too far removed from the image represented in the media, as this would lead to a breakdown of communication between the celebrity and the reader of these representations. Eakin also suggests that biography can be seen as 'assaulting' the subject; biographies can harm their subjects because 'the very existence of life writing requires the fiction that persons and their lives be susceptible to the commodification involved in textual representation' (Eakin, 1999: 172). This is often true of the 'unauthorised' biographies written without the celebrity's consent, which can harm the celebrity's image. Biographies often violate the privacy of a person by treating them as a commodity to make money from. Therefore, the distinctions between biographies and autobiographies dissolve on close scrutiny and the boundary between them is fluid.

In opposition to the above accounts, Mandel (1980) does not see autobiography as a recollection of one's life. In his view, an autobiography is above all an artefact, a construct wrought from words. Evans argues that autobiographies 'can never represent what they claim to represent, namely the whole life of a person. Furthermore, this whole person is in any case a fiction, a belief created by the very form of autobiography itself' (1999: 1). Evans suggests that autobiographical writing stems from individual terror at the thought of dying without a written record. Whilst this may still be the case with some autobiographies it seems unlikely to be the driving force behind more recent celebrity autobiographies. Other literature, as above, would suggest that autobiographies are more of a narcissistic enterprise to promote an image instead of being a result of a fear of dying unknown. Celebrities live in an environment that promotes continuous self-disclosure, and autobiographies are the perfect tools for telling one's side of the story in the flux of endless media speculation. As many stories in the tabloid press and celebrity magazines are wholly fictional, autobiographies offer an independent voice to a celebrity and a means to control the stories about them.

Jelinek (2003), writing about historical autobiographies, claims that autobiographers are frequently faulted for excluding the personal and the intimate. Today, this is not true. All the autobiographies studied in this thesis concentrate almost solely on the personal and the intimate details of personal lives. The value of the personal is clear in celebrity culture, and therefore autobiographies must follow the tradition of constant revelation and confession of intimate details often already reported in the media. Some autobiographies, such as those of celebrities who do not give many interviews, have a tendency to reveal more than those of self-promotional celebrities who are constantly in the media

### **2.2.3. Gender, Feminism and Autobiography**

'Gender, as we understand and use it, is that deep imprinting of cultural beliefs, values, and expectations on one's biological sex, forming a fundamental component in a person's sense of identity. When viewed collectively, it is a system of relations between the two groups, with males almost universally in a position of dominance' (Bell and Yalom, 1990: 5). According to Kuhn (1990) conventional biography has traditionally been a male domain. Autobiography, on the other hand, is increasingly viewed as a female enterprise. As Jelinek puts it, historically, 'the very idea that one's domestic and emotional life constituted an appropriate subject matter for autobiography was, at least in the English tradition, essentially a female notion' (2003: 51). In patriarchal culture men enjoy the privilege of conceiving of themselves as the 'universal subject;' rational, self-determining, transcendent and disembodied, whereas women are seen as the exact opposite, the embodied 'Other.' Eakin (1999) claims that autobiography promotes an illusion of self-determination where authors live under the illusion that they have created themselves by writing their own stories thus determining their own identities through the act of writing. However, the self is always defined by its relations with others. The sustained study of women's autobiography is the single most important achievement of autobiography studies in the two last decades. One of the consequences, however, and perhaps an inevitable one, given the feminist project to distinguish female from male autobiography, has been an unfortunate polarisation by gender. According to Eakin 'the three most prominent of these male-female binaries are the individual as opposed to the collective, the autonomous as opposed to the relational, and narrative as opposed to non-linear, discontinuous, non-teleological forms' (1999: 48). Celebrity autobiographies are individualistic instead of recording collective experience. This is due to the nature of celebrity culture and its promotion of individual personalities. However, it could also be said that any claim towards the autonomy of the autobiographical self is an illusion. Celebrity autobiographies exist in relation to celebrity culture, the capitalist imperatives behind celebrity marketing, and the celebrity's publicity machine. As well as appearing individualistic, autobiographies are always relational, whether they are



written by men or women. Furthermore, their autonomy is immediately removed by the presence of a ghost writer. Celebrity autobiographies written by women are rarely non-linear. There is a narrative formula that records events in a linear form, according to specific timelines. Olney argues that 'women's autobiographies display quite a different orientation toward the self and others from a typical orientation toward the self to be found in autobiographies by men' (1980: 17). The shift of attention from bios to autos, from life to the self, evident in female autobiographies, changed the focus of autobiographies. The private and the intimate became central and the emphasis was increasingly on psychological self-observation.

In female autobiography, there has been a concern to maintain a sense of self through writing. 'Simone de Beauvoir is a paradigmatic illustration of a person anxious to maintain, through the written word, a sense of herself as a coherent person' (Evans, 1999: 26). However, de Beauvoir does this by telling her story through her relations to others. In doing this she limits her own agency (Evans, 1999). Evans sees de Beauvoir's autobiography as an exercise in concealment rather than revelation. Regardless of seeming to reveal all, it could be said that some form of concealment and certainly embellishment is at work in most celebrity autobiographies today. Celebrities seem to follow in the footsteps of de Beauvoir and represent morally questionable issues in a certain light, posing as victims or dismissing transgressions as weaknesses. As this thesis will reveal, restraint and a process of selection are part and parcel of the genre of autobiography. It is, however, difficult to discover omissions as the genre promotes revelation and telling all there is to know. Evans suggests that de Beauvoir was perhaps 'so concerned with the construction of herself as the heroine of her own narrative that she did not wish to admit those aspects of her own behaviour which might not have accorded with her interpretation of this project' (1999: 48). Celebrity autobiographies necessarily need to construct the subject as the hero or the heroine in order to comply with their promoted image. Although omissions are made, more common practice is justification. Transgressions are revealed and then the celebrity attempts to either justify that transgression or respond to an accusation of transgression. Due to the commercial imperative, autobiographies cannot give a wholly negative image of the celebrity concerned. Both omissions and justifications will be discussed in this thesis.

Feminists used autobiographical texts as reference for life (Anderson, 2001), replacing the notion of gendered identity as something innate by drawing attention instead to how 'masculine' or 'feminine' the meanings produced within autobiography were, emphasising the binary opposition between masculine and feminine texts, thus not moving forward from the age-old divide. Evans (1999), however, thinks that in the 1960s women's autobiography had the potential to be innovative and to transgress rigid gender boundaries.

Within the changing climate about sexuality and gender relations which dates from the early 1960s auto/biography took an increasingly gendered form. On the one hand, more women were writing auto/biography than ever before, and doing so as part of a culture which explicitly encouraged the emergence of women's voices. On the other, men continued to write the kind of public, deeply conventional autobiography that had always been an aspect of male writing. In a very obvious sense, therefore, women's autobiographical writing became both more innovative and radical, while men's remained locked into a rigid distinction between the public and private which reflected the problematic nature of late twentieth century masculinity (Evans 1999: 91-92).

Historically, male autobiography was dominated by a denial of emotional and sexual life. Today, things are different. As this thesis will reveal, men have become as confessional about their private lives as women are, and willingly disclose sexual exploits and emotional turmoil. However, men rarely need to justify their actions to the same extent that women do, especially when it comes to sexual matters. Whitehead (2002) argues that women cannot be masculine in any essential sense. 'They can only take up masculine practices, discourses and behaviours, but it is not the same as being a masculine subject. Woman as the feminine subject belongs to a different political category to man, and as such, is vested with a different set of knowledges and truths' (Whitehead, 2002: 210). Evans (1999) acknowledges that from the 1990s onwards accounts of men identifying their vulnerability began to emerge. Much of this writing initially came from gay men. For Evans the main problem of male autobiography today is how to locate the masculine in relationship to the person and the subjective self. 'For women, the self has always been assumed to be less unitary and more private' (Evans, 1999: 108).

In her review of women's autobiographies from antiquity to the Renaissance and then to the end of the nineteenth century England, Jelinek (2003) discovers a common emphasis on the personal. She also uncovers self-consciousness about gender and fear that the readers will accuse female writers of vanity for writing their life stories. Historically then, women writers are often 'apologetic and self-deprecating at the same time that they take pride in their accomplishments and assert their honesty and integrity' (Jelinek, 2003: 87). The most significant achievement of women's autobiography has been that it has blurred the boundaries between previously separate spheres: it has made private public. The deconstruction of autobiography as a genre which privileged a white, masculine subject, eventually gave way to a sense of its potential or use as a political strategy by different social groups (Anderson, 2001). Currently, autobiography is written by people from all walks of life, but the question of whose voice can and will be heard, still remains.

#### **2.2.4. The Self and the 'Real' Person in Autobiography**

'Since its inception as a formalised field of study, autobiography studies has been preoccupied with whether an autobiographical text can communicate to its readers the reality of its author's experiences' (Spicer, 2005: 388). Writing an autobiography requires a certain consciousness of the self. In autobiographical writing all kinds of incidents, trivial in themselves, become representative moments (Anderson, 2001). In order to write an autobiography a person needs to become self-reflective and to look within himself/herself. Jelinek sees autobiography as 'an amalgam of one's self-image, one's process of thinking and feeling, and one's talent as a formal writer' (2003: 13). However, celebrity autobiographies are rarely related to the writing talent of the celebrity in question. Instead, autobiographies are the result of a systematic process of selection by the celebrity and their management and the writing talent of a ghost writer trying to capture the celebrity's voice. Jelinek also suggests that as a genre of self-discovery, autobiography is capable of any combination of truth and fiction. What complicates the study of autobiography is that 'by its very nature, the self (like the autobiography that records it) is open-ended and incomplete; it is always in process or, more precisely, is itself a process' (Olney, 1980: 25). In this sense, as fame, autobiography, and the self can all be described as processes, it is important to examine the interconnections between these in order to discover how celebrity autobiography comes to represent the processes of constructing the self and the development of fame.

'In telling their stories, narrators take up models of identity that are culturally available. By adopting ready-made narrative templates, they take up culturally designated subjectivities' (Smith and Watson, 1996: 7). Identities represented in autobiographies, then, adhere to, or stand in opposition to, cultural and societal norms.

Auto/biographers in much of the twentieth century have refined the possibility of emotional lives and motivations of their subjects, and fitted the life to the external expectations and the known realities. Thus, as a cultural and literary form, auto/biography has had two remarkable features: first, its almost complete and uncritical acceptance of social norms and conventions; and second, its articulation of the social expectations about a person, rather than a discussion of the person her- or himself (Evans 1999: 136).

Arguably adhering to social expectations about a person instead of writing the self applies more to biography, as there is a tendency to resolve conflicts or negative aspects of a personality through a resolution corresponding to social conventions and traditional gender

roles. This is perhaps because biography is more reliant on the assumptions and interpretations of the biographer, who is bound by the societal norms and conventions surrounding him or her. This thesis will argue that celebrity autobiography has the potential to transgress moral boundaries, depending on the strength of the personality, and the level of fame of the narrator/protagonist. This is in opposition to conventional views according to which 'contemporary auto/biography cannot in any sense "reveal" because the author has internalised the norms and conventions of the twentieth century' (Evans, 1999: 138). However, traditional gender conventions do influence the way celebrities are portrayed in autobiographies even though the emphasis is often on the maintenance of a coherent image.

According to Eakin, our sense of continuous identity is 'the primary fiction of all self-narration' (1999: 93). Eakin argues that narrative and identity are interconnected to such an extent that each constantly 'gravitates into the conceptual field of the other' (1999: 100). Thus, he proposes that narrative is not merely a literary form but a mode of self-experience, while the self of autobiographical discourse does not necessarily precede its constitution in narrative. The negotiation of public and private is crucial to autobiography. Famous people use autobiographies to try to control the narrative of their individual subjectivity. However, at the same time they are 'imprisoned within a perception of the construction of the self, which often has both a negative and a distorting impact on the accounts given' (Evans, 1999: 23). Evans admits that the construction of the self in autobiography is complex but it often assumes that the subject is an integrated individual self with a coherent persona. Evans points out: 'For many individuals, the demands of being this kind of stable, never-changing self are impossible. Nevertheless, what autobiography often tends to endorse is the view that the "real" person can be identified and presented to the reading public' (1999: 24).

Anderson (2001) suggests that all autobiographical writing has cognitive and performative aspects, between what it means and what it does. She takes Rousseau's *Confessions* (1953) as an example, explaining that there are two aspects to his autobiography: telling (cognitive) versus excusing (performative). Like Rousseau, many celebrities have a tendency to use the performative aspects of autobiography. Instead of telling their story, they end up excusing their behaviour. In the analysis that follows the performative aspects of celebrity autobiography will become clear. Anderson believes in the dominance of the performative at the expense the cognitive dimension in autobiography. Performance takes over because if everything could be understood through cognition, there would be nothing left to excuse, and there would be no text, no justification, or excuse for autobiography. As Anderson puts it, 'the point therefore is not what Rousseau confesses but the act of confession, the drama

of the self' (2001: 51). Rousseau's *Confessions* could then perhaps be seen as the first celebrity autobiography, as it paved the way for the current, performative mode in which most celebrity autobiographies are written. Celebrity autobiographies adhere closely to the dominant values and trends in celebrity culture, creating a drama of the self instead of rationally explaining specific incidents. The purpose is not to gain a cognitive understanding of a celebrity's life but to revel in the drama of the performing self. Anderson further notes that 'Rousseau confesses everything but feels guilty for nothing' (2001: 55). This is another similarity to the way contemporary celebrities represent themselves in autobiographies. As the thesis will show, guilt is more common in female autobiographies. Transgressions are often explained away or simply dismissed as the by-products of the pressures that fame bestows on these fragile egos.

Autobiography raises similar problems in terms of 'authenticity' and the 'real' person that celebrity culture itself does. Representation in autobiography does not guarantee the truthfulness of the text or the 'authenticity' of the image. As commercial enterprises celebrity autobiographies are as manufactured as the celebrities themselves. Anderson (2001) is sceptical about the claim that the personal will automatically guarantee 'authenticity.' Eakin argues that 'even though there is a legitimate sense in which autobiographies testify to the individual's experience of selfhood, that testimony is necessarily mediated by available cultural models of identity and the discourses in which they are expressed' (1999: 5). It is clear that any notion of selfhood is always culturally constructed, as individuals cannot live 'outside' of a culture. This thesis will reflect on how celebrity autobiographies capture that cultural mediation in their representations of individual celebrities.

Smith and Watson argue: 'Whether one's story is ever one's own is a question that perhaps can no longer be posed in terms of individualism and ownership in a postmodern world where concepts of the self are negotiated socially and dialogically. Individualism has been commodified; the personal contents of the "personal" have been largely evacuated' (1996: 16). Anderson in turn points out, that 'getting personal doesn't guarantee that the story we narrate is entirely ours or even that is narrated in our own voice' (2001: 126). Furthermore, one needs to be wary of any claims of the subject as unitary as there are always conflicting perspectives and discourses at play in constructing an autobiographical self. Smith and Watson believe that 'in a postmodern society, the disappearance of an unproblematic belief in the idea of true selves is compensated for by the increase in autobiographical narratives' (1996: 7). Every autobiographer must find a guise or a voice with which to come to terms with himself and his world. 'If he is candid, he will admit to a number of voices and guises that he will adopt as his mind and the world enlarge,' Rosenblatt (1980: 176) claims.

Because celebrity autobiographies are often written by ghost writers, it is the task of the ghost writer to find the voice for the autobiography. In a sense, the subject of an autobiography always wears a mask that resembles the 'real' person and indeed promises to reveal the 'real' person. 'Ideals of the true self and true world nevertheless exist. Against these ideals all costumes and masks are arrayed' (Rosenblatt, 1980: 176). Following Rosenblatt, autobiographies often represent an idealised version of events, and an idealised version of the person, regardless of unsavoury events or bad behaviour. However, arguably celebrity autobiographies rely more on entertainment value than idealism. The resolution is nearly always positive, which guarantees the continuity of the celebrity image and career.

Goffman (1971) introduces a key concept for this thesis: persona. The persona is 'the character we take on to play a part in a particular social situation. Different situations will usually require us to play different parts and therefore adopt different personas' (Watson and Hill, 2000: 280). The representations in autobiography are specific constructed personas for the celebrity and cannot be taken for the representation of the 'real' person. Goffman (1971) also uses the concept of performance to describe the act of self-representation. An important aspect of performance is the fact that performances are often described as staged. Performance is central to celebrities' acts of self-presentation and will be used throughout this thesis to indicate the artificiality of celebrity representations. According to Whitehead, discourses speak of 'privileged knowledges and ways of thinking about the world. So although the individual is a discursive subject, it cannot be a neutral one. For in taking up discourses as practices of self-signification, acts of performativity are undertaken' (2002: 207). As well as through masks, performativity can be described through the term role. 'The concept of role, as used by social theorists, was taken from the theatre. [...] The core element in the concept of a role is that a role is separate and distinct from the person playing it. A role is a performance, an enactment of a persona different from that of the actor' (Brod, 1995: 14). The role a person is playing may dictate the kinds of persona appropriate to the situation (Watson and Hill, 2000). I would argue that the public face, as identified by Rojek (2001), is a role the celebrity plays in public. This role, like that of an actor's on film or on stage, is an illusion and a construction designed to portray a specific image. Auto/biographies, on the other hand, confuse the boundaries between the public and the private personas of the star. They go beyond the public role in terms of confessing to private thoughts and feelings but also conceal the constructed nature of the endeavour of writing the self. The thesis aims to analyse how autobiographies construct personas through performance.

Asa Berger (1997) defines narrative as a story that contains a sequence of events that takes place within a specific time period. Due to their specific time frames, autobiographies form a narrative aimed at representing the celebrity in a specific light, detailing a period in their lives with the purpose of revealing the 'reality' behind the image. Autobiographies are often described in terms of the false recognition that a child experiences when first looking into a mirror, termed by Lacan (1997) as the mirror stage. Anderson suggests:

Read in the light of Lacan's mirror stage, autobiography reveals the impossibility of its own dream; what begins in the presumption of self-knowledge ends in the creation of a fiction that covers over the premises of its construction. The subject, through autobiography, strives towards the false symmetry of the mirror, unified self which can only ever be a fiction (2001: 66).

Danahey also likens autobiography to the mirror stage:

In his description of the mirror stage, Lacan embodies a prototypical autobiographical narrative, as the writing subject pursues a specular image of unity and self-possession that it can never achieve. The subject is constantly thwarted in its search for a unified image of itself by its awareness of the difference between the 'I' and the image in the mirror (1993: 43).

As celebrity autobiographies must negotiate between the public face and the 'real' self, they can never describe the person as a whole, unified being. As commercial objects, autobiographies must favour the side of the person that most resembles the representations in the media, whilst at the same time offering a glimpse of the unseen, some truths previously untold, and a coherent, fluent narrative journey from childhood ( or another starting point, especially in terms of serial autobiographies) to fame. So, unlike Rousseau, who claimed to represent his whole life truthfully, celebrities aim to represent themselves as the mirror image, a being more unified and whole than they actually are.

### **2.2.5. Conclusion on Autobiography**

Autobiographical writing has a long history but in recent decades it has become a leading literary genre. In the past forty years, autobiography has enjoyed a particular popularity as a result of two shifts in the practices surrounding literature (Evans, 1999). Firstly, autobiography is now expected to reveal everything about an individual. Therefore, the private life of individuals has taken precedence over professional successes or failures. Secondly, the subject of autobiography no longer needs to be a member of political or social elite. There has been an explosion of interest in the lives of ordinary people, and

autobiographical writing is widely practiced among all social groups. Celebrity autobiographies in particular are increasingly popular. However, autobiography has suffered from not having been taken seriously as a literary genre and not being seen as worthy of academic study. As a result, the academic theorising on autobiography started relatively late. Autobiography as a genre is still often seen as a sign of moral decline and a part of the confessional celebrity culture. However, the study of autobiography has the potential to open up questions about the representation of gender, race and class, as well as the centrality of constructing, knowing and narrating the self in capitalist culture where the self is increasingly commodified. It is important to note that the genres of autobiography and biography cannot fulfil their claim to represent the 'whole' life of a person. Furthermore, this 'whole' person is a fiction created by the autobiographical approach to telling a life story, as Evans (1999) describes it. The expectation for the reader of the autobiography is often that the author 'will reveal themselves explicitly and offer an account of themselves which includes as much of their negative selves as the more positive aspects' (Evans, 1999: 41). It is clear that autobiographers rarely fulfil their promise to disclose all. As this thesis will show, there is always a process of selection before a celebrity autobiography is published. For some critics the search for any 'real' person in autobiography is pointless and no such person exists. Furthermore, people and lives cannot be contained in print.

Combining the study of celebrity culture with that of the genre of autobiography will uncover the interconnections between the way the celebrity self is represented and constructed through narrative both in the media and in autobiography. Celebrity culture relies on mythologised accounts of individual lives for the transmission of moral and cultural values. To what extent celebrity autobiographies adhere to this function remains to be seen. Celebrity autobiographies are generally seen as commercial endeavours of narcissistic individuals without any value as literary texts. Celebrity autobiographies are often organised as or contain sections resembling moral tales: overcoming hardships, illnesses or addictions, and living through failures, and then finally finding personal happiness and success. Autobiography has a tendency to blur the lines between fact and fiction, which makes it a difficult genre to study. The elusiveness of changing selves adds to the complexity of the genre. Like celebrity culture then, autobiography is an ever-changing genre with blurred boundaries and few solid tools for unpacking the meanings discovered.



### **3. Jordan and Katie: The Work of Autobiography**

#### **3.1. Introduction**

Many celebrities who manage to achieve fame just crash and burn, succumbing to addiction and depression. The negative, damaging aspects of celebrity have been a key, recurring discourse in the fame narrative of many celebrities. On the other hand, there are celebrities who seemingly flourish in the limelight. Former glamour model Jordan, whose real name is Katie Price, seems to belong to the latter category. For her, fame seems to be tailor-made. Her confessional interviews and autobiographies construct her as a persona fulfilled through fame. Jordan and her pop star husband Peter Andre were a poster couple for modern British celebrity until they divorced in 2009. They are an example of celebrities that often seem to annoy the public because they seem so overtly self-promotional. Yet they also make people want to know more about their lives, as there aren't so many celebrities who so willingly and unashamedly parade their personal lives in front of the public. Jordan and Andre are constantly in the media doing various things – or more precisely, talking about the things they do. Jordan is one celebrity whose sole achievement of posing topless in tabloid newspapers in the late 1990s catapulted her into the media limelight where she has stayed since, although post-divorce her fame has been tarred by negative tabloid stories. This chapter will examine Jordan through an analysis of her different personas constructed in autobiographical and media discourses.

Unusually Jordan has adopted a dual brand consisting of Jordan and Katie Price, both of which images are constantly promoted through the media. Furthermore, the Jordan/Katie Price brand is also promoted through a specific image constructed through her four autobiographies. Overall, the four autobiographies detail a period in Jordan's life and therefore represent a different Jordan/Katie Price<sup>4</sup> in each one. The first one, *Being Jordan – My Autobiography* (2005) details the events that lead Jordan to become a glamour model, the early stages of her career, and her adventures with several lovers. The second autobiography *A Whole New World* (2006) describes the early days of her relationship with Peter Andre, their subsequent wedding and the birth of their son Junior. In this autobiography Jordan becomes a domesticated version of the outrageous glamour model represented in the first book. The third autobiography *Jordan – Pushed to the Limit* (2008), is much darker as it details Jordan's marriage difficulties, postnatal depression after son

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<sup>4</sup> For the sake of clarity she will be referred to as Jordan throughout this thesis.

Junior's birth and a miscarriage. The book also describes her new pregnancy and the birth of her daughter Princess. The two autobiographies that detail her marriage are constructed around her domestic and work life and as a result, incidents that would be trivial and ordinary such as taking care of her children or working on her relationship are built up into something more, representative events in the growth of a persona known as Jordan. The fourth autobiography *You Only Live Once* (2010) describes the breakdown of her marriage to Peter Andre, her subsequent wild partying and a PR war with Andre as well as several plastic surgery procedures. In this autobiography, Jordan is also seen to find happiness with new husband Alex Reid. This thesis will examine the different sides to Jordan/Katie Price as constructed in the press and the autobiographies.

Autobiography gives Jordan and her management an opportunity to 'talk back' and construct representations that show Jordan in the best possible light. It also reveals the constructed nature of the self and celebrity image, which in the case of Jordan is closely linked to her commodification as a celebrity.

Whereas most glamour models disappear from the limelight after their modelling career is over, with the help of her management team Jordan managed to become a celebrity commodity no longer linked solely to her glamour girl persona. As commodities, celebrities are different from other commodities because ultimately they sell a person and an identity. Jordan uses her image to promote a number of products from novels to perfume, underwear and reality TV shows and all of these are plugged and promoted in her autobiographies. This is an image built around her performance of gender. Instead of telling the story of Jordan, her autobiographies have the tendency to excuse Jordan's behaviour and as Anderson puts it, Jordan 'is using her autobiographies as a form of coercion' (2001: 47). By this he means that the autobiographies try to correct both personal and social sleights and misrepresentations, and to prove that Jordan is special, apart from the rest, and thus deserving of her fame. Jordan is a major presence in the field of celebrity because she exploits her position as a celebrity in order to build her brand. The media are often critical of her but this was to Jordan's benefit when she started constructing a celebrity image.

### **3.2. Being Jordan: The Construction of an Image**

Katie Price first became known as Jordan after appearing topless in the *Sun* in 1996. The new name allowed her to create a raunchy, sexy image, which became her first incarnation and her first performance as a celebrity. Based on exhibitionism, Jordan regularly featured in British tabloids and celebrity-based magazines as bimbo and soon became a hate figure.

Her first autobiography *Being Jordan - My Autobiography* engages with the backlash against her:

I've been called a slapper, a tart, a man-eater, a woman who is so desperate for male attention she will do anything to get it. I've been told that I'm a freak; that I'm addicted to plastic surgery; that I've mutilated my body because of the way I look. I've been described as unstable, insecure, out of control, a drunk. It has been claimed that I'm obsessed with fame and will do anything for publicity (Price, 2005: ix).

The newspapers attacked her on her appearance, intelligence and outrageous behaviour. *Mail on Sunday* wrote in 2001: 'Jordan is just a dyed-blond bimbo with no intelligence and no talent other than a freakish figure which has been surgically enhanced. She is portrayed as this year's Samantha Fox; a pneumatic pin-up for the new millennium who will disappear as fast as she arrived' (Pryer and Clarke, 2001: 38).

A celebrity can achieve fame through talent, achievement or skills, but glamour models are pin-ups who use their bodies to achieve fame. Such celebrity rarely lasts very long because they are famous for being rather than doing. Jordan is a tabloid-culture celebrity and her success originates with the size of her breasts and her willingness to show off her body. When she first appeared on the modelling scene her image was very specific. As it is described in *Being Jordan - My Autobiography* her image was that of 'sex-mad Jordan' (Price, 2005: 120). This, and her other autobiographies construct gendered representations of the many sides of Jordan/Katie Price, including mother, wife and a business woman. This is necessary to her image based on a play with femininity. Throughout her rise to fame Jordan seemed happy to play up to her dumb blonde image. 'I like to come across as really thick bimbo, stupid. It's easier then. No one expects anything from you' she once told an interviewer (Pryer and Clarke, 2001: 38). The relentless media attention, regardless or perhaps because of its initial scandalous negativity, helped Jordan to seamlessly enter the tabloid culture as she quickly learned to play the game of confession, promotion and revelation, a common tactic for 'famous for being famous' celebrities.

However, Jordan also prompted a debate in broadsheet newspapers about her potential for representing feminism. The *Sunday Times* described her as 'an unholy mix of feminism, men's desires and ladette culture' (Knight, 2003: 3). *The Independent* in turn wrote that 'Jordan represents the uncompromising independence of a truly modern young woman' (Blacker, 2004: 33). *The Observer* wrote: 'The notorious topless model, tabloid fave and lad-mag staple evolved into some sort of broadsheet heroine-cum-post-feminist icon' (Flett, 2004: 20). Other newspapers were more sceptical. *The Evening Standard* wrote: 'The final

proof that fame and talent need not go together? That a woman who takes her clothes off for men is now regarded by some as a 21<sup>st</sup> century feminist icon' (Saner, 2004: 8). Based on the image constructed in the first autobiography Jordan could be seen as a representative of 'a highly sexualised version of power feminism, so called "do-me" feminism that sees sexual freedom as the key to female independence and emancipation' as described by Genz and Brabon (2009: 91). This construction could be seen as a postfeminist, postmodern take on the modern woman. 'Do-Me' feminism is partially based on the use of irony as a space of playfulness and ambiguity. 'Do-Me' feminists deliberately make sex objects of themselves through dressing provocatively and adopting 'raunchy' behaviour in public. Such feminism is thus 'seen to blend the ideologies of women's liberation and the sexual revolution' and has been discussed as 'a new breed of feminist heroine who is untrammelled, assertive, exuberantly pro-sex, yet determined to hold her own in a man's world' (Genz and Brabon, 2009: 92). In the sense that Jordan is seen as having used her physical appearance and sexuality to achieve personal and professional goals, I would argue that Jordan embodies this type of feminism as discursively represented in her autobiographies. For example, she is often represented as using her looks to get a man. 'I was dressed to kill in my all-in-one skin-tight black catsuit, thigh-length leopard-skin boots, with a black jacket and a fur collar, all made-up and waiting to meet my gladiator<sup>5</sup>' (Price, 2005: 75). Furthermore, her whole career is based on her looks, around which her brand image is constructed. 'I like to tease and get into provocative positions that look naughty. [...] After nine years in the glamour-modelling business, I've probably covered just about every position and look there is, from bondage to girly. [...] Whatever I'm doing I want to make an impact' (Price, 2005: 58-59).

As a 'Do-Me' feminist Jordan appears to have 'ideas about her life and being in control which clearly come from feminism' (Ganz and Brabon, 2009: 93). 'For some reason I agreed to appear in panto over Christmas 1997. [...] I played a princess in *Robinson Crusoe*. I had to wear a tight, red, cropped top showing plenty of cleavage, a pair of flared see-through red trousers and a little crown. My job was to come on, look good and bat my eyelashes and stick out my chest. I didn't have a great deal to say, but I don't think I was booked for my acting ability' (Price, 2005: 73). Showing a self-awareness about what is expected of her in order to maintain her image, these extracts illustrate 'Do-Me' feminism's emphasis on knowledge, and the power and control that one can gain from using that knowledge. It is implied that Jordan clearly uses her gender performance as a glamour model to capitalise on men's fantasies and this is what became her intrinsic value as a celebrity. More

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<sup>5</sup> Former boyfriend who was a part of the TV show *Gladiators*.

generally, 'Do-Me' feminists are very aware of their sexuality and how to use it to their advantage. Madonna has always used her sexuality to create new incarnations of her image, and to construct provocative music videos. Paris Hilton has built an empire based on a sex-tape and a dumb blonde image, and Pamela Anderson's image was built on her sexualised appearance on TV show *Baywatch*. I would suggest that 'Do-Me' feminist celebrities are seen as in control of their careers but the brand is built around a very sexual image that exploits their femininity.



According to Genz and Brabon 'the "Do-Me" feminist draws a sense of power and liberation from her sexual difference and thus can be said to propagate the old-fashioned idea that women get what they want by getting men through their feminine wiles' (2009: 97). Using her looks and sexuality to get a man is a very prominent discourse in Jordan's first autobiography. Jordan's love life has helped to elevate her status, and her various boyfriends have filled copious column inches. She has had a string of high-profile romances with footballers, media personalities and pop stars. An important thematic in her autobiographies is their sexual explicitness. Jordan describes the sex she has and the anatomy of her partners in great detail. The shock value of these revelations adds to her image as the 'sex-mad Jordan.' Her encounter with a former boyfriend is described in *Being Jordan - My Autobiography*:

Out of all the lovers I've had, I had some of the most adventurous sex with Dane. True, he had the smallest willy, and his body could have done with some serious toning, but I loved him, and when you love someone you don't expect their body to be perfect. I admit it was strange having sex with him after Warren, who definitely had the best physique of any lover I've had, and at first I did miss his powerful and muscular body (and, if I'm honest, his bigger willy), but Dane was definitely a better lover (Price, 2005: 128).

Another encounter with the father of her son Harvey reads as follows:

I finally had sex with the footballer the fans call King of Pornography. I was hoping for mind-blowing shag, [...] but I'm afraid it didn't happen like that. [...] Dwight was very selfish in bed. [...] I had no complaints about his body: he had a fantastic six-pack, gorgeous muscular legs and quite a big willy, which I did find a turn-on (Price, 2005: 179).

Most notably the Jordan that is constructed in her first autobiography is sexually assertive and uninhibited, and based on this characterisation she is very much a 'Do-Me' feminist.

She has a threesome, has sex outdoors, uses sex toys, dresses up for sex, and films herself having sex on several occasions. All of these activities are described in great detail. She is represented as sexually liberated but also as sometimes not being completely in control of all these activities: they are often described as being instigated by her various boyfriends and she just seems to go along with them as this is what her image is supposed to be – the sexy, adventurous glamour model who is not afraid to experiment, even if this is to please her man.

I also let him [Dane Bowers] fulfil the ultimate male fantasy. I had a threesome with him and another woman. [...] It might have been his ultimate fantasy, but it certainly wasn't mine. I agreed, hoping he would forget about it. But of course he didn't. [...] I felt like I was putting on a show for him more than doing something for myself (Price, 2005: 143).

The representation of Jordan as assertive, independent, and sexually in control, is somewhat undone by representations of her as weak, insecure, jealous, and needy in her relationships, as well as by incidents where she was beaten up by one boyfriend, used for sex by another, and when she was sexually assaulted as a child. Based on these representations her seeming 'Do-Me' attitude to sex and sexuality seems to have been borne out of negative experiences as a woman, where she is seen to have been abused by various people. This is manifest in her response to a break-up with boyfriend Dane Bowers:

After we had finished [having sex] Dane was all over me, asking me to call him soon. I was cool as anything, and promised nothing. I wanted him to feel cheap, to realise that I had just used him for sex. I wanted him to feel like I had felt so many times before. [...] I had been through hell for him but now I had the upper hand (Price, 2005: 273).

Revenge as a sign of empowerment suggests something paradoxical with the concept of 'Do-Me' feminism. Allegedly about the pleasure from sexuality and sex, there is no irony, fun or play in this encounter as represented Jordan autobiography. Rather sex is an exercise of power. This revenge narrative provides a less liberated and less glamorous side to Jordan's life. Even though Jordan very often plays on her sexuality with a cheeky take on interviews, the narratives of her autobiographies suggest a side to her that works against feminism. Jordan can also be seen as a representative of a culture based on patriarchal exploitation of the female image, at the same time as her image is constructed as a strong, independent woman. To elaborate, although some aspects of Jordan fit within postfeminist ideas, such as 'Do-Me' feminism, Jordan is, above all, a commercial image and it could be argued that like many other celebrities, she is merely a surface onto which often contradictory ideas and

narratives can be projected. This enables the attachment of feminist and other meanings to her image. From her autobiographies, it becomes clear that the former mainly relate to the notion that women 'can have it all': family, career, fulfilled sex life, wealth, love. However, it could be argued that it is Jordan's fame that makes it very easy for her to achieve all these things, not whether she is a feminist. Indeed, she has very little to say about women's emancipation or of anything of particular importance relating to divisions between men and women.

Jordan's initial image was created during a period when there was an increasing sexualisation of culture (Genz and Brabon, 2009). According to some critics she became the principal proponent of a culture based on overt and repressive representations of female sexuality. *The Scotsman* wrote: 'Rather than idolise a woman who is in the public eye for doing something brave, useful, creative or interesting, young women are choosing a role model who has made a living promoting herself as a sex object' (Wyllie, 2007: 1). 'Texts citing highly sexualised and pornographic styles and aesthetics have become a common feature in Western societies' (Genz and Brabon, 2009: 101). Instead of being empowering, the Jordan image was seen as objectifying women by catering to men's fantasies and desires in a blatant and manipulative way. She epitomised raunch culture, characterised by excessive sexualisation and objectification of women (Levy, 2006). Levy characterises raunch culture as 'involving women with cartoon-like bodies, caricatures of female "hotness" who express their femininity by wearing tiny, revealing, "slutty" outfits that supposedly empower them but in fact turn them into objects' (2006: 5). The world of voyeuristic lad's magazines and TV shows featuring scantily clad women are part and parcel of raunch culture, which is an ultimately commodified form of popular culture arguably produced for the male gaze and controlled by men. Jordan as a glamour model and a commodity fits neatly within raunch culture. She is paid to take her clothes off but as a result of her glamour girl career she has become one of the most recognisable and marketable female celebrities in the UK. Levy writes: 'the glossy, overheated thumping of sexuality in our culture is less about connection than consumption. "Hotness" has become a cultural currency' (2006: 31).

The *Daily Mail* suggested that Jordan, as represented in her first autobiography and in the representations of her media image in general, 'epitomises the kind of lifestyle celebrated by today's young people and witnessed in all its glory in the *Big Brother* house. This lifestyle is based on shameless exhibitionism, wanton hedonism and guilt-free indulgence of selfish pleasures' (Weathers, 2002: 24). *The Observer* described her as 'incapable of understanding the deeper consequences of anything, which makes her, at worst, pathological, at best fearless' (Sawyer 2002: 18). Jordan was constantly criticised because

her fame suggested that today anyone, even somebody who took their clothes off for a living, could become famous. She has become one of Britain's most followed celebrities regardless of the fact that she has been called various offensive names. Yet as she is reported as having said: 'I'm one girl who's taken such a slating in the press that nothing can bother me anymore' (Sawyer, 2002: 18). Jordan's public persona is of someone who can withstand these attacks and to this extent, represents feminism, replaying some of Madonna's attributes. As Bordo argues, Madonna 'modelled the possibility of female heterosexuality that was independent of patriarchal control, a sexuality that defied rather than rejected the male gaze, teasing it with her own gaze, deliberately trashy and vulgar, challenging anyone to call her a whore, and ultimately not giving a damn what judgements might be made of her' (1993: 282-283). Jordan appears to possess a similar kind of rebellious sexuality, teasing men but not quite adhering to the pin-up stereotype.

Western culture has often traditionally associated female sexuality with passivity under the male gaze. Earlier pin-ups could be described as passively posing in tabloids and magazines, but it is difficult to describe Jordan's celebrity persona, represented as having actively orchestrated her own career and to a large extent her own image from the beginning, as passive. Her autobiographies represent her as driven by her own ambition. Whereas her glamour model predecessors were portrayed as soft and even childlike, Jordan's glamour look and image were constructed as 'dirty,' implying that she clearly knows that sex sells. Jordan's determination to do things her own way is evident in *Being Jordan – My Autobiography*. 'We argued a lot during shoots over what I should wear and how I should pose. [...] I hate it when photographers ignore what I think and just order me about as if I haven't got a clue. [...] I know what angles I look best in and what positions are going to look good.' (Price, 2005: 58). 'I had made sure that I was completely in control of how the calendar would look in terms of the poses, the props and my outfits. I wanted to create something different and striking' (Price, 2005: 279). For a long time Jordan seemed to manage to negotiate the celebrity world without ever falling victim to her fame, even though many of her former boyfriends, associates, and friends sold unflattering stories about her and countless paparazzi pictures of her falling out of nightclubs circulated in the press. Yet she is represented as breezing through celebrity life with ease. Jordan does not align with the stereotypical representations of celebrities falling victim to fame.

*The Times* suggested that initially, in her glamour girl days, 'people hated Jordan because the British nation didn't really know what to do with her' (Knight 2003: 3). There were no precedents to compare her to. In fact, perhaps many people, even women, actually liked her due to her 'go and get it' image, but they pretended to be appalled because it is not acceptable to like someone like Jordan. It has a lot to do with gender, because women were



not supposed to be so blatantly sexual. As Tseëlon puts it, 'condemnation of the sexually active woman has been part of European traditions from Roman literature, which argued that within every respectable woman there lurked a whore, to medieval Christian misogyny' (1995: 95). Jordan's persona illustrates that this tradition has not entirely disappeared. Her image is in fact quite similar to that of Russell Brand, the bad boy comedian, who describes several sexual adventures in his two autobiographies.<sup>6</sup> For many Jordan was a disturbing development in British culture. Like Madonna, Jordan is represented in many ways as a masculine woman, which still seems to be a taboo in British society. The autobiographies represent her as independent and uncontrollable – and therefore masculine. Presumably the society does not want to accept a celebrity who seems to challenge the traditional concept of passive femininity. Jordan's glamour girl days made her very successful and she managed to create a gendered image directed towards men by using female sexuality. At this time she embodied some of the characteristics of so-called 'Do-Me' feminism, but was also seen as a representative of raunch culture characterised by the exploitation of women. Overall, Jordan's image was that of a self-created celebrity who played by her own rules and was fearless of the consequences of her actions. During her glamour model days she was often described in the media as rude and obnoxious because she had affairs and drank to excess, which is exactly what young women had started to do those days. As such Jordan, the glamour girl, was the perfect role model for those times.

### 3.3. Image Change: From Jordan to Katie Price

In 2004 Jordan appeared in the reality TV series *I'm a Celebrity...Get Me Out of Here!*. This show confirmed Jordan as a household name as the press suddenly started writing favourably about her. During the show she flirted with another contestant, Australian pop singer Peter Andre and after emerging from the jungle, the pair started dating and later married and went on to build a strong brand through reality TV shows, interviews and autobiographies detailing every aspect of their lives. After the programme, Jordan became a powerful brand consisting of Jordan, the glamour model, and Katie Price who, through her marriage to Peter Andre, was a more domestic and down to earth representation of the woman called Jordan. The series encouraged audiences to believe that they fell in love in front of the cameras and their relationship caught the media's attention. It was something that could be endlessly speculated on. Jordan's autobiographies *A Whole New World* (Price, 2006) and *Jordan – Pushed to the Limit* (Price, 2008) also promote this image. Jordan and

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<sup>6</sup> See the chapter 4 below.

Peter Andre were represented as more ordinary and approachable than stars judged by their portrayal of talent, glamour or mystery. 'They are often described as trashy or as chavs, implying that they lack cultural capital' (Holmes, 2006: 57-58). They realised the economic power of being a celebrity couple and used their relationship to promote themselves accordingly. As the commercial value of persona has increased, its nurturance has become a process of constant rewriting through image management, reinvention, autobiography and the confessional. Until their divorce, the secret of the brand that became 'Katie and Peter' was being an accessible celebrity couple. 'Katie and Peter' exploited the desire to know about the personal lives of celebrities, especially their love lives, marriages, family problems and daily activities.

After leaving the jungle, Jordan joined Andre's management company CAN Associates and was set to be transformed into Katie Price, wife and mother. Her new manager Claire Powell was seen to be the mastermind behind the brand that became 'Katie and Peter' but a different take on this assumption is articulated in *A Whole New World*:

The very reason I wanted to write my book was to show that I wasn't just a glamour girl; I was Katie Price as well. And although Claire [Powell] still insists that she changed my image, she didn't. My image was already changing when I met her – besides, I didn't join up with Claire to change my image (Price, 2006: 121).

Now 'Katie and Peter' were a team who did most of their publicity together. To a large extent 'Katie and Peter's' promotional practices were a game of confession and revelation, always suggesting a life in motion, a life with stories to tell; whether of success or happiness or failure or distress. After all, any saleable story works to maintain a person's celebrity status. 'Katie and Peter' kept the media interested by revealing all the changes in their lives unlike many other famous couples, especially those who could be described as stars, who prefer their lives to remain a mystery. Indeed they appeared fascinating partly because they granted the media access that many other celebrity couples did not. However, 'Katie and Peter' were required to give regular interviews even when they had nothing specific to promote. Perhaps as a consequence, their self-promotional practices concentrated on ordinary things, such as family, personal life, and their relationship with each other. The illusion was that the audience knew 'everything' there was to know about them, which made them more accessible than many other famous people. They achieved a visibility central in today's competitive celebrity culture.

So great is the value of visibility that the manufacturing and marketing of celebrities now reach into business, sports, entertainment, religion, the arts, politics, academics, medicine,

and law. Visibility is what every aspiring actor wants and every unknown professional seeks. This is the new world of industrialised celebrity [...] in which individuals [...] can be elevated to a level of visibility unimaginable at any other time – and can be compensated with imaginable rewards (Rein et al. 1997: 1-2).

‘Katie and Peter’ as represented in Jordan’s second and third autobiographies are shown to have mastered the art of staying visible. ‘Suddenly it seemed that the only shoots I was doing were for *OK!*, with the odd tabloid here and there, and while I earned a lot of money in 2004 and 2005 – hence one tabloid dubbing me and Pete “Dosh and Pecs” – it wasn’t for my glamour modelling’ (Price, 2006: 123).

Alongside work commitments *A Whole New World* gives emphasis to caring for disabled son Harvey. ‘I’m usually a really impatient person, who doesn’t like being kept waiting and who likes things done their way, but with Harvey I’m a different person. I’ve discovered I can be very patient’ (Price, 2006: 65-66). In this autobiography Jordan becomes a more domesticated version of the outrageous glamour model and even stops going out, drinking and clubbing because Andre doesn’t ‘like the person she becomes’ when she is drunk (Price, 2006: 46-48). A new kind of vulnerability is constructed alongside the hard, outrageous Jordan persona, and this is represented as the ‘real’ Katie Price. This is particularly evident in *Jordan – Pushed to the Limit*’s account of Jordan’s postnatal depression:

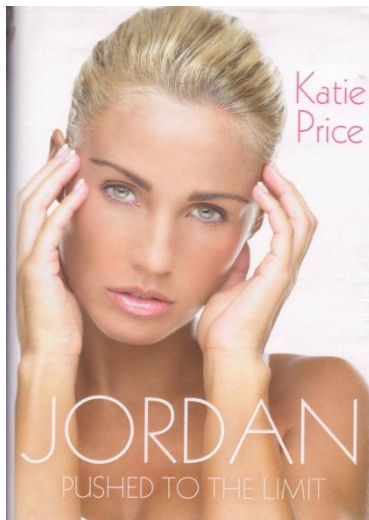
One night, when I was at the beginning of my book tour, I reached rock bottom. [...] I sat down at my dressing table, staring numbly at my reflection. What was happening to me? I couldn’t bear to feel like this anymore. [...] I was so desperate I had to do something. [...] I’m so ashamed of what happened next [...] I don’t want to say what drug I took (Price, 2008: 18-19).

The autobiographies thus cleverly exploit different sides to the Jordan/Katie Price persona through a description of different phases in her life. There is always something new to tell and a new side to her persona to represent. In *A Whole New World* and *Jordan – Pushed to the Limit* Jordan is mostly described through her relationship with Andre:

We’re also very similar; both of us are insecure and both of us get jealous – in the way that we want each other so intensely and we don’t want to lose each other. [...] He really is my lover, my best friend and my soul mate. [...] I love the fact that he didn’t know me as Jordan, that he met me as Katie Price. I never had that feeling I’ve had in other relationships that he was only interested in me because I was famous (Price, 2006: 44-45).

Since Pete and me have been together, there have been plenty of stories claiming that our marriage is in crisis and they're all bollocks! Yes, we bicker, but all couples we know bicker, and it's not because we're about to split up. The only real time we came close to it was when my postnatal depression put such a strain on our marriage. We are feisty with each other, but we're completely equal, we give as good as we get (Price, 2008: 95).

Anderson suggests that self-representation in autobiography 'is always developed in terms of available conventions and discourses' (2001: 111). The two autobiographies described above place Jordan in the role of a wife and mother, struggling to hold onto her relationship and deal with starting a family with her new husband. She is thus described almost entirely through her relationship with Andre, whereas *Being Jordan – My Autobiography* saw her as



someone independent, regardless of the relationships she had with various men. The sexual overtones have now been toned down in favour of domestic life. When a person describes herself through other people in autobiography she creates 'a passive autobiographical self' (Evans, 1999: 35) and as a result limits her own agency. The emphasis on togetherness causes the narrative to become a joint story of 'Katie and Peter'. This obviously works well for promotional purposes and for the construction of 'Katie and Peter' as a brand. At this point in time, 'Katie and Peter' came together as the mainstay of the interest in them was not on their

individual personas but them as a celebrity couple. The autobiographies are highly selective, tending to dramatise domesticity by referring to incidents involving Jordan's disabled son Harvey or Jordan and Andre's various arguments. 'My stomach lurched when I saw the ambulance parked in our driveway. Harvey was lying on a stretcher in the back of the ambulance. He had several deep gashes on his face, which was covered in blood, and his nose was badly swollen. [...] I thought he was dead' (Price, 2008: 239). Harvey is a central part of the narrative of 'Katie and Peter' as Andre comes to treat Jordan's disabled son as his own. Andre's relationship to Harvey becomes central to his appeal. However, there is another side to 'Katie and Peter' involving their volatile relationship including arguments, jealousy and break-ups.

The next day, when Pete discovered I'd been out in London and that I hadn't told him, we had a massive row. The row lasted three days, it was so bad. He claimed that he was hurt that I hadn't phoned him to let him know I was going to The Embassy

[nightclub], but I really couldn't see what his problem was. [...] I don't want to go out and flirt, to get anyone's number or shag anyone! I just want to go out and have a drink and a laugh (Price, 2008: 136).

The more negative side of the relationship, as represented in the two autobiographies, also becomes part of the narrative of 'Katie and Peter' implying that the marriage is not always on safe ground and creating the narrative possibility and even an anticipation (when looked at post-divorce) of eventual break-up.

The phases that Jordan is represented as going through from 'trashy glamour girl Jordan' to 'domestic Katie Price,' to 'mother of three children', to 'a business woman,' all work to commodify her. Her sexuality and domesticity are just marketing features adopted for each new issue of a product. Tetzlaff wrote on Madonna: 'The discourses she employs are but mere tools in the self-promotion through which she achieves self-determination' (1993: 257). As a result, the boyfriends and husbands could be described as tools used for creating a new saleable persona. In her relationships Jordan has been the dominating presence and the men have been there to help sell the commodity that is Jordan/Katie Price. According to Oliver 'Katie arrived as Jordan's out-of-control sexuality finally threatened to alienate the press and was presented as the genuine "authentic" woman behind the masquerade' (2007: 16). The new Katie Price allowed women to relate to her persona and as a result, she could diversify her brand and sell both herself and products aimed at women and children.

Rojek (2001) argues that celebrities personalise the contradictions between the central myths of achievement culture and common experience and emphasise personal success. At the same time celebrity culture perpetuates economic inequality. Jordan is a prime example of achievement culture. Her autobiographies construct her as someone who has always been hungry for success and hates failing. Thus in *Being Jordan- My Autobiography*:

I'd always wanted to be a model; either that or a pop star – or both! I can almost hear you thinking, she must think a lot of herself. But I don't. I've just always been a bit of an exhibitionist. I love showing off and being the centre of attention. Modelling gives me the perfect chance to do that. [...] I've done very well out of being a model, but success didn't just fall into my lap. I've worked hard for everything I've got (Price, 2005: 7-8).

Apart from charities, Jordan only promotes her own products. Her personal characteristics are often described in the media by words like success, media savvy and manipulation. Tetzlaff writes about Madonna:

Though a certain sleaze factor was undoubtedly an important element of Madonna's initial rise to fame, it simply cannot account for her continued superstardom. For one thing, being the sex symbol of the moment has always been a job with high turnover – male sexual fantasies are more likely to be fuelled by iconic variety than by iconic fidelity (1993: 242).

This could be applied to Jordan. Had she not met Andre and constructed the brand 'Katie and Peter' she could very well have disappeared into obscurity like so many glamour models before her. The couple became a very profitable business venture that possibly neither party would have achieved by themselves.

There have always been celebrities that use self-promotion, but in recent years there have been many more of them. Many of them haven't distinguished themselves for anything other than their ability to stay in the headlines. Although to start with both Jordan and Peter Andre had very specific careers as a glamour model and a pop singer, they consciously moved into the famous for being famous category. Their self-promotional tactics ensured that they were known as a celebrity couple regardless of any work they did. Although they both had work projects to promote, their actual work was side-lined by an emphasis on their personal life. 'Katie and Peter' was a product of an increasingly self-promotional culture in which celebrities have become more and more visible. There seems to have been a particularly neat fit between their eager embrace of celebrity discourses and the particular cultural context.

### **3.4. Masks and the Performative Gender: Looking for the 'Real' Jordan**

*I'm a Celebrity...Get Me Out of Here!* relies on the 'authenticity' of the contestants. The media started immediately debating the difference between Jordan and Katie Price, suggesting that a celebrity persona is an artificial image, but beneath the surface there is something 'real' and 'authentic.' Jordan entered the jungle as Katie Price, a more domestically inclined woman, a devoted mother to her son, inviting the viewers to observe her new identity. The previous Jordan persona, who wears revealing clothes, shows off her body and talks provocatively only occasionally appeared, like a protective shield. Until then Jordan had been very careful not to reveal too much of her 'real' self. For Katie Price, being Jordan is important for making a living. It enabled her to build a considerable fortune. 'Katie seems to put on Jordan like a mask, letting the personality evolve as the layers of make-up go on,' Knight (2004: 32-33) observed in the *Daily Mail*. There is a double message here, claiming to be 'really' Katie Price but not letting go of Jordan.

Some people may not like the Jordan image, but it's still the name that sells. I've been interviewed and photographed for so many magazines now [...] and they all say they want to interview me as Katie Price. But on the cover it says that they've got an interview with Jordan – so, as much as people want to know about the Katie Price side of me, the magazines will always use the Jordan name to promote the interview and sell copies. [...] I don't wake in the morning and think, oh right, today I will mostly be Jordan (Price, 2008: 145).

Tseëlon argues in her book *The Masque of Femininity* (1995) that women living within Western cultures are required to put on a mask of femininity.

Femininity is a disarming disguise: it is donned, like masquerade, to disguise the female's desire of the phallus (of power). Afraid to challenge the male, who possesses the phallus directly, the woman deflects attention from her desire for power through its opposite: constructing a very feminine, non-threatening image of herself. (1995: 37-38).

This scholarly quote can be compared to the media's perception of Jordan/Katie Price. *The Times*, for example, wrote about Jordan's dual brand:

Jordan conceals her ambition, drive and business acumen behind the excessive femininity of her pouting façade that works as a successful brand. She uses her two identities to sell everything from perfume to underwear. Where Jordan enacts an extravagant parody of female sexuality, Katie, through her marriage to Peter, pantomimed domestic bliss (Oliver, 2007: 16).

In turn, the *Daily Mail* article below conveys the confusion about the two sides of Jordan:

On meeting her for the first time, it is difficult to know where Katie Price ends and Jordan begins, or even if they are the one and the same person. The 5ft 1in, size 6 child-woman, who walks into the room, free of make-up and wearing a black tracksuit, bears virtually no resemblance to her pneumatic, let-it-all-hang-out alter ego (Weathers, 2002: 24).

The association of Jordan with an excessive use of femininity neither makes her look innocent nor does it deflect attention from her desire for power. Her ambition is celebrated in her autobiography: 'By 2008 I had built up a pretty impressive business empire. There were the autobiographies, my novels, my children's books, my reality TV shows, my two perfumes, my lingerie, my bed linen, and my range of hair products...and I was itching to try

my hand at something else' (Price, 2010: 58). In media representations but especially in her photo-shoots, ambition, drive and shrewdness in business are concealed behind a mask of excessive femininity. However, the mechanics of commodification are foregrounded in the promotion of her various business ventures, described in great detail in her autobiographies, which she even uses to plug her products.

Tseëlon, drawing on the work of Erving Goffman, introduces the idea of 'impression management', through which social actors have 'private realities' and 'public appearances' (1995: 41). 'The model of a person underlying the impression management perspective is that of a manipulator who tries to control the impression people will form of them through situationally appropriate behaviours' (Tseëlon, 1995: 41-42). Jordan's two personas work in this way. Jordan as a glamour model is designed to stimulate male desires and to represent an independent, sexy and vulgar self. On her *Playboy* photo-shoot described in *Being Jordan – My Autobiography*: 'I loved the headline: "London's Legendary Bad Girl, Jordan." I was exactly where I wanted to be, and it was a great feeling' (Price, 2005: 209). Katie Price on the other hand is aimed at family audiences and women and teenage girls in particular, offering a role model for career success and domestic life. As her fourth autobiography demonstrates, Katie Price lives for her children: 'The kids are the most important things in my life and I would do anything for them. [...] Of all the things in my life, I am most proud of my children' (Price, 2010: 38). The Jordan and Katie Price images are constructions or masks, which, working together, gain maximum exposure in the media and sell the brand. As Schwichtenberg (1993) suggests, femininity can be seen as an exaggeration in which woman 'plays' at herself, playing a part. Jordan's personas illustrate this 'playing a part.'

As explained in Chapter 2: 'Surveying the Critical Field,' the performative is in excess of the cognitive within autobiographical writing. Autobiographies can never tell a real, factual story. 'The textual "I" seeks out excuses to perform itself; it creates dramas in order to stage the real drama of the self' (Anderson, 2001: 51). Autobiographers are like actors on a stage, but instead of playing a role, they perform themselves. Jordan and Katie Price are stereotypes, adhering to cultural conventions of femininity, Jordan as the sexually free tramp, Katie Price as the more modest wife and mother. Jordan deliberately plays with masks and masquerade. Kaplan describes how 'the mask in romanticism was terrifying because it deceived, it hid the "real" subject, it distorted and concealed identity; but the mask in ancient folklore represented play, the recognition of the changeability and non-fixity of the subject' (1993: 149). The Jordan and Katie Price dyad can be thought of in these terms. Representations of Jordan seem to hide the 'real' person, but becoming Katie Price also offers a chance to play with identity. Jordan's playful product promotions always see her wearing a different mask through dressing up in costumes. No matter how hard people try



putting labels on Jordan, she remains elusive. Is she the sex-bomb that ruthlessly uses her body to get what she wants, is she a shrewd, money-hungry businesswoman who sells the events of her personal life to earn as much as possible, or is she a devoted mother and wife, who loves horse riding and wears pink? Jordan does not stay in one spot for long so all of the above labels could be applied at different times. 'Ironically, really, that the most perfect tabloid creation of recent times should be one character who consistently defies and effectively satirises the rigid labelling system put in place to keep people in theirs,' Hyde (2004: 7) writes in *The Guardian*. Peter Andre's several comments on how he liked Katie but detested Jordan picked up on how one mask could be replaced by another. Jordan is a site of a series of conflicting discourses, promoted both in the media and in her autobiographies. *A Whole New World* describes Jordan's two masks:

Up until my appearance on *I'm a Celebrity* the public only really knew me as Jordan and probably thought that was the only role I could play. Glamour girl Jordan was outrageous, sexy and provocative – she was the one who made me famous. The press seized on the whole Jordan/Katie thing, though, and loved to go on about how devilish Jordan had taken over sweet little Katie Price and ruined her, with her boob job, her wild party antics and her man-eating. [...] I've got a sexy and outspoken image to live up to and I know perfectly well what will grab people's attention and get me on the cover of the men's magazines and in the newspapers (Price, 2006: 40-41).

What is significant here is the acknowledgement of Jordan as a role, implying that the Jordan image is a mere performance, a mask put on for the purposes of selling the brand Jordan to magazines and newspapers. As Judith Butler (1990) has argued, becoming gender is a process of interpreting cultural reality laden with taboos, choices and restrictions. 'The choice to assume a certain kind of body, to live and wear one's body a certain way, implies a world of already established corporeal styles' (Salih, 2006: 26), in which the natural body is increasingly suspect. Jordan has consciously chosen the artificial bodily style achieved through plastic surgery with five breast surgeries, a nose reshaping operation, lip fillers and Botox. Although excessive, Jordan's use of bodily manipulation falls within contemporary gender norms. Jordan's use of plastic surgery and cosmetic enhancements has a commercial motive and are very much a part of the image that sells the brand.

There is so much rubbish written in the press about me and my body – like how I must suffer from body dysmorphia, [...] or that I am addicted to plastic surgery. And do you know what? It is complete bollocks. I'm *not* addicted to surgery. I've just been open about what surgery I've had done – and the press exaggerates it to make it seem as though I am addicted! I sometimes feel that I

can't win with the press. I've admitted to having surgery and using Botox and fillers, and they still go on and on about it. Yet if you deny it or pretend you haven't, they still try and out you. Journalists write that I'm so fake. Well hello! I *admit* that I'm fake (Price, 2010: 20).

Plastic surgery is a central part of the Jordan persona and she is seen to have deliberately constructed this as an outer form of mask to create the persona that would appeal to men. Jordan's body adheres to the glamour model stereotype with huge breasts and otherwise small figure thus staying within the confines of feminine stereotypes.

Judith Butler states that 'gender is a persistent impersonation that passes for the real and destabilises distinctions between natural and artificial' (1990: x). For Butler gender is performative and nothing within an identity is fixed. 'The binary divide between masculinity and femininity is a social construction built on the binary divide between men and women – which is also a social construction' (Gauntlett, 2008: 147). Gauntlett suggests that 'rather than being a fixed attribute in a person, gender should be seen as fluid variable which can shift and change in different contexts and at different times. [...] Gender is a performance – and nothing more' (2008: 150). If behaviour is all that gender is, Jordan's excessive display of femininity both as Jordan and Katie Price could be seen as parodic performance. She acts in a certain way to achieve goals and produce effects. Furthermore, Butler argues:

When the constructed status of gender is theorised as radically independent of sex, gender itself becomes a free-floating artifice, with the consequence that man and masculine might just as easily signify a female body as a male one and woman and feminine a male body as easily as a female one (1990: 6).

I would argue that in autobiographical writing there is evidence of this 'free-floating artifice.' Female autobiographies can take on a masculine edge as easily as a feminine one and vice versa.

This can be illustrated through the comparison of Jordan's and Peter Andre's respective autobiographies. Both use similar language and are confessional, detailing sex lives, bodily insecurities, depression and family life. Jordan is always represented as strong and independent whereas Andre is represented as reliant on other people. Both come across as extremely vain about their appearance, and are insecure in relationships. But Jordan is represented as more or less a self-made woman and is seen as ruthless when it comes to her business ventures whereas Andre is represented as reliant on managers and handlers. In some ways these autobiographies reverse gender roles, Jordan adopting the masculine

traits of public life and earning money and Andre adopting values associated with the private sphere of home, or other so-called feminine traits as highlighted in these extracts from his autobiography *All About Us – My Story*:

I guess I let myself become a bit too dependent on Mel [B of Spice Girls] and every time the phone rang I would hope that it would be her voice at the end of the line. [...] I came to feel intimidated by the whole affair and it preyed on my mind to such an extent that often I couldn't perform with Mel – and I don't mean sing (Andre, 2007: 80).

I'd started to take myself way too seriously. Everything was about me; it was the gym, the gym, the gym, and nothing else. To me image was everything. In all my video clips the lighting had to be perfect to show my body off to the best advantage. [...] Looking good became more important to me than vocal or dance training (Andre, 2007: 86).

I became a binge eater. [...] The more I was eating junk the more I wanted it. I trained less and less. I ate more and more. In four or five months I put on a stone, which I'd never done before. I was always ripped and cut. Now I let myself go completely (Andre, 2007: 184).

In addition, in relation to sex and descriptions of sex, Andre's autobiography also lacks the crudeness and scandal of Jordan's. As we will see in the case of Robbie Williams and Russell Brand this kind of feminine discourse has relevance to other male celebrity auto/biographies.<sup>7</sup> Adopting Butler's argument, because 'the substantive effect of gender is performatively produced and compelled by the regulatory practices of gender coherence' (1990: 24), feminine male autobiographies have a tendency to go against the norm. Even though the celebrities themselves may have a very masculine image, the discourse of male autobiography often plays with femininity (as female autobiography plays with masculinity). Butler argues that 'gender is what you do at particular times, rather than a universal who you are' (Gauntlett, 2008: 150). However, due to the 'heterosexual matrix' retaining its dominance, feminised male celebrities such as Peter Andre are often ridiculed. Indeed, taken together Jordan and Andre's autobiographies appear to articulate a power relationship, in which Jordan is constructed as the more successful partner only at the expense of Andre. To return to the narratives relating to the different sides of Jordan/Katie Price they make it difficult to find the 'real' person behind the series of performances. Even

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<sup>7</sup> See chapter 4 below.

as Jordan exposes intimate details of her life, sometimes in a very shocking manner, she comes across as shallow or blank. She is represented as so wrapped up in the image construction that her claims of truthfulness and representing the 'real' become suspect. Jordan's gender performances provide the basis of her success as a celebrity. Celebrity culture values those who seem to represent themselves as 'real' and 'authentic,' and who are willing to reveal every aspect of their lives. Jordan's autobiographies thus ensure her continuing success by recording her life for public consumption. The autobiographies also reveal that Jordan's success derives from her ability to manipulate her own image. The autobiographies demonstrate how Jordan has constructed and managed her fame, becoming a successful brand and a powerful force within British celebrity culture. However, she faced a serious media backlash following her separation and divorce from Peter Andre.

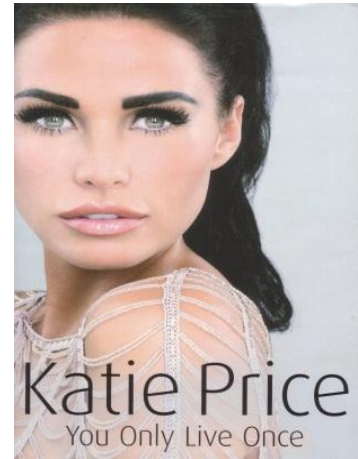
### **3.5. The End of Jordan and Peter – Divorce and Brand Failure**

During spring 2009 from their ITV2 reality show *Katie and Peter: the Next Chapter: Stateside*, and broadcast to millions of viewers, it became evident that Katie Price and Peter Andre were facing marriage difficulties. Not surprisingly there has been speculation in the British tabloid press about their marriage difficulties and news reports continued until the divorce and Jordan's new marriage in January 2010. As celebrity culture relies on the personal and the intimate, career successes and failures are generally only secondary to personal triumphs and dilemmas, i.e. successes and failures are often measured in personal rather than career terms. This press coverage therefore was potentially damaging to Jordan's reputation. Her fourth autobiography *You Only Live Once* (Price, 2010) marks Jordan's response to press speculation: 'The press were yet again saying that we were splitting up. They were full of stories saying I was being cruel to Pete, mocking his music, putting him down...but that was complete crap. We were convinced that someone close to us was selling stories to the press' (2010: 116). 'The press continued to write negative stories of our relationship. There was one saying that we didn't want to be together anymore but realised that we couldn't break up as we were a business and a brand. It was unbelievable – I would only stay with someone for love. Fame and money are nothing compared to that' (2010: 124).

The press stories gave the impression that the marriage was a business arrangement but the autobiography refutes that. But in May 2009 Andre walked out on Jordan and the couple separated. Andre retreated from the media whereas Katie Price, at least according to the press, reverted to her old glamour girl ways, partying, drinking and wearing skimpy clothes, causing a media backlash against her as now she was a mother of three with family responsibilities to consider. According to *You Only Live Once*, however, the break-up was

triggered by photographs in the *Sun*: 'There I was, plastered across the front of it, in a shot taken in a Bristol nightclub, looking the worse for wear. I was flashing my cleavage and sitting next to Spencer Wilton, one of the riders I knew, who just happens to be gay but when did the papers ever let the truth get in the way of a good story?' (Price, 2010: 148). It seems fitting that a marriage that relied on media attention seemingly eventually ended due to press photographs.

During her party escapades after the marriage break-up, Jordan was closely followed by the cameras filming her new reality TV show *What Katie Did Next*. Her motivation for starting filming immediately after the break-up is described in *You Only Live Once*: 'I wanted my new series to show the real me, and how I was living my life after my marriage had ended. I wanted to reveal my fun side and to prove that the press stories were complete bollocks' (Price, 2010: 165). Jordan's 'failure' instantly took on a personal tone in the tabloid press. According to the press she was emotionless when faced with the end of her marriage, and she was widely criticised by commentators. But Jordan's autobiography defends her seemingly unemotional demeanour: 'I didn't cry. My marriage to the man I had thought was the love of my life was over, but I didn't cry. I know some people will take this to mean that I'm hard or unfeeling but it's not true. [...] I knew I had to be strong' (Price, 2010: 149). Nevertheless her carefully constructed image started to crumble and Jordan could not escape the press's criticism.



Judging by her continuous self-promotion, the alleged brash, emotionless Jordan is nevertheless represented as depending on others to validate her self-esteem, moreover, she thrives on public's admiration. This is very similar to Robbie Williams' persona as represented in his memoir.<sup>8</sup> Therefore, despite her uncharacteristic request for privacy regarding her divorce, she immediately started filming her reality TV show and soon waged a bizarre PR war against Andre. All this kept her in the headlines, with the failed marriage becoming a subject of public debate. *The Times* wrote:

Katie Price's £30 million wealth and cultural prominence comes from the fact that she was the first celebrity to cut out the paparazzi middle-men, and kiss and tell on herself. In this respect, her marriage to Peter Andre wasn't just a relationship. The focus of eight reality TV series over five years, it was also a product and a career (Moran, 2009: 4-5).

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<sup>8</sup> See chapter 4 below.

It was no surprise then that as had often been the case when it came to anything Jordan and Andre did, their separation was seen as a publicity stunt and speculation about when and how they would get back together was rife. Yet her autobiography *You Only Live Once* implies that Jordan was taken aback by the speculation:

I was completely stunned by the coverage. There were some reports that the break-up was a publicity stunt, which I thought was insane. [...] And there were plenty of other reports, which portrayed me in a negative way. There seemed to be no sympathy for me at all. Instead it was Saint Pete and Sinner Jordan all the way. Yes, the press brought Jordan back pretty fast, as if she was always the bad girl waiting to come out of Katie Price (Price, 2010: 155).

A marriage break-up had become a competition, a race to win the publicity war and the sympathy of the public. However, due to a glamour girl image that never wholly fitted the mode of conventional femininity, Jordan didn't stand a chance against Peter Andre's image as a doting family man and a good father. Andre was often photographed crying and looking distressed and according to her autobiography, this irked Jordan more than anything:

I was stunned when I saw all these pictures of Pete crying and looking heartbroken. I thought, "Hang on a minute! Why are they showing pictures of *him* looking so upset? He's the one that dumped me! [...] Why is there no sympathy for me?" Just because I wasn't going to allow myself to be seen crying in public – that's not what I do – it didn't mean I wasn't heartbroken (Price, 2010: 154).

The autobiographical narrative consistently implies that Jordan could not understand why she was constructed as 'the bad guy'. It would seem that if the press could not see her in distress, they assumed that she was not hurt by the break up and reported the break-up accordingly. They blamed Jordan and supported Andre.

Jordan's autobiographies reveal the self-deceptiveness of modern narcissism. In order to bolster her self-esteem, she has 'a self-serving bias' (Baumeister, 1999: 6) when it comes to reporting about her. In celebrity culture, and life in general, identity requires social validation. As Baumeister puts it:

An important step in claiming a desired identity is having one's claim validated by others. Even if some people do not share the same values, it is sometimes desirable to have them validate your identity claims. For example, outrageous behaviour of musicians and other artists may scandalise the witnesses, but their

scandalised reaction helps validate the artist's identity as notorious, rebellious, or iconoclastic (1999: 8).

Jordan's post break-up behaviour was not validated by the media, leading to her downfall. The narrative of her autobiography sees Jordan taking credit for her successes but denying responsibility for her failures. In the autobiography, following her marital separation it is Andre who left her (and by implication the children) and not the other way around, attempting to negate newspaper reports that Andre had left as a result of Jordan's drink fuelled partying and flirting with other men:

I felt as though the press needed someone to blame for the marriage breaking up and they decided to blame me. I was seen as the bad guy and yet I was the one who had been dumped. One of my friends pointed out that it seems the press always blame the woman for a marriage breaking up, whatever happens. Maybe it's because newspapers are mainly run by men? (Price, 2010: 170).

Pictures of Jordan partying were splashed across the tabloids so that not only did she have to deal with negative stories but the paparazzi intrusion as well. Her autobiography implies that it is this which finally broke her spirit:

Back in the UK it was really tough as I was pursued relentlessly by the paps, and battered every single day in the press. I tried not to read the lies, but sometimes I would and I can tell you it's soul-destroying reading about yourself being described as the one who was to blame for the marriage breaking up, when all you ever tried to do was to be a good wife (Price, 2010: 159).

Moreover, according to the autobiographical account the press contrasted the return of Jordan with Andre's seemingly heartbroken demeanour:

I still hadn't given any interviews, yet every day there seemed to be stories about Pete and me in the press. It seemed to me that while I was being slated, Pete was getting the best press he had ever had in his life. He was being portrayed by the press as the heartbroken victim and the perfect dad (Price, 2010: 169).

Under pressure from the press, Jordan escaped to Ibiza, where the press reported wild partying ensued. It seemed as if Katie Price had reverted to her earlier Jordan performance, turning into a person who behaved outrageously and shocked people. As the identity she had displayed before she met Andre, the press now 'validated Jordan' as her 'real' identity.

Jordan's celebrity identity exploits the fact that no one seems to know who the 'real' Jordan or the 'real' Katie Price is. This is possibly a conscious strategy on her part as she constantly changes not only her looks and styles, but also her behaviour, reverting back and forth between Jordan and Katie Price. After the separation however, 'turning into' Jordan may not have been the best choice of strategy. Such double-coded identity signals the artificiality of identity as constructed not given. It illustrates that identity is a matter of choice, style and behaviour rather than intrinsic moral or psychological qualities. It also suggests that 'identity is a game one plays and that one can easily shift from one identity to another' (Kellner, 1992: 152). There was a general feeling that Jordan's post-break-up behaviour was making a mockery of everything she had achieved as Katie Price. *The Sunday Mirror* wrote:

There is something sad and dark about the return of Jordan. [...] It is in the way she hasn't missed a beat since her marriage came to an end. There has been no outpouring of public grief. We haven't seen a flicker of remorse over what the split will do to the kids. It's all been about her – going out, getting hammered, pulling blokes and dumping her three kids with the one steady influence in her life, Peter Andre (McIntosh, 2009: 31).

The golden girl who some claimed as a new kind of feminist icon was now seen as pathetic in her narcissistic quest for hedonism and excess. It was said that Katie Price returned to her old Jordan image because she could no longer keep up the pretence, thus also suggesting that her marriage had been nothing but a sham and, Katie Price nothing but a constructed commodity. In this instance, then, many chose to believe that the 'real' Jordan had been 'hiding' behind the domestic Katie Price. It seems that where there is a mask, there is also always a desire to see behind it. The tabloids certainly refused to accept 'Katie Price', representing her as 'fake' and 'Jordan' was now seen as the 'real' identity. Kellner suggests identity has become 'a freely chosen game, a theatrical presentation of the self, in which one is able to present oneself in a variety of roles, images and activities, relatively unconcerned about shifts, transformations, and dramatic changes' (1992: 158).

The press also constructed a morality tale around the failing marriage. This cautionary narrative, as Kellner (1992) more generally describes, sets out to show that those who go beyond acceptable boundaries in the pursuit of wealth, power and fame are bound to fall. In Jordan's case, this fall was represented as a failure of her personal life. In her career she has commanded great success but in her personal life Jordan was described as seeing others only as extensions of herself. Peter Andre reinforced that view, declaring that there had been three people in their marriage: Peter, Katie and Jordan (Butler, Mansey and Piper, 2009: 4-5). Andre is claimed to have said: 'Maybe she never was Katie. Maybe Jordan was the "real" her with Katie the pretend person, rather than the other way round. It feels like



she's been trying to force herself to live a life she didn't want to live' (Butler, Mansey and Piper, 2009: 4-5). Whether the tabloid reports of Andre's words are true or not, they added fuel to the debate surrounding the 'authentic' and the 'artificial,' the 'real' and the 'fake.'

It has been claimed narcissism is the pathology of our time (Tyler, 2007). A narcissist wants to be the winner and fears being labelled a loser (Lasch, 1991). But success has to be ratified by publicity. The traits of a narcissistic society were clear to see in the post-separation PR war between Jordan and Peter Andre. The 'truth' about the failure of the marriage became a matter of competition, a commodity to be sold to and distributed by the tabloids and celebrity magazines. Within the tabloid discourse, success and failure are engaged with at the more intimate level of personal trauma, guilt, insecurity and transgression. After a period of wild partying, the newspapers reported Jordan's anguish over the impending divorce:

Angst-ridden Katie Price is in despair over her split from husband Peter Andre, fearing it has seriously damaged her image and could cost her millions of pounds. [...] Friends say that away from her party-girl image, Katie is now racked by self-doubt and fears for her career (Butler and Piper, *Sunday Mirror*, 2009: 7).

The newspaper reports on the personal anxieties and failures together with fear over the loss of image and damage to Jordan's career with the former being seen as possibly causing her professional failure. Indeed in her autobiography Jordan is represented as recognising that partying in Ibiza finally destroyed her carefully constructed image: ' [...] looking back, Ibiza was the moment when the press about me was so bad that it really affected people's opinion of me. I feel they turned against me then and I certainly wish that hadn't happened. It was so unfair because the stories were all lies' (Price, 2010: 180-181). According to *The Mirror*:

[Jordan's] outrageous behaviour masked her inner pain as she also confided in organisers how alone and despised she felt [...] The 31-year-old has lost almost a stone and is down to a size six. [...] She thinks she has been portrayed as the bad guy in her split from Pete and the pressure of this enormous backlash has really taken its toll. (Moodie, 2009: 3).

The inner pain is seen to be exemplified by the changes in the body. Distressed women are often described as having lost (too much) weight. At the time it was also reported that Andre had lost weight after the split, but most narratives emphasised his exercise regime and healthy eating patterns whereas Jordan was described as looking gaunt, thin and drawn. According to reports, the most difficult thing for Jordan to deal with was that she was

despised by those who felt sympathy for Andre. The tabloids had started calling Peter Andre 'Saint Peter.' Jordan was losing the PR war that arguably she herself had started.

It was also suggested, at least in the conservative *Daily Mail*, that the disparity between Jordan and Andre's individual careers was to blame for the split. The paper declared:

Viewers of their TV shows have long witnessed a poisonous relationship in which the two protagonists are seemingly bound together more by commercial concerns than any romance. [...] Cynics have noted that before they met [...] in 2004, Katie Price was Jordan, a fading Page Three Girl whose sole claim to fame was a décolletage that defied both biology and physics. Andre was a barely remembered Australian pop star without a hit to his name for almost a decade. Together, however, they found a highly lucrative niche in this celebrity obsessed age and made millions out of glossy magazines and tabloid television channels. [...] Yet while Miss Price continued to rake in cash from her disparate business portfolio, [...] Andre's career failed to take off in the same way. The disparity between their earning potential is undeniable (Price and Moulton, 2009<sup>9</sup>).

For the *Daily Mail* Jordan earning considerably more than Andre, being the more prominent celebrity, and not hesitating to throw this in Andre's face (witnessed in their reality TV shows), is problematic. One such row broadcast in *Katie and Peter: The Next Chapter: Stateside* is described in her 2010 autobiography:

[Pete said:] "You're a miserable cow and living with you is miserable." I just shrugged; I had heard him speak to me like this many times, I was hardened to it. "I'm the one that makes the money, so I'll have it my way," I replied. That may have sounded harsh but I was sick of him sniping at me, and sick of the situation we were in (Price, 2010: 136).

It is no surprise then that newspapers began to imply that the disparity between their wealth was an issue that caused problems in the marriage. Traditional values, where the man is the provider for the family and the main earner, were turned upside down in Jordan and Andre's relationship. This situation, however, is not unusual in celebrity culture and the fact that the *Daily Mail* declares the disparity in earning potential as the reason for the marriage break-up perhaps only serves to reveal the newspaper's own bias.

The *Daily Mail* was not the only newspaper to speculate on their respective levels of fame as reason for their divorce. Jordan and Andre's celebrity career was seen as a competition over

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<sup>9</sup> <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/tvshowbiz/article-1180722>

fame. *The People* reported that 'Katie believes a bitter divorce can still be avoided if she and Pete iron out what she sees as the main bone of contention in the troubled marriage – their respective levels of fame' (Hind, 2009: 4-5). Jordan allegedly declared in *The Mirror*: 'Pete could never accept the fact that I was the star. He was always going to be in my shadow and he just couldn't cope with it. He had a bit of success once but he should have respected the fact that modelling as Jordan made the money' (Butler, 2009: 6-7). However, after the split, the tables seemed to turn in Andre's favour. After retreating from the media Andre made a successful comeback in the form of his own reality TV show. He also received other TV work and released an album. With public sympathy on his side he seemed to catch up with Jordan in the fame stakes.

Lasch explains how 'in the past success retained moral and social overtones but now success is an end in itself. It is seen as the victory over your competitors, which alone retains the capacity to instil a sense of self-approval' (1991: 58). The main discourse in relation to Jordan and Andre's divorce became one about success and failure. Jordan, more successful than Andre during their marriage, was seen as failing. Andre, a failure (at least in his music career), had now become successful. In the bid for readers, the newspapers exploited this process of success and failure and the competition for fame. Personal failure was seen to lead to career failure in Jordan's case whereas Andre was represented as having gained personal integrity followed by career success. According to the tabloids, Jordan seemed to realise this and apparently hastily declared: 'I don't have to apologise for who I am. This [returning to glamour modelling] is what I've wanted to do for a long time. Pete has held me back and now I'm going to show him' (Butler, 2009: 6-7). It is worth noting here that Jordan's 2010 autobiography suggests that she did not give any interviews to the press that she had grown to despise so it is quite possible that this quote is an invention on the part of the newspaper. Since success has lost any meaning beyond itself, celebrities have nothing against which to measure their achievements other than the achievements of other celebrities. Therefore it was perhaps inevitable that Jordan and Andre's separation and subsequent divorce would be represented as pitting the two against each other. But with the emphasis on personal attributes rather than any real achievements, *how Jordan and Andre behaved* after the split became a matter of competition. As Lasch puts it, 'today men seek the kind of approval that applauds not their actions but their personal attributes. They wish to be not so much esteemed as admired. They crave not fame but the glamour and excitement of celebrity' (1991: 59). At the same time vulnerability is important to a celebrity image, a quality that the Jordan persona generally lacks, but Andre, often represented as vulnerable and emotional, came across as more human and likeable than Jordan. The separation and divorce became an on-going game of revelations and confessional interviews, orchestrated by the two celebrities or at least their very capable PR

teams. For Jordan, the divorce was a personal failure, but it remains to be seen whether that will result in long term damage to her image and career.

### **3.6. Conclusion: Failure and Redemption**

As this chapter demonstrates the newspaper reporting of celebrities is on success but also on failure, when contempt for the excesses of celebrities is manifest especially in relation to those who have succeeded in achieving 'empty' fame, have no proper 'occupation' and no discernible talent. These celebrities are the prime target of tabloid and fan attack. In autumn 2009 the previously successful Jordan experienced a serious setback to her image and career and possibly for the first time since her glamour model days, experienced the audience's contempt for her, as Andre's fans organised into 'Team Pete' and let their hatred for Jordan be heard via Internet blogs and social networking sites. The press played Jordan and Andre against each other, but Andre was winning the battle. With Jordan's reputation at a low ebb after a summer of what was represented as hedonistic partying and public mudslinging against Andre, Jordan did not seem to mourn her divorce but had immediately started dating a new man, the controversial Alex Reid, who was often described as a 'cross-dressing cage fighter.' However, realising that she needed to repair her damaged image, Jordan (or her PR team) made a decision to return to the Australian jungle and join the new series of *I'm a Celebrity...Get me Out of Here!*.

Her autobiography explains that Jordan's reason for entering the series was to achieve 'closure on my marriage' (Price, 2010: 232):

When it was revealed that I was going back into the jungle there were some people who said that I was only doing it in order to win back the popularity that I worried I'd lost since the marriage break-up [...] but that really wasn't the reason why I signed up for it. However, I did want people to know that I was a completely different woman from the heartless bitch the press had portrayed me as over the past six months (Price, 2010: 235).

But the press and the public saw it as an opportunity to punish 'the most hated woman in Britain'. The mission of redemption and to show Jordan as 'authentic' and 'genuine' was interpreted as simply manipulative and false. *The Sunday Mirror* wrote: 'Watching "the Pricey" is like gawping at a car crash. You don't feel good about it, but you just can't stop yourself' (O'Sullivan 2009: 25). The public repeatedly voted Jordan to undertake 'bushtucker trials' – tasks to earn food for the camp of celebrities. These often involved large numbers of insects, rats and reptiles. As Carroll puts it, 'primetime reality TV is the perfect platform for a public beating' (2009a: 21). The viewers seemed to be punishing

Jordan by nominating her to do every single 'bushtucker trial,' eventually causing her to leave the programme after only a week. The vengefulness of the viewing public caused a debate in the press about the cruelty of contemporary reality TV and about audience bullying of disliked stars. *The Sunday Independent* claimed:

Ant and Dec's theatre of cruelty offers the chance to decide who has to eat a kangaroo's anus and then delight as they fall apart under the strain. [...] It was evident from the start that Jordan wasn't to be given a chance. Her only role in this circus was to be kicked around for our entertainment. [...] More credit to Katie Price then, for refusing to go along with it any longer. What has Jordan done, after all, to deserve this kind of bullying? Because that's what it was (O'Hanlon<sup>10</sup> 2009).

Jordan was an easy target for a hate campaign. When she entered *I'm a Celebrity...Get me out of Here!* for the first time, Jordan was a despised glamour model but she became admired by many through her relationship, marriage and family life with Peter Andre. After the break-up her reputation was ruined by what seemed to be her reverting back to her glamour model ways. Her redemption bid on *I'm a Celebrity...Get me out of Here!* failed to convince the public of her 'authentic' sincerity. Instead it was seen as a cynical attempt to repair the wholesome 'Katie Price' image.

The appeal of celebrities relies on mystery and revelation. If there is nothing more to reveal, celebrities may find that people lose interest and their fame fades. Jordan exemplifies the cycle of success and failure, and how this is often tied to personal life. The issue of manufacture and the search for the 'authentic' dominate celebrity culture. As this chapter has shown, celebrities often need to engage in constant revelations to stay in the limelight. However, this can work against them as no one can fully control their image. This chapter has revealed how autobiographies are used as a counter-narrative to media revelations. The Jordan and Andre divorce became a game and a popularity contest, and as a result, Jordan became so overexposed that by the time she entered the jungle the public showed signs of tiring of her constant revelations. This exemplifies the fact that too much exposure can prove a hindrance to the celebrity's success. The next chapter will show that more reclusive celebrities can keep the audience's interest by staying out of the limelight. If a celebrity is not constantly in the media, revelations come to have more value.

As we have seen, Jordan dealt in public with a private matter and although this had served her well previously, being in many ways the core component of her celebrity persona, this

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<sup>10</sup> <http://www.independent.ie/.../mean-girls-replayed-as-reality-tv-in-the-jungle-1951888.html>

time it backfired. It seems to be the famous for being famous celebrities like Jordan that have become an occasional target for public contempt. According to *You Only Live Once*, Jordan acknowledges her failure and blames it on the media: 'I felt as if I was being bullied: that I had been bullied for the last year. It was like a mental torture where every single thing was ripped apart, where nothing but lies was written about me, where I was constantly made out to be a bad person. I didn't know how much more I could take' (Price, 2010: 290). At the end of year 2010, the seemingly untouchable Jordan had finally tired of the relentless scrutiny. She no longer seemed to enjoy the limelight. She implies in *You Only Live Once* that she has made a decision to partly retreat from the media: 'I had come to the decision that I was going to cut back on the interviews I did in the future. I was sick of the gossipy slanging matches I had got involved with in the past. [...] I'd had such negative press, seen so many lies written about me, that now I'd had enough of it' (Price, 2010: 265). Jordan's ordeal also revealed that even the most successful celebrities will, at some point, be exposed to the downsides of fame – occasional failures are inevitable in a fast-moving celebrity culture.

## **4. Masculine Confessional in Celebrity Auto/biographies: Robbie Williams and Russell Brand**

### **4.1. Introduction**

Celebrity has become the achievement that removes people from ordinary life, making them special or extraordinary. Pop star Robbie Williams and actor and comedian Russell Brand are what Rojek (2001) calls an ‘achieved celebrity.’ ‘This kind of celebrity derives from the perceived accomplishments of the individual. Achieved celebrities possess rare talents or skills. This does not rule out the fact that achieved celebrities often need to work hard to get any recognition for their talents’ (Rojek, 2001: 18). The recognition of talent is often represented in confessional discourses and tabloid reporting as putting extra pressure on stars. But at the same time, it is assumed that fame has the capacity to change lives for the better even when often the opposite appears to happen. As Russell Brand sees it: ‘My Fat Sam<sup>11</sup> experience had given birth to this ridiculous dream of salvation through fame and success. And ever since then, that vision has been the one thing that has been utterly unwavering for me’ (2008: 104). Fame can also be destructive – it is ultimately a contradictory process that oscillates between success and failure with failure often associated with the destructions caused by addictions. This chapter will examine the celebrity of Robbie Williams and Russell Brand through an analysis of their confessional discourses. I will look at two authorised biographies written about Robbie Williams: *Robbie Williams – Somebody Someday* (2002) written by Mark McCrum and *Feel: Robbie Williams* (2004) written by Chris Heath, and Russell Brand’s two autobiographies: *My Booky Wook* (2008) and *My Booky Wook 2 – This Time It’s Personal* (2010), both written by him rather than a ghost writer. Therefore, the chapter will also address the differences between biography and autobiography, and compare autobiographies written by the celebrity and autobiographies written by a ghost writer.

The emphasis of this chapter is on the examination of masculinity within the feminine genre of auto/biography. As mentioned in the previous chapter, autobiography has the potential to reverse gender roles with male stars’ confessionals often discursively constructed as feminine. In this way gender roles are blurred within both autobiographical and biographical writing. The compulsion to confess has traditionally been a feminine preoccupation but the intensification of celebrity culture would appear to have extended this compulsion to male

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<sup>11</sup> Russell Brand played the part of Fat Sam in a school play *Bugsy Malone*.

stars. Picking up elements from the previous chapter, I will also examine how ideas about roles and masks, performative gender and masquerade apply to male stars. But where Williams and Brand differ from Jordan and other female celebrities discussed in this thesis, is that they are seen to possess talent and charisma, and therefore better fit the category of 'stardom' than 'celebrity.'<sup>12</sup>

The history of autobiography is bound up with the history of (masculine) individualism (Danahey, 1993). Historically, men appeared more confident due to their dominant position in society and the public sphere. Women, confined to the private sphere of home, lacked a position within the public sphere, which would allow them to publish autobiographies and were not considered as 'individuals' anyway. As will become clear in the following chapter, women's literary efforts were often undervalued and seen as trivial. But more recently there has been a shift. Evans (1999) and Skeggs (1993) describe how on the one hand, women's autobiographical writing has become more radical, innovative and prolific, and on the other, men's autobiographies began to represent vulnerability, identity crises and self-doubt. In the case of Jordan, and some other female celebrities' autobiographies appear to portray a new type of confidence and a sense of entitlement<sup>13</sup> whereas men appear to have lost their confidence in the wake of feminism.<sup>14</sup> Some scholars such as Genz and Brabon (2009) and Cohen (1990) have called this the 'crisis of masculinity,' where male subjects are as conflicted as women. This chapter shows how male stars, Williams and Brand in particular, have come to be represented as neurotic and insecure – features traditionally described as feminine (Genz and Brabon, 2009, Cohen 1990). In the auto/biographies that I have examined, men make confessions about themselves, exposing their inner feelings in a similar manner to women. Men, who were once seen as rational and objective, now justify their existence through confessional means. Furthermore, as seen in the case of Williams and Brand, male stars' weaknesses and failures sometimes seem to turn into addictions and macho posturing, which might be thought of as a reassertion their masculinity. Cohen argues:

It is not easy for either men or women to accept failure. But, for the past century, it has been easier for women to show failure. That has been no advantage to women. [...] For men the problem is the opposite. We are taught to feel we ought to succeed and achieve.

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<sup>12</sup> Williams and Brand will be referred to as stars in this chapter in order to distinguish them from 'famous for being famous' celebrities.

<sup>13</sup> See for example Sharon Osbourne: *Extreme: My Autobiography* (2005) and *Survivor: My Story – The Next Chapter* (2007).

<sup>14</sup> See for example *Peter Andre: All About Us – My Story* (2007).



Yet we find ourselves in situations where we are powerless (1990: 84-85).

He goes on to imply that this powerlessness increasingly leads to drinking, drugs and depression dominating the lives of both Williams and Brand.

As autobiography theorist Anderson (2001) describes it, Jean Jacques Rousseau's autobiography *Confessions*<sup>15</sup> (1953) was the first masculine confessional relying on obsessional self-revelation of feelings as well as events.

Rousseau believed that his task as autobiographer was to confess all and to make himself as transparent to his readers as he was to himself. His task as an autobiographer was less an attempt to remember the past, to memorialise the life he led, than to make others recognise the inner truths about himself that he already knows through the unique access to his own feelings (Anderson, 2001:45).

Although Rousseau wrote his autobiography in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, it appears similar to modern celebrity confessionals and in particular, the masculine celebrity confessional. It could be argued that this is because of Rousseau's dominant role in the Enlightenment's increased interest in the self and identity, ideas that have continued in to the 21<sup>st</sup> century. However, like most celebrity autobiographies, Rousseau's *Confessions* should not be seen as a reliable record of a life. As Rousseau puts it, 'if by chance I have used some immaterial embellishment, it has only been to fill a void due to a defect of memory. I may have taken for a fact what was no more than probability, but I have never put down as true what I knew to be false'(1953: 17). As seen later in the chapter, Russell Brand in particular has deliberately represented conversations or events not as verbatim records but embellished to gain an entertaining effect through storytelling. In many contemporary auto/biographies 'facts become stories.' Danahey argues that 'Rousseau defines himself in terms of his difference from others' according to the 'Romantic ideology of the uniqueness of individual, especially the individual genius. [...] The premise of autobiographical texts written by Rousseau and others was that the authors were unique and that their life histories fit into no recognisable pattern' (1993: 41-44). This is a common feature of celebrity culture as the branding of celebrity relies on the uniqueness of the individual. This also extends to auto/biographies as these are geared towards enhancing the established and distinctive image.

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<sup>15</sup> First published in 1781.

As Anderson (2001) sees it, confessional discourses, and self-representation in general, always rely on available discourses, meanings, conventions and stereotypes. Celebrity auto/biography is therefore a specific cultural discourse that promotes individualism through confession. Initially a masculine discourse, contemporary celebrity autobiographies have arguably become feminised texts used by both men and women to reveal their innermost feelings, the events of their lives, and in the process, promoting themselves in order to represent themselves as worthy of being remembered, admired and memorialised in writing. This suggests that autobiographies are a part of a narcissistic celebrity culture. In this chapter, I will examine how these ideas, based on Rousseau's autobiography and the Enlightenment notions of individual and genius in general, are represented within male stars' auto/biographical discourses and particularly adopted in Russell Brand's and Robbie Williams' auto/biographies. I will also examine these texts as feminine discourses through notions of masquerade and performance, but also texts in which there is a reassertion of masculinity through humour, sexuality and representations of transgressive behaviour. I will also analyse the auto/biographies as narratives of addiction and mental illness, aimed at creating 'authenticity' and exposing the supposedly 'real' self of these stars. As seen in the previous chapter, auto/biographies also offer a counter-narrative alternative to press stories and as such, they work as PR vehicles for the stars.

## **4.2. Masculine Masquerade and Gender Performance**

Autobiographical or confessional writing can never guarantee the 'authenticity' so valued by the dominant discourse within celebrity culture. However, it is implied that the confessional reveals the 'real' person. This is generally done by exposing the aspects of the performative that construct the celebrity's public image. As Rojek puts it, 'celebrity status always implies a split between the "I" (veridical or true self) and the "Me" (the self as seen by others). The public presentation of self is always a staged activity, in which the human actor presents a "front" or "face" to others while keeping a significant portion of self in reserve' (2001: 11). For celebrities, this can be confusing because the true self and the public face are so closely interconnected (Rojek, 2001). Auto/biography is supposedly a way of negotiating between the veridical and the public self. However, this is complicated by the fact that as a commercial product an auto/biography is a part of the public image of the star. As seen in Chapter 3: 'Jordan and Katie: The Work of Autobiography', commercial celebrity autobiographies are selective and usually aimed at 'selling' the celebrity. Auto/biographies become celebrity merchandise aimed at promoting the celebrity in question, the unknown 'truths' revealed in the process are selected tactically at the expense of the more mundane aspects of the celebrity's life. 'To speak of public and private selves is to speak of what is

considered socially and culturally appropriate performances – emotions, behaviours, actions – by women and men in public’ (Genz and Brabon, 2009: 114). Celebrity culture has a tendency to blur the boundaries of the so-called gender appropriate behaviours. As seen in the previous chapter, Jordan regularly appeared to adopt behaviours associated with masculinity such as drinking and ‘sleeping around.’ In this chapter I will examine how Brand and Williams also adopt some behaviours associated with femininity such as paying attention to their appearance and looking for a life partner, and thus construct a partly feminised persona.

As discussed in Chapter 2: ‘Surveying the Critical Field,’ according to poststructuralist thought, individuals only exist within discourse and performativity is a discursive construction of self- signification (Whitehead, 2002). The more general entry of women into the public sphere in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is also evident within celebrity culture, and according to Whitehead (2002), Genz and Brabon (2009), Cohen (1990) and others, has resulted in the ‘crisis of masculinity.’ The traditional stereotype of a hero as young, aggressive, sexually powerful, masculine and equipped with an ability to solve problems has become less dominant. Male stars can no longer straightforwardly rely on this hero stereotype to build their image on, and many contemporary male stars portray a sexually ambivalent image that combines the feminine emotional impulse to confess, excessive macho posturing alongside an increasingly androgynous bodily image. Male stars almost parody themselves through camp posturing. As Cohen puts it, in the past ‘being unforgiving and hard was the proper posture for a proper man, [...] whereas now men have become self-conscious narcissists and the new man can be masculine and feminine, strong and weak, active and passive’ (1990: 1, 37). Traditionally, masculine auto/biographies have represented men as disembodied intellects – a concept borne out of the Enlightenment notion of the creative genius. As described in his autobiographies, Russell Brand has partly drawn on this image of the tortured, talented genius to build his whole image. He also shows an awareness of its constructed and performative nature.

The ideal of the impoverished artist really pervaded that school.<sup>16</sup> They liked people from modest backgrounds, who were good-looking and talented. And drinking neat liquor from the bottle, with my long hair and my shirt undone and my beads, not so much the lizard king,<sup>17</sup> more a gecko duchess, I fitted nicely with the idea of what a creative person should be (Brand, 2008: 164-165).

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<sup>16</sup> The Drama Centre London

<sup>17</sup> During his time at the drama school Brand based his image on the singer of the 60s band The Doors, Jim Morrison, who adopted the nickname The Lizard King.

In the DNA of my pompous personal mythos is the fetishisation of the artist, the belief that art hurts to make, that it's somehow sublime and torturous. So when performing, particularly live, I go into a shamanic state, meditating, chanting and asking for supernatural guidance (Brand, 2010: 179).

On the other hand, modern celebrity auto/biographies represent men as fully embodied and gendered beings, caught up in the play of gender roles where masculine and feminine become increasingly intertwined and sometimes in tension. Men are no longer the heroic figures of the past but appear vulnerable and have also become sexualised objects, to some extent adopting a traditionally female subject position. Thus Robbie Williams' in his biography *Feel: Robbie Williams* articulates a desire to find love, get married and 'live happily ever after'.

I don't know. [...] I always thought there was a fairy-tale ending to all this, and naturally it was going to be love. You know, like in the songs and in the movies. [...] The last ten years have been spent most nights looking for Mrs Williams. [...] I'd like to settle down. I've got three dogs – I'd like three kids. I wouldn't mind a pot belly, actually, and a tan (Heath, 2005: 31).

But Williams seems to disguise and distance himself from his desire for love and happiness behind humour – a tendency that reappears several times in his biographies. His biographer comments: 'Much of the serious business in Robbie Williams' life is done in the shadow of not altogether innocent humour' (Heath, 2005: 29).

The idea of masculine masquerade is deeply opposed to traditional beliefs about the nature of masculinity. As Brod puts it: 'The masculine self has been held to be inherently opposed to the kind of deceit and dissembling characteristic of the masquerade' (1995:13). Rousseau, for example, saw any kind of performance or adoption of roles as corrupting of the masculine virtues.

Rousseau [...] warns of the corrupting influences of theatrical artifice on the pure soul of the noble savage. [...] 'Real' men embody the primitive, unadorned, self-evident, natural truths of the world, not the effete pretences of urban dandies twirling about at a masquerade ball. The masquerade was the province of the female [...] [and] only effeminate men would adopt masquerade (Brod, 1995: 13).

But, stars such as Williams and Brand are precisely set up as these urban dandies described by Rousseau. They adopt roles and masks to make themselves seem larger than life and these masks have become central to the constructed image. Williams' stage persona portrays him as cocky and arrogant whereas, in significant tension with this stage persona, his biographies represent him as an extremely narcissistic, self-conscious and insecure man. In dialogue with the stage image, Williams defends the created stage persona as stemming from his insecurities and lack of self-belief. 'It's bonkers to think that this person, feeling how I feel, is going to get up and generate 10,000 people to have a good time. I don't know how I'm going to do it' (McCrum, 2002: 20). 'At that time I actually had contempt for my audience for coming to see somebody so shit. I'd be on stage and think "What have you come to see this wanker for?" It was a horrible place to be' (McCrum, 2002: 29). *Feel: Robbie Williams* also exposes his awareness of people's perception of his image: 'People have this image of me that my persona is: I'm fucking arrogant and cocksure and overconfident and think I'm it' (Heath, 2005: 42-43).

Brand's comic stage persona offers a very androgynous, confident and aggressive image whereas his autobiographies present a lot more down-to-earth, very intelligent person but one who has an 'obsession' with fame as well as an 'addictive' personality. Because Brand describes this tension in comic terms, it does not seem as contradictory as Williams' two personas. The autobiography appears to imply that both sides of the persona are a part of his narrative journey to fame but beating his aggressive tendencies and addictions have made him a stronger person by the denouement of his second autobiography. Brand plays up the performative aspects of gender: 'So when I arrived [at Italia Conti stage school], still knowing how to communicate with girls because I was all feminised and everything, but being hysterically heterosexual, it was perfect' (Brand, 2005: 137). This suggests that his camp image was constructed in his teens as a way to hide his social awkwardness; people often mistook him for a girl due to his long hair, pretty face, chubbiness, and the late onset of puberty: 'One of the consequences of this was to make me very aware of my appearance. [...] As a way of coping with this, I developed a trait that I have maintained to this day when I'm around very masculine men, which is that I go all camp' (Brand, 2005: 80). Arguably the process of masquerade allows male stars and their publicity machine to construct commercially viable masculine images that can be changed. Brand did not always sport big hair, black clothes, skinny jeans and eyeliner. This is an image specifically constructed as he became more famous to distinguish him from other comedians:

[I constructed] this spindly liquorice man, this sex-crazed linguistic bolt of tricks and tics and kohl-eyed winks. Clad in black like a hangman with dagger boots and hurricane hair came my creation. An organic construction sufficiently macabre to contend with the chemical warfare of modern fame, and even though this monster

bore my name he did not resemble the delicate schoolboy or battered addict that preceded him (Brand, 2010: 45).

Brand's autobiographies imply that the image he portrays is constructed for being in the public eye. 'I'd organised my entire personality around fame, not to mention my physical appearance. [...] Without fame my whole persona doesn't make sense. Without fame my haircut looks like mental illness,' Brand (2010: 129-130) admits. This seems like another mask, not a revelation of the 'authentic' self as male stars must now be as concerned about the commodity value of their appearance as female stars. Whannel describes how 'in reaction to the muscle bound hunk, recent years have seen the re-emergence of the male waif – thin, awkward, and odd. [...] This figure, often associated with drugs, [...] marks a re-emergence of a more self-destructive hedonism' (2002: 74). Brand has cultivated an image that has elements similar to that of male rock stars of the 1960s-70s, exemplified by stars such as Jim Morrison and Jimi Hendrix. 'I saw the film *The Doors* and decided "I'm gonna be like that person." The flimsy identity that I had constructed was instantaneously swept aside: not by Jim Morrison himself, but Val Kilmer's interpretation of Jim Morrison, as viewed through the cinematic prism of Oliver Stone' (Brand, 2008: 130).

Williams, after being forced to portray a clean-cut image during his boy band years, has gone through various masculine incarnations and adorned his body with several tattoos. Having tattoos is seen as something rather impulsive. According to Heath, one night he needed a distraction and went out to get a tattoo: 'He needed a different kind of pain this evening, to take his mind off his mind' (2005: 3). Williams readily admits that Robbie Williams, the pop star and entertainer, is nothing but a construction:

I developed a front a long time ago that hid my insecurities and that front is one hundred times bigger than myself. Whatever picture I paint of who they think I am, which is somebody I put up a shield to protect myself from – cocky, cheeky, confident, arrogant – is not who I am. Rob is different from Robbie. Robbie is the one who gets on stage every night. If I'm offstage I wouldn't ask anybody if I could entertain them. I'd be scared if they said no (McCrum, 2002: 71-72).

Similar to masks adopted by female celebrities, male stars construct them through the use of clothing, hairstyles and even make-up. In the auto/biographies studied in this chapter, these masks are generally associated with the acquisition of fame and the need to take on an image that protects another self. Whereas in Jordan's autobiographies, for example, she seems to be constantly wearing a mask, and seems content doing so, male auto/biographies reveal a rift between the 'authentic' and the 'manufactured'. If fame

requires construction, masculinity is still associated with facts, rationality and the 'truth'. Masquerade, roles and masks thus create discursive confusion and the need to expose what lies beneath them through confessional discourse. In their auto/biographies Williams and Brand each come across as self-deprecating, mobilising irony and joking to mask the pain and confusion at the heart of which is the different but similarly troubled image characterising the talented artist. The constant use of irony and self-deprecating humour comes across as somewhat 'predatory' by representing transgressive behaviours and constructed personas as 'harmless fun'. The transgressive behaviours are excused through the construction of these stars as young boys unable to help themselves. They seem to behave in a certain manner simply because fame allows them to. The masks in auto/biographies mark the gendered sexualities of celebrities as constructed through fakery and spectacle, a hallmark of an image-obsessed celebrity culture, in which aggression, humour and transgressive behaviour are particularly associated with the image of the male star.

Masks and performance, according to Brod (1995), could also be described as roles. As discussed in Chapter 2: 'Surveying the Critical Field' above, role theory brings the theatricality of the performative to the forefront. As such, it implies that role enacts a persona different and separate from that of the actor. For celebrities, roles are often played on stage or during a public performance. As the mask and performance theory showed, male stars often portray different personas. Genz and Brabon argue that 'male identity has become unstable, readily contestable, increasingly transferable, open to re-appropriation and constantly in motion' (2009: 135). Stars such as Brand and Williams appear to use the instability of the male identity in playing different roles. Heath (2004) suggests that Robbie Williams' success is largely due to his ability to perform. Williams too is reportedly aware that his image as an entertainer depends on playing a fantasy role for his fans:

Compared with Presley, Sinatra, Dean Martin, Freddie Mercury, people are really conscious of themselves these days, and they are scared to do anything that would make them look silly. I think that's why there are not many entertainers, big showmen. What they gave you was fantasy. What they gave you was romanticism. What they gave you was a place to escape. They didn't keep it real, you know. They kept it unreal. And I love that. I plan to keep it unreal for as long as I can (Heath, 2004: 132).

The biography emphasises Williams' wish to construct roles based on fantasy, which is justified by his desire to escape his 'real' self.



Although celebrity culture promotes the adoption of roles perhaps, as seen in Chapter 3 above, a mask is a better word to use for the different incarnations of Williams and Brand. The masculine mask is generally worn 'in order to achieve a normative performance-oriented phallic heterosexual male sexuality' (Brod, 1995: 17). Indeed, both Williams and Brand's masculine image is associated with sex; sleeping with fans and other celebrities, even if their autobiographies reveal fewer scandals and 'shocking' detail than Jordan's autobiographies. The discursive difference can be seen by comparing Brand's *My Booky Wook 2: This Time it's Personal* (2010) with *Being Jordan - My Autobiography* (Price, 2005) discussed in the previous chapter: 'I was resolutely single and suddenly women were available and I did not sip like a connoisseur, I barged through the vineyard kicking over the barrels and guzzling grapes as they grew. [...] Frenzied and famished I chewed through glass and clenched the soil' (Brand, 2010: 60) Whilst Jordan's sexual 'revelations' were blunt and straightforward, the use of metaphors in Brand's autobiography both accentuates an animal like sexual appetite and instantly devalues the scandalous admission that Brand makes – he had sex with countless women with no regard to who they were. Both Williams and Brand have been the subject of kiss and tells on various occasions with such tabloid stories adding to the image as heartthrob, sex symbol or Lothario. Brand's autobiography *The Booky Wook 2 - This Time It's Personal* suggests complicity with such tales:

The kiss and tells ripened through the summer, and every morning paper brought a new harvest. Barely did I have a kiss that didn't entail a tell. To me though it didn't seem pejorative, it merely



helped the narrative which they'd concocted, in which I was complicit, that I was a wild man Lothario. These terms were actually used – wild man, oddball, sex insect, spindle limbed lust merchant, sex inspector. [...] It suited me though; it was a type of notoriety that I enjoyed. The more right-wing papers used me as an icon of moral decline (2010: 63).

In his autobiographies Brand is seen to acquire some 'heroic' features through his sexual escapades and although he seemed to be condemned by some tabloids, their stories didn't negatively affect his overall image. 'This is the kind of conduct that the *News of the World* and *Daily Star* relish. Soon the Sunday rags oozed with tales of my misdeeds, ghosts of the past rose from their graves, slung on a negligée and sputtered up half-truths for lazy bucks' (Brand, 2010: 60). As seen in Chapter 3: 'Jordan and Katie: The Work of Autobiography' above, negative stories can cause a celebrity's downfall but most of the scandals that Brand has been associated with are represented as integral to the construction and maintenance of his image. The Brand persona, constructed as cool and edgy through tabloid and autobiographical descriptions of his affairs and behaviour, was often also associated with drug use. Compared to Jordan's autobiographies, in which sexual encounters are recounted in terms of their emotional resonances, in both Williams' and Brand's auto/biographies sex is detached from feelings: 'The sex feels like surgery. As though his semen is being removed by an automated procedure. It is horrible' (Heath, 2005: 388). Both stars admit that after beating addictions to drugs and alcohol, they overcompensated for the void in their lives by becoming addicted to sex, which is very rarely described in emotional terms. This is contradictory, as feelings relating to childhood, fame, the paparazzi, the addictions, and depression are recounted in an emotional feminine discourse through confession. This maintains my impression that in general auto/biographies confuse any rigid boundaries of masculine and feminine.

If celebrity culture relies heavily on the existence of the 'real' behind the façade so too auto/biographical discourse supports the existence of the 'real' self. The auto/biographies studied in this chapter indicate that the stars are purposely 'playing a role' when performing. However, they also stress that there is a 'real' person behind the mask: 'My art is to project myself a hundred times bigger than I am, and have people to believe me,' Williams appears to confess to his biographer (Heath, 2005: 151). According to Brod:

In so far as the conceptualisation of gender as masquerade invokes an image of a true, or real person behind the performance, it may therefore best be understood, perhaps, as occupying a position between gender role theory and performance theory, albeit much closer to performance theory in that continuum (1995: 17).

Discourses rely on available meanings and knowledge, and in the current cultural context it is more useful to talk about masculinities and femininities instead of masculinity and femininity. As demonstrated by Williams and Brand, both stars adopt different versions of masculinity at different times, occasionally reverting to what might be regarded as feminine discourses, whereas for Jordan the process often works in reverse. Judging by her autobiographical discourse, she mostly operates within a feminine private sphere but often displays masculine traits

In addition to sexuality and gender the auto/biographies play on the childlike qualities of the star persona. These confessionals expose a form of infantilism that is sometimes used by both image-makers and tabloid journalists to construct narratives around specific (male) stars. Brand displays his awareness of the selfish qualities in his persona: 'Get ready for those bits of the book where I demonstrate such a lack of compassion that you may be tempted to hurl your copy at my selfish face' (Brand, 2010: 145). He then goes on to describe how having taken a girlfriend to Hawaii where he was filming, Brand sent her home because he realised that there was a chance of bedding his co-star. Williams' biography reveals that he believes fame has prevented him from fully growing up. "People remain the same age as when they become famous." "So you're forever 16?" "Yeah, unless you've had to face adversity. I think I'm about 18 right now" (Heath, 2005: 152). Williams is represented as having been deeply affected by early achievement of fame: 'I'm from a council estate. I'm from a working class background, and in a space of a few short years I found myself travelling on private jets, staying in really nice hotels, meeting royalty and the government, and it's really weird' (Heath, 2005: 153). It is alleged that fame is the reason for their childish behaviour and occasional temper tantrums, which prevent them from forming a fully adult personality. Both Brand and Williams are seen to refuse the traditional constraints and demands of marriage and nuclear family, not settling down, sleeping with countless women, and living their lives in a haze of alcohol and drugs. Both stars also come across as infantile, refusing to grow up and take on traditional adult male responsibilities. *Feel: Robbie Williams* describes his inability to grow up:

I still get excited on some Saturdays knowing that I don't have to go to school the next day. It's the truth. And sometimes, I just stay up really late on purpose. That's how grown up I am. And if there's cake in the fridge, I can eat it all – I can. It's my cake (Heath, 2005: 191).

Both Brand and Williams are set up as dependent on having people around them and fearful of being alone, further confirming a childlike status. 'One way or another I felt kind of isolated as a kid and consequently as an adult, or tall child or whatever it is I am, I've been team building. [...] Animals, children and the working class comprise the company in which I'll feel most at ease' (Brand, 2010: 44). Both Brand and Williams construct masks so convincing that these performances are often seen as representing the 'real' person rather than constructed images. However, integral to these image constructions, the other side of success has been addictions and personal failure.

### **4.3. The Trouble with Fame: Confessing Addiction and Depression**

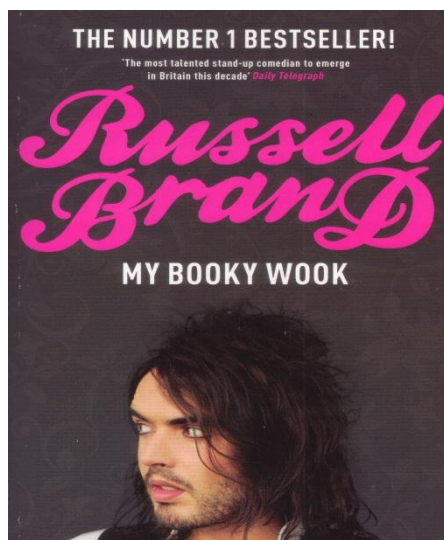
Williams' and Brand's successes working across the fields of pop culture, film and stand-up comedy derives not only from their creative achievements, but also from the persona and lifestyle. Unlike many female stars/celebrities, male stars such as Williams and Brand are often described as charismatic in their auto/biographies. This is a gendered term often associated with the concept of the creative genius. 'Weber sees charisma as a gift from the grace of God. This is its vital attachment to the domain of the supernatural' (Marshall, 1997: 20). But as Rojek highlights:

Achieved celebrities live on a different plane to the rest of us. Their sense of psychological integrity is undermined by public representations of their fame. For the public face is always an assisted, artificial construction, a design intended to have a cultural effect in stimulating desire and worship in the audience (2004: 105).

In their auto/biographies, but also often in the press, both Williams and Brand are described as having a lifelong sense of personal restlessness. The paradox of an intense dissatisfaction in the midst of outstanding artistic and commercial success defines Williams, whereas Brand's restlessness appears to stem from his desire for fame and success. Dissatisfaction is represented as central to understanding Williams' relationship to celebrity. In spite of fame, success, and material gains, he still seems to doubt himself, and is disillusioned with his position as Britain's most successful pop star: 'All this has ever made me [...] is miserable and rich. What it's done, it's fucked up my family life, and it's made it difficult for me to make friends. What fame has done: it's made me fucking miserable and loaded' (Heath, 2005: 481-482). In this narrative, drugs and alcohol are used to disguise his feelings: 'I didn't start being an addict full on. It sort of gathered speed the more miserable I got. It was always there' (Heath, 2005: 86). In comparison, Brand's autobiographies imply that he nearly squandered his chance to be successful and famous

by using drugs. The narrative centres on a lifelong ambition to achieve fame, which didn't happen until he gave up drugs and alcohol. 'I was born to be famous, but it took decades for me to convey this entitlement to an indifferent world and suspicious job centres – both presumed me a nitwit, possibly with good reason as I was brilliantly disguised as a scruff-bag' (Brand, 2010: 3). The realisation of failure is central to the discourse of fame in *My Booky Wook*: 'I've achieved nothing. I've made things worse. I couldn't go on living like this. I had to become successful. [...] I want people to remember me before I'm dead, and then more afterwards' (Brand, 2008: 343). Brand started using drugs as a teenager, and his first autobiography relates how, over the years, he moved from softer drugs to heroin, becoming addicted to the drug to such an extent that he lost jobs, friends and girlfriends. The

autobiography offers detailed descriptions of his drug use and his feelings towards drugs.



I loved the [drug] paraphernalia – the blowbacks and bottles and bongs – and I got so stoned that I went to bed and was there for three days. I didn't eat or anything – just lay there bewildered. [...] I just stared and wondered and became a drug addict. From then on, I smoked draw every day without fail or exception until the narcotic baton was passed on to heroin (Brand, 2008: 126).

The drug narrative builds up Brand's outlandish 'wild man' persona but also implies that all professionalism went out of the window when he discovered drugs. This is in contrast to the manner in which he is seen to pick up the pieces and finally achieve fame through becoming more professional and taking pride in his work recounted in his second autobiography. The narrative account of *My Booky Wook* posits Brand assuming that fame would solve his existing problems, realising that this would not be the case, precipitating his heroin use. Acknowledging that disintegration is a part his persona, he is repeatedly seen losing jobs by doing crazy things on drugs such as dressing up as Osama bin Laden the day after 9/11. 'Once I finally got a bit of success, it became clear that my internal deficit of sadness and longing would not really be sated by the things I'd always thought would save me. The realisation made me turn to hard drugs – specifically heroin – in an even more concerted way than I ever had before' (Brand, 2008: 241). In the autobiographical narrative Brand wants to escape reality because fame did not deliver what it had promised. Heroin, on the other hand, seemed to do exactly what it promised: 'What it mainly does is take you right out of reality, and plant you somewhere more manageable. In short, it contextualises everything else as meaningless' (Brand, 2008: 241-242). 'I'd sort of

fallen in love with the warmth of [heroin] – the way it felt like crawling back into the womb’ (Brand, 2008: 241). But for Brand, heroin also contributes to his downfall, losing him many employment opportunities as he lived up to his constructed, crazy image. The narrative recounts a low point as Brand realises that he is addicted.

The first time I realised I’d become addicted to it, I was in Ibiza. [...] I began to get anxious. I could feel myself heating up and breaking out in sweat, and then my legs started kicking and jumping. That’s the worst symptom of heroin withdrawal – I can tolerate the nausea and the sweating, but I hate it when your legs go all kicky (Brand: 2008: 255).

My stage performances had become mental breakdowns for a handful of spectators. I was steadily getting sacked from all my jobs. My girlfriend had left me. My heroin use was incessant. And the only reason I hadn’t made a serious attempt to kill myself was because I just thought, ‘I’ve not done anything yet’ (Brand, 2008: 271).

By exposing the addiction, the autobiography mobilises this narratively to make Brand more ‘authentic’ and fallible. Even though his persona is that of an (over)confident and talented genius, the addiction exposes a vulnerable side to his persona. However, the autobiography stresses that Brand would probably no longer be alive had he not stopped using heroin. ‘On the tapes you can see that I’m sort of deteriorating. I’ve got a bloated, permanently sweaty look to me, and I have the distant expression that junkies often have; [...] just the appearance of being absent’ (Brand, 2008: 303). Brand’s drug use is seen to escalate from recreational to full blown addiction and the narrative carries Brand on a journey towards death. If he was to achieve success he would have to give up drugs. ‘[Therapist] Chip explained swiftly that if I didn’t stop taking drugs straight away, I’d be in prison, a mental asylum or a coffin within six months’ (Brand, 2008: 334). ‘The prospect of relinquishing [drugs] was terrifying. The only reason I did so was because I was more afraid of what was going to happen to me if I didn’t’ (Brand, 2008: 361). As the resolution of Brand’s drug narrative shows, he could only achieve success after he had been to rehab and stopped taking drugs. As such the first autobiography works as a morality tale.

Many of Brand’s escapades whilst on drugs are described through humorous anecdotes. ‘That’s all life is to me – raw material for comedy. People tell you: “Life’s not a rehearsal.” Well, mine is – it’s a rehearsal for when I get onstage and do the real performance’ (Brand, 2008: 361). The use of humour works to add to the constructed image but the drug stories do have an effect of creating a more serious side to Brand’s persona as troubled and mentally unstable. The seriousness of his addiction is represented as something that he

had to conquer in order to achieve real success. As the second autobiography shows, after giving up drugs, Brand managed to land a role in a Hollywood film and has since become a successful actor. Therefore, the narrative of descent also allows Brand to show his strength of character – the ability to make the decision to stop taking heroin and climb up the ladder of fame again.

In a similar way, Williams went public with his alcohol and drug problems in a documentary film *Nobody Someday* (2002). The documentary follows the European leg of his *Sermon on the Mount Tour* in 2001. In the film Williams is seen to talk about how gruelling it is to be famous and how hard he finds life in the public eye. At the beginning of the tour he declares that he has just come off drugs and alcohol and talks openly about his addictions. The filmmaker and director of the documentary Brian Hill commented at the time:

I was worried that he wouldn't open up. But he soon proved so open that my camera was almost his confessional. He started the film in despair at the prospect of the tour and his life as a pop star; he then went through emotional highs and lows that seemed to be released by the presence of the lens (Hill, 2001: 16).

What is evident in *Nobody Someday* (2002) is that Williams' reluctance to allow himself to enjoy or feel content about his career or his life is central to the representation of his persona: 'When I was a kid and saw what people in my position had, I wanted it. But I'm struggling now to find something to enjoy about it. The money is fantastic but I've never been that bothered about money. I live the dream and I don't enjoy it.' Both in the documentary and in his two biographies struggling to find aspects of fame that he enjoys becomes part of a yet another adopted mask. However, the implication is that this is something closer to his 'real' persona than the aggressive and cocky pop star he also portrays. *Feel: Robbie Williams* offers several stories of Williams' addiction and depression.

He details the downward spiral in which depression and drugs chased each other's tails in his life. 'And then,' he smiles, 'you develop a hideous fucking twitch.' [...] Each time he took cocaine, it would bring on the same involuntary twitch, so that he didn't even have to tell the people around him what he'd done. His drinking, meanwhile, was daft and extreme. He would sometimes drink a bottle of Sambuca in ten minutes, after which he would triumphantly declare, 'I'm pissed.' [...] 'I drank 25 pints of Guinness once,' he says. 'That was the height of it.' He often tells these tales with a certain amount of laddish bravado, but it never takes the real emotion long to catch up. 'It was a really sad time,' he says. It wasn't as if he was ever the kind of person who was successful at drinking and drugging his problems away. There were years of trying, stopping and starting (Heath, 2005: 125-126).

Williams is seen to attempt to stop using drugs and going to rehab several times before he finally succeeds. In the biography the incidents of drinking and taking drugs are recounted as the masculine past-times of a young and immature Williams. However, what started off as experimentation is seen to escalate into an addiction, which masks depression. 'In presenting a public face, achieved celebrities often complain of symptoms of psychological disassociation. The public responds to a carefully constructed external face, but the real self is elsewhere and suffers from annihilating feelings of non-recognition and, in some cases, invalidation' (Rojek, 2004: 105). In the auto/biographies' confessional narratives drug taking is a response to the myth of fame – problems solved, happiness ensuing – collapsing. However, in relation to male celebrity culture, this kind of excessive and addictive behaviour is also taken as a sign of creative genius. This myth is also still alive and well within celebrity culture (Harper, 2006). In the case of Brand and Williams, they are almost expected by the public and the media to do crazy things and abuse illegal and legal substances to excess. Commentary on this phenomenon particularly runs through Brand's autobiographies:

I was always being warned about my behaviour but lionised for it at the same time. They'd always be telling me that I had to pack it in, but it was also clear that this was an industry that had revered Peter O'Toole and Richard Burton, and as long as you could come up with the goods, you could get away with just about anything (Brand, 2008:195).

But if transgressive behaviour is often seen as acceptable for male stars, female stars/celebrities still seem to face the contempt, derision and sometimes pity from the public and the media when behaving in a similar manner.

Drug use and alcoholism then not only connect Williams and Brand with the masculinity associated with the creative genius but also with the child-like enthusiasm with which they throw themselves at this culture. They are like Peter Pans living in an adult world, tasting the forbidden substances, just because their fame gives them the opportunity to access this world and because fame also makes substance abuse acceptable, especially when it comes to male stars. Furthermore, in addition to addictions, Brand and Williams have suffered from 'sadness' which is how they both describe depression and mental illness. Mental illness is generally seen as a female malady, into which strong men should not succumb. However, the auto/biographies studied in this thesis seem to imply that the celebrity world often accelerates these conditions regardless of whether the sufferer is male or female.

#### 4.4. Being 'Drama Queens' – Male Stars and Mental Illness

Giles (2000) sees the Romantic notion of the genius as the central stereotype attached to creative stars and describes how someone with talent is seen as an 'individual whose brilliance is such that he cannot relate to ordinary people; whose creative flights of fancy are indistinguishable from his bouts of melancholy and mania' (Giles, 2000: 42). Throughout the history of fame many celebrities have suffered from some form of psychiatric disorder. 'Fame, and the associated concepts of genius and greatness, has ancient origins as well as a long-standing association with madness' (Harper, 2006: 312). Contemporary celebrity discourses often emphasise the connection between mental illness and fame, as in Williams' and Brand's auto/biographies. 'I'm in semi-retirement mode again. I've got a bit of a bummer on about my whole career so far. I'm having a melodramatic few days...about being a big shit and fake. It makes me sad that there is so much stuff out there that doesn't represent me' (Heath, 2005: 480). This is one of many similar statements within Williams' biographies. In Brand's autobiographies, narratively, mental illness becomes a central part of his personality:

I've never had a sustained period of medication for mental illness when I've not been on other drugs as well. It's just not something that I particularly feel I need. I know that I have dramatically changing moods, and I know sometimes I feel really depressed, but I think that's just life. I don't think of it as 'Ah, this is mental illness,' more as 'Today, life makes me feel very sad.' I know that I also get unnaturally high levels of energy and quickness of thought, but I'm able to utilise that (Brand, 2008: 376).

Although these confessions perhaps gain sympathy, they also have the opposite effect of rendering stars 'drama queens,' a term usually associated with the performance of female celebrities, exaggerating their 'craziness' and making them seem self-pitying about their 'sadness.' Unlike female celebrities' mental illness, often associated with excusing behaviour, male stars' mental illness is also a part of their dramatic personas. Hence Brand and Williams become 'drama queens'. This partly renders them feminine.

Auto/biographies are mythologised accounts of individual lives. Williams' and Brand's auto/biographies are narratively constructed around the concept of overcoming hardships such as drug addiction, alcoholism and mental illness. Fame seems to give people a licence to be manic, or depressed, or an addict, but this phenomenon is also gendered. Male stars' mental illness is often associated with the concept of the genius whereas mentally ill



women can be seen as weak, hysterical and pathetic.<sup>18</sup> Williams describes his manic behaviour on stage as a persona, a front that he has created, which means that he never forgets about himself on stage and he is always very aware of being in the process of performing as 'Robbie Williams, the pop star.' Behind the scenes, however, he is often represented as depressive, unable to turn down drugs. 'A really sad time actually, because I was so fucked up. I didn't know how not to do cocaine on Tuesday at five o'clock in the afternoon. I just lost the ability to say no' (Heath, 2005: 44). In a documentary *The Secret Life of a Manic Depressive* (Fry, 2006) he is seen to admit that fantasy and becoming famous, and later his addictions, may have been his way to escape depression. 'Mental illness is a token of both public greatness and private vulnerability. The celebrity, that most visible of attractions, is always imperilled by mental illness,' Harper suggests (2006: 314). Both Williams and Brand have been open about mental distress because for male stars credibility and mental instability seem to be interconnected (Harper, 2006). It is clear, however, that it is difficult to describe depression on the pages of an auto/biography: 'People think that if you are depressed, you're depressed about something. More often than not, I'm not. I just feel...terrible. And it's not about record sales or media or family. That's stuff I can pin it on. The real root of it all is, actually, I suffer with an illness that's called depression' (Heath, 2005: 17). Both stars have also turned mental illness to their commercial advantage by exploring their problems and 'craziness' on the pages of auto/biographical accounts and authorised documentaries. Ironically, mental illness makes them potentially more marketable, and works to maintain the perceived image of these stars.

According to Harper 'mental illness fulfils a double function in contemporary culture: it guarantees a star's reality as a suffering subject and it also contributes to the perception of his or her artistic authenticity' (2006: 316). Mental illness implies both ordinariness and uniqueness. For a long time Williams dealt with depression by drowning his malaise with alcohol and drugs but he admits that after he stopped drinking he felt worse than when he was drinking, a situation that made him realise he was suffering from depression (Fry, 2006). His dislike of his own songs, disillusionment with touring and his ambivalent relationship with fans are then not merely the whims of a spoilt pop star. He is represented as a complex persona whose behaviour is affected by his eternal 'sadness.' Sad is a word he uses often to describe his mental state. Williams has also benefited from revealing his mental illness. In contemporary culture, 'mental illness reveals the "truth" about the

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<sup>18</sup> See chapter 5 below.

celebrity concerned, reminding ordinary people that celebrities are “real” people in a way that does not contradict or undermine their star status’ (Harper, 2006: 321).

Brand has been very successful in drawing on his mental illness and addictions as material for his comedy routines, but this has also fallen apart:

I have a self-destructive streak. A thread of divine madness that sometimes makes me really funny and wild but other times makes me a fucking liability. I get this gurgling discontent in my belly, a sense that everything is pointless and that nothing, nobody is worthwhile and that maybe it’d be better to slip off under a blanket or drug and never face light again (Brand, 2010: 165).

Brand’s autobiographies see him as being drawn to overly dramatic bouts of mania on stage: ‘Well, if you want fucking drama, I’ll give you fucking drama! I drained the glass of vodka I was holding, smashed it on my head and plunged it into my chest, raking it up and down my arms’ (Brand, 2008: 190). Brand used his melodramatic tendencies to his advantage in building up his star image:

The novelty of being good at something gave vent to the wild, reckless aspects of my character. Previously, these had come in the form of tantrums, self-harm, and smashing things, but from this point onwards, they began to evolve. I started to become aware of and lovingly nurture the archetype/cliché of the self-destructive artist (Brand, 2008: 121).

Auto/biographies of famous people offer morality tales and narratives of overcoming obstacles and celebrities have become the central characters used to represent difficult issues such as mental illness and addiction. However, the admission of the dramatic tendencies in their personalities can be seen as a part of the ‘decadent culture of disclosure’ as described by Eakin (1999: 171) who argues that personal matters have become so central that previously hidden social issues become a part of celebrity discourses where nothing is considered ‘off-limits.’ Many stars’ narratives rely on the decadence and excesses of fame, as these are a part of the star image and are regularly reported in the accounts found in the tabloids, magazines and documentaries.

Unlike Brand who, like Jordan, seems to revel in his fame and whose life-long ambition has been to become famous, Williams portrays an image of a star who is extremely troubled by fame and the attention he receives. To escape the pressures of fame in Britain, where he is so popular, Williams moved to Los Angeles, which became his sanctuary where he could lead a relatively normal life and walk around virtually unrecognised. ‘Hiding is vital to staying sane,’ he told *The Daily Telegraph* (Barber, 2004: 3). His biography *Somebody Someday’s*

resolution sees him happy and settled in Los Angeles, having finally found some peace from the paparazzi and the fans. 'Rob's turnaround has lasted. He's still clean, happier in LA than he's been for a long time. He likes the anonymity, being away from the constant harassment of press and fans that he gets at home. In LA he can, by and large, do the normal things that normal people do (McCrum, 2002: 288). Previously, however, Williams experienced every success and failure possible within the music industry and celebrity culture. Fame is represented as a central part of his persona. 'If I wasn't Robbie Williams right now, I'd probably be auditioning for the *Big Brother* household. I would. Because I wanted to bigger and better myself. I wanted that dream. [...] I think a huge majority of people's dreams are the same. They want to be bigger and better, they want the glamour, the fame, the celebrity,' he tells his biographer McCrum (2002: 284). But behind fame, success and popularity lies his confessing to his problems and weaknesses, which only adds to the fame. In *The Mirror* Robbie admits the difficulty of maintaining a sense of reality in the world of celebrity:

I've got a terrifying, warped perception of the world. I haven't had reality for years. Now I can't find my own reality that I'm happy in, or one that isn't full of shame and regrets. I'm a split personality, a psychologist's dream – part of my character is very self-destructive (Goldwin and Palmer, 2001: 12-13).

Williams' biography offers another side to the story: 'It's like I've been in this deep sleep, this deep nightmare and I've just woken up and seen how great things are. How wonderful my job is and what a gift it is' (McCrum, 2002: 278). The biographies give Williams an opportunity to present a different image not defined by the permanently dissatisfied person represented in the media.

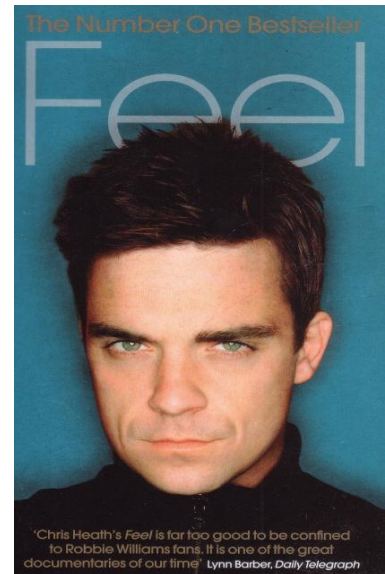
Historically, heroic and mythological narratives formed the basis of stories in public domain, so it is not surprising that modern stars are also represented in these terms. As Whitehead puts it, 'the exaggerated behaviours and unreal lifestyle of such men only serves to reinforce the allure of their masculine display' (2002: 123). Addiction and mental illness combine to create a masculine representation that combines excess, aggression and vulnerability, creating particular myth of masculinity well suited to masculine stardom. 'Individuals create their own selves and realise their own desires against a scenario partly constructed by their own artistry' (Whitehead, 2002: 102). For stars, addictions, mental illnesses, and sexual indiscretions become a part of the constructed self and the narrative of success and failure. As men, stars such as Williams and Brand are generally given leeway by the entertainment industry to misbehave and this adds to their allure. The issue is different for female stars

who are often condemned and vilified for bad behaviour as described below in Chapter 5: 'Gender, Class and Reality TV: Jade Goody and Kerry Katona.'

#### 4.5. Autobiography and Biography – Differences and Similarities

Williams' biographies and Brand's autobiographies demonstrate the differences between these two forms but they also expose the similarities. Indeed, since the Enlightenment, biographies and autobiographies have lost the stark differences that separated them. Biography used to be seen as a factual account of the lives of important men whereas autobiography was the genre that dealt with the feminine and the domestic, recording not just facts but also emotions. As Chapter 2: 'Surveying the Critical Field' above showed, lines are blurred between contemporary autobiographical and biographical writing. Both now rely on the revelation of the personal and the domestic with celebrity auto/biographies often pivoting on exposing both success and failure.

Judging by Williams' authorised biographies, objectivity, as discussed in Chapter 2, is no longer important in biographies. Both McCrum (2002) and Heath (2005) offer their own viewpoints. Both of these biographies are constructed by the authors through close contact with Williams, and are based on the latter discussing his life. In



this sense, they come across as authorised memoirs of Robbie Williams, though not recorded by the star himself. Similar to an autobiography written by a ghost writer, Williams' biographers record his thoughts and feelings, and the stories he tells about his life, but they also add their own commentary, thoughts, and interpretations to the text. Heath ponders on his role in *Robbie Williams: Feel*:

I don't think that the questions other people wonder about when they see or hear of what we are doing – to what extent I am a writer and to what extent I am a friend, at any given moment do these roles not rub against or contradict each other? – bother or trouble either of us. What may seem eccentric, or conflicted, or confusing from the outside seems perfectly natural day by day (2005: 159).

Autobiographies often act to counter stories in the media, especially the tabloid press, or at least are in dialogue with these stories. Therefore, autobiographies often favour the performative at the expense of telling the story and often act as PR for the stars. They are

designed to promote the star and to excuse misdemeanours and transgressions. However, because Williams' biographies are not written by Williams himself, they lack the overt emphasis on the performative present in Brand's autobiographies, although it is clear that at times Williams is seen to perform, taking on roles and purposefully acting according to his 'pop star' image. Heath writes: 'What is unsaid but understood is that it [the biography] will be unvarnished and unembellished; the world as it happens, the words as they are said' (2005: 160). In a sense, Heath's commentary throughout the book contains autobiographical elements as he describes his own association with Williams and interprets Williams' persona for the readers. The voice of the biography is thus that of the biographer but as Williams' life is recorded as it happens, and his thoughts are recorded as he expresses them, for the reader the text feels almost like a Robbie Williams autobiography. Furthermore, the autobiographical elements extend to the biographer, who is always present in the text, commenting on Williams' life and persona. Even though the biographer is a man, the combination of the feminised image and persona of Williams, Heath's recording Williams' (and sometimes even his own) feelings, Williams' disappointments and depression, and Heath's own subjective viewpoint, render the text feminine. Evans notes that the author of a biography 'is concerned to find the fixed point in any encounter and to see, not the complexity of human relations but the possible simplicity' (1999: 75). However, in my view, Heath narrates exactly the ambiguousness of Williams' life, not attempting to reduce him to any fixed or simple explanation that would define him as a person or as a star. He also admits that it is difficult to represent Williams' way of speaking in writing: 'There are great difficulties in conveying Rob's speech accurately on a written page because he will often slip from irony to sincerity – just as he will onstage – in the same sentence and then back again' (Heath, 2005: 224). A full representation of the Williams persona then requires interpretation on the part of the biographer.

Few people are judged more harshly in the modern world than someone famous or privileged who is caught contradicting himself. [...] It is not the nature of lives to be neat, and all lives, when examined close up are crammed with contradictions. Often, when lives are written about, these are smoothed away in a cosmetic, fake narrative, but there are plenty of such contradictions scattered across these pages, most of them as obvious to the book's subject as they are to the reader (Heath, 2005: 471).

Modern biographies are also no longer necessarily based on a literal chronology of a person's life. As *Feel: Robbie Williams* demonstrates, often the focus is on recording life as it happens. But the author Heath is not with Williams all the time, they meet on various occasions in London or in Los Angeles and Heath spends days or even weeks with Williams. The biography has no fixed chronology and Heath can at one time record what Williams is

doing on a specific day or just record a story he decides to share about his life. Therefore, the temporal chronology associated with most autobiographies is missing. Autobiographies, on the other hand, rely more readily on the chronological and time-bound narrative. Every autobiography studied in this thesis has a temporal starting point. In the case of first autobiographies, this is usually birth or childhood, and serial autobiographies continue from the incidents at the end of the previous one. However, Williams' 2005 biography doesn't start with his birth and only contains a few stories about his childhood experiences. The biography is more concerned with the present day and follows Williams as he records an album and goes on tour, intercepted by free time when he relaxes at his Los Angeles house. The narrative is constructed through specific incidents.

In Chapter 2: 'Surveying the Critical Field' above I discussed how autobiographies have been thought about in terms of commercial constraints putting pressure on stars to tell a saleable story. I discussed how some theorists compare autobiography to the Lacanian mirror image. Arguably celebrity auto/biographies represent not the Lacanian mirror image discussed earlier nor the 'real' person but something in between – a partly-fictional character based on the real person. As seen in the case of Russell Brand and Jordan, their autobiographies have a tendency to create an image that corresponds to the public image but also, on occasion, work as counter-narratives to press stories. However, there are also points where the narrative suggests the search for a unified self. In a sense, the requirement for a temporal narrative automatically creates a more unified self in that only certain events are chosen for representation. Auto/biography is always connected with narrative fiction (Evans, 1999). It is thus the blurring of lines between fact and fiction that contributes to the unreliability of both autobiography and biography. However, Brand, like Rousseau, makes the acknowledgement of this unreliability a part of the story and notes that his autobiographies contain several statements and discussions that may not be verbatim records of what was actually said at the time. For example, a conversation between Brand and Sean 'Puff Daddy' Combs regarding a trip to watch boxing in Las Vegas:

"That's cool," said Puffy. "You score the tickets; I'll grind out the jet." That's by no means verbatim but it is the gist and style of what he said. [...] "Make sure they're ringside. I can't be sitting in no punk-ass bullshit seats." Similarly, that may not be verbatim but it was certainly the gist and vaguely the style (Brand, 2010: 289).

What this kind of fictional licence achieves is to evoke the style of speech that 'Puff Daddy' uses and also to create a comic effect. 'Puff Daddy's' American twang is contrasted with Brand's response echoing a rather formal English English: 'Sean, you can rest assured that it will be no problem getting those tickets' (Brand, 2010: 289). This is a common feature in

Brand's autobiographies, which often adopt the style of speech of the person whose speech is recorded. This has the effect of enhancing Brand's own persona and enhancing his voice within the text. Brand is represented through his Englishness. The use of specific styles of speech also adds to the humorous approach that is generally used in Brand's autobiographies. This gives Brand the power to tell other people's stories and to compare other people to himself.

The lesson that fame is subjective is painful to learn. I'd spent my entire life chasing its elusive blessing [...] only to discover that if you pop across the English Channel to Calais, British fame is as much use as British currency. 'Monsieur, I would very much like to take your daughter upstairs. And I'll have that Camembert an'all.' 'Alors!! You stinking English scum, my daughter will go nowhere with you – I've never seen you before and your haircut is, 'ow you say...ridiculous' (Brand, 2010: 129).

I've never felt more English in my life than when I was in that American cliché swap shop. They'd say, 'I hear your pain, it's good that you shared.' And I'd be thinking 'Oh do fuck off. For Christ's sake, someone put *Eastenders* on the fucking telly and give me a glass of Beefeater gin and a toasted crumpet' (Brand, 2008: 16).

Through these comparisons the autobiographies then offer a construction of Brand through his nationality. Brand's persona is closely linked to his Englishness and English eccentricity in particular. Compared to the allegedly over the top Americans or the Brit-hating French, Brand can construct himself in his interactions with foreigners and thus exercise power in relation to his self-identity.

As auto/biographies cannot represent the whole life of a person, omissions and selection are a central part of writing auto/biographies. Williams' biographer Heath describes his approach to recording Williams' life:

In even the most honourable and truthful account of someone's life and how they live it, there are choices to be made, and by necessity each choice must side track or evade some small part of the experience the reader would have had if actually present. Many of the things left unsaid here are to do with the mundane and unremarkable moments that make up all lives; the dark matter of life as it quietly continues in predictable ways between galaxies of incident (2005: 247).

Indeed, both Williams' biographies and Brand's autobiographies concentrate on the most dramatic aspects of their lives, recording the most scandalous, or heart-warming, or strange

incidents with very little detail about day-to-day mundane lives. As in Jordan's autobiographies, there is also a tendency to dramatise the everyday events that are recorded, bringing the biographical and the autobiographical writing very close in style. Brand's autobiography *My Booky Wook* describes an incident from his childhood, clearly demonstrating this dramatisation of life:

The hostility between us [Brand and his stepfather] was mostly unspoken. It was a silent war, constantly in motion. Colin went into the back garden. He looked under the stone, and came back, full of terrifying adult man-rage. [...] As he dragged me out into the back garden, I fell over and pissed myself (2008: 94).

Furthermore, Brand also has a tendency to emphasise the dramatic through self-indulgent commentary, particularly evident in narratives about his childhood.<sup>19</sup>

This bit of my childhood might be a bit of a downer to read, it was a bit of a downer to live an' all. The period around my seventh birthday has been studied by so many analysts and counsellors that it's little wonder that I was such a show-off. [...] I had an insular, yet somehow idyllic early childhood – which was okay, so long as I wasn't forced to leave the house or do anything with other people – that was suddenly brought to an end by a sequence of dramatic shocks (Brand, 2008: 51).

This dramatisation of life is part and parcel of celebrity culture, and as such it also becomes central to auto/biographies. Reality TV shows such as Jordan's 'Katie and Peter' series, which circulates around the lives of celebrities in home and work situations, rarely manage to capture the 'real' dramas occurring in their lives because the subjects are not filmed all the time. Auto/biographies on the other hand, can be seen as the site where the 'real' drama can currently be found. For stars such as Brand and Williams who rarely give interviews, autobiographies and authorised biographies appear to give stars more control over their story, and have become the central vehicle for attempting to offer readers something more 'real' and 'authentic' than edited TV shows do.

What unites Williams' biographies and Brand's autobiographies more than anything else, however, is their commentary on fame. Both Brand and Heath go to great lengths to examine the nature of, and a star's relationship to, contemporary fame. Williams is described as an old-school entertainer who has been famous for so long that he no longer

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<sup>19</sup> Brand's mother first fell ill with breast cancer when Brand was seven years old and further suffered from different forms of cancer various times. His mother's illness is seen as seriously affecting Brand.



knows what life without fame would be like. Brand, on the other hand, has only recently achieved fame and still seems to enjoy his notoriety. They are narratives of success, failure and success again through overcoming obstacles. Auto/biographies thus form moral narratives and metanarratives. These books comment on the successes and failures in the world of celebrity and the highs and lows offered by fame, but they also offer a more general take on the nature of fame itself. In *My Booky Wook 2 – This Time It's Personal* Brand reflects almost analytically on celebrities:

When you meet the famous [...] their humanity seeps into the encounter and you acknowledge that in fact like all objects of fetish, all icons, they are a reflection of your perception. They are used like saints or gods; here to tell stories, to give us warnings of the perils of success or to be held aloft as examples of contemporary ideals. One figure can be used to represent either extreme, depending on culture's mood; David Beckham or Lady Diana can be an example of domestic excellence or individual indulgence depending on the tabloid. [...] But away from the page they become nothing more than people (2010: 196).

Similarly, Heath regularly comments on fame and the famous. In his introduction to a chapter discussing Williams' difficulties with the paparazzi and the current state of fame, Heath offers an analysis of contemporary celebrity:

We live in a psychotic time as far as fame is concerned, a strange and unstable period in the history of celebrity. A time when there is too much fame and too much hysteria surrounding it. [...] Left to roam free and unchecked, celebrity has become ugly. It has become hateful and hated both for its potency and for its pointlessness. There are several consequences for those like Rob, who wish that whatever fame they have can be of the old-fashioned kind. This era of overheated celebrity is not the easiest for someone of his disposition to be famous in (2005: 37-38).

These auto/biographies thus represent fame as an achievement while at the same time they expose the downsides that fame brings with it. The masculine auto/biographies studied in this chapter also imply that certain flamboyant, 'crazy', extraordinary personalities are those who are most likely to achieve a star status, and also most suited to stardom. This discourse, however, is often only attached to male stars. As was clear from Jordan's narrative, her fame was associated with hard work, certain ordinariness and domesticity, and her union with Peter Andre. As Jordan is not seen in terms of talent like Williams and Brand, so her type of fame is culturally devalued. This also applies to autobiographies. Brand's eloquent prose is seen as further proof of his talent, and his voice in the text is very strong, dovetailing seamlessly with his persona and image as a stand-up comedian. Even

though Jordan's ghost writer captures Jordan's voice and style of speech well, the common knowledge that Jordan hasn't written her autobiographies devalues them. Her manner of speech in real life and her voice within the autobiographies is seen as 'chavvy' or 'common.' Therefore, I would argue that, masculine celebrity autobiographies follow the main tendency in celebrity culture in making talented, male stars seem more important and valued than famous for being famous female celebrities, whose autobiographies are devalued texts and more readily seen as purely commercial and manipulative enterprises.

#### **4.6. Conclusion: Blurring Gender Boundaries**

For celebrity auto/biographies, a central requirement is that the subject will be revealed as many negative aspects have already circulated in the media. Brand and Williams' auto/biographies represent them as 'typical' of a wide range of celebrities with emphasis in their narratives on revelation of both success and failure, and in responding to media stories, the revelation of the 'real' person behind the image. In such auto/biographies, the denial of emotional and sexual life that dominated the auto/biographical writing by men in an earlier era, as discussed in Chapter 2: 'Surveying the Critical Field,' has disappeared. Today, confessional auto/biographies of men and women are feminine texts representing emotions and feelings such as love, sadness, depression and anger. Williams' and Brand's auto/biographies emphasise male stars confessing all and their public images are often based on masquerade and role-play, 'revealing' the narcissism, self-indulgence and insecurity of male stars. Scandal and transgressions, addiction and mental illness are all common subjects in auto/biographies, and paradoxically they make stars seem vulnerable at the same time as they construct them as talented, creative geniuses whose artistic sensitivities make them succumb to traditionally female maladies. Alcohol and drugs are seen as an important part of this genius persona, with substance abuse having the potential to lead either to death, madness or redemption through sobriety. Whilst there are certain social expectations about how a person should behave that are generally gendered, male stars are often given the licence, or even expected to behave badly and be redeemed, whereas when it comes to female stars this redemption is conditional. In general, celebrity auto/biographies have contributed to the shift of emphasis away from the 'demonstration of the moral qualities of the subject towards the discussion and explanation of individual difference' (Evans, 1999: 140-141). Certainly Brand and Williams are constructed through a specific image of the male star as both fallible and flamboyant but the expectation of morality is replaced by the transgressive persona of the star. Williams is differentiated from other stars through his ambivalent attitude towards fame and constant dissatisfaction with

being a pop star. Brand is individualised through his created persona starting with his dress-sense and hair style, but culminating in overtly dramatic performances.

Auto/biographical writing promotes the existence of the 'real' person behind the image, so that it might be too radical to follow Judith Butler in her insistence that gender is a mere performance and that there is no identity behind the artificial construction of gender. Celebrity has always relied on 'authenticity,' but if there is no 'authentic' or 'real' self, on what are these assumptions based? Obviously, the 'authenticity' in auto/biographies is a discursive construction, just like gender is. In the feminised texts of the auto/biography, masculinity is asserted through the description of promiscuous sexual activities and through an emphasis on the often aggressive, 'crazy,' and talented public persona. Williams attests that his construction of Robbie Williams, the pop star, is very different from his 'real' self. Brand claims to 'really' be slightly mad and troubled, tendencies which are intensified when he is performing.

As discussed in Chapter 2 above, Blaise claims that autobiography is the opposite of biography and sees biography as 'an identification with achievement' (1996: 201). Autobiography, according to this view, is a narrative 'based on tactlessness, indelicacy, humiliation and embarrassment' (1996: 201). Even though traces of the consideration of tact, ethics and delicacy can still be found in biographies, they have come to resemble autobiographies to a much greater extent than previously thought. The Robbie Williams biographies studied in this chapter do not shy away from the descriptions of failures and the feelings these elicit. As Russell Brand has made tactlessness, flamboyance, and humiliation central parts of his persona, his autobiographies revel in his indiscretions and personal and professional failures for the purpose of demonstrating his success. As Brand puts it, 'The guiding star of my anguished adulthood has been the knowledge, absent in my childhood, that shame embarrassment and failure are funny' (2010: 272).

In male celebrity auto/biographies the traditional cultural discourse of masculinity is associated with the representation of the male star as a creative genius. This is in stark contrast with the feminised discourse of the text itself, where the narrative adopts features associated with the feminine gender and style of writing, which emphasises the emotional confessional that leaves nothing to the imagination, revealing all there is to reveal, thus claiming to represent the 'truth.' Celebrity auto/biographies thus follow in the footsteps of the dominant discourse on celebrity in blurring the traditional boundaries of what is considered masculine and feminine. At the same time auto/biographies further blur the distinctions between the 'authentic' and the 'constructed,' which have preoccupied celebrity theorists and autobiography theorists alike. As the next chapter shows, however, masculinity and femininity in celebrity discourses are often associated with class. Whereas for male

stars being working class is often an advantage, for female stars it can prove a hindrance. Both Brand and Williams are working class men who have risen above their meagre beginnings and achieved fame and success through talent. Being working class becomes a problem when you are female, uneducated, and rise to fame through reality TV, as the case of Jade Goody and Kerry Katona reveals.

## **5. Class, Gender and Reality TV Celebrity: Jade Goody and Kerry Katona**

### **5.1. Introduction**

It has often been pointed out in recent years that women's autobiographies carry a sense of their being somehow "unfinished" human beings. The awareness of being "different", pain arising from that sense of being somehow incomplete, unable to add up, to see your existence related to, let alone symbolic of, the world at large (Ward Jouve, 1992: 114).

Celebrity autobiographies too recount a journey of an unfinished human being – a human being in process. The celebrity travels towards accomplishment through various highs and lows, and nowhere is this incompleteness stronger than in the autobiographies of young, female, working class reality TV celebrities such as Jade Goody and Kerry Katona. Ward Jouve's argument indirectly offers proof for my argument that autobiographies confuse gender boundaries because the sense of incompleteness applies to both masculine and feminine autobiographies. But if autobiographies more generally suggest the ambiguous nature of gender, female working-class reality TV celebrities' autobiographies are, nevertheless, more traditional in their representations of gender. This chapter will argue that representations of working-class female celebrities are intimately tied to a femininity articulated through narratives of class, mental illness, breakdown and scandal.

Jade Goody appeared in series three of reality TV show *Big Brother* in 2002 and, after the show, managed to build a media career cultivated through appearances in reality TV shows and through confessional interviews. Her death from cervical cancer in 2009 elevated her status as a celebrity and her previous scandals and misdemeanours were conveniently forgotten.<sup>20</sup> Kerry Katona achieved her celebrity status as a member of a 1990s girl band Atomic Kitten after a brief stint as a lap dancer. After leaving the band in 2001 she has mainly appeared in reality TV shows and in confessional interviews which maintain her fame. Both celebrities can be categorised as famous for being famous and have managed to stay in the media through their 'train-wreck' existence and being involved in scandals. As Croft puts it, 'the most fascinating celebrities know that a life of motion is far more interesting than one that appears stagnant. It doesn't particularly matter whether celebrities move upwards into career success or downwards to failure and tragedy, as long as they

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<sup>20</sup> Representations of Goody's death will be examined more closely in chapter 6.

keep moving' (2006: 27). For celebrities such as Goody and Katona, this movement is essential for the maintenance of fame and their autobiographies are packed with narratives of hardships, violence and scandal, which provide this movement. This chapter will examine Jade Goody's two autobiographies *Jade – My Autobiography* (2006) and *Jade – Catch a Falling Star* (2008) and Kerry Katona's autobiography *Kerry – Too Much, Too Young* (2007). At the heart of these autobiographies is the struggle for validation in the eyes of others through self-improvement. Both Goody and Katona are working-class women who have experienced a difficult childhood. Their autobiographies offer a 'rags to riches' narrative from brutal childhood neglect, addiction, and domestic abuse to success and fame. The books detail the wild excesses of early fame, breakdown and recovery, battles with social mobility, bodily improvement, eating disorders and mental illness, with motherhood represented as the ultimate saviour of these two women. In this way, these autobiographies offer gendered discourses on female working-class existence.

This kind of autobiography gives to those who would normally be excluded access to public discourse. Goody and Katona's ability to publish autobiographies brought them within the frame of capitalist culture, whereas telling of their own story also attempts to persuade fans that they are still the same, unchanged selves. For celebrities such as Goody and Katona, then, the notion of 'authenticity' becomes a central part of the autobiographical discourse. As they moved up from an impoverished world of council estates to the world of celebrity, it became essential for them to demonstrate that they were still the same, 'authentic' people that they were in the beginning. Being humble in the face of success is central. But this is a gendered phenomenon. As discussed in the previous chapter, male stars are given leeway to be arrogant in their enjoyment of their success as this is often associated with their 'skilled' labour. As talented artists some male stars are seen as deserving of their success whereas female celebrities such as Goody and Katona are associated with having been given a lucky break with no work on their part involved in the process of achieving and maintaining fame. Even though this is only a perception, as these celebrities do work, it is a dominant one. At the same time as male stars such as Williams and Brand are represented as heroic in their rise above their working class roots through talent, female celebrities doing the same are often seen as not quite deserving of their new position in society. For the former class rarely enters the representations but Goody and Katona are represented through the prism of class as well as gender. As Skeggs puts it, 'class is experienced by women as exclusion. Whereas working-class men can use class as a positive source of identity, a way of including themselves in a positively valorised social category, this does not apply for working-class women' (1997: 74). This chapter will therefore examine the classed representations of these two celebrities, their rise from 'chavs' to celebrities, the scandals and events that lead to continuous failures and public condemnation and the gendered and

classed confessional discourses that work re-instate their fame. Both these celebrities found fame at a young age, were known as loud, dim 'chavs', were subjects of innumerable scandals about drink, drugs and violence, and were seen as 'being out of control.' Their media representations often adhere to the general view of working class people as 'useless, tasteless and inarticulate' (Skeggs, 2004: 96). The wider working-class 'chav' is represented in the media as being reliant on benefits, a theme which defines both Goody and Katona's childhood experiences as described in their autobiographies: '[My mother's] manic depression and drinking made it impossible for her to hold down a job, so for most of her adult life she had depended on the social for money and had nowhere of her own to live. She had wanted to be the best mum in the world to me, and in her eyes, and most of other people's, she had failed' (Katona, 2007: 104). The chapter will examine to what extent autobiographies and their main narratives work to maintain or to counter this image and do so through gendered narratives.

McRobbie remarks that being a celebrity requires 'a continuous scripting of daily psychodramas and the construction of recognisable characters' (2006: 28). Celebrities represent different types of cultural value and become signs for voicing difficult, personal or scandalous issues through their confessional discourses. As Marshall (1997) suggests, celebrities have the potential to represent issues, themes and values that may be outside the bounds of public debate and bring forth issues concerning gender and class. However, the reality TV celebrity differs from celebrities who have achieved fame through talent or skill. In current celebrity culture, anyone, even uneducated working class women such as Goody and Katona, can become famous. 'Through processes of voyeurism and identification, Jade Goody became a household name, made millions, and achieved a celebrity status without drawing on education, entrepreneurial skills or talent, sending out a message that if she can do it, anyone can' (Cashmore, 2006: 194). It seems that her lack of education and apparent ignorance and naiveté ultimately became the ingredient elevating her to fame. In opposition to Goody, Kerry Katona's fame has always been intensely inconsistent. Since her Atomic Kitten days, she has moved in and out of limelight, disappearing and reappearing at regular intervals. However, these two celebrities embody the contradictory nature of modern celebrity. The media's merciless condemnation at various points of their careers has paradoxically ensured their celebrity status and their inclination to confess all has given permanence to their fame.

## 5.2. From 'Chav' to Celebrity: Class and Gender in Narratives of Betterment

Definitions for the word 'chav' first appeared in dictionaries in 2005 and since then its meanings have mainly evoked negative connotations. According to Jones, the meaning of 'chav' is ambiguous but the term is currently used by the middle-classes to 'show their distaste towards working-class people who have embraced consumerism, only to spend their money in supposedly tacky and uncivilised ways rather than with the discreet elegance of the bourgeoisie' (2011: 7-8). Celebrities from working class backgrounds such as Goody and Katona are mocked for being 'chavs' and this contempt is often associated with their dress sense, their changing bodies, their extravagant consumption practices, and their lack of education. Overall, the term 'chav' has, according to Jones, come to 'encompass any negative traits associated with working-class people' (2011: 8). According to Owen (2011) although the working-class has faced derision before, the 'chav' phenomenon brought together many prejudices against the working-class. In this way, 'chav' celebrities such as Goody and Katona become bearers of classed and gendered signs marking them as disgusting, tasteless, violent, sexually promiscuous, loud, council estate scum. According to Jones, the new UK Prime Minister Tony Blair declared in 1997: 'In a meritocracy, those who possess the most talent will rise naturally to the top. Social hierarchy will therefore be arranged according to merit' (2011: 96-97). However, Jones argues that meritocracy ends up becoming 'a rubber stamp for existing inequalities, re-branding them as deserved' (2011: 96-97). After the emergence of *Big Brother* and other reality TV shows there has been a steady stream of people from working-class backgrounds rising to the top. Since these celebrities have rarely gained any merit other than appearing on a reality TV show, they dilute and confuse meritocracy's main principle of talented people rising to the top.<sup>21</sup> As a result, however, talentless, famous for being famous celebrities such as Goody and Katona become the subject of endless derogatory stories in the press and vilified for being 'out of control', uneducated and talentless. They are the butt for middle-class contempt towards the working class. In response to this autobiographies become PR vehicles for so called 'chav' celebrities to justify their social mobility.

Goody and Katona perform their femininity through class, which is a significant part of the constructed persona through which they are represented in autobiographical and confessional discourses. As Skeggs suggests, 'working-class women are often represented

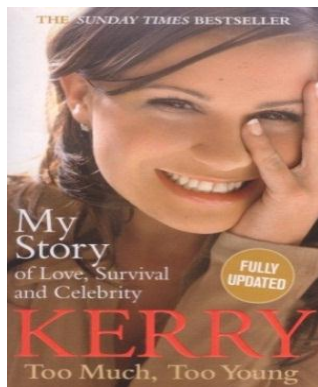
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<sup>21</sup> However, it should be noted that these celebrities are seen to have something 'special' that separates them from other hopefuls who never make it to the top.



as the cipher of embodied excess and their obvious excessive attention to appearance is taken to denote low moral value and potential disruption' (2004a: 99). Goody and Katona's autobiographies invoke morals and values that firmly place them within working-class, 'chav' culture, albeit 'chav' is retrospectively seen as embarrassing and something to move away from, evident in Goody's autobiography *Jade- Catch a Falling Star*:

We'd get really dressed-up – me in an over-the-top Moschino outfit that I used to call my pride and joy. [...] It consisted of a white skirt and a white shirt with little black stick men and women all over it. [...] Or another number that was covered in the designer's logo to the point that you couldn't probably see the dress itself. I might as well have had D&G tattooed on my face, I was so eager to prove that I was cool. It pains me now to admit that I've since realised I was actually a chav before they were given a name (Goody, 2008: 2).



The emphasis here on the centrality of wearing a certain kind of designer clothing marks Goody as 'chav.' For those with taste, such excess is a marker of bad taste. 'Chavs' are also subject to ridicule over their dress sense because even though they cover themselves in designer logos, their designer clothes are often fake. Bourdieu (1986) argues that the working-class is associated with tastelessness and that women are sign bearing carriers of taste. 'Chavs' are seen as ultimately tasteless because nothing in their sartorial style is discrete or minimal, like 'bling' jewellery, it is showy. For Goody and Katona, (designer) clothes acted as reassurance of their new position in society, but they were often ridiculed for their taste. Katona's autobiography *Kerry- Too Much, Too Young* describes her cartoon-like 'chav' style during her Atomic Kitten days: 'I looked more like a hooker working Lyme Street Station than a pop star, with big furry boots that made my legs look like golf clubs, dead short denim hot pants that showed my bum, denim chaps and a two-tone metallic bra' (2007: 160). Furthermore, after her former husband Bryan McFadden left her for a sophisticated Australian singer Delta Goodrem, Katona's autobiography highlights the differences between the two women in class terms: 'I can't blame him for wanting to be with her rather than with me – a brassy, busty, loud-mouthed chav!' (Katona, 2007: 313). By calling themselves 'chavs' Goody and Katona are seen to adhere to the expected image and to confirm that they were indeed what they seemed to be.

Katona's working-class background is introduced in the first chapter of *Kerry – Too Much, Too Young*:

Without a dad, I had to survive as best I could with Mum. Sometimes I'd lived with her and sometimes, when she wasn't able to look after me herself, I'd stayed with relatives or friends. Mum had attempted suicide several times, and I was often the one who had to look after her. I'd never lived in one place for longer than three years and by the time I was eleven, I'd been to seven different primary schools. At thirteen I was taken into care, staying with four sets of foster parents before Mum and I were finally reunited. God knows how we came through it in one piece, but we did. During all the hard times I can remember feeling guilty, responsible for my mum's depression, confused about who I was and most of all unloved, but now millions of people had shown they wanted me, Kerry Katona, when only ten years earlier no one had wanted me at all (Katona, 2007: 9).

A troubled childhood and feelings of being unwanted are contrasted with Katona's new status as a celebrity. The difficulties she had faced provide a background for the creation of celebrity in 2004 when Katona wins the reality TV show *I'm a Celebrity, Get Me Out of Here!* where the winner is determined through a public telephone vote. Being a 'chav' is explained narratively through Katona's childhood experiences of living on council estates, experiencing violence, and dealing with her mother's depression, suicide attempts and alcohol addiction. 'I shrunk down in the back seat listening as Mum and Dave started shouting at each other. As he drove off in the dark, Dave started punching Mum in the face with his fist. [...] I screamed for him to stop, but I knew he'd hurt me if I tried to get between them' (Katona, 2007: 13-14). 'I could see [my Mum] lying on the kitchen floor, and there was blood on the lino. She had a deep cut on her ankle and the black handle of a carving knife was sticking out of her thigh. [...] Dave was in the living room, watching us as I pulled at the knife, which came out as easily as if I was cutting butter' (Katona, 2007: 18). Although Katona didn't have physical fights herself, violence was constantly present through her mother's various boyfriends. Forced to look after her depressed and suicidal mother from a very early age, the narrative positions Katona as the 'adult' who has lost out on her childhood.

I'm facing her but she is too involved in what she is doing to take any notice of me. I see the light glint off something in her hand. I stand and watch as she runs a razor blade across her wrist once, then twice. Not understanding, I watch the blood streaming from her arm onto her tight blue jeans. I'm screaming and crying. That's my very first memory, and it's something no little girl should ever see (Katona, 2007: 48-49).

I realised that she'd slashed her wrists again when she rolled up her sleeves to wash the dishes once and I saw the bandages, but I was also aware that if I wasn't around, giving her a reason to live,

she'd be dead. That felt like a big responsibility for a little girl (Katona, 2007: 75).

Katona's background is represented through incidents such as those described above, contrasted with her gaining the public and media affection and finally achieving a status as a celebrity after winning *I'm a Celebrity, Get Me Out of Here!*. However, Katona's further breakdowns are always represented as being connected to her traumatic childhood experiences. 'That's what life [...] was like; unpredictable and violent, but never dull' (Katona, 2007: 79). At the same time, there is also a need to represent the working-class background in an entertaining manner, giving her the drive to succeed: 'Andy's told me that what made them pick me [for Atomic Kitten] was the fact that they knew instantly that I was going to be a star, and that I'd bash my head against a brick wall until I got there. He called it the Marilyn Monroe syndrome' (Katona, 2007: 155). Joining the manufactured girl band represented an escape from her 'chav' background as each member was given a new 'identity' with clothes to match, in a similar manner to the Spice Girls' image construction earlier in the 1990s.

Skeggs points out that 'disgust has evolved to protect the human being from becoming too close. [...] So disgust with the working class because of the association made with excess works to maintain distance whilst in proximity. [...] Yet disgust also relies on public acknowledgement' (2004a: 102). Disgust is a common response to those famous for being famous, i.e. reality TV, working-class celebrities. This can be illustrated by Goody's first appearance on *Big Brother*. Her antics in the house quickly attracted media attention and she became notorious for her lack of education and general knowledge. The media attacked her viciously. She was thrown into the world of celebrity precisely for her representation of excess; for her accidental appearance of nudity after a drinking game with other housemates, for performing a sex act on a fellow housemate on television, and for continuously getting drunk and clashing with other housemates. The fact that Goody was often described as hideous, ugly, overweight, uneducated or stupid set her up as the epitome of what is wrong in British culture. Goody was continuously called a 'minger.'<sup>22</sup> These representations had undertones of middle-class hatred towards the working-class.

Goody's first autobiography details her council estate and family background, already familiar from media representations: 'I've only ever received two gifts from my dad in my whole life. One was an Armani jacket he bought with a stolen credit card. The other was a

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<sup>22</sup> A derogatory form of female social classification associated with their appearance, usually taken to mean dirty or disgusting.

picnic box. [...] He'd nicked that from someone's bag' (Goody, 2006: 19). 'Dad wasn't a drug addict when he first met my mum, though. He was a robber then. Oh, and a pimp apparently' (Goody, 2006: 20). 'My mum was what was known as a "clipper." A clipper is someone who pretends to sort people out with prostitutes but runs off with their money instead' (Goody, 2006: 20). 'I woke up in bed to see [my dad] stood in the corner of the room putting a needle into his arm. I'll never forget the look on his face. His eyes were rolling into the back of his head and he was shaking' (Goody, 2006: 23). 'Dad's mum was a madam in a whorehouse for a while. You'll soon realise this is the case for most of my family – they're either plain dodgy or drug addicts' (Goody, 2006: 25). 'Mum never owned her own house when I was younger – we always lived in council flats. [...] Every night – and most days, come to think of it – my mum would hold puffing sessions. She was always stoned' (Goody, 2006: 31). 'Losing the use of her arm was infuriating for my mum, and as a result she often beat me' (Goody, 2006: 41). On the basis of these representations her background sets her in the world of criminal activities, drug use and domestic abuse. The narrative relies on these representations to construct Goody as 'authentic' and to create a stark contrast between her 'chav' background and her later life as a celebrity. Goody's background is also later used to excuse her transgressions. It is implied that due to her background she has not learned adequate social skills. For example, Goody's numerous, physical fights with her boyfriend and the father of her children Jeff Brazier are described and excused in *Jade – My Autobiography*:

Every time he pissed me off or upset me I'd throw the money card back in his face. I was nasty to him and I've got an evil tongue. I'd hit him right where it hurt him the most: "Get out of my fucking house! You're a scrounger, you're a ponce, you've got no independence. You drive my car as if it's yours. You think you're a man but you're not." I could sting him with words such like that, and he'd be distraught. I'd get violent too. I'd hit him. I was so aggressive. But you see, I didn't know how to be anything else. All my other relationships were fuelled by violence so I didn't know how else to behave (Goody, 2006: 188).

As violent behaviour is generally seen as non-feminine, being working-class or 'chav' explains how Goody came to be so aggressive. Constructing a persona based on class can be used to account for behaviour that doesn't fit within dominant gender norms.

In a similar manner Katona's autobiographical narrative links transgressions in particular to her working-class northern background and her mother's drug addiction. Katona has also often been associated with drug use and alcoholism. The newspapers regularly accuse her of either being a drug addict or an alcoholic. Her autobiography *Kerry – Too Much, Too*

*Young* narratively associates working-class celebrity with addiction and with an acceleration of substance abuse:

I began to get so anxious about going for a night out that I started drinking really heavily when I was at home. I couldn't handle all the attention and found that if I downed a few drinks before I went out, it helped. Anything I could lay my hands on would do (Katona, 2007: 178).

Back then, I was only discovering what it means to be famous, as the whole obsession with celebrity was only just beginning. [...] Going out and not being able to have a drink in case you are labelled an alcoholic is plain annoying, and nowadays if I go to the toilet, I never take my bag with me and am careful not to sniff when I come out in case I'm labelled a drug addict (Katona, 2007: 202).

The gulf between Katona's background and her newfound celebrity status is accentuated narratively; the autobiography highlights her difficulties adjusting to fame and the attention it brings, thus telling a story of the shift from alcohol as an escape mechanism to a dependency on alcohol and drugs. More generally, violence, alcohol and drugs have become a central part of 'chav' discourses, usually associated with council estates.

Goody was branded Miss Piggy as soon as she entered the *Big Brother* house and the media revelled in criticising her appearance and her linguistic faux pas including calling East Anglia East Angular and thinking it was a place abroad. 'I didn't understand at the time that he [*Big Brother* housemate Spencer] was laughing because I was being such an idiot. When I was asking him all those questions about East Angular (OK, East Anglia) I didn't have a clue it would make me so famous. I also didn't have a clue I sounded quite so thick' (Goody, 2006: 119). These mistakes resulted from her lack of education and were taken as a proof that the working-class are uneducated and stupid. Negative coverage dominated the media. *The People* attacked her by writing: 'We must lob the gob,' the *Sun* and *The Mirror* called her the most hated woman in Britain and the *Daily Star* branded her a monster (Guest, 2007). From the beginning the media relied on the construction, manipulation and promotion of storylines stemming from Goody's background and hardships in life. Most of these involved Goody's move from a girl living on a council estate to the woman living in the world of celebrity. As Goody's fame grew, she started receiving more positive coverage in the press. *The Star* reported in November 2002:

While the 21-year old Bermondsey babe was in the *Big Brother* house she piled on nearly a stone with comfort eating and boozing. Today, almost six months on, it's a totally different Jade than the

one the world grew to love. Gone are the flabby tummy, bulging bum and wobbly thighs. In their place is toned, tanned flesh and a cute heart-shaped face that positively glows with health (Thurgood, 2002: 25).

In January 2003 the *Daily Star* wrote:

Since leaving *Big Brother* 3 last year, life's been up for the gobby babe from Bermondsey, South London. She got her figure back after piling on the pounds during the show and has released a fitness video. And she was voted one of Britain's best bodies in a magazine quiz. But despite her success, her feet were firmly in the ground. "I'm not a celebrity," she says. "I'm just a lucky girl who got put in a house and has done quite well out of it" (Taylor, 2003: 25).

The newspaper articles emphasise the dippy blonde image and the narrative of old Jade Goody transformed into the new Celebrity-Jade, who is still the same down-to-earth person, unchanged by sudden success. The stories emphasise how she has taken control of her life. As seen in the quotes above, when it comes to female celebrities, in tabloid newspapers this control is most often represented as taking control of the body, losing weight and getting fit. The autobiographies follow along similar lines in representing Goody's new image through her new body. 'I got down to a size 12. I've never felt so good in my life. I had a new house, a beautiful baby, I was going out and having a good time, and it was like a whole new me. I also dyed my hair caramel and got long hair extensions put in. I felt great. After all the shit in my life, things were going brilliantly again' (Goody, 2006: 197). Goody's initial celebrity persona is defined through losing the outer signs of working-class excess; bleached blond hair, flabby body and tasteless clothes. Bodily transformation is represented as bringing mental well-being: 'I might come across as if I've got a tough exterior, but all those comparisons to a pig had really hurt me. The negative comments knocked my confidence so much. [...] I was always analysing things, because that's what every paper does to me: I look at my body and always think I need to change a part of myself' (Goody, 2006: 198). Goody's aggressive nature is associated with her childhood but narratively her bodily insecurities are caused by fame and the excessive attention of the media. Being branded an ugly pig while she was on *Big Brother* is seen as providing the spur for Goody to desire the transformation of her appearance. The latter also works to move her away from being a 'chav' and she is represented as looking more classy and elegant instead of brassy and tasteless. It is implied that without celebrity, Goody would have remained a 'chav' whereas fame has given her the tools to transform herself and to reject the values of 'chav.' The transformation into celebrity is also represented as a reaction against the media's attitude towards Goody's appearance.

I got papped doing exercise in the park and I felt crushed. It was the first time I'd read something negative about myself and it really, really hurt. Mind you, I think I asked for it. [...] I was wearing a pink Juicy Couture tracksuit, pink Chanel sunglasses, my nails had just been painted and I was carrying about 50 shopping bags. The headline was: 'It's a pork in a park.' When I saw it, I sat on my bedroom floor and I cried and cried. I hated the way I looked. I'd never been self-conscious before, but now I was just looking in the mirror and criticising everything about myself (Goody, 2006: 167-168).

Goody's celebrity image is carefully cultivated by publicity and promotion, representing Goody as the underdog who's done surprisingly well in life despite early hardships. She is set up as seeing material rewards of fame as less important than happiness, physical well-being and being true to herself. More generally reality TV stars' 'real life' and 'performance' life cannot be easily separated as after the initial break into the media most of their further performances are in reality TV shows; they live their lives through the media: Goody had a contract with Living TV for several reality shows and Katona has appeared in *I'm a Celebrity, Get Me Out of Here!* as well as many reality TV shows where the camera follows her daily life, broadcast on ITV2. In a sense, it could be claimed that their whole life is a performance as the traditional separation between public and private is non-existent. Arguably Goody and Katona could be described as representations of Boorstin's (1961) pseudo-events, known for being well known, lacking in merit or talent, constructed through the media and through self-construction in confessional discourses.

Once they had achieved some degree of fame, discourses about Goody and Katona suggest a performance designed to remove them from their 'chav' backgrounds and to capitalise on their 'lucky break.' After *Big Brother* Goody is constructed as trying to better herself and to re-educate herself. Changing her appearance was central here. Biressi and Nunn argue that 'Jade became a stark signifier of the possibility of self-transformation and social mobility' (2005: 105). They suggest that in Channel 4 documentary *What Jade Did Next*:

The escape that she articulates reveals knowledge about the importance of attaining not just economic wealth, but the cultural artefacts of taste and knowledge, of cultural capital. The possession of the right car, of literacy, of designer clothes, of the right body and private property became a part of Jade's narrative of betterment (Biressi and Nunn, 2005: 105).

Thus Goody's new image was contrasted with her old self adorned in a 'trashy' eviction dress, the overweight body, speaking with a working-class accent and with an over-the-top personality. However, descriptions of her social mobility are undone by representations of

her image as ditzy and uneducated: 'I had my interview and the lady from *Heat* [magazine] asked, "How does it feel to have already earned X amount of money?" I remember saying, "Is that more than £70,000?" and she said, "Awww, bless!" She couldn't believe I didn't know the value of what I'd earned' (Goody, 2006: 154). Goody's attempts to better herself are also represented in *Jade – My Autobiography*: 'I'm going to tuition lessons because I want to improve my reading and writing. [...] I thought it would be a good idea to try and improve myself a bit' (Goody, 2006: 156). Goody's autobiographies pick up on her struggle with language evident in interviews and TV appearances; difficulties with unfamiliar and long words leading to mispronounced words and sentences the middle classes can laugh at. Whilst this is the 'essence' of Jade Goody, she was inarticulate in 'real life' so there is also a sense of the ghost writer tidying up her speech. Arguably this is inevitable in autobiographies about working-class, uneducated celebrities, but the process also works to devalue the texts further. Compared to Russell Brand's fluent autobiographical voice,<sup>23</sup> Goody's voice seems like a construction. This is paradoxical, as the purpose of the autobiography is to represent her as 'authentic'.

In 2005, in a similar way, Katona appeared in a 'reality show entitled *My Fair Kerry*, in which she stayed with an Austrian Count and Countess learning how to be the perfect lady' (Bell, 2008: 10). This was an attempt to remove Katona from her working-class roots through behavioural correction and the learning of 'ladylike skills.' The programme backfired. Bell states: 'During the filming [...], Katona became mentally unwell and increasingly uncertain of her own identity. She felt humiliated by the programme, which appeared to focus on erasing her "unacceptable" low class identity, and on "curing" her of her pathological personality' (2008: 11). Katona's autobiography describes the purpose of the show as follows: 'Count Carl-Philip was my host and the idea was for him to teach me how to speak proper, dance, walk and mix with the cream of society. Hearing him tell me that so much about me wasn't good enough when I felt so low was horrible' (Katona, 2007: 302). 'I definitely failed to become a lady – all I wanted to do was go home' (Katona, 2007: 304). Narratively, the autobiography defends Katona's right to stay true to herself, to her working-class background, in the face of society's prejudice. As with Jade Goody's construction as celebrity, the narrative suggests that if a 'chav' like Katona can make it, then anyone can. Katona's celebrity persona then also emphasises her 'authenticity' and the fact that she has remained unchanged by fame, regardless of the fact that her persona is based on the 'chav' stereotype. Unlike Jade Goody, who tried to better herself and managed to occasionally lose the association with 'chav.' Katona is firmly associated with working-class

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<sup>23</sup> See chapter 4 above.



and 'white trash.' Katona's autobiography only maps her early career and the achievement of celebrity after *I'm a Celebrity, Get Me Out of Here!* and she has gone on to maintain her celebrity career through her working-class persona, which is seen to guarantee her 'authenticity.' Katona's narrative thus differs from that of Jade Goody, as being a 'chav' is a moniker she has been unable to lose. In general, being a 'chav' is seen as something that has to be left behind in order to succeed, but as Katona's success shows, it can also be used in the construction of a celebrity persona.

### **5.3. 'Authenticity', Construction of the Self and the Confessional**

'Some of the earliest autobiographies by working-class women were written in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. [But] the belief that working-class women cannot and should not write has proved remarkably persistent.' (Webster, 1992: 116). Such derision is emphasised today because working-class celebrities' autobiographies are usually ghosted, thus arguably 'confirming' that poorly educated, 'common' individuals cannot possibly have the intellectual capacity to write a book. In addition, autobiography occupies a low place in the hierarchy of genres. But for that reason it offered and still offers working-class women 'a form which did not involve claims to high artistic aspiration' (Webster, 1992: 116). Goody and Katona's autobiographies work to commodify them as celebrities, but also commodifying class through entertainment which helps to sell them to the public. Such an emphasis on class occasionally draws attention away from a gendered discourse. If celebrity autobiographies are generally seen as being representatives of low culture with little literary merit, working-class, famous for being famous female celebrities' autobiographies are seen as the lowest form of the genre. They are considered by literary critics and broadsheet newspapers to be calculating enterprises designed only to make money and to enhance celebrity image.

Contemporary celebrity autobiographies by working-class women rely on the concept of 'authenticity' and being 'real.' The genre and narrative form of autobiography depends on a story telling about the 'authenticity' of the celebrity, that they are unchanged by fame – alongside stories of scandal. The autobiographies try to represent celebrities as unchanged by fame, highlighting ordinariness and being 'real', and also emphasise the most interesting or scandalous events of their lives. At the same time, drama seeps into descriptions of ordinary events. In fact the childhoods of these celebrities, as seen above, seem far from ordinary and arguably set the narrative parameters for how future downfalls are handled. In a sense these autobiographies offer a discourse that represents a picture that is more cohesive and whole than the 'real' lives which are the subject of media hype. A sense of an unfinished self also runs through the narrative.

As seen in the previous chapters, 'the confessional has played an important role in the historic emergence of the individual, self-conscious person equipped with subjectivity and moral standards' (Skeggs, 2004a: 120). Goody and Katona are reliant on the confessional to guarantee their 'truth' and to maintain their position as celebrities. As they have no acknowledged talent and few skills to fall back on, the confessional becomes an essential part of their image and is required through public gossip, speculation and confrontation. Confession of downfalls and failures portrays these celebrities as moral individuals. The autobiographies of Goody and Katona construct a narrative that moves through the successes and failures, already familiar from the media representations, to construct a very specific image of a working-class girl made good. The 'truth' represented in the autobiographies is performative and as the chapter on Jordan shows, often works to represent the celebrities in the best possible light and to gloss over the most transgressive aspects of their character. Guilt and shame have become a common theme in female autobiographies.

In guilt cultures social control is exercised as if it were internally in the conscience of the individual, and behaviour is monitored by these forms of guilt reaction. By contrast, in shame cultures, social control is exercised through mechanisms such as public confrontation of the sinner, gossip, and more public and overt forms of moral restraint. The confession was a part of a new personhood, organised around the key concepts of conscience, consciousness, feeling and sentiment. It was the method by which the dual self – the one that views its interiority from an external standpoint, could be performed (Skeggs, 2004a: 120).

In Goody and Katona's autobiographies the confession works through both guilt and shame. Both feel guilty for their bad or unacceptable behaviour, but are shamed into guilt by the media's merciless condemnation of them as celebrities behaving in an unacceptable manner. *Kerry – Too Much, Too Young* represents Katona's drug use as adding to the guilt she already feels about not being able to 'save' her mother from depression and for deceiving her foster parents.

Doing speed with my Mum became a regular thing at weekends. When I did, I felt that my insecurities about my background and who I was dropped away. I did feel guilty about taking it [...] because I knew it was wrong. I think even then I knew I was letting myself down by taking it, but I wanted to be doing what everyone else was doing – peer pressure's hard to resist (Katona, 2007: 123-124).

The autobiography is the first public moment that Katona has confessed to using drugs, as this side of her was concealed from the media. However, the media continued to speculate about her drug use for years, until it was revealed in 2009 that she was using cocaine regularly and was secretly filmed doing so. The autobiography first represents her drug use as merely a weekend pastime and her alcohol abuse as binge drinking, concealing the true extent of her addiction, which is only revealed towards the end of the book. This works narratively to build up to her final breakdown, when she confesses to her addiction and enters rehab.

Jade Goody is represented in her autobiographies through a continuous narrative of guilt and shame: 'I knew I had done wrong in the [*Celebrity Big Brother*] house, but until the *News of the World* interview it still hadn't quite sunk in how much I was hated. [...] I thought that if I spoke from the heart I would be able to convince people I hadn't meant to offend' (Goody, 2008: 101). It is notable that the confessions in autobiography are often a clear response to malicious newspaper reports. For example the above interview in the *News of the World*<sup>24</sup> was accompanied by several photos of Jade crying and looking distressed and the headline that the above quote is a response to reads: 'Yes I am a bully. Yes I am a racist.' The response in the autobiography continues: 'I hadn't said that – all I said was that I could see how people would think from watching some of the footage that I was a bully and a racist. But it's about selling papers, isn't it?' (Goody, 2008: 109). The autobiography provides celebrities with an opportunity to respond to tabloid allegations, but as commercial vehicles for the celebrity, the autobiographies also engage in a discursive performance to construct and maintain a coherent image. For volatile celebrities, whom I would argue both Goody and Katona are, it is in this narrative construction that the 'real' personality can disrupt the coherence of the intended representation. Media image and the autobiographical image are often in conflict and since the public will not necessarily read the autobiography, the former often dominates. After scandals or transgressions, the media often express doubt regarding the 'authenticity' of the image. 'After the *News of the World* interview people had started saying that I was putting on crocodile tears, and this just made me more paranoid. [...] There was no way I was putting it on, or would ever be capable of doing something like that. I'm not that bloody clever, but now I was obsessed that people thought I was' (Goody, 2008: 110).

The autobiography thus works through guilt caused by the public shaming of the celebrity. Confessing to this guilt seems a compulsive part of the female working-class celebrity's image. In comparison, any guilt that male stars such as Brand and Williams may feel about

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<sup>24</sup> 21 January 2007

any morally dubious behaviour is omitted from the auto/biographies in favour of humorous accounts that represent acts of transgression as part of the persona. Even though the media may attempt to shame male stars, in the auto/biographical discourses studied in this thesis there is no trace of shame or guilt. For example, the response in Brand's autobiography *My Booky Wook 2: This Time It's Personal* to a scandalous newspaper article is represented as follows:

My move to Radio 2 was heralded with this headline in the *Daily Mail* above an article written by Alison Boshoff: "Drug addict. Sex addict. Bin Laden impersonator. Is Russell Brand REALLY what Radio 2 needs?" My response to this was to give Alison Boshoff's email address on air, dubbing her "Nosh-off, Bosh-off" – a suggested colloquialism for hygiene-driven inter-orifice fellatio, and to ring the *Daily Mail* (Brand, 2010: 118).

Male stars have the ability to respond to public shaming through continuing the cultivated persona as wild and unpredictable and not something to change or feel guilty about. As Bell puts it:

The "bad boy" image of hedonistic excess – drug and alcohol addiction, promiscuity, violence – is in many ways acceptably masculine [but] uncontained female celebrities are, by default, somehow insane. Salacious media reporting of female crisis celebrity reinforces the unrelenting representation of female celebrities per se as pathologically narcissistic and out of control (2008: 4).

Both Katona and Goody's autobiographies are confessional narratives of a female celebrity constantly in crisis. 'Suddenly it all got too much: I locked myself in the toilet where I broke down and couldn't stop crying. Eventually Bryan came and kicked down the door, then he took me home to Mum's where I had two weeks to recover. I was diagnosed with depression and given anti-depressants' (Katona, 2007: 206). The failures in their lives are also often linked to their class background. Katona's breakdown described above was linked to her mother, who was a drug addict, expecting Katona's undivided attention whilst she was under pressure at work. It is suggested that Katona felt guilty for having moved away from her home town and her working-class background leaving her needy mother behind.

Associated with the individualism that autobiography traditionally demands is the concept of the self. According to Evans (1999) autobiographical construction of the self is complex but always based on the assumption that the self is coherent. This implies stability of the self, which is in direct opposition to the demand for change informing the representation of celebrity image. Moreover, the self is a concept that has historically been based on class:

upper and middle classes were seen as having the capability to form a self, whereas the working-classes were excluded because they often lacked the ability to write a self. The self therefore is by no means a neutral term but includes classifications according to class and gender. Foucault (McLaren, 2002) describes autobiography as a type of self-writing that works to individualise people in a similar manner to the spoken (religious) confession. As McLaren suggests, 'autobiography can function ambivalently as confession or self-writing' (2002: 151).

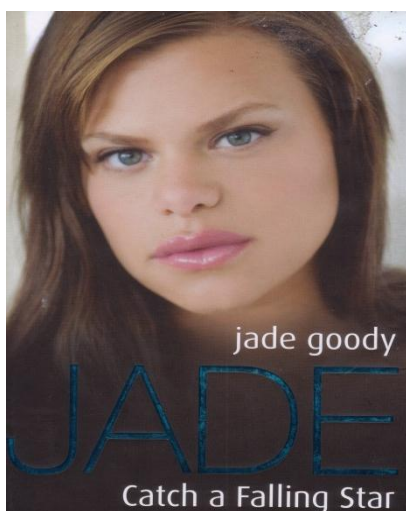
A significant feature in regard to the self is the movement of the self from outside to inside. The self gained an interiority that could be told through particular techniques. What came to be known as the working-class autobiography (in the 19<sup>th</sup> century) drew on two traditions: spiritual autobiography and story-telling (Skeggs, 2004a: 122).

Contemporary celebrity autobiographies mainly rely on narrative and story-telling but also include an element of spirituality in the form of redemption through the realisation of the 'larger meaning of life.' *Jade – Catch a Falling Star* ends with Goody's realisation of what is important in life: 'Out of all this I seem to have found a focus. [...] I just suddenly had this overwhelming feeling that I want to give something back. [...] From hereon it's going to be different. [...] I want to do all things I never would have bothered about doing before' (Goody, 2008: 281-282). The resolution of the narrative thus represents a new awareness and the desire to leave the past behind. Katona's autobiography *Kerry – Too Much, Too Young* ends on a similar note of self-realisation: 'I'm determined to cling on to what I've got and not to let my past beat me. If it wants to try, it will have a fight on its hands. [...] I'm sure I'll be able to overcome any obstacles that come my way. Whatever happens, my new family is what matters most to me and they will always come first' (Katona, 2007: 332). In expressing a desire to leave the past behind and look forward to the future, both autobiographies thus leave room for future confessionals to continue the story.

'Different techniques of telling enable the attribution of the "self" to different groups; for the working-class, it always had to be a way of displaying respectability' (Skeggs, 2004a: 123). Autobiographies can be represented as morality tales where the protagonist learns from his or her past mistakes. The resolution in Goody and Katona's autobiographies then attempts to represent the respectability of these characters, which has been in question many times throughout their careers. However, because the resolution looks to the future, the work of becoming a finished self is still in progress. This is therefore not a final resolution. Respectability is also evident in Brand's autobiography which ends with him having found his future wife, implying a new-found family-man image. By the end of Brand's second

autobiography, he has left behind his addictions and womanising ways, the resolution looks forward to the future: 'The next night we went on our first date and she was so funny and pretty but more importantly she emits some gentle power that makes me want to be good. [...] From the first date I changed. No more women' (Brand, 2010: 309). In fact, it is rare for a masculine autobiography to end on a note of triumph of masculine behaviour. As they are often read mainly by women, masculine autobiographies have adopted elements of romantic fiction. In these autobiographies there is a narrative need to find a happy ending. Even though there may be future autobiographies, each book needs a resolution that represents the characters as having found an often normative and temporary equilibrium. Often the endings highlight the importance of personal success, and look forward to the future.

The narrative model of autobiographical writing closely resembles fiction. 'An autobiographical narrative provides unity to the heterogeneous and disparate aspects of



one's life' (McLaren, 2002: 151). The close ties are clear to see in Goody and Katona's autobiographies whilst both celebrities are represented in the media as leading chaotic lives involving various downfalls, scandals and acts of transgressive behaviour. The autobiographies bring a sense of coherence to these lives. In the media transgressive incidents have been told through individual stories usually with negative connotations but autobiographical discourse offers a narrative of success emerging from failure. Goody and Katona's constructed selves are formed through cohesive, coherent narratives.

These celebrities grow to become more whole and contended in themselves. To put it another way, these autobiographies simplify life into a narrative where the celebrities act as the main characters.

Goody's autobiographies demonstrate the commercial tensions between telling more and the celebrity's reluctance to tell all. The first autobiography *Jade – My Autobiography*, published in 2006, is a narrative concentrating on Goody's rise to fame from a difficult working-class childhood. However, her new-found celebrity status is described in an entertaining manner that emphasises social mobility and coping with fame. The autobiography purposefully omits significant details (see below) of Goody's early life as these might disrupt the image of the celebrity under construction. The second autobiography, *Jade – Catch a Falling Star*, published in 2008, when Goody had become an established celebrity but nearly ruined her career through scandalous behaviour and news

coverage, confesses to these early omissions from the first book. The main omission relates to Goody's mother's use of hard drugs and Goody's violence. In the first autobiography, the former is only mentioned briefly: 'Mum's not like my dad, though; she'd never get involved in hard drugs. Her only vice is weed, and she smoked it because it kept her mellow' (Goody, 2006: 32). A violent incident described in detail in the second autobiography is also glossed over earlier: 'I had a fight with Mel [Goody's mother's drug user friend] once. I pulled her out of the house and started laying into her' (Goody, 2006: 97). The omissions are admitted in the second autobiography. 'I glossed over it in my last book – I'd been too frightened to tell a living soul' (Goody, 2008: xvi). 'Every night I would go home and frantically search for evidence of my mum's drug use. Would she be on crack? Would she even be alive? I used to argue and argue with her, and I hated it. In the end we were fighting like a cat and dog' (Goody, 2008: 9). 'I'm not proud of what I did next. And anyone who already thinks I have a bad temper will just think they're being proved right after hearing this. [...] I pulled Mel by the hair, shut the door, dragged her outside and proceeded to hit her uncontrollably. [...] I hit her over and over again until physically I couldn't fight anymore' (Goody, 2008: 11). 'And there and then, to prove a point, I decided to show her how nasty and heart-breaking it was to see a member of your own family, your own flesh and blood, killing themselves in front of your very eyes. I took some of her crack; put it in a Rizla paper to make a joint and I smoked it. I felt dirty and disgusting' (Goody, 2008: 12-13). 'I rushed over to where Mum was, grabbed her by the throat and pushed her hard up against the wall. [...] I was nearly choking her but I didn't care. [...] She punched me and I whacked her back' (Goody, 2008: 13-14).

Although Goody may have been reluctant to reveal these details in her first autobiography, the exclusion of her violence and earlier life from the autobiography was presumably designed to sell Goody as a celebrity and to capitalise on her newfound fame – a strategic decision on the part of those responsible for constructing her image. By the time of the second autobiography Goody had been involved in several incidents involving violence, anger and abuse, as well as a major race-related scandal broadcast on national television. The image of the 'authentic' self as a lovable bimbo had been destroyed. In commercial terms, the narrative also had to continue in order to maintain Goody's fame but there is a stark difference between the portrayals in the two autobiographies. The first is mostly a tale of success designed to sell the 'rags to riches' story whereas the second one is much more negative and disturbing, and possibly more honest because Goody could no longer hide behind the earlier image. Regardless of the negativity, the resolution, as discussed above, is a happy, forward-looking one, notwithstanding Goody has just been diagnosed with cervical cancer that would eventually lead to her death.

It is significant that in the past working-class women rarely wrote their own stories. Instead, they told their stories to somebody who would write autobiographies for them. According to Skeggs 'access to the self is limited by the means and techniques of telling and knowing' (2004a: 124). Historically, the 'autobiographical form came to mark – and be marked – by the privilege of self-possession. Being the author of one's life, rather than the respondent of another's interlocutions, generated different sorts of personhood; a class difference that is being reproduced in contemporary forms of telling' (Skeggs, 2004a: 124). The working-class female autobiography, written by a reality TV celebrity, can be seen in this way. Ghost writers, celebrity managers and publicists, as well as the publishing houses and booksellers all profit from celebrities. The celebrity self that is constructed in these autobiographies is produced through the ghost writers' understanding of the celebrity's image and the requirements of the market. Objectified and commodified, the celebrities themselves become cases to be investigated through someone else's eyes. As Wanko puts it, '[the] biographer must create a central character from a wide-ranging and often contradictory life. The biographer's job is to give order, somehow, to amazing variety' (2003: 209). The same applies to contemporary ghost writers and those few celebrities that write their own autobiographies. It is a question of selection necessary for the creation of a coherent narrative and a unified character. According to Skeggs, historically, 'moral attribution was only given to particular selves who displayed self-governance' (2004a: 125). Contemporary autobiographies in turn have discarded moral attribution and self-governance. Instead the less straightforwardly moral the celebrity is and less he or she displays self-governance, the more interesting he or she can be represented through narratives of success and failure. Therefore, controversial celebrities can sell more books than those that are considered less interesting. Self-governance is often only a part of the resolution, seemingly achieved through the process success and failure. As well as being commodified by the autobiographical process, Goody and Katona become objectified by those who write and publish their autobiographies.

#### **5.4. Mental Illness, Bodily Representations and the Gendered Narratives of Breakdown**

According to Holmes and Redmond, 'the representation of modern fame is bound up with auto-destructive tendencies or dissolution. One of the dominant scripts of stardom and celebrity now centres on the real and symbolic pain fame brings to those who exist in the glare of the media spotlight' (2005: 15). The media are increasingly involved in damaging the image of a celebrity through salacious and unflattering reportage. Autobiographies on the other hand work through narratives based on damage caused by fame to offer a



narrative of healing. Feminine autobiographies especially trade in narratives of crisis. Goody and Katona's autobiographies centre on breakdown and bodily struggles.

Femininity is a public performance that depends on the validation by others (Skeggs, 1997). This is particularly evident in the lives of celebrities who are, in a sense, always on display. Bodily representations are even more central for reality TV celebrities with little talent, whose celebrity relies wholly on media appearances. Discourses of the celebrity body are central in Goody and Katona's autobiographies. As the media constantly criticise and judge celebrity bodies, celebrities are always under pressure to maintain an acceptable body image. As Bailey puts it, 'women's very bodies are tailored, by women, to conform to social ideals which are historically specific. Women have been associated with the body and emotion' (1993: 104). Engaging in such discourses, Goody and Katona's autobiographies are arguably more traditional in their representations of gender. Fame brings with it pressures to adhere to feminine bodily norms and for Goody and Katona this pressure has driven them to eating disorders and plastic surgery.

It was also during this time that I developed an eating disorder. I was making myself sick to keep the weight down, and when I wasn't doing that I was developing a serious (and very secret) addiction to slimming pills. The more people said how good I looked - I had long dark hair extensions at the time and I nearly combusted on the spot when I read that one newspaper thought I looked like Liz Hurley - the more pressure I felt to maintain it. Slimming pills just seemed like the easy answer to keep the weight off (Goody, 2008: 26-27).

Goody's autobiographies tell the extent of her bodily insecurities and in doing so add to her representation as being somehow unfinished - a sense that dominates the narratives in both of her autobiographies. From the beginning media representations concentrated on judging Goody's body, which, according to the autobiographies, was the reason that Goody became so insecure about her looks. Goody didn't look her best at the eviction from the *Big Brother* house in 2002: 'I didn't try my eviction outfit on during the whole time I was in there. I think I was in denial. I was about a size 10 before I went on to *Big Brother*, and when I came out I was a size 14! So when I put the dress on - I was bulging out everywhere' (Goody, 2006: 137). Her appearance at this time fuelled media judgement of her body. After the initial reporting, the media never stopped calling Goody Miss Piggy or comparing her to a pig, names that arose every time Goody received negative publicity. Goody also did not realise that she was doing her body serious harm through abusing slimming pills. The implications of her slimming pill addiction are revealed in *Jade - Catch a Falling Star*:

I hadn't actually admitted it to anyone yet, but my body was turning into an absolute mess because of all the damage I was doing to it. Ever since Bobby was born I'd been relying on slimming pills and laxatives to keep my weight under control. Yes, I might have exercised and, yes, I might have told certain magazines I was on some new-fangled healthy-eating diet. But I was always supplementing it with tablets (Goody, 2008: 73).

The second autobiography contains several similar sections where Goody's persona slowly unravels, revealing new, previously untold details. Thus the autobiographies give an impression of revealing hidden truths and of admitting previous omissions, thus working narratively to construct a sense of 'authenticity'. But at the same time as these autobiographies construct 'authenticity' they admit that Jade Goody, the celebrity, is indeed a narrative construction, and one that is on-going and changing depending on circumstances.

Social gender norms affect the way celebrity autobiographies are written and the manner in which celebrities are represented.

As most feminists argue, gender norms are not simply innocuous social rules or guidelines that tell one how to act and dress; gender norms play a significant role in social organisation. Moreover, the gender norms for women are not just constraining on some trivial level but encourage self-starvation, bodily mutilation, and unwarranted surgical practices (McLaren, 2002: 97).

Bodies are cultural constructions and celebrities are currently seen as embodying the 'ideal' body and appearance. However, autobiographical narratives represent female celebrities' bodily struggles to achieve and maintain this 'ideal' thus using the body to 'authenticate' the celebrity. 'Bordo discusses the ways in which culture constructs and pathologises femininity. [...] These pathologies are an extreme form of the inscription of femininity on women's bodies' (McLaren, 2002: 95). In Goody and Katona's case gender pathologies are combined with the class pathology of 'chav'. Their working-class bodies are seen by the media as not conforming to the ideal, with pressure put on them to modify their bodies to fit the norm. In Goody's case, this pressure leads to bulimia.

I was sick. And sick. And sick. [...] I looked myself in the mirror and I smiled. I'd actually enjoyed the feeling of being sick. [...] So that was it; I didn't stop after that. [...] Nobody knew. And it went on for months. [...] But underneath it all I was deeply ashamed. I'd be all alone, crouching in a toilet with my head down the loo. What kind of a person does that? (Goody, 2008: 198-199).

Moving into the world of celebrity, new celebrities often alter their appearance to improve and to transform. This transformation then provides material for their on-going narrative construction. Goody's autobiographies represent the eating disorder as the only way that Goody can stay in control of at least one aspect of her life although at the same time a shame discourse works to construct a deeply troubled young woman who cannot cope with sudden fame and is ashamed of having succumbed to bulimia. Eventually Goody had to confess to her eating disorder. Confession then alleviates the shame but narratively sets in motion her addiction to slimming pills. 'Pills offered me a sneaky way of doing the same job. I got well and truly hooked on them' (Goody, 2008: 27). Narratively, an eating disorder and slimming pill addiction then work to construct a troubled female celebrity, or female celebrity in crisis – a representation also familiar in media representations.

The autobiographies follow the dominant feminine discourse of train-wreck female celebrity, demonstrated by numerous celebrities over the years. Female reality TV celebrities' autobiographies and confessional discourses are clearly gendered feminine through bodily narratives. As the body is the main avenue for female celebrities to 're-invent' their image, it becomes central to discourses about the persona and the self of the celebrity in crisis. Pressures of fame are written on the body, but eating disorders are rarely revealed in media confessionals. The emphasis in these is often on healthy eating, diet and exercise, but as seen in Goody's case, the autobiographies reveal hidden disorders and addictions, putting the created media image in question. But this also ensures the autobiography's place as the site of 'truth' and 'authenticity'. According to Bell (2008) reality TV female celebrities' fame depends on their being both in and out of control. This in turn guarantees a continuous narrative to be circulated in the media. 'Through the memoir, one can offer emotional intimacy, dispute or create media scandals, and assert authenticity' (Bell, 2008: 4). What is central about contemporary celebrity autobiography is that it is one of the few means of (re)constructing a celebrity persona, which is to some degree under the control of the celebrity (Bell, 2008).

As well as physical failures, mental distress has also become a central theme in celebrity autobiographies. As seen in the previous chapter, even male celebrities are now willing to confess mental instability, but instead of creating pity or condemnation of them, mental distress adds to the male 'creative genius' image. However, this works differently in relation to female celebrities.

Gender is understood to be an important ingredient in the way celebrity madness is communicated and understood, with the appropriation of the "feminine therapeutic discourses" used to reinforce the patriarchal definition of genius as a combination of male and female qualities reserved exclusively for men. [...]

Celebrity mental illness provides women with a melodramatic affect correlating to a particular female experience of frustration and disempowerment (Holmes and Redmond, 2006: 291).

Female breakdown is often narratively represented as being caused by failed relationships, thus the female celebrity is defined through her relationships with men. Katona had a mental breakdown after her marriage collapsed and she was treated in two rehab centres, the Priory in the UK and Cottonwood in Arizona U.S.A. Katona's breakdown was widely reported in the media, as her autobiography relates: 'There were newspaper reports all over the place about how I was losing it' (Katona, 2007: 306). Her autobiography *Kerry – Too Much, Too Young* offers a response to these newspaper reports by detailing her illness: 'I did my best to forget everything and get on with my life, but it was impossible. My dream of having a happy, stable family of my own was in pieces. I was a broken woman and didn't know how I was going to get through it' (Katona, 2007: 293). 'When I was at my lowest point, certain friends persuaded me into going out, having a drink and taking drugs. [...] For a few hours I did feel better. I would forget the pain and feel like I wasn't worthless or ugly. I had no idea what I was doing to myself or how it would end and refused to admit it was becoming a problem' (Katona, 2007: 294). Like in the case of Goody, the autobiographical discourse implies that Katona's background is to blame for her insecurities, addictions and depression. 'I replayed [the relationship with Bryan] in my mind, trying to work out what I had done wrong. I blamed myself, my upbringing and the insecurities it had given me' (Katona, 2007: 295). 'A lifetime of rejection dictates its own pattern of behaviour, and that's something I needed to change' (Katona, 2007: 311).

Katona's mental breakdown is represented as a continuous struggle. She is weak and fallible as she succumbs to the same addictive behaviours time and again:

In the months that followed my first stay in the Priory, I had huge highs and lows. Despite my resolutions to stop relying on drink and drugs, I couldn't resist the way they made me feel better about myself. An argument with Bryan would plunge me back into depression and I'd head straight for the pub (Katona, 2007: 300).

Harper (2006) suggests that female mental illness is often described as a 'battle.' Unlike their male counterparts female depressives are seen as being in a constant 'battle' with their illness whereas for men, mental illness adds to their images as mad geniuses. Male mental illness is not usually seen in tragic terms, the tragedy only enters the discourse when a male celebrity dies before their time. Furthermore, mental illness is used to prove Katona's 'authenticity' vis-a-vis the 'role' she played in Atomic Kitten: 'In a way, being one of

the Kittens was like acting, so because I wasn't being myself I didn't need that confidence boost' (Katona, 2007: 179). The autobiography attempts to satisfy the public curiosity about what the celebrity is 'really' like (Dyer, 1986). Katona's Atomic Kitten persona is replaced by a fallible and disturbed young woman, supposedly 'the real Kerry'.

According to Harper, 'in today's postmodern media, the "appearance" and "reality" of celebrity (both equally constructed) are represented simultaneously' (2006: 321). The autobiography then becomes a text which, through representations of mental illness, seems to offer the 'reality' behind the glamour of celebrity. However, narratively mental distress is resolved and the celebrity returns to glamorous life: 'When I came out [of rehab] at the end of those six weeks, I was a new woman. I felt so refreshed, so vibrant and healthy' (Katona, 2007: 312). Mental illness is represented as an everyday struggle, working to 'authenticate' Katona's reality TV-based celebrity persona constructed after she left the band Atomic Kitten and divorced her pop star husband. The transgressive and mentally distressed Katona is returned to normality through a discourse of motherhood, a new marriage and a new pregnancy. In the story of her life, marriage and motherhood are represented as central to happiness and content: 'I want to be with Mark and our kids in one big happy family forever' (Katona, 2007: 330). Female celebrity autobiographies then rely on motherhood as a vehicle to resolve the crisis, hardships and failures. If autobiographies work to reduce the stigma attached to celebrities through representing them as 'authentic' and by revealing the 'truth' about their personas, the discourse of 'authenticity' does not always work. The media's condemnation can be so total that it is difficult for celebrities to counter accusations through confession. This is particularly evident in the case of scandal discourse.

## **5.5. Autobiography as a PR Response to Scandal and Crisis**

Negative reporting in the press about Jade Goody arose at regular intervals but reached its peak when Goody was involved in a scandal. In 2007, Goody took part in *Celebrity Big Brother* with her mother and her boyfriend Jack Tweed. The concept of the programme saw Goody and her family as 'masters' of the *Big Brother* house, while other housemates acted as servants. The programme culminated in a race scandal when Goody was accused of racially abusing Indian housemate Shilpa Shetty. The scandal saw newspapers once again viciously attack Goody. She was the biggest star reality TV had made in the UK, but during her two week stay in *Celebrity Big Brother* house, she ruined her carefully constructed image. Goody was soon seen as a bullying monster as viewers complained to media watchdog Ofcom about her apparently racist behaviour (Nathan, Cox and Robertson, 2007: 6). The *Sun* urged people to evict 'Jade Baddie' and started a campaign to 'Evict the Face of

Hate.’<sup>25</sup> Goody’s behaviour caused such a furore that the formerly lovable reality TV star was turned into an international hate-figure in a matter of days. Goody denied being a racist both in the Diary Room of *Celebrity Big Brother* and in countless interviews after the show. The scandal was dubbed ‘Goody Gate’ by the *Sun* (Nathan, Cox and Robertson, 2007).

The scandal forms a large part of Goody’s second autobiography *Jade – Catch a Falling Star* (2008). The book’s title could be seen to refer to Goody’s failure after the scandal. The autobiography offers a response to hurtful media reports, working to assure the public that Goody is not a racist and is apologetic for her behaviour, but above all outlines Goody’s mental breakdown after the scandal. The narrative begins with Goody entering the *Celebrity Big Brother* house at the height of her success:

I’ve never had such a reception in my life. The entire audience was cheering my name and shouting for Jack – they were going mental. It was all the more surreal because this was where I’d stood when I went into the same house five years before and no one had the foggiest idea who I was. But here was me – a national home-grown celebrity – and people actually liked me and wanted me to do well (Goody, 2008: 79).

However, due to arguments perceived as racist, the public and the media soon condemned Goody and her ‘racist’ behaviour. It was clear that there was a class difference between working-class Goody and upper class Shetty, which in the autobiography is represented as the cause for the argument that came to be seen as racist:

What I said was never racially motivated. I honestly said nothing that was directed at the colour of Shilpa’s skin and I never would. Yes, I shouted. Yes, I was nasty. And yes, I am horrified that I could behave in that way and I wish I could take back everything that I said that evening. But ultimately we were fighting because we were from different classes and had different values in life. I really felt like she was looking down on me, and people who know me will know I have a chip on my shoulder about that. I don’t want anyone to think they’re better than me, just because they have more money or have had a more educated upbringing. I felt like, to her, I was common. And, to me, she was a posh, up-herself princess. But it was never to do with race (Goody, 2008: 93).

The autobiography evokes class to excuse Goody’s transgressive behaviour. In the British context, class-based abuse is not regarded as serious as racial abuse. Crowds were banned from Goody’s eviction due to threats she had received and her press conference was

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<sup>25</sup> Heat, 27 January – 2 February 2007, pp. 16-18

cancelled (Nathan, Cox and Robertson, 2007). The autobiography provides a stage for representing Goody's self-reflection on her own bad behaviour. 'Then Davina [McCall] showed me the argument. And never have I seen such a vicious-looking face in my life. "The face of hate" I think it was called in one newspaper, and they were right. I was disgusted to look at myself' (Goody, 2008: 96). The 'race scandal' is contrasted with Goody's earlier *Big Brother* experience: 'In the past I had been named the most hated person next to Osama bin Laden. I had been called a fat troll. And people had banners saying "Burn that pig." But back then I didn't have anything to lose; now I had so much' (Goody, 2008: 97). Again, Goody's troubled background was mobilised to excuse her behaviour, linking her once again firmly with the working-class stereotype of violent and aggressive behaviour: 'I didn't know that my presence could be so intimidating or bullying. I don't want that, but I don't know any other way to argue. I've never blamed my past for anything I've done, but I don't know any other way. My only way to argue is to shout – to get louder so that I can't hear what they're saying' (Goody, 2008: 104). Even though the statement claims that Goody does not use her background to excuse her behaviour, discussing it in that way gives the impression that her background should be considered when judging her behaviour. The media's condemnation would seem to have led to Goody's mental breakdown and she was eventually sent to the rehab centre the Priory by her management. However, Goody's time in therapy was plagued by stories in the tabloids that were not willing to forgive and forget. The *Daily Star* claimed that she 'was "kicked out" of rehab because she was too angry for anger management classes.'<sup>26</sup> The paper also reported that Jade's stint in rehab was a publicity stunt (Millar, 2007).

Scandal discourse has a special status in celebrity discourses because it appears to tell the ultimate truth about the star, which all the fabrications of publicity and promotional campaigns can no longer hide. As the media represented Goody's previous image as a manufactured lie, the autobiography responds to allegations by representing Goody as 'authentic' and 'real' but deeply mentally troubled. The autobiography also maps Goody's attempts to redeem herself by giving interviews to the media, a redemption that backfired as the media represented Goody's attempts as a calculated PR exercise.

I just wanted to explain myself to as many people as possible, to try and convince people that I wasn't a racist. And despite the criticism I got afterwards for seeming to appear on every TV show as if I was on a sympathy trail, I don't regret it. All I wish I hadn't

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<sup>26</sup> Heat 17-23 February 2007

done was to say “sorry” as many times as I did. I should have said it once only and disappeared. But I genuinely was remorseful (Goody, 2008: 112-113).

The relationship between celebrity and cultural values becomes central in the narrative of a scandal. Celebrities articulate particular meanings and social values to the audiences. According to Hinerman, ‘media scandal is a narrative disruption where a particular set of acts is seen to violate the moral boundaries of culture’ (1997: 146). Previously adored for her lack of social graces and made fun of for being so ‘common,’ Goody was vilified for the same reasons. Even though she had always been seen as somewhat ignorant, her extreme behaviour was seriously at odds with both cultural norms and her celebrity image. Newspapers reported her appearances on TV shows as publicity stunts, carefully stage-managed appeals for forgiveness with confession used to excuse inexcusable behaviour. It is important to note that the discourses surrounding the race scandal ignored the fact that Jade was mixed-race herself, with a white mother and a black father. The focus was on her class background rather than her race, which perhaps demonstrates how the media pick and choose which facts to emphasise in order to sell the best possible story to the public.

According to Bell, ‘celebrity autobiographical products about mental illness are self-reflexive texts predicated on a knowingness of the need to continually remake the self within popular culture’ (2008: 4). The overall narrative of the race scandal is represented as this kind of self-reflexive process; Goody growing as a person and realising what is important in life. As a result of the scandal, Goody lost many lucrative deals, concentrating on herself, to reflect on her life and behaviour, and with the help of therapists unpacking her anger issues represented as stemming from her childhood and her relationship with her mother. ‘Being here – in rehab – frightened the living hell out of me. I was in the Priory, under doctor’s orders. For the past week I’d been on the front page of every newspaper and magazine in the country, alongside words like “racist pig” or “vile bully”. The nation hated me. My life was crumbling beneath me’ (Goody, 2008: xv). Goody’s anger and aggression are seen to relate to the difficulties of dealing with her mother repeatedly lying about her drug use. Goody is diagnosed with depression. Narratively Goody must face up to her past if she is to move on. ‘I’d never admitted this to anyone because it killed me to think about it. I deliberately didn’t write about it in my last book because I couldn’t face it and didn’t want people to judge my mum. But now I have to face it if I’m ever going to get over my anger and hang-ups’ (Goody, 2008: 135). In order to be therapeutically healed and to become more traditionally feminine, Goody needs to let go of her anger and use of violence to resolve conflicts. She has already transformed her body and appearance, now she strives to create a whole new self.



There was a point in mid-2008 where I finally thought I'd picked myself up, dusted myself off and learnt a hell of a lot along the way. I was gradually starting to become Jade again. After *Big Brother* I lost all my confidence and felt like I had no identity. I know now that it's really important for me to feel liked. [...] To know that people didn't like me was the worst feeling in the world. [...] To be hated for something I wasn't made me lose all sense of who I was and all self-belief (Goody, 2008: 262).

If scandal stripped Goody of any coherent sense of self or identity, the autobiography emphasises the learning curve involved in revealing a whole self again: 'I hope I've come out a better person because of it' (Goody, 2008: 249). Goody's final breakdown came when she was accused of being a bad mother after emerging from the *Celebrity Big Brother* house, but in the end motherhood is seen as being Goody's ultimate saviour and through motherhood a more traditional femininity is constructed in place of the out-of-control, mentally unstable and aggressive Goody: 'My boys give me more pleasure every day. They're growing up so quickly it's unbelievable. And I want to savour every bit of time I have with them' (Goody, 2008: 266). 'The boys make me laugh every day, which takes my mind off things and keeps me normal. I don't know what I'd do without them' (Goody, 2008: 283).

The media, however, were unwilling to forgive and forget. After her 'crash and burn' performance on *Celebrity Big Brother*, the media not only condemned her, but also started to look for evidence of her duplicity (Goody, 2008). Stories of hypocrisy and deceit emerged. Goody's 'authenticity', previously essential to her media persona, was put in question. Newspapers reported that instead of losing weight through exercise and diet, Goody had had liposuction to get in shape for her fitness video (Byers, 2007<sup>27</sup>). As her 'authenticity' was based on honesty, on being 'just Jade', both in private and in public, this was thrown into doubt. *Jade – Catch a Falling Star* also works to construct another narrative and deny this duplicity.

When I came out of the house I found that I was facing another scandal aside from the racial allegations. Newspaper reports were saying that I'd cheated on the [fitness] DVD and that my weight loss had been down to liposuction, not exercise. I was fuming at this. But as usual I had myself to blame. You see, I have actually had liposuction before – I've just never come clean about it. I got it done at the same time as I had my boob job in 2005 (Goody, 2008: 215).

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<sup>27</sup> <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/print.do?articleId=1294229>

Continuous revelations of deceit arguably made it difficult for Goody to redeem herself and to rebuild her career. As Rojek argues, 'the redemption script is high risk since it acknowledges personality defects and depends on avoiding slipping back to behaviour that provoked the public censure and punishment' (2001: 90). After the 'race scandal' it seemed that Goody had slowly started slipping into obscurity: the media like nothing more than to build celebrities up and then knock them down (Batty, 2007). However, the media also like to see someone make a comeback. In Goody's case this occurred when she was diagnosed with cancer in 2008, which renewed interest in her and turned negative publicity into sympathy.

## **5.6. Conclusion: Tradition, 'Authenticity' and Gender**

Autobiography is one of the few means that contemporary celebrities have to control their representations and to respond to media allegations. Populist autobiography can give a voice to the members of marginalised groups and allows working-class celebrities to 'explain' their rise from 'rags to riches.' Autobiographies allow celebrities to construct and reconstruct personas in response to media's reporting. Autobiographies also allow celebrities to tell 'their side of the story' through a creation of an emotional intimacy with the reader. To put it another way, they offer a counter-narrative from that offered in the press.

Working-class, reality TV celebrities like Goody and Katona generally maintain their fame through the confessional, which becomes a part of their constructed personas. They come to be seen as honest and open, telling everything about their lives. However, autobiographies often reveal that this apparent honesty is a construction, and that significant details of these celebrities' lives are concealed from the media. As the media often condemn, ridicule or negatively judge famous for being famous celebrities, they come to be represented as not deserving of their fame. This is a gendered phenomenon because as the previous chapter showed, male celebrities appear more valued than female celebrities. For Goody and Katona, autobiography becomes a site for the construction of a likeable persona. Classed as 'chavs,' being working-class becomes central to the representations of success and failure in Goody and Katona's lives. As Goody and Katona repeatedly transgress moral boundaries, these transgressions are 'explained away' through their class background. The violence, substance abuse and financial difficulties that they faced as children living with volatile mothers relying on benefits become central to their narrative of betterment and their journey to celebrity.

As working-class women Goody and Katona are seen to lack the ability to be 'normal' although they are represented as 'ordinary.' The autobiographies represent them as

continuously finding themselves in situations where their behaviour marks them as different, and as a result drama occurs. The autobiographies adhere to the script of female celebrity in crisis. The narratives are dominated by mental and physical distress, bodily insecurities, and the inability to cope with fame. The constant media attention brings Goody and Katona the material rewards of fame, but they are represented as being negatively influenced by the constant surveillance and judgement of their private lives. The autobiographies studied in this chapter reveal the calculated nature of modern celebrity autobiographies and the extent to which they can be used to counter negative or untrue stories in the media. These autobiographies also represent a more traditional gender discourse than the other auto/biographies examined in this thesis. Femininity is constructed through the representation of the body, fashion, and taste, but also in relation to mental illness, eating disorders and scandal.

## **6. Representations of Death and Dying in Celebrity Culture**

### **6.1. Introduction**

Death fascinates and terrifies in equal measure. It becomes especially interesting when the person who dies is famous and dies before their time. As Giddens puts it, 'death is only a "problem" when it is premature death – when a person has not lived out whatever a table of life expectancy might suggest' (1991: 204). Recent years<sup>28</sup> have seen the death of several prominent celebrities, sparking a debate about the representation of death in the media. Due to the widespread media commentary on these deaths, it became necessary to move away from the case studies in previous chapters to take a more thematic look at celebrity death discourses. In particular, due to the unexpected illness and death of Jade Goody in 2009, it seemed important to look at her cancer and the process of dying more closely, since she chose to keep herself in the media throughout her slow decline. The unexpected death of the most high profile pop star of contemporary times, Michael Jackson, could not be ignored either, as his death illustrates the tabloid media's treatment of dead stars and the re-construction of stars' image in death. Hollywood star Heath Ledger's death has been linked to that of Michael Jackson as he died of similar causes and quite unexpectedly. Jackson, Goody and Ledger illustrate how, in a similar manner to the autobiographies discussed in the previous chapters, newspapers can act as a counter-discourse to their own stories. They construct a counter-narrative that represents dead celebrities as icons and saints, ignoring the previous negative stories and negatively represented celebrity personas. As we saw earlier, the press often contribute to celebrities' downfall, but death is often followed by newspapers elevating previously derided stars.

Celebrity deaths become media events, which often cause an outpouring of grief from the public, as well as reactions and commentary from both other celebrities and the media. It is increasingly difficult to differentiate whether the audience's reactions to these events are authentic or mediated. Thomas suggests that 'the public has been conditioned to "learn" their reaction from the media. It is often suggested that the public grief is excessive' (2008: 363). Kitch describes how the US publication *Newsweek* implied after John F. Kennedy Junior's death that 'the grief following celebrity deaths is "virtual grief," an inauthentic public form of "media-orchestrated" empathy, abetted by celebrity-charged curiosity, bordering on voyeurism' (2000: 171). Rojek explains that in celebrity culture there is a

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<sup>28</sup> 2008 -2011 in particular.

tendency for 'recreational mourning' for dead celebrities (2001: 34). Paradoxically, after the death of a celebrity, there is widespread scandalous speculation about the celebrity's life and death on one hand and the building up of the celebrity's image on the other. 'Criticisms of "virtual grief" and "recreational mourning" have been a common feature of post Princess Diana questioning of the authenticity of and voyeuristic motives behind public mourning and the media's exploitation of death' (Thomas, 2008: 370).

Death is the ultimate uncontrollable reality, which disempowers the human being and obliterates all human achievement, representing the final loss of control, posing a challenge to the desire for recognition driving celebrity culture. 'Death is necessarily culturally constructed, it grounds the many ways a culture represents itself, yet it always does so as a signifier with an ungraspable signified, always pointing to other signifiers, other means of representing what finally is just absent' (Webster Goodwin and Bronfen, 1993: 4). The most obvious thing about death is that it is always only represented. One cannot know death nor have a direct experience of it. After death one cannot return to write about it (Webster Goodwin and Bronfen, 1993, Dollimore, 1998, Watkin, 2004). Furthermore, 'the hiding of the reality of the body's pre-death decomposition in illness has produced a disconnection in modern cultural consciousness between death and its physical and embodied reality' (Watkin, 2004: 24). Goody's death in particular made this very visible.

Celebrity culture has been described as a secular religion. Because the roots of secular society lie in Christianity, many of the myths relating to celebrity deaths reflect religious imagery (Rojek, 2001). Celebrity deaths are disturbing because they make death visible in a society that prefers to keep death hidden away. Death in contemporary culture is represented in and through the dead and the dying. The deaths that figure most prominently in popular representation are those of famous people. However, 'every representation of death is a misrepresentation' (Webster Goodwin and Bronfen, 1993: 20). Representation of a dead celebrity is a representation of a person that is already absent and thus needs to be narrativised in relation to the living person. Autobiographical or confessional narratives of those who are dying become disturbing because they emphasise the inevitability of death and make visible the deteriorating mental and/or physical health. Death can be categorised into types. A good death is fast, without suffering. A bad death such as Goody's 'involves a long, painful dying process exacting a heavy toll on both the sufferer and the family members. A tragic death takes place suddenly and strikes healthy human beings, often in the midst of their lives' (Robben, 2004: 5). In this thesis the tragic death is exemplified by Heath Ledger and Michael Jackson.

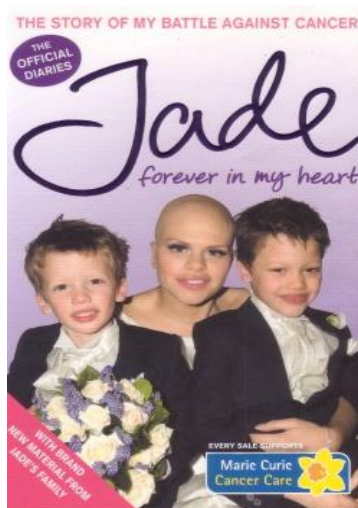
Drawing from theories of death, mourning, confessional discourse and celebrity culture, this chapter aims to analyse cases of bad death and tragic death. Jade Goody's confessional narrative exposes the process of dying from terminal cancer whilst the tabloid discourse surrounding Heath Ledger's and Michael Jackson's unexpected deaths illustrates how death fits in with the understanding of celebrity as a secular religion. Like success and failure, death is a process rather than a single event. Furthermore, death of others gives meaning to our success: we are still alive. The analysis of death discourse must show 'not only how it claims to represent death, but also what else it in fact represents, however suppressed' (Webster Goodwin and Bronfen, 1993: 20). The confessional narratives of illness, death and dying and the tabloid discourse surrounding unexpected and/or mysterious deaths offer a level of invasiveness that reflects the negativity enveloping celebrity culture. These discourses also exemplify the hypocrisy of the tabloid press and reveal increased voyeurism both on the part of the public and the media as well as exposing a growing death industry seeking to profit from dead stars.

## 6.2. Part One: Representing Death and Dying

### 6.2.1. 'Death Diary,' Reality TV and Counter-Narrative

#### 6.2.1.1. Introduction

On 19 August 2008 Jade Goody's world was turned upside down. Whilst she was a contestant on Indian *Big Brother*, she got a telephone call telling her she had advanced cervical cancer. Going on Indian *Big Brother* was a part of her comeback after the 'race scandal' discussed in the Chapter 5. Six months later her treatment had failed and she was told that she only had weeks left to live (Goody, 2009). Despite undergoing extensive chemotherapy, Jade discovered her cancer was terminal. She lost her battle with cancer on 22 March 2009. Goody's diagnosis prompted her to record her fight with the illness in the form of a diary, *Jade, Forever in my Heart* (Goody, 2009), which was published posthumously. She also allowed Living TV to follow her progress in a series of reality TV documentaries. The diary and the reality TV series work as an extremely invasive confessional. They also put across Goody's point of view, thoughts, feelings and fears to an



extent that many critics found disturbing and unnecessary. Goody had lived all her adult life in the media spotlight and for her the confessions included in the diary and the reality TV series ensured that she died in a blaze of publicity. Not only were her illness and death fed to the tabloids and magazines, Goody's confessional discourse went beyond anything that has been seen before in Britain in relation to terminal cancer.

Goody was told about the cancer on a TV programme, which is hardly a normal way to be told about a serious illness.

Suddenly she lost all control, not only of her career, but also of her health. Arriving back from India she had to face the paparazzi at the airport. Goody's diary maps her predicament.

For the past nine years, since *Big Brother* 3 in 2002, I have lived my life in the spotlight and I knew this would be no different [...] But landing at Heathrow that morning I wished I could switch it all off for a day. [...] I'm used to being in the spotlight, and usually a few paps don't bother me at all. This time though, I felt the heat of the lights and all those eyes on me and I felt so vulnerable, as if I'd forgotten to put my clothes on. [...] I felt safer away from the spotlight (Goody, 2009: 11-12).

As often happens with famous for being famous celebrities, there was a lot of scepticism on the part of the public and the media as to the seriousness of her condition. Many saw it as a calculated publicity stunt, which exposes the cynicism with which contemporary audiences and the media regard celebrities. News of celebrity deaths is now almost always broken by gossip and news websites. The public's online comments severely upset Goody (2009: 20-21):

Can't believe Jade Goody is talking about having cancer when it's just a few abnormal cells. Loads of people get that.

I have no sympathy with Jade Goody. It's like karma. She said all those horrible racist things to Shilpa Shetty and then she got cancer.

Jade is exaggerating and lying about this cancer and I think she should be ashamed.

As the negative and sceptical reactions increased, Goody was forced to respond and her confessional cancer narrative would continue until her death. Goody's feelings are described in the cancer diary: 'Call me a racist, a bigot, a chav, whatever – but don't call me a liar. How could people say I deserve this killer disease because of some mistakes I made two years ago' (Goody, 2009: 21)? Goody decided to make her side of the story public as a response to those who claimed her cancer was a publicity stunt. She also wanted to make as much money as possible for her two sons in case she didn't survive the cancer.

I met up with Max [Clifford], Mark [Thomas] and Living TV to talk about my TV show. Originally, I'd wanted to get better before starting filming again but my treatment is going to last for months and I need the money to support my boys. The papers are full of details about my cancer so I might as well have the cancer stuff on my show. We agreed that they will follow me around as I have my cancer treatments. I don't mind showing it. [...] It's funny because I am so aware of how this works. If you are not seen to be working and doing well then no one wants you. It's as simple as that. I haven't worked much over the last year after all that Shilpa [Shetty] stuff. People said my career was finished, that *Big Brother* made me and *Celebrity Big Brother* broke me. This is a chance to work properly again. Things are on the up! (Goody, 2009: 82-83).

Goody allows nearly every aspect of her life to be filmed and talks candidly about her cancer on camera. The only time that the viewer sees her close the door on the camera crew is when she has just started losing her hair and is extremely upset. The filming continues until her wedding, after which her condition quickly deteriorates and no filming is done during her



last weeks. Max Clifford defends Goody's decision to film her illness in *Jade*<sup>29</sup> by telling the camera that as Goody had lived her life in the media, talking about her cancer came naturally to her. Clifford also mentions that Goody wants to keep as busy as possible and that the hearts and minds of the British public are behind her in her battle with cancer. It was clear that she was not pretending to be ill – her cancer was real and life threatening. Soon the majority of the public were willing to forget Goody's scandalous past and even went as far as naming her the Princess of Essex.

#### **6.2.1.2. Celebrity Lifestyle, Normal Life and Cancer**

Foucault describes confession in terms of specific techniques that human beings use to understand themselves.

The confession is a ritual discourse in which the speaking subject is also the subject of the statement; it is also a ritual that unfolds within a power relationship, for one does not confess without the presence (or virtual presence) of a partner who is not simply the interlocutor but the authority who requires the confession, prescribes and appreciates it, and intervenes in order to judge, punish, forgive, console, and reconcile. (Foucault quoted in Gill, 2006: 4)

Goody's cancer confessional was then a way for her to communicate with the public, the media and herself. In the Living TV series she confesses that she is not only recording her battle with cancer to expose the illness in order to help other cancer sufferers, and not only to make money, but also to see for herself, when she gets better, what the cancer did to her mentally and physically. If she survives, she doesn't want to forget the pain, she wants to remember it. 'Confession is not a means of expressing the irrepressible truth of prior lived experience, but a ritualised technique for producing the truth. It is not the free expression of the self but an effect of an ordered regime by which the self begins to conceive itself as individual, responsible, and therefore confessional' (Gill, 2006: 4). Goody's confessional uses her illness and impending death as a way of making her interesting and is represented as a test of her moral character. She is seen to become more reflective of her life, and a narrative of finding comfort in religion, family and friends runs through both the diary and the reality TV series.

Romanticism was 'a determining factor in the increase of confessional discourses – the confessional has become in Western culture a crucial mode of self-examination and self-

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<sup>29</sup> Living +1, 19 March 2009

expression' (Gill, 2006: 6). Celebrity culture in particular relies on continuous self-examination by celebrities. Self-examination turns into a confession when it is made public in magazine or newspaper interviews or diaries and autobiographies. Goody epitomised celebrity culture by living through continuous confessional. Now she allowed the media to follow her final demise, publicising her cancer through harrowing words, photographs and images. In addition to tragic moments, Goody's confessional details everyday life and occasional happy moments, bringing power to the confessional words. In the beginning of the reality TV series Goody is seen as working and living a relatively normal life. Spending time with her sons such as going to the Winter Wonderland in Hyde Park in the first instalment of the reality TV documentaries, *Jade: The Next Chapter*,<sup>30</sup> is described as a way to make her feel normal. The narrative shows how, in the early days of the treatment, she is very optimistic, convinced that she will beat cancer. Having confronted so many setbacks in the past she believes that she is strong enough to survive the cancer. Optimism in the face of a serious illness is a common feature in cancer narratives. However, *Jade: The Next Chapter*<sup>31</sup> also reveals her naiveté as she explains: 'I don't know anything about cancer. I'm a bit naïve about it. That might even actually offend some people. I don't want to know anything about it. Where does it come from? Why does it only affect certain people and not others? I just don't understand it.'

The confessional highlights Goody's quest for self-improvement in the face of death but also the despair caused by the realisation that all she had achieved – financial security, fame or material possessions no longer matter: 'Now I was forced to think about dying I wanted to understand about living. For I could suddenly see that despite everything I've had – like my kids, houses, money and fame – I hadn't really deeply appreciated it, because I didn't think I had to' (Goody, 2009: 11). Yet she continued to commodify herself through selling details of her life. Retail therapy features prominently in Goody's confessional, as do beauty treatments as a way of feeling feminine after she has undergone a radical hysterectomy and lost her hair. These modern pastimes are also ways of staying in control as Goody struggles to control her life and her story. Her conflation of religion, alternative therapies, self-help and confessional self-scrutiny are examples of her reflexive restructuring. Giddens describes the reflexivity of modern lifestyles:

In the post-traditional order of modernity, and against the backdrop of new forms of mediated experience, self-identity becomes a reflexively organised endeavour. The reflexive project of the self, which consists in the sustaining of coherent, yet continuously

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<sup>30</sup> Living 2, 2<sup>nd</sup> March 2009

<sup>31</sup> Living 2, 2<sup>nd</sup> March 2009

revised, biographical narratives, takes place in the context of multiple choice as filtered through abstract systems. In modern social life, the notion of lifestyle takes on a particular significance (1991:5).

Celebrity lifestyle is evident in the Living TV series. *Jade – A Bride to Be*<sup>32</sup> shows Goody shopping for a wedding dress, treating her bridesmaids to a pampering session and a teeth whitening, and generally being continuously followed by the paparazzi. Her lifestyle options are limited by her illness, as there are several things she is incapable of doing. Other areas of her life are in her control and she largely follows a script for a celebrity lifestyle. For the viewers of Goody's televised confessional, her bringing forward her illness, and then living the celebrity life in front of the cameras, may seem undignified.

The familiarity generated by mediated experience quite often produces feelings of reality inversion: the real object and event, when encountered, seem to have a less concrete existence than their media representation. Moreover many experiences that might be rare in day-to-day life (such as direct contact with death and the dying) are encountered routinely in media representations; confrontation with the real phenomena themselves is psychologically problematic (Giddens, 1991: 27).

In this case Goody's cancer and death are very real phenomena, yet mediated through words and images. 'In pre-modern societies sickness was part of many people's lives and contact with death was a more or less commonplace feature of everyone's experience' (Giddens, 1991: 161). Today, death and illness are routinely hidden from view so when the process of dying was exposed as blatantly as in Goody's confessional and commodified as a part of a celebrity image, this could arguably be seen as an example of our cultural obsession with celebrity going too far and revealing a more disturbing side of society's fascination with famous people.

Strategies of knowing and caring for the self have developed in various historical and spiritual contexts. 'Christianity positions itself as a salvation religion, one that claims to lead individuals from one reality to another – as such it has much in common with the secular genre of self-help' (Guenther, 2006: 87). Goody's quest to understand herself and her illness has both religious overtones and a great resemblance to a self-help manual: 'I picked up a book a friend gave me when I was diagnosed. It's called *Life Application Study Bible*. It helps you understand how you can live your life following the lessons that are in the bible.

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<sup>32</sup> Living +1, 2 March 2009

I've started taking comfort from some of the things it says and thinking a bit more about religion in general' (Goody 2009: 19). Her diary serves as her method of self-examination. The diary is 'a space in which she bears witness against herself, investigating her faults, temptations and desires' (Guenther, 2006: 87). It shows how she has grown and that she is well aware of how other people see her, revealing a more mature person than her public image implies. The persona that comes across is not dumb or ignorant, the character flaws usually attributed to her: 'I've had to learn to laugh at myself over these past few years, before anyone else gets a look in. It takes away the pain of being laughed at if you do it first' (Goody, 2009: 161).

### **6.2.1.3. Celebrity Culture and the Public Representation of Cancer**

Until quite recently, the presentation of serious, life-threatening celebrity illness was masked from the public. Physical disintegration following a terminal disease was usually concealed until after death (Rojek, 2001). Today's celebrities have no such luxury as the news about their illnesses, deaths or accidents seem to find their way to the media rapidly after the incident. In case of death, the paparazzi and curious members of the public usually find their way to the place of death before the body has been removed. Although the paparazzi followed Goody relentlessly during her battle with cancer, at the request of her mother, they left her alone on the day of her death. Goody's mother's thoughts are recorded in the diary:

I went outside and spoke to all the waiting photographers. 'We don't want pictures of Jade coming out in a body bag,' I said. 'Leave her be now.' They all nodded and looked upset. Some of them had been following her for years. We waited until it was dark before she left the house for the last time, and no, not a single photo of her was taken. Those snappers were so good in the end (Goody: 2009: 278).

Goody had discovered media success and turned her life into a drama that kept her alive in the journalistic imagination (Schickel 1985). In her confessional Goody spoke movingly about her illness and her impending death. Goody could be accused of narcissism as she, despite the dark shadows of illness, chose to have no peace from the media. She was described in the press as ignorant for going to India to earn money whilst waiting for her test results from the hospital and as 'addicted to fame' as she decided to make her suffering public. The confessional mode of reality TV is dismissed as raw, narcissistic and unformed. Heddon argues that 'the history of confessional narratives has created a perception of women obsessively confessing their secrets, reinforcing stereotypes of female psyche as fragmented and needy' (2006: 139). Goody's musing on death and the process of dying, intercepted by bouts of anger, could be said to create an impression of her as a fame

hungry narcissist. In current celebrity culture in general, women writing or talking about their private lives are often seen as narcissistic and vain. However, writing and talking about the feelings and the physical pain associated with terminal illness could also be seen as brave and admirable. Therefore, confessionals and autobiographies are generally 'celebrated for their candour and criticised for their perceived exhibitionist egotism in equal measure' (Nicol, 2006: 100). As such Goody's confessional diary seems at once to conform to the tradition of confessional modern literature but also represents 'something of our own age insofar it reflects an impulse within contemporary media-saturated culture for habits, fantasies and self-impressions which normally remain private to be placed on full display' (Nicol, 2006: 100). The diary complements the reality TV series as it reveals more than the edited TV programmes, which in themselves are very voyeuristic, leaving little to the imagination. Goody's life with cancer literally becomes an open book. The Living TV series offers an edited version of her cancer battle but in the current media environment images are stronger than words. The viewer sees her having chemotherapy in hospital, being pushed into an ambulance in a wheelchair, sucking on a painkilling lollipop, losing her hair, crying in despair, growing frail and thin and so on. Many British newspapers, the *Daily Mail* being the most prominent critic, saw going to such detail as an unnecessary example of the recent 'obscene' confessional tendency in celebrity culture. The progress of Goody's illness can be seen through the cancer narrative but the series also shows her working, giving interviews, planning her wedding and generally living her life as a celebrity.

In *Jade: The Next Chapter*<sup>33</sup> Goody keeps a hectic work schedule. Because she hasn't had a lot of work coming her way after the 'race scandal,' she is grateful for the renewed interest that is ultimately not an interest in her as much as an interest in her living with cancer. Goody is seen to attend book signings, give television interviews about her cancer, talking to journalists and having photo shoots. The emphasis on work exemplifies the achievement-based style of living famous for being famous celebrities need to lead in order to continue to make money and to stay in the headlines. Even cancer doesn't stop Goody from striving to achieve more. The emphasis on achievement in contemporary society affects us all, as we have to juggle our work and our social and private lives, but not many people would have the resources or the strength to keep on working in the midst of cancer treatment. However, it appears evident that Goody goes shopping and has beauty treatments to avoid thinking about cancer. She piles up her work commitments for the same reason. Her actions demonstrate a certain denial of the facts of her predicament. Soon, she is too exhausted to

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<sup>33</sup> Living 2, 2<sup>nd</sup> March 2009

continue to work. The documentaries show her visibly tired and emotional, and the emphasis shifts to her private life and the progress of her treatment.

The number of confessional spaces available in the media and the quantity of confessions elicited has increased, and at the same time, spaces for privacy have decreased. As seen in the previous chapters of this thesis, celebrities seem to have embraced the opportunities to 'tell their side of the story' and the audience's interest in the private narratives of celebrity lives is far from abating. Confessionals offer an opportunity to reveal the 'real self' and if a celebrity is living with a terminal illness, he or she has nothing to lose by making their suffering public. 'Being open about celebrity illness presents the celebrity in an out-of-face relationship with the public and ultimately reveals the resilience of the veridical self. The disintegration of the body produces a new surface on which the self coheres and continues in a different kind of dialogue with the public' (Rojek, 2001: 87). 'Confessional writing, as opposed to the simply autobiographical, is taken to mean work marked by an extraordinary candour about the private anguish, which afflicted the author at the time of writing,' Nicol (2006: 107) explains. Its power comes from the sense that what the audience reads is a genuine revelation about the distress faced by the writer. The readers of Goody's diary recognise both the ordinary life that she leads with her children and the extraordinary life that she leads as a celebrity. In everyday life Goody faces the same fears and dilemmas as other people do but as a celebrity her life is an aspirational one.

In the diary and the Living TV series Goody's self is 'commodified for public consumption' except that this time the subject is terminal cancer (Robbins, 2006: 157). Goody's confessional is a confession of mortality and reveals the unspeakable nature of death. No living person knows death, which produces a fear of death, prompting the dying person to search for answers. Goody's journey towards death is a very public one, but as a Western person she is distanced from the experience of death. 'It is perhaps because of this apparent remoteness that what was almost a "vogue" for cancer narratives was discernible in Britain in mid-to-late 1990s, an appetite provoked by ignorance, fear and the cult of personality that has come to dominate our culture' (Robbins, 2006: 161). However, Goody's death some ten years later has become the most public profile cancer death in Britain. She admits in the second part of her reality TV series, *Jade*,<sup>34</sup> that she never expected to lose her hair. However, she doesn't want the paparazzi to take pictures of her bald head and decides to sell the story to the *News of the World*. In the documentary Goody admits that sometimes it is easier to deal with the bigger things such as her hair loss in the public eye. She would rather sell the story and the photographs of her bald head to the media. This is

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<sup>34</sup> Living +1, 19 March, 2009

her way of staying in control of her representations and a way to ensure that the pictures are classy and elegant, instead of grainy, secretly taken paparazzi photographs. She therefore commodifies her appearance in this manner and sells it to the newspaper. Being bald becomes Goody's final re-invention as she refuses to wear a wig even for her wedding.

'The usual, fleeting public representations of death, dying and grief in the media arguably only reflect how Western culture continues to reject the issues. These depictions mirror the truncation of emotional expression and serve as a metaphor for the ways our society regards death and dying' (Lovell, 1997: 35). Slow death from a terminal illness is not generally represented in the media whereas sudden and unexpected deaths, murders, violence and homicides receive a lot of attention. From the beginning of year 2009, Goody was dying in 'real time' on television and on the pages of the newspapers and magazines offering daily and weekly updates of her condition. The process of dying became the ultimate reality, something that had never been seen before. Lovell explains that death and dying in the media are depicted in 'media-bites' (1997: 35). For example, in the *Living TV* series, the viewer follows a real person dying, a process which took several months. For the purposes of the series the process was speeded up through a representation of the different phases which Goody went through. Chemotherapy is filmed only once. Goody comments on this in the cancer diary: 'The crew got permission [from the hospital] to film me today and are going to release the pictures but I don't know how interesting they'll be because all I'm doing is lying on a bed. Still, I've never seen anyone having chemo on TV before. I hope it helps some people' (Goody: 2009: 278). It reveals a lot about the importance of offering something interesting or entertaining to the public, that in the midst of her treatment, Goody is worried that the images of her having chemotherapy may not be interesting enough as she isn't doing anything other than lying in bed.

Arguably more disturbing than the chemotherapy is a scene in *Jade: The Next Chapter*<sup>35</sup> when Goody has woken up to find that half of her hair has fallen out during the night as a side effect of chemotherapy. She looks so genuinely distressed and in despair that the scene is difficult to watch. The narrative implies that this is really the first time that Goody actually clearly experiences the severity of her condition. There is nothing in this scene to justify keeping it in the final edit and showing it to the audiences. Goody is crying, refusing to look in the mirror, the rest of her hair sticking up in every direction, explaining to the camera how upsetting losing her hair is and how embarrassed she feels. Her mother tries to show her how to tie a headscarf to conceal her hair loss but Goody is too upset. Finally, she shuts the door on the camera crew but you can still hear her crying in despair in the bathroom.

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<sup>35</sup> *Living* 2, 2<sup>nd</sup> March 2009

The scene is one of the most harrowing and voyeuristic scenes possibly in any reality TV series to date. It exposes the seriousness of Goody's condition in material terms. Even though she has been able to feel the changes that cancer treatment has caused in her body, now both she and the viewers can see it in the form of her balding head. If one of the most vivacious and vibrant celebrities of the decade can experience such despair and suffering then so can we. We too could get cancer. The scene does remind the public that nobody lives forever and that cancer doesn't discriminate between celebrities and ordinary people. The scene is a bit too real, even for reality TV, too invasive even for Goody. She is represented as having been naïve about her cancer until the side effects of the chemotherapy force her to 'look in the mirror.' What she sees is a woman ravaged by the side effects of a gruelling treatment.

During the course of the series Goody is seen growing weaker, unable to walk for long, feeling ill and being transferred between hospital and home. She learns that the tumour has spread to her bowel, groin and liver.<sup>36</sup> Most footage does not offer anything too disturbing in terms of her deteriorating health but her deteriorating spirits are just as disturbing. Goody's friend describes on camera how she was 'trying to catch her breath,' how she 'couldn't breathe,' how she was 'screaming and howling' after being told that she only had one to two months to live.<sup>37</sup> Goody's boyfriend Jack Tweed in turn describes how she has said that she 'just wants to go now,' how she has told him to make her proud when she is gone and to look up in the sky and she will be the biggest star there.<sup>38</sup> Towards the end friends and family increasingly speak for Goody whereas the camera follows her through the good times and the bad.

#### **6.2.1.4. The 'Uncensored' Diary and the Representation of the Dying Body**

The written diary, supposedly representing an uncensored view of the cancer, however, is a different matter altogether. It is an extension of the programmes on Living TV and offers a more detailed view of death and the process of dying.

In the course of modern times dying has been pushed further and further out of the perpetual world of the living. Death has become not so much forgotten as tabooed – almost obscene. [...] The natural processes of corruption and decay had become disgusting,

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<sup>36</sup> *Jade*, Living +1, 19 March, 2009

<sup>37</sup> *Jade*, Living +1, 19 March, 2009

<sup>38</sup> *Jade*, Living +1, 19 March, 2009



and any consideration of them regarded as unhealthy and morbid: the ugly facts are relentlessly hidden (Dollimore, 1998: 119-120).

Goody's cancer diary not only reveals her feelings and thoughts but also offers a description of the changes cancer imposes on her body. Her story does not focus on erecting the meaning of life and death through the narrative. 'The story demonstrates the failure of meaning and the failure of language to make meaning possible' (Robbins, 2006: 162). As death is a concrete fact of life, it is difficult to depict the meaning of death in words. 'The process of change and decline is typically more disturbing than the idea of not being at all' (Dollimore, 1998: xiii). At various points of her cancer battle, Goody comments on her bodily sensations and the changes to her body caused by the cancer treatment: 'My body, the one that was making all this cancer, didn't feel like my own anymore. [...] For a whole five minutes, all the laughing made me forget I am ill. Then I went to the toilet and remembered all over again because thick, black, tarry stuff was falling out of me into the loo. It smelled disgusting and made me feel horrible inside' (Goody, 2009: 37). The diary maps her symptoms: radiotherapy makes her skin smell of burning and chemotherapy makes her feel itchy. She also writes about her bowel movements or the lack of them and about the side effects of her treatment, such as continuously vomiting. Another major theme is a loss of femininity, which is represented in physical terms: 'I'm twenty-seven years old and I'm having hot flushes like a fifty-year-old. My periods have stopped and I don't feel like a woman anymore. I still have my ovaries, but the treatment is killing everything inside them. Chances are nothing can be used. I'm crying one minute, then I'm hot. I'm all over the place' (Goody, 2009: 95-96). It is possible to read Goody's bodily narrative as exhibiting what Julia Kristeva defines as abjection: 'those moments when the speaking subject is forced into an awareness that she or he inhabits a body, and is therefore, an object, powerfully subjected to forces that it can neither control or resist. Kristeva uses the proliferation of cancer cells in a previously healthy body as a metaphor for the process of abjection' (Robbins, 2006: 164). The terminally ill experience the deterioration of the body in accelerated and intensified ways. Goody's decline was fast as the cancer had grown inside her for years, unnoticed by routine tests or NHS doctors. The decline of the body is frightening and disturbing, eliciting fears and anxieties previously unknown: 'I started being sick all night and didn't stop. God knows what was in my tummy. I kept thinking I had nothing left but still I was throwing up. I am wondering how this is all going to end. When will it stop? What on earth is happening to me?' (Goody, 2009: 173). The cancer is seen as something violent, savage and uncontrollable. In terminal illness, there is no question of eliminating the physicality of death. Goody's confessional shows her body and eventually her mind in decline. The reaction to the description of the sick body creates distaste. The public are not used to such

close proximity of the dying body. Ariès explains that 'before people thought of abolishing physical illness, they ceased to tolerate its sight, sounds and smells' (2004: 47). Goody records the experience of her failing body that doesn't even feel her own anymore: 'My body just feels like a one big organ now. Not something that belongs to me, just a failing machine that doctors keep poking at. A young person's body that feels old and doesn't work' (Goody, 2009: 250).

#### **6.2.1.5. Image, Narrative and Cancer**

'Since the Enlightenment, it has been assumed that there is a relationship between man's attitude towards death and his awareness of the self, of his degree of existence or simply of his individuality' (Ariès, 2004: 40). The Western idea that the individual reaches self-awareness in suffering, and on the verge of death, reinforces discourses surrounding the dying, but in Goody's case this takes a practical rather than a spiritual form. 'I don't know how to explain it but I thought that my life was in danger, it was about time I sorted it all out. It made me want to do special things' (Goody, 2009: 10). She is also represented as feeling like having cancer has changed the way she sees herself and the relationship between her, the media and the public: 'Being so young and being told that I've got something I have no control over has changed me. I don't care anymore what people think about me or how they judge me' (Goody, 2009: 87). Her feelings, as represented in the diary, are a rollercoaster ride ranging from despair to optimism. In October 2008 she writes down her resolutions for beating cancer: 'I feel more determined than ever today. I will not be a cancer victim. I will not let cancer get better of me. I will always get the better of cancer. I will always be stronger than it. There's a cancer cell and there's me and I will always be stronger than the cancer cell' (Goody, 2009: 79). When her condition declines and she learns that she only has weeks to live Goody decides to marry her long-term boyfriend Jack Tweed and they only have a week to plan the wedding. In *Jade: A Bride to Be*<sup>39</sup> Goody is seen organising the wedding from her hospital bed. The planning is stressful and she often loses her temper. Like in the beginning of her illness, when she was pushing herself to work as much as she could, now her narrative sees her to push herself perhaps too far, wanting to control everything. Just before her wedding, she leaves the hospital and has to be helped in and out of the ambulance. *Jade: A Bride to Be*<sup>40</sup> shows her in a wheelchair and in the ambulance, on a bed, the paparazzi surrounding her, taking pictures when she leaves the hospital. When

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<sup>39</sup> Living TV, 2<sup>nd</sup> March 2009

<sup>40</sup> Living TV, 2<sup>nd</sup> March 2009

she gets home, the paparazzi are there waiting for her. The interest in her condition seems relentless.

'The ritualisation of death is a special aspect of the total strategy of man against nature, a strategy of prohibitions and concessions. This is why death has not been permitted its natural extravagance but has been imprisoned in ceremony, transformed into a spectacle' (Ariès, 2004: 41). Illness prolongs the spectacle of death for Goody. Events of her life such as showing her baldness to the world, having her sons christened and her wedding are all sold to newspapers and magazines. Like celebrity narratives in the magazines and newspapers, the Living TV documentaries follow a narrative pattern concentrating on the portrayal of Goody in relation to traditional femininity. She is portrayed in terms of motherhood through several scenes where she plays with her children, cooks for them and takes care of them. This is especially poignant as she is 'losing her femininity' in bodily terms. She loses her hair and her womb, and experiences the menopause at the age of twenty-seven. She must undergo a hysterectomy and will be unable to have children in the future, which causes her much distress. The physical changes set up the narrative that constructs a happy ending in the form of her marriage to boyfriend Jack Tweed. When she dies she has realised her dream of marriage and motherhood and is therefore ready to die. The wedding offers a narrative closure to the series and to Goody's life in general. She looks her old vibrant self in the footage of the wedding and is described as having found peace in the traditional role of a wife and mother. Her femininity is reasserted through the domestic setting of motherhood. However, in her diary, *Jade, Forever in My Heart*, she despairs over not having enough strength to be a proper mother for her sons: 'In that moment I knew I couldn't be a proper mum to Bobby and Freddy any more. They were too much. I was too ill to look after my own kids. It was over. My role as a mummy to the boys was finished. I am never going to feel better' (Goody, 2009: 196). The candidness of the diary reveals that the reality TV show constructs a certain reality instead of reflecting a pre-existing truth.

The reality TV series is clearly concerned to give a balanced view that shows both the positive and the negative events in Goody's life. The emphasis of the narrative is on the positive and therefore ignores the fact that her new husband is wearing a prison tag because he has been convicted of an assault and has spent the past months in prison, missing most of Goody's ordeal. The narrative does not include the fact that she eventually becomes so ill that she is unable to be a mother to her boys. The series also ignores the feelings of depression and the desire to be left alone that Goody experiences in the final stages of her cancer. These feelings are all recorded in the diary, which goes to show that even though the actual images on the TV screen may be stronger than the words on the pages of the diary, reality TV relies on the construction of a narrative and therefore cannot

represent the unedited 'truth' and 'reality' of Jade Goody's life with cancer. As seen previously, the confessional diary is also selective and constructed but it also appears to aspire to represent the 'truth.' When Goody approaches the end, the importance of family replaces the importance of fame and achievement. Her legacy of raising awareness of cervical cancer replaces the importance of material things and money. In the face of death she no longer cares much about being a celebrity. She is even seen to admit in her diary that she has never felt at home in the celebrity world: 'Being nice to other famous people just for the sake of it is not my thing' (Goody, 2009: 235). Goody is grateful for her fame only because it allows her to make money for her sons. Ultimately, death obliterates human achievement. Celebrity, fame and recognition, which so many aspire to, and some desperately cling on to, are irrelevant when a person is dying.

Death from illness is an uncontrollable decline, a failure of life. In terms of career, image and commodification, the process of dying was a great success for Goody. In death she became more popular, more famous and more celebrated than she had ever been during her life. Some people write their diaries with an eye for posterity; others use the pages to grapple with private emotions. Goody was represented as being entirely open about the fact that she was writing her cancer diary to make money. Paradoxically, terminal illness changes people's perceptions of what is important and in the end Goody no longer cared about success and failure. Goody declares in her diary: 'It came out in the papers today about my condition having spread to the bowel, liver and groin. People know now. For once I don't ask what the articles are saying. It doesn't matter to me one way or another' (2009: 177). The death industry seeking to profit from her death included newspapers, magazines and book publishers, but the media representations were mostly kept under control by Goody's PR man Max Clifford, whereas Goody's agreement to document her illness ensured that her own words balanced out the more speculative and outrageous tabloid discourse and the widespread criticism from journalists and commentators. In a similar manner to her autobiographies discussed in the previous chapter, the confessional diary and the reality TV show acted as a counter-narrative. When Goody gets too ill to contribute to the diary, it is continued by her mother to include her actual death and the funeral. Even in death, Goody's story carried on as Living TV showed a commemorative documentary and the funeral. Goody's death caused debate in the press. Some papers saw her death narrative as unnecessary and undignified, whilst others elevated Goody to the status of a saint, comparing her to Princess Diana.

## 6.2.2. Debating Death – The Elevation of Jade Goody

### 6.2.2.1 .Cancer as a Commodity

As a result of the ‘race scandal’ Goody virtually disappeared from the media and her future as a celebrity seemed uncertain. However, behind the scenes Goody was planning a comeback. She had experienced the inevitable descent that often faces celebrities. The media were more than willing to contribute to her fall. It had always been acceptable for the press to ridicule her, call her names and criticise her. The press would normally think twice before offending a high profile celebrity but Jade Goody was only a former *Big Brother* contestant who, according to the media opinion, had outlived her fifteen minutes of fame a long time ago. The media were tearing down a celebrity that they had built up (Mangan, 2009) and it was widely believed that Goody’s career was finished. However, Goody didn’t seem ready to let go of fame. Instead, she began to appear in the tabloids again, mainly through being photographed in celebrity parties. Max Clifford explains: ‘When Jade came to me [...] she did not have any money at all. I was starting to rebuild her career’ (Shaw, 2009: 2).

When the backlash finally died down, Goody embarked on her rehabilitation. As part of this she joined the Indian version of *Big Brother* and on her third day in the house received the news that she had advanced cervical cancer and had to return home immediately. Personal drama became entertainment. After the devastating phone call, terrified Goody was seen barely holding herself together in front of the cameras. Adverts for the show’s phone-in numbers scrolled across the screen, whilst Goody was clearly in distress. ‘It was an indecent spectacle’ (Moir, 2009b<sup>41</sup>). ‘In the created world of celebrity, which often isolates people in their own minds if nowhere else, it is difficult to maintain a sense of reality’ (Hall, 1996:9). This can cause a belief that the celebrity is protected from ill health but fame is no defence against a deadly disease. As could be expected, when she returned home, the tabloids were less than kind to her. It was immediately reported that Goody had gone to India knowing that there was a possibility that she might have cancer because she needed the money. Once again cynical journalists slated Goody’s ignorance.




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<sup>41</sup> <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/debate/article-1151366>

For celebrities such as Goody, fame is often sensational – whatever tugs at human emotions and fears (Evans and Wilson, 1999). During her battle with cancer, her life, both her professional achievements and private life continued to be human-interest stories circulated in the media. Despite the physical pain, Goody continued her career. The cancer had renewed interest in the fallen star. Goody had turned herself into a commodity and wasn't going to stop being one even when faced with serious illness. Her cancer provided her with a new selling point and a new narrative and Goody had no difficulty in selling stories of her battle with cancer. Disturbing as it is, cancer had now become a commodity.

Insider information about celebrities is now central and private thoughts are now a part of confessional celebrity discourses and a part of the celebrity production process. Celebrities can no longer isolate themselves and expect fans to remain fascinated. Fans would now turn to different celebrities who appear to allow more access to their private lives (Cashmore, 2002: 156).

Perhaps this is why Goody decided to stay in the headlines even when faced with a battle with serious illness. Celebrity status is something over which she had little control. Having lived most of her life in the media, her life had ceased to be her own. Therefore, for her, making the cancer public property was possibly a way of trying to control the representations in the media. The media were going to report on her illness regardless of her co-operation. Making public the gruesome details of her treatment seems to imply that she was looking to stay in control. Part of her motivation for selling rights to stories of her illness may be described as trying to gain agency in the midst of uncontrollable media reportage (Bell, 2008). This also ensured the sympathy of the public and a more positive angle on the stories. As a result, the 'real' Jade Goody was 'represented as a woman with agency and self-control, who is psychologically self-actualised and likeable' (Bell, 2008), having matured from a childish, ignorant bully to a mature, self-contained mother who will do anything to secure her sons' future.

#### **6.2.2.2. Backlash and Sentimentality: Reactions to Cancer**

The doctors discovered that the cancer had spread and despite initial optimism Goody was



soon constantly sedated by powerful painkillers. By early 2009, Goody's illness had grown to fatal proportions and it was announced that the cancer was terminal. 'As with almost anything she had done in the public eye, she again threw the public's attitudes into sharp relief – this time about death.

The sentimentality began almost immediately. Suddenly the previously despised Goody was a paragon of bravery, a saintly mother battling overwhelming odds' (Edemariam, 2009:12). The nation had become captivated by the impending death of famous for being famous Jade Goody. Newspapers, however, were sceptical of Goody's decision to continue to work by revealing every detail of her cancer battle to the media. The *Daily Mail* attacked Goody for her ignorance and the fact that she was making money out of her illness:

I have nothing against Jade Goody; it would be odd to feel anything other than sympathy for any mother dying so young. But that doesn't take away from the fact that she has achieved little of lasting merit in her short life. That shortcoming is, in fact, exactly what she has been celebrated for. The reason why she became so famous is precisely because [...] she knows so little (Mount<sup>42</sup>, 2009).

Jones<sup>43</sup> (2009) in turn wrote in the *Mail on Sunday*:

The overriding image of the past few days has been that of Jade Goody's face: it is pink, it is swollen, and it is tragic. It would be pretty much impossible to look at, day after day, if we hadn't come inured, over the past few years, to seeing endless young women paraded in front of our noses in various stages of disrepair: the Amy Winehouses and the Britney Spearses, staggering around in the street, getting into cars flashing their knickers or the track marks on their arms or the bald spots on their heads. [...] The only quality that ensures real fame, the only quality that sells, is that of chaos.

Jones (2009) sees modern day fame as horrible and implies that Goody's decision to sell the rights to her wedding and the christening of her two children to *OK!* magazine and Living TV allows a level of invasiveness that is close to an autopsy. People these days seem to have a train-wreck mentality and the worse the news, the more attention it will receive (McLain, 2007). The *Daily Mail* implied: 'Everything in Jade Goody's life had been sold to the highest bidder and served up as amusement. Yet, this is the life and the exposure she brought upon herself' (Moir, 2009b<sup>44</sup>). According to the *Daily Mail*, Goody's actions themselves were morally devalued by the suspicion that her entire life had been a series of cheap stunts (Moir 2009b). For several months, cynics believed that rumours of Goody's

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<sup>42</sup> <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/debate/article-1153665>

<sup>43</sup> <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/debate/article-1151739/LIZ-JONES-Death-dignity-leave-buttoned-middle-classes/>

<sup>44</sup> <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/debate/article-1151366>

condition were exaggerated and she was accused of using the cancer as a publicity stunt. The *Daily Mail* reported before Goody's wedding:

Welcome to the final series of the Jade Goody Show. A few days earlier, the cameras just happened to capture the private moment when the bride accepted the groom's proposal and the touching results were duly hawked around the block at £10,000 a time. Now the snappers manage to stumble across the groom as he goes shopping for a wedding suit. But there is something very different about this celebrity wedding. Not only has every moment been choreographed for the cameras. Everyone also knows that it will be followed, in short order, by a celebrity funeral (Hardman,<sup>45</sup> 2009).

Goody's illness was played out in the media like a soap opera, which several newspapers sarcastically pointed out. Those who criticised Goody for exploiting her condition were derided as 'middle-class snobs' and those who supported her 'deathbed soap opera' were accused of supporting celebrity 'trash culture'. Both in life and in death Goody remained controversial. There was a great amount of hypocrisy surrounding media reports of her illness. Those who over the years had heaped abuse on Goody suddenly elevated her to a saint, emphasising her bravery. Critics claimed that she was the ultimate representative of a society where people are obsessed with the trivial instead of what is really important. Elsewhere, some felt that she had been 'foisted on the working class as some great, adorable champion of chav' (Moir, 2009b<sup>46</sup>). On the one hand, Goody was represented as a part of a shallow culture that celebrates empty achievement and on the other; she was seen as a symbol of upward mobility.

Negra and Holmes (2008) observe that the coverage of female stars 'in crisis' contrasts forcibly with the journalistic restraint often exhibited in relation to male stars. Therefore, it is not surprising that Goody was criticised for making her cancer a commodity. Negra and Holmes (2008) continue by explaining that the different treatment of male and female celebrities invites questions about the extent to which dignity and privacy are increasingly gendered in the context of celebrity representation. Audiences were both fascinated and repelled by Goody's tragic final days. The *Daily Mail* (Moir 2009b<sup>47</sup>) asked whether we are so desensitised that watching a woman's death is acceptable entertainment. Goody was always objectified and subject to double standards, mocked for her looks and her body. It

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<sup>45</sup> <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-1149334>

<sup>46</sup> <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/debate/article-1151366>

<sup>47</sup> <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/debate/article-1151366>



was implied by some that she died as she had lived; viewed through a lens of public vilification and mockery. The *Daily Mail* chastised Goody for her outlook on life and death. 'I've lived my whole adult life talking about my life. I've lived in front of the cameras. And maybe I'll die in front of them' (Goody, 2009). The *Daily Mail* takes this as proof that modern fame is exploitative and that the most distasteful celebrities are those like Goody, famous for nothing in particular: 'Dying in front of the cameras would certainly fit with the territory of being a reality TV construct, a person who almost doesn't exist unless a camera is trained on their every inconsequential move' (Moir, 2009b<sup>48</sup>). Goody's illness prompted debate about the vacuous celebrity culture and, in a derogatory manner, it was implied that after appearing in *Big Brother 3* Goody 'has become what passes for a star these days, another inexplicable, sad symbol of our celebrity obsessed age' (Moir, 2009b<sup>49</sup>). The difference between a star and a celebrity was a common topic of debate and the discourse in the media took a historical view to stardom where reality TV contestants and other celebrities without merit or talent were the underclass, whereas in the past stars were represented as fabulous, enigmatic and talented – people that the public could look up to.

In part, Goody was represented as a troubled and ill-educated woman exploited by reality TV executives but it was also evident in the narratives surrounding her that she had managed to turn tables and exploit celebrity culture (Hardman, 2009). Compared to pop star Kylie Minogue, who had been diagnosed with breast cancer some years previously, and who made an announcement to the media about her cancer and then, according to the press, disappeared from the media to recuperate with grace and dignity, Goody was seen as undignified for publicising her illness. Given that Goody had spent all her adult years providing stories for the tabloids and celebrity magazines; Brooks suggests that 'it should have not come as a surprise that she wished that audience for her final days' (2009: 28). There had always been something voyeuristic in following Goody's escapades and this voyeurism was encouraged by Goody and her management. *The Guardian* described her as a symbol of an exhibitionist coarsening of culture:

Seen in one light, Ms Goody is a quintessential victim of modern media culture, a child of a broken home who has been endlessly debased and served up as entertainment, in death as in life, no humiliation too great. In another, however, she is the exploiter not the exploited, using the modern media to the bitter end, willing to do almost anything to make some of the money for herself that they have made out of her. Either way, Ms Goody is an embodiment of the decade in which she was a player – an

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<sup>48</sup> <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/debate/article-1151366>

<sup>49</sup> <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/debate/article-1151366>

amorally live-now-pay-later decade whose wider ethos is now abruptly ending too (Anon, 2009: 32).

If one wants to be cynical, being diagnosed with terminal cancer proved to be a good career move. The *Daily Mail* implies that ‘cancer wrapped Goody in a cloak of respectability and public affection that was never quite hers when she was in good health’ (Moir,<sup>50</sup> 2009b). She had achieved fame against all odds, which made her interesting. Much was made out of Goody’s deprived background in analysing her cancer and death. The fact that she was uneducated was taken as the reason for Goody’s ignorance when it came to going for cervical smear tests and eventually dealing with the cancer itself. Goody’s death came with a terrible inevitability but it left her time to organise her affairs, make money for her sons and even get married. She paraded these events in front of the media – something that cynical commentators saw as unnecessary.

### **6.2.2.3. Redemption Through Death**

Although Goody has been described as a manufactured celebrity, her cancer battle exposed, more than any of her previous endeavours, a veneer of ‘authenticity’.

Crucial to the possession of the celebrity status that comes with popularity is a particular form of distinction in which the celebrity, as he or she appears before the media audience, can be outrageous, bold, greedy, bitchy or ruthless but they cannot appear pretentious. Pretentiousness is primarily a classed charge, which calls aspirant working class or lower middle-class identities to order (Biressi and Nunn: 152).

Therefore, it was important for Goody to appear to be what she seemed to be. She had been accused of pretentiousness during the ‘race scandal’ but was redeemed as a result of so openly laying bare the final months of her life and her mixed emotions when facing death. There has been much written by academics about the way that celebrities such as Diana, Princess of Wales, provide opportunities for the public to do ‘life work’; that is, to think about their own behaviour, ethics and relationships through a continuing engagement with the narrative of their favourite celebrity’s life (Turner, 2007). During her final months, Goody had the social function of creating awareness of cervical cancer. Her emotional confessionals ensured that people were able to put themselves in Goody’s position and thus learn about illness and mortality. *The Daily Telegraph* observed: ‘There was also

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<sup>50</sup> <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/debate/article-1151366>

something distasteful about the morbid interest in her terminal illness, but even those of us who were turned off by it can see the allure of dabbling with death at a safe distance' (Corrigan, 2009: 20).

As the previous chapter showed, Goody's troubled life ensured that she needed the adulation of the public to maintain her celebrity status. For her, it was not unusual to talk openly about her cancer as she had talked openly about every single aspect of her life. The *Daily Mail* reported:

Her inarticulate ranting about what it is actually like to die from cancer is not only brave, it is refreshingly honest, the first time we have seen in the media what it really is like to die from cancer. Usually, we read about death through a prism of middle-class restraint, where it is injected with a bit of humour and bravery, and is rationalised (Jones,<sup>51</sup> 2009).

On the one hand, the continuing narrative of Goody's life was indeed a commodity, offered to the public as a mode of entertainment, on the other, cancer granted Goody the power to influence the public sphere, and gave her a voice to talk about an issue that would threaten the lives of many women. Cancer charities and doctors soon noticed an increase in the number of young women going for cervical smear tests. This came to be called the 'Jade Effect.' If there is any meaning to the frightening and painful journey she endured, it is that her publicised battle with cancer made the society more sensitive to early diagnosis and treatment of cancer. The illness created debate not only about cancer but also about class, the state, and the British education system. The derision Goody encountered was always based on her working-class background. This, combined by her perceived ignorance, created a representation of a member of the white underclass previously rarely seen in the media. Judgements about her class were often thinly veiled behind speak about the morality and exploitation in reality TV programmes and celebrity culture. *The Guardian* argued that 'despite the supposed democratisation of television, the truly uneducated, those marked by true poverty and deprivation, rarely appear in our light entertainment schedules' (Mangan, 2009: 1). It was generally thought that the education system had failed Goody. According to *The Belfast Telegraph*, Goody 'showed how Britain has spiralled into one of the most unequal and immobile societies on earth, and how the British have openly begun to jeer and sneer at the people trapped at the bottom' (Hari, 2009: 4). As discussed in the previous chapter, working-class Goody was perceived an easy

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<sup>51</sup> <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/debate/article-1151739/LIZ-JONES-Death-dignity-leave-buttoned-middle-classes/>

target for criticism. Media reporting before and after her death now often referred to the derision directed at her as deriving from bigotry and deep-seated prejudice within the society.

Before her death, the media gathered outside Jade Goody's house. They stayed put day after day; awaiting updates on Goody's deteriorating condition. Millions of people analysed emerging details because they were so fascinated, dismayed, gripped and repelled by the real life drama (Moir, 2009b<sup>52</sup>). This 'death-watch' is arguably a part of the negative turn that celebrity culture seems to have taken. During her life Goody had always attracted fiercer judgement than the average celebrity. The public revel in the misfortunes of the famous, but Goody's cancer was all the more intriguing because it was something she didn't bring onto herself. She wasn't a self-harming drug addict, a hopeless alcoholic or mentally ill and depressed. Her illness was something far more frightening because it was uncontrollable. You could always judge those who brought failure upon themselves but in Goody's case, the harsh judgements of the past were soon forgotten in the face of a terminal illness. The previously critical *Daily Mail* observed that like Diana, Princess of Wales, Goody 'found more esteem in the leaving of life than in the living of it, which, in its way, is heart-breaking in itself' (Moir<sup>53</sup> 2009b). The most troubling parts of Goody's character disappeared from public discourse. The 'race scandal' was soon pushed to the background whilst Goody once again came to be represented as the ditzzy young woman who entered *Big Brother* in 2002. In death, Jade Goody was redeemed, even sanctified.

#### **6.2.2.4. Becoming the 'Princess of Essex'**

As represented in her diary and reality TV show, when it became clear that there would be no happy ending to Jade Goody's fairy-tale, she began planning her own funeral. This would be the first 'reality TV death' followed by a 'reality TV funeral,' which would become part of the series of Goody's Living TV reality shows. Pain and suffering is always more riveting than happiness, but it was deemed undignified by many commentators to expose suffering so blatantly. 'Perhaps this stark display of the ultimate reality will draw some sort of line under that reality television trash culture that has dominated the media landscape for the past decade. Society has new and urgent priorities now. Vapid quests for instant fame suddenly seem rather dated,' Moir (2009b<sup>54</sup>) wrote in the *Daily Mail* before Goody's death.

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<sup>52</sup> <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/debate/article-1151366>

<sup>53</sup> <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/debate/article-1151366>

<sup>54</sup> <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/debate/article-1151366>

In death she played a role much larger than herself by creating awareness of cancer. There was talk about her legacy. However, her narrative also forced the society to face up to the reality of death.

Cancer appeared to change many people's perceptions of Goody for the better. It also caused a backlash against the exploitative media that took every opportunity to profit from the illness. *OK!* magazine even published a tribute issue to Goody before she was even dead, attracting a lot of criticism. Living TV continued to film her until the end and showed a two-part commemorative episode that included her funeral. According to *The Times*, Goody's 'death attracted huge interest and, perhaps inevitably, growing tension over the scramble to profit from her story' (Foster, 2009: 17). The book publisher John Blake renamed Goody's autobiography and it went on sale soon after her death, in direct competition with her official 'cancer diary,' profits from which were to go to Goody's two sons. John Blake also published the paperback version of Goody's second autobiography after stopping the publication following the 'race scandal.' The publisher changed the front covers to include birth and death dates, despite the books containing no information about her cancer or death (Foster, 2009).

*The Guardian* speculated that in addition to making money, Goody decided to stay in the limelight until her death 'because to go away, to leave the TV screens and front pages, would be to finally give up her sense of self, to accept that she would soon no longer exist' (Edemariam, 2009: 12). Sceptics judged Goody and implied that it was her need for publicity more than anything else that kept her in the media after being diagnosed with cancer. 'Though the media spent only two days with Goody in the last six weeks of her life, a story, released by Max Clifford, appeared in the tabloids every day, creating what appeared to the public to be an on-going reality TV show' (Wark, 2009: 9-10). For seven months, Goody died in public. It was the most extraordinary of modern British deaths, orchestrated by Clifford. However, nothing Goody did during her life was particularly ordinary. She stayed in the headlines because she always managed to lead a chaotically extraordinary life. This lifestyle formed the basis of her celebrity. *The Observer* pointed out that 'much was made at the funeral service of Jade being an ordinary woman who lived and extraordinary life' (McVeigh, 2009: 3).

Through reality TV Goody 'gained a voice denied to almost all women of her class and background' (Edemariam, 2009: 12). Because she was dying, people listened. Whether this was curiosity, pity or genuine grief and sympathy, people reacted like she was a person they knew. The media made Goody's death into a spectacle, but ultimately, this was Goody's choice, made with the best intentions in mind. Some critics may have called it vulgar and unnecessary and the media may have exploited the tragedy, but in many

people's minds she became the 'Princess of Essex,' a moniker given to her by the tabloid newspapers. The temptation is to interpret the reaction to Goody's death as a sign that many people have lost the ability to distinguish between personal and the public, as had Goody herself. There is some truth to this. After all, Goody's 'is the first death to combine the excesses of both reality TV and the Internet' (Corrigan, 2009: 20). She was compared to Princess Diana because her death prompted a very public outpouring of grief. However, untimely deaths of the young and famous have always attracted interest. After Princess Diana died, the nation needed someone to fill her shoes but nobody could have predicted that it would be someone like Jade Goody who would be compared to the late Princess. *The Times* wrote: 'For the younger generation, Goody's death was represented as feeling like the first untimely death of someone they knew' (Midgley, 2009: 5). This was their Princess Diana moment. *The Western Mail* in turn reported that 'Goody's decision to battle her cancer in the spotlight laundered her image – transforming her into a tragic heroine and a devoted young mother' (Devine, 2009: 20). Many described Goody as a saint, because her narrative had touched many people and been an inspiration to others. Yet others saw the reaction to her death as a reflection of our celebrity-obsessed culture. Celebrities are 'false gods' in a secularised society (Devine, 2009: 20), it was claimed. *The Belfast Telegraph* wrote: 'Reality/celebrity TV is the new religion; its stars are the new gods. The new opiate of the people' (Hopkins 2009: 36). Piers Morgan<sup>55</sup> noted in the *Mail on Sunday* that Goody 'attracted more opprobrium over the years than almost any other public figure and yet she ended her life with the greatest outpouring of love and admiration from the British public witnessed since the death of Princess Diana.' Sir Michael Parkinson gave a withering verdict on Goody's story, stating that she represented 'all that is paltry and wretched about Britain today' (Wilson, 2009<sup>56</sup>). He called Goody a bad role model who was barely educated and ignorant, insisting that her death was not the passing of a martyr or a saint. There is a truth to this but Parkinson's comments received widespread criticism because he was, after all, talking about a person who had just died a painful death.

Goody was a celebrity to the end and the final act of her celebrity life brought the streets of London to a standstill. Thousands of people lined the streets to say their goodbyes. It was clear that Britain mourned Goody's loss. Goody attracted both hatred and admiration but she was always ready to publicise herself. 'In today's celebrity culture it rarely matters what is said about you, as long as you stay in the headlines. In scenes reminiscent of the funeral of Diana, Princess of Wales, people gathered on the streets, clapped and threw flowers on

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<sup>55</sup> <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-1165505>

<sup>56</sup> <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/debate/article-1168395>

to the hearse' (McVeigh, 2009: 3). The funeral was the last farce of her life. Over the months her fans had watched her being treated for cancer, growing frail and weak, losing her hair. The audiences shared the news that nothing more could be done for her, and that she only had months, then weeks to live. Even those who had criticised her couldn't deny Goody's courage in the face of cancer. Experts had warned that fame would destroy her and the critics had branded her talentless. However, it wasn't fame that destroyed her, it was terminal cancer. According to *The Mirror* 'The funeral was the final episode in a life so ultimately tragic it commanded interest from all corners of the earth' (Carroll 2009b:8).

Goody's rise to celebrity tells a universal tale of aspiration. She came to fame by grasping every opportunity that life threw at her. In the eyes of the critics her achievements amounted to nothing much. She came to epitomise celebrity culture just by being herself. It is unexpected that a celebrity such as Goody now has a legacy as the media coverage of her cancer created increased awareness of cervical cancer. Her narrative also showed people the reality of inevitable death, making it more acceptable to not be brave and dignified (Jones, 2009). From the beginning to the end Goody was a true reality TV celebrity. She always generated discussion, divided opinion and caused controversy. The hype surrounding her illness and her death was not surprising. Goody was one of the most prominent British celebrities because she was always available. By continuing to make herself available when facing death, she ended her life as she had lived it – as a celebrity. Her journey from a monster and Miss Piggy to a tabloid heroine facing death with grace and dignity exemplifies the hypocrisy of the tabloid culture. According to the *News of the World*, Goody was a 'woman who unashamedly admitted that her life only began the moment she stepped in front of a TV camera. She was a celebrity for whom the limelight was her lifeblood. The attention nourished her, making her feel valued and precious' (Malone 2009: 6-7). She sacrificed her privacy for the life of a celebrity. Her celebrity status appeared to grant her comfort, safety and financial rewards, but it also brought with it chaos, trauma, scrutiny and criticism. In the end, career-wise, death became her biggest success. Different parties continued to exploit Goody's fame after her death. She will undoubtedly remain the most remembered reality TV star that Britain has produced. She emerged during a decade when reality TV, celebrity culture and the centrality of being famous rose to prominence. The representations of the process of dying and death, however, were perhaps a sign that celebrity culture has moved to a more negative period when even death is not off-limits.

## 6.3. Part Two: Representations of Unexpected Death

### 6.3.1. Introduction

Death has often been represented as the 'great leveller' but as Field *et al* suggest, 'worldly inequalities are in no way levelled at the time of death but persist, permeating every aspect of death and dying. The timing, place, manner and social implications of an individual's death are shaped by their position in society' (1997:1). When celebrities die unexpectedly, the news of their death instantly feature on television, newspapers and the Internet. If the death occurs in mysterious circumstances and is caused by anything other than natural causes, speculation, scandal and endless obituaries and commentary follow. Newspaper reporting on death uses narrative as a strategy to exploit the event, endlessly circulating the life stories of these public figures, following core plots that are revisited daily as new information emerges, revealing new aspects of the unexpected death. Newspapers use narrative and personalisation to explain rather than report news and in general, in death narratives there is a fine line between truth and exaggeration. As seen in previous chapters, autobiography often functions as a counter-narrative to negative media reporting. This chapter examines how, following death, newspapers construct their own counter-narrative by changing their focus on the celebrities in question.

A recent development has been the death of several celebrities such as actor Heath Ledger and pop star Michael Jackson from an accidental overdose of prescription drugs, which has prompted debate in the media regarding the availability and use of such drugs. The pressures of stardom are seen to affect these sensitive, artistic people to such an extent that they have taken to self-medicating with a combination of drugs ranging from sleeping pills to anti-depressants. 'The ways in which a society deals with death reveal a great deal about that society, especially about the ways in which individuals are valued' (Field *et al*, 1997: 1-3). Celebrity deaths often prompt the search for a greater meaning. Dead celebrities are seen to have a legacy of some sort – in the case of Heath Ledger and Michael Jackson an artistic one. 'The common sociological view is that death in contemporary Western society is publicly absent but privately present' (Pickering *et al*, 1997: 124). However, when famous people die unexpectedly, death becomes very much publicly present. In general, the reporting of unexpected death is characterised by the untimeliness of the passing. If the person who has died is famous enough, the reporting continues for a long time, newspapers and magazines revisiting the incident and therefore keeping the name alive. 'Death remains the great outsider, but it is an outsider that does not stay where it is put. Death and the dead keep coming back into the world of living'



(Small, 1997: 205). One of the ways in which dead celebrities keep coming back to the world of the living is through the media. 'In secular society the honorific status conferred on certain celebrities outlasts physical death. Celebrity immortality is obviously more readily achieved in the era of mass communications, since film footage and sound recordings preserve the celebrity in the public sphere' (Rojek, 2001: 78). Thus Heath Ledger is kept alive through his film performances whereas Michael Jackson's music recordings have rendered him immortal. Celebrity deaths are firmly tied in with the drama of their lives, in which the artistic works are only secondary to the life narrative. Both Ledger and Jackson remained relatively secretive about their personal lives; as a result their deaths attracted wild speculation. Schickel suggests that 'in the age of celebrity the only truly heroic act an artist can perform is to protect his vision and his virtue by cloaking them in a modesty that is near to the secretive' (1985: 110). After death, film and musical performances become a testament to the artistic talent of the celebrity. The reporting on unexpected deaths is split between immortality, legacy and talent on one hand, and speculation over the personal life of the star and the cause and implications of his or her death on the other. Unlike Jade Goody, Heath Ledger and Michael Jackson were not described as ordinary. Jackson was too extraordinary and strange to ever be so described, whereas even though Ledger was more often seen as an ordinary father and husband, the emphasis was on his extraordinary talent. The 'one of us' narrative that featured heavily in Jade Goody's and also Princess Diana's case was missing from the tabloid discourses attached to Jackson and Ledger.

### **6.3.2. Death as Career Success**

'Death can be a good career move if it is surrounded by ambiguity that supports continuing tragic or at least cautionary speculation' (Schickel, 1985: 128). *The Express* commented on the lucrative nature of celebrity deaths: 'Numerous stars over the years have proved that death can be good for business. Since the death of Michael Jackson, the singer has earned hundreds of millions. The sales of his classic hits have outstripped those of most living artists' (Sheridan, 2009: 24). Ledger's death in turn ensured the success of his last completed film *The Dark Knight* – he even won a posthumous Oscar for his performance. According to *The Guardian*, 'the Oscar was not a surprise, because from the moment of his death it was impossible to extricate his personal impact from the box-office performance of the picture' (Thomson, 2009: 12). Celebrity deaths evoke nostalgia and many celebrities become even more famous and admired in death. Dead stars keep coming back again and again, becoming candidates for secular canonisation. Schickel asks:

After the first simple and largely journalistic reprocessing of the lives of those stars that die unexpectedly – the lengthy obituaries,

the retrospective picture displays in the magazines and on television, the critical appreciations, and the hasty moral and philosophical ruminations - is there another, mythic and transcendent plane that can be reached? (1985: 129)

What follows are televised documentaries, biographies and re-release of songs or films, all done in a blaze of publicity. Schickel calls these by-products of death 'modern funerary art' and continues by describing these as instruments by which, after death, we are 'finally allowed to take full possession of these lives' (1985: 129). At the commercial level these images may now be 'manipulated in any manner the media choose, without regard to inconvenient facts, inconvenient temperament or, for that matter, inconvenient agents' (Schickel, 1985: 129-130). The intensely private Heath Ledger and Michael Jackson thus became public property after their deaths:

All stars, in death, turn into Mickey Mouse, the most agreeable of the great ones, who passively allowed himself to be drawn and redrawn until his creators had him just where they wanted him to be.' It is a public possession, in which the celebrity's image is completely internalised by the fans. In death, the public has them exactly where it wants them. Those elements in the biography that discomfited fantasy in real life now wither and eventually disappear, while fantasies that the public wished to impose upon them can now be freely grafted on their unresisting ghosts with no inconvenient facts to interrupt the reveries (Schickel, 1985: 129-130).

Arguably, Schickel's argument could be applied to Michael Jackson's death. The accusations of paedophilia that had tarred his career and his reputation were overwhelmingly displaced in favour of talk about his extraordinary talent and his musical legacy. Death seems to have done for Jackson what he could never do when he was alive: wipe away people's memories of the accusations of child molestation. Though never convicted, Jackson spent almost \$40 million paying off his accusers and the stigma of the claims devastated his image, already ravaged by his obsession with cosmetic surgery and painkiller addictions (Sheridan, 2009). In death his flaws seem to almost have been forgiven.

In the case of Heath Ledger, his short temper with the paparazzi and his reclusiveness were ignored as he became portrayed as a sensitive and talented actor who died at the peak of his career. The emphasis was on his film performances and the legacy that he would leave behind. The *Sunday Mercury* reported:

When the 28-year old father of baby daughter dies in his New York apartment, it is certainly shocking. But although he died young, I'm

not sure Ledger lived fast. Apparently pills found in his body weren't taken for thrills, but stress and insomnia. [...] He was a serious young man with a commitment to his craft; wildness and passion only exhibited in the roles he played. Such commitment allowed him to forge a reputation as one of the most promising actors of his generation. He also had charisma in abundance, and a track record of choosing films that didn't merely buff his ego, but provided real challenges [...] Having died in the hot fever of youth, Ledger will, no doubt, join the pantheon of actors and actresses whose legend is only enhanced by an early death (Jackson, 2008a: 10).

The construction of Ledger as a talented, committed actor was an often-used strategy in newspaper reporting after his death. This construction worked to divert attention from the numerous questions and speculation regarding his drug use, instead portraying Ledger in a positive light as a father and an actor. This could be contrasted with the reporting surrounding the death of actress Brittany Murphy in December 2009 of an overdose of prescription drugs. Murphy was portrayed as a troubled young woman, struggling mentally and physically in the competitive world of acting. Her career was secondary to the reports of her weight loss and mental distress. Therefore, especially when it comes to male celebrities, emphasis seems to be on talent and achievement. For them 'death works as a kind of airbrush, whisking away the imperfections of reality, glossing over and imparting a satisfying glow to its subject' (Schickel, 1985: 130).

### **6.3.3. Celebrity Deaths as Dramatisation of Social Concern**

The early deaths of Ledger and Jackson highlighted the prominence of prescription drugs in modern society, where many use these medicines to solve problems caused by the modern achievement-based society, the pressures of making money, living 'the good life' and living up to society's expectations. The *Sunday Express* reported:

Once it was cocaine, speed or heroin, but Michael Jackson's death highlights a new and startling trend for over-use of legal prescription drugs – often more deadly than illegal narcotics. It echoes last year's tragic demise of screen star Heath Ledger from an accidental overdose of prescription tablets. Their high profile deaths have turned the spotlight on what has been a largely silent epidemic. It is not confined to celebrities. Many patients legitimately prescribed painkillers or sedatives become addicted (Johnston 2009: 26).

Celebrities dying from an addiction to prescription drugs have caused alarm amongst journalists who use these deaths to warn the public about the dangers of prescription drugs. *The Observer* reported:

Among the deaths linked to prescription drugs are those of Heath Ledger, Anna Nicole Smith and Michael Jackson, a toll that was added to last week with the death of Brittany Murphy. [...] Tragedies like these suggest that the celebrity habit of pill popping is spreading alarmingly. [...] Such cases make headlines because they expose the lives of superstars. But they represent only the tip of the iceberg, doctors warn. [...] Prescription drugs are becoming America's new addiction, studies show. [...] Addiction to prescription drugs often arises as an accidental dependence to a drug first taken, and given, in good faith for a real ailment. For example, Michael Jackson is thought to have become addicted to Demerol after suffering a serious burn inflicted during the filming of a Pepsi commercial in 1984 (McKie 2009: 24).

The death of so many prominent celebrities from an overdose of prescription drugs is taken as a sign of a larger epidemic within society and used to dramatise the tendency to self-medicate. The deaths of Jackson and Ledger were widely used as a warning about the dangers of these drugs. Reports are backed up by commentary from doctors and experts and dramatised by listing the drugs found at the scene of death. The deaths are portrayed as tragic and unnecessary. McKie continues: 'However, as is clear from the example of Michael Jackson, when a star wants access to drugs, they generally get their way. For his part, Heath Ledger was taking a combination of painkillers, sleeping pills, anti-anxiety medication and tranquillisers when he died' (2009: 24). The reporting emphasises the easiness of obtaining such drugs if you are famous. People tend not to refuse stars any request even though it may harm them. Stars' ability to transgress the moral boundaries of a society features highly in posthumous comments on the cause of death. Michael Jackson was described as having obtained drugs using several false identities and there was a lot of speculation as to where Heath Ledger might have obtained prescriptions for so many drugs. Michael Jackson's personal doctor Dr Conrad Murray was even accused of murdering him by administering him with a lethal amount of drugs.<sup>57</sup>

The need for mind-altering drugs, however, adds to the enigma of deceased stars. Why did they need to escape their lives so badly that they ended up dead? 'Celebrities mirror the post-modern sense of splintered selves, especially in the distance that seems to exist between the public and the private personae' (Brauer and Shields, 1999: 7). In the case of

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<sup>57</sup> Dr Murray was convicted of involuntary manslaughter in 2011.

an unexpected death, the secrets of the private self eclipse the professional accomplishments. The troubled lives of Heath Ledger and Michael Jackson received a lot of attention from the media. However, most of the reporting was mere speculation and commentary based on 'insider' reports on stars' lives. This only highlights the impossibility of knowing the truth about the star. Possibly the only people who knew the whole truth – the stars themselves – were dead. As they died, they took their secrets with them to the grave, leaving the fans and the media morsels of information gathered from previous biographies, interviews and reports.

#### **6.3.4. Reporting Death: Tabloid Newspapers and Voyeurism**

The life stories of dead celebrities revisit their lives, their successes and failures, careers and personalities and their public images and 'real' selves. Journalism in pursuit of sensation at the expense of complexity seeks to turn the deaths into a narrative of speculation and scandal. Death makes tabloids more predatory. The public identify with the stars who appear vulnerable in some way. The tabloids work to expose this vulnerability in order to sell their stories to a greater number of readers.

Tabloids, with their reputation for unscrupulous method, possess for their readers the potential for both portraying the patently fictional as well as the private reality behind the star's public façade. Tabloids are often characterised by distorted quotes, pure fabrication of information and sources, absences of any balancing point of view, and the use of paid tipsters and information (Brauer and Shields, 1999: 8).

Tabloids are seen to have access to the hidden or private truth of a person. When celebrities die, they claim to have access to the intimate details of the circumstances surrounding the death. In most cases, these intimate details are mere speculation based on a morsel of truth.

Celebrity deaths are followed by both voyeuristic reporting in the tabloids and a process of public mourning. The scene of death gathers a crowd and in these modern times people have gone as far as taking photos on their mobile phones of Heath Ledger on a stretcher in a black body bag, being taken away by paramedics. A photograph of Michael Jackson in hospital emerged in several newspapers. According to reports, Jackson was already dead when taken to hospital, meaning that the photograph that emerged was that of the dead star. A photograph of Jackson's deathbed was also published in the newspapers, detailing every item that was found on or near the bed. The *News of the World* wrote: 'The photo taken by a family insider the day after Jacko died at his rented mansion in North Carolwood Drive, Los Angeles, shows the aftermath of the frantic struggle to revive him' (Desborough,

2009: 4-5). The article continues by speculating on the number of medical equipment in the room and what it might have been used for:

Bizarrely, what looks just like an incontinence pad sits in the centre of the bed, possibly covering blood or other stains. The length of blue ribbon alongside is believed to have been used as a makeshift tourniquet, to bind the star's arm and find a vein so that drugs could be administered. The duvet is pulled to one side and incredibly, there is still a slight dent made by dying Jacko's head in the plumped-up pillow (Desborough, 2009: 4-5).



However, apart from the supposedly authentic picture, the article itself is mere speculation as to what each item shown has been used for. The article does not deal with facts but instead has constructed its own narrative around the possible events of the death scene. The photograph forms the centre of the story whereas the text itself tries to explain the photograph in dramatic terms. The dramatising of the death scene is taken further by a large text attached to the photograph: 'crime scene.' Therefore, the article not only describes the bed as the scene of death, but also as a crime scene, implying that there was a crime involved in Jackson's death. However, at this time police were investigating the death but no one had been arrested or formally charged with a crime relating to Jackson's death.

Several tabloids such as the *Sun* and *The Mirror* published 'shocking details of Jackson's drug death' (Fricker, 2009: 44) detailing what his hair, face and body looked like, his weight, how he received four jabs into the heart, his broken ribs and bruises, and how he was starved and totally bald (Parker and Kennedy 2009: 4-5). However, the information that was supposedly from a leaked coroner's report was proved to be false. Regardless of doubts about the validity of the coroner's report, both papers ruthlessly published their findings as front-page news. The tabloids have a tendency to construct their own dramatic narratives around celebrity deaths in which speculation is central and the truth doesn't matter as much as selling copies. The public are bombarded with information about these deaths that may or may not be true. If the tabloids manage to get hold of photographs such as 'Jacko's deathbed' or 'Dead Jacko' in hospital, these are ruthlessly exploited to make money. When Princess Diana died, most newspapers refused to publish photos of her dying taken in the

scene of the car crash. Since then things have changed. There seem to be no limitations, morals, or discretion when it comes to publicising death.

The events leading to Heath Ledger's death were recorded in great detail by several newspapers. *The Mirror* speculated on Ledger's life before the death:

It is claimed that [Ledger] went into rehab to wean himself of heroin. He was depressed at the split with his *Brokeback Mountain* co-star Williams and pining for their two-year-old daughter, Matilda Rose. He had trouble sleeping. In his last few days [...] he struck a lonely figure in tattered jeans and a hoodie, treading sleeplessly after dawn to local cafés for breakfast (Antonowicz, 2008: 23).

The events are reportedly confirmed by several local residents who saw him before his death. After the death, reports claimed that the star had looked troubled and wanted to be left alone. The *Daily Mail* reported: 'Ledger, reportedly exhausted to the point of illness by his frantic work schedule, had long felt uncomfortable in the limelight. There had been panic attacks when he hit big time and, more recently, sleeplessness and strange, morbid thoughts' (Pendlebury, 2008: 11). The death is represented as mysterious through the representation of the star's last days or hours. No one knew where Ledger obtained a large amount of prescription drugs, whether he was a drug addict or whether he just suffered from insomnia and took the drugs in order to sleep. *The Mirror* speculated on Ledger's death:

Sick at heart and exhausted by crippling insomnia, the *Brokeback Mountain* star tried to stave off this mounting depression with cocktails of prescription pills. [...] Ledger's naked body was discovered at his New York apartment on Tuesday afternoon. [...] A post-mortem was inconclusive and toxicology tests are still been carried out. Sources claim that the apartment was in a breakdown state, virtually unfurnished with a mattress on the floor serving as a bed (Pettifor and Cummings, 2008: 8).

Even though there are no photographs of Ledger's apartment or deathbed, the scene was described in the tabloids whose sources painted a picture of squalid and run down place fitting with the mysterious and tragic death. Unnamed sources are quoted to give 'credibility' to the stories. Ledger's death is more mysterious than Jackson's due to the lack of such explicit photographs and the reliance on such mysterious sources. The overall narrative emphasised the tragedy of someone so young and talented dying so alone and unhappy.

In the narratives of both Michael Jackson and Heath Ledger, the overall conclusion seemed to be that they were killed by the pressures of fame. Ledger died at the height of his

success, initially making the death seem like a failure. Jackson had been experiencing a long process of career failure and was about to make a comeback. His death brought him even bigger success than he had had when he was alive. In commercial terms, for both, death was a great success. 'The tragedy is heightened by the implication that the celebrity was ironically struck down at an unfair moment' (Kitch, 2000: 186). This is true in both cases as a career success was waiting. Ledger's biggest movie was yet to be released and Jackson's comeback concerts were yet to begin. 'To compensate for this unfairness the tabloids provided a villain who was responsible' (Kitch, 2000: 186). For both stars the ultimate villain was fame and celebrity. Even though other villains were sought, such as the doctors who prescribed drugs or friends and family that failed the suffering stars, the real blame was put on the cult of celebrity.

### 6.3.5. Constructing Immortality

Of all sources of religion, the supreme and final crisis of life – death – is of the greatest importance. [...] Death is the gateway to the other world in more than the literal sense. [...] A great deal, if not all, of religious inspiration has been derived from it. [...] Death and its denial – immortality – have always formed, as they form today, the most poignant theme of man's forebodings (Malinowski, 2004: 19).

Celebrity is often described as a secular religion with religious imagery often used when a celebrity dies in order to make him or her immortal, and to emphasise his or her legacy. The construction of immortality works as a positive counter-narrative to the negative and speculative narrative regarding the cause of death examined above. Both Ledger and Jackson left creative legacies, which gained a lot of attention in the press. In Ledger's case most newspapers went through his filmography, highlighting *Brokeback Mountain* as his artistic triumph. *The Guardian* emphasised his skills as a performer:

[Ledger's] performance [in the *Brokeback Mountain*] was a surprise: Ledger had not previously really shown evidence of such depth, calm or simplicity. It wasn't just that he made us believe in a 'gay' cowboy: he made us think about Ennis Del Mar, his character with the generally restricted worldview of a Wyoming cowhand. In short, he was playing someone a good deal less educated than Heath Ledger – and there are actors who are not comfortable playing dumb (Thomson, 2009: 12).

Jackson's long career prompted commentary on several career highlights, emphasising his musical genius. *The Times* examined his musical legacy:



Michael Jackson is expected to become the first artist to fill each of the top ten slots in the UK singles chart at the same time – and an unreleased album could bring still more posthumous success. Industry experts were predicting yesterday that a new benchmark would be set for pop music, 27 years on from the commercial peak that Jackson scaled with *Thriller*. [...] The momentum behind Jackson can only build as blanket media coverage of his life and legacy continues (Hoyle and Fletcher, 2009: 8).

Materiality poses a problem for the representations of death, as death always implies an absence. In this sense, the material objects of films and musical recordings became important in establishing the dead stars' legacy.

Dead celebrities come to be resurrected through the media. 'In the instance of actual death, the materiality of the signifier, the name attached to the corpse, becomes a more disturbingly contingent than usual. When the name is spoken or written, the dead celebrity lives on a little longer within the mystical power of naming' (Watkin, 2004: 5). Names are important in celebrity culture, therefore naming is also central in death. Jackson was repeatedly referred to by his well-established nickname 'Jacko' as well as by his real name. Using Jacko instead of Michael Jackson created familiarity but also referred to his ultimately 'wacky' life. He had previously been called 'Wacko Jacko' due to his strange behaviour, such as allegedly sleeping in an oxygen chamber. The tabloids carried the connotations of 'Wacko Jacko' in their reporting of the death, creating an image of a true eccentric, a person unlike any other. It could be said that once the naming stops, the stars are truly dead and buried. However, the tabloids keep the name alive by repeating it at every opportunity. The release of Ledger's film *The Dark Knight* renewed the interest in him, and his name was further kept alive when he won a posthumous Oscar for the film. In 2009, his last film, *The Imaginarium of Doctor Parnassus*, during the filming of which he died, was released, prompting further commemorative commentary in the press. It could be said that the tabloids will keep a name alive until there is nothing more to tell.

Immortality matters culturally because we cannot accept death as a complete annihilation of the person. The idea of the decomposition of the corpse and, more importantly, the visible disappearance of the personality, are the disturbing signifiers that remind people that at some point life will end. These suggestions of fear and horror seem to threaten man at all stages of culture with some idea of annihilation, with some hidden fears and forebodings (Malinowski, 2004: 21).

Immortality in celebrity culture is no longer religious – it is secular, material and mediated. 'It has been said that the modern man suppresses death because secular society does not

give him mythical or ritual outlets to react to death' (Fabian, 2004: 59). Therefore, celebrity deaths become spectacular ritualised media events. These deaths give the public an opportunity to reflect on the horror of death and loss, and therefore often create an overtly emotional response to the death of a person that none of the ordinary people have ever met or known. The media event of the death of a star thus creates a reaction that seeks to secure immortality through the commodification of death. Michael Jackson's albums instantly entered the top of the charts and his fans flocked to the cinemas to see a documentary about the rehearsals for his comeback concerts *This is It*. Heath Ledger's posthumously released film *The Dark Knight* was a success as the hype surrounding his death ensured the blockbuster status of the film.

In a sanitised society the horror of death is generally related to serious illness and slow decline or violent and accidental death. Unexpected death from drug abuse of those who represent the most successful and admired in our society creates anger, astonishment and curiosity. The fascination with death is evident in the way that the media and the public immortalise dead celebrities. 'As the old religious notions of hell, sin and evil no longer exist, death has become shameful, a failure. Hell, sin and evil are no longer regarded as part of human nature but as social problems that can be eliminated by a good system of punishment' (Ariès, 2004: 47). Celebrities in general have the power to transgress moral boundaries but rarely face the consequences of their actions. They cannot escape death but in death any past transgressions tend to be downplayed in favour of the canonisation of the star in immortality. When he was alive Michael Jackson had faced several charges of child molestation but he had never been convicted or the accusations proven. The accusations, however, caused a decline in his career. Before his death, he had been on the verge of a comeback, planning his first concerts since the accusations. In death, the past was brushed aside and barely mentioned in the media. Death can thus not only make a star immortal, but also restore his image. The dead Michael Jackson was seen as an innocent and childlike eccentric and his previous strange behaviour was remembered with affection. The tabloid commemorative editions praised his talent and charisma, his dedication to music and his work for charities. Jackson was represented as a victim of his fame. The *Sun* wrote:

Nobody had any sympathy for [Jackson] before but there was a groundswell of sympathy after his death. [...] The public that once judged Jackson negatively are now seeing a fuller picture. [...] He was a man who yearned so deeply to do good with his life but was ultimately consumed by indescribable loneliness and pain. [...] He was a man who thought attention from fans could be a suitable replacement for love from family. But fame and fortune have never made anyone happy (Jackson, 2009: 4-5).

*The Mirror* associated Jackson with Elvis:

He was the black Elvis. As glorious and tragic as that. As mesmerising and monumental. As adorable and pitiful. As epic, unforgettable and beautiful. Michael Jackson, dead at 50, had talent to burn, the kind of talent that comes along once in a generation. Yet his private life too often obscured those great gifts. Like Elvis, he craved fame and was destroyed by it (Parsons, 2009b: 1-12).

In death Jackson was turned into an icon. In iconicity, recognisable images form the basis of a person's recognition to the extent that the actual reality of the person is almost forgotten. Jackson was immortalised as inspirational yet eccentric. In life he was one of the most inaccessible stars of our time, but death made him accessible. As an icon he inspires quasi-religious devotion in his fans. Due to Jackson's secretive existence and unquestionable talent, it was easy for the media to turn him into an icon. As with the death of other icons such as Elvis and Marilyn Monroe, speculation surrounding the cause of death and the final days ensured that Jackson's death became the item that dominated the news for weeks, even months, as new details emerged. Jackson's memorial service became a large part of the media story as it was broadcast all over the world. Jackson led a life that seemed to have elements of real madness: the narratives portrayed him as overtly sensitive to the world, unable to shut it out regardless of all his money and fame. He seemed less free to move and act than most ordinary people and, as such, in addition to becoming an immortal icon in the media he was also represented as a victim and a representative of the downside of being a superstar. Jackson's death allowed the media to celebrate his life through reminiscent repetition and to assess his meaning to the broader culture.

#### **6.4. Conclusion: Death and Counter-Narrative**

According to Dollimore, 'even as we are driven forward by secular fear of failure, we resort to the metaphysical reassurance that such failure is ultimately inevitable' (1998: xviii). Death awaits everybody but normally one can shut it out and pretend it doesn't exist. When a celebrity dies the public can no longer ignore death, as it becomes front-page news. For the person who dies, death is the ultimate failure that wipes away all achievement and success. In the eyes of others, for all the celebrities featured in this chapter, death also became the ultimate success. In death, celebrity as a secular religion becomes central. Dead stars come to be immortalised and canonised. They can become martyrs or tragic figures that died too soon. Past transgressions such as Jade Goody's 'race scandal' or Michael Jackson's child molestation charges are brushed aside. Dollimore (1998: xix) argues that 'the "crisis" of the

modern individual is less a crisis than a recurring instability deriving from the theological obsession with death, loss and failure.’ Celebrity culture has become increasingly centred on failure but in death celebrities’ successes dominate the news. Talent, the extraordinary qualities of the dead star and his or her career successes are the central themes of media reports. In death, celebrities become available. They are described as the heroes of our time and their deaths as a waste of extraordinary talent and a tragic loss of a charismatic personality. Those who die young are tragic, and their deaths take on new meanings that may teach us about the state of modern society. There is a search for a greater meaning for the death as evidenced by the debate surrounding cervical smear testing during Jade Goody’s cancer battle or the speculation about the overuse of prescription drugs after Heath Ledger’s death. The narratives surrounding celebrity deaths work to immortalise the famous. Success comes both in commercial terms, in the form of the legacy left in the artistic works of the star, and in narrative terms, as the immortalisation of the star through the repetition of the life story. Death itself, seen as the end of physical life and the deterioration of the body, fails in the face of the process of immortalising the celebrity.

Media reporting on death has faced a lot of criticism. Jade Goody was widely attacked for ‘selling her death’ to various magazines and newspapers, and for allowing her illness to be filmed. However, the tabloids were also criticised for jumping on the bandwagon of Goody’s death narrative. The photographs that emerged in the papers of frail Goody who was clearly nearing death were seen as evidence of an exploitative celebrity culture where even death could be used as a commercial tool. The harrowing photographs that emerged after Ledger and Jackson’s deaths and widely published in newspapers were also disturbing. Celebrity deaths reveal a society where values and morals are abandoned in favour of making money. Ours is a society where death, once private, becomes commercial – death can be manipulated and newspapers are free to put a spin on it in whichever way they choose. There are no restrictions on publishing photographs of dead bodies or black body bags. The discretion shown in the case of Princess Diana’s death is long gone, leaving an ‘anything goes, as long as it makes money’ mentality as the growing death industry seeks to profit from deceased stars.

Several celebrities passed away between 2008 and 2010 revealing the ruthless tabloid mentality at the heart of contemporary celebrity culture. Death reveals the double standards driving celebrity culture. The public and the media can revel in the misfortunes of celebrities when they are alive but in death they must be immortalised as icons, saints or martyrs of our time. They become victims of their success or tragic figures whose money or fame cannot save them from the reality of death. The unexpected deaths featured in this chapter expose the impact of the pressures of fame and the need to escape through using

prescription drugs. Goody's slow decline interrogates the importance of a dignified death. 'Today, death must become the discreet but dignified exit of a peaceful person from helpful society that is not torn, not even overly upset by the idea of a biological transition without significance, without pain or suffering, and ultimately without fear' (Ariès, 2004:48). By exposing the details of her slow decline, Goody disrupted the society's need for a dignified death, the quiet passing of a peaceful person away from prying eyes. It could be said that the deaths of Ledger and Jackson were also undignified. At the heart of these deaths is an inability to cope with life – a failure to flourish in the limelight.

The death discourse, then, oscillates between success and failure. Death can be seen as resulting in success but the physical event of death itself is a failure, prompting endless speculation as to what might have been if the celebrity had lived. Celebrity culture is driven by a need to turn death into liberation from suffering instead of an end to life. The suffering experienced by celebrities may be either mental or physical, but the villain of the death narrative is fame. 'Western society has surrounded death with shame, discomfort and repulsion. Tabloid reporting on celebrity deaths adds to this "pornography of death" in modern society. It is difficult to believe that all of those who publicly mourned the dead stars felt a truly authentic emotion of affective loss' (Robben, 2004: 4). The reactions to the deaths of celebrities seem excessive, fuelled by curiosity rather than genuine affection. We forget that celebrities were human beings as they are immortalised into icons, saints or legends. Death makes celebrities into secular gods, but it also turns them into ultimate commodities that can no longer resist the process of commodification. The media are free to exploit the deaths and to attach new meanings to the image of the dead stars. As a result, death is the ultimate career move, for the careers now have an infinite life. Death offers a second chance of greatness and success and dead stars become permanent icons of the confused and contradictory values of contemporary society.

## **7. Conclusion**

Since the end of the 1990s, celebrity has occupied the position of an idealised figure of aspiration and a vehicle for consumerism on one hand, and the subject of public mockery, condemnation and vilification on the other. Contemporary culture actively promotes individuality, consumerism and the possibility of constructing one's lifestyle, body and identity, and celebrity-based texts have contributed to these processes. Celebrity is controversial not only because it occupies a great amount of media space, but also because it interrogates contemporary society's values, morals and lifestyles. Celebrity both shapes the society and distorts it, embodying 'authenticity', manufacture and artifice, image, identity and the self, and private and public realms. As a subject of media's interest, celebrities have come to use confessional narratives to respond to stories in the media and to 'tell their side of the story.' These confessionals currently take the form of authorised biographies, autobiographies, published diaries, reality TV shows and confessional interviews. During the past decade celebrity auto/biography has become a best-selling literary genre. It is one of the central confessional vehicles that grants a celebrity at least some control over their own story with the claim to expose the 'truth' about the celebrity.

This thesis has examined celebrity culture through an analysis of confessional discourses and media discourses centring on success, failure and death. All three contribute to the narrative process of constructing celebrity personas. An examination of auto/biographies as counter-narratives to newspaper stories has exposed a tension between celebrities and the media. Both parties claim to represent the 'truth'. However, it has become clear that the 'truth' is a construction both in newspapers and in auto/biographies. Auto/biographies are commodities designed to sell the persona of the celebrity in question – a persona that is itself nothing but a mere construction. Auto/biographies are self-promotional vehicles constructed for the purpose of representing the celebrity as 'real' and 'authentic'. When it comes to newspapers, celebrities no longer have a private life – they are constantly criticised in the press. Every transgression, every moment of happiness finds its way to the media, often even when a celebrity would rather keep certain things secret. This unrelenting interest seems to have caused a deluge in celebrity auto/biographies seeking not only to profit from the revelation of the 'truth' but also to correct misrepresentations in the media, thus constructing what I have termed a counter-narrative. The emphasis on the previously under-researched area of celebrity autobiography has therefore revealed an increasing tendency within celebrity culture for celebrities themselves to 'tell their side of the story' – a tendency that is also clear in celebrities' use of social media such as Twitter and Facebook

to tell us about their thoughts, lives and escapades. This increased use of social media would be a fruitful area of study in the future.

Auto/biography fits well within celebrity culture due the requirement to reveal everything about the individual. Both in celebrity culture and in auto/biographical writing, the private lives and personal successes and failures take precedence over professional successes and failures. Neither celebrity nor auto/biography was taken seriously as an area of scholarly interest for quite some time. The main interest was on auto/biographies of 'important' men based on the Enlightenment myths of the individual and the genius. Women's auto/biographies were thus overlooked until feminism increased interest in feminine writing. Whilst biography has traditionally been seen as masculine, autobiography has been labelled feminine. In addition, celebrity culture itself has been seen as a feminine phenomenon due to its emphasis on the private and the confessional. This thesis took gender as its emphasis, revealing how boundaries between masculinity and femininity are increasingly blurred within auto/biographical writing. However, as auto/biography as a genre tends to blur the dividing lines between fact and fiction, it is risky to make any definitive conclusions. It is essential to pay attention to the selective nature of auto/biographies and the centrality of constructing a dramatic, entertaining and saleable text.

Jordan is a celebrity who lives her life through the media, exemplifying the modern tendency for self-disclosure, the confessional and celebrities' willingness to reveal all for the right price. Jordan's celebrity has gone through cycles. She has in turn been represented as either bad and derided or accepted and loved. In addition, she has sparked debate over whether she is 'real' or 'fake' both in terms of her persona and her surgically enhanced body. The study of Jordan's use of her autobiographies as representing different constructed personas interrogates the central point of analysis: performance versus 'authenticity'. Chapter 3 shows how autobiographies are performative texts that have the purpose of creating a drama of the self and how Jordan constructs an image through a performance of gender. The instances of 'authenticity' are carefully constructed and create an illusion of confession/revelation. The chapter examines how overexposed celebrities' redemption bids often fail and how what is represented as 'authentic' may come to be perceived as manipulative and false. As a large part of celebrities' appeal is based on mystery and revelation, self-promotional celebrities such as Jordan are always in danger of revealing 'too much' and as such losing the public interest in new revelations. As the chapter shows, Jordan is skilled in using masks and masquerade to sell the different personas discursively represented in her four autobiographies, each of which is based around a narrative of either 'Jordan' or 'Katie Price'. Jordan's autobiographical personas adopt some masculine characteristics at the expense of the feminisation of her husband

Peter Andre, thus introducing the idea that autobiographies have the potential to blur or to transgress fixed gender boundaries. Jordan's cycle of success and failure is tied to her personal life, a process which also applies to the other celebrities studied in this thesis. In Jordan's case professional failure is seen to follow personal failure, whereas Russell Brand and Robbie Williams for example, achieve professional success after personal failure.

Russell Brand and Robbie Williams' auto/biographical narratives confirm the conclusion reached regarding the blurring of lines between femininity and masculinity both in auto/biographical representation and in celebrity culture. The confession is usually associated with femininity but the restraint regarding the personal and the intimate in evidence in male auto/biographies of previous eras has disappeared. Men are required to confess to emotions and distress, making masculine auto/biographies feminine texts. Williams and Brand's auto/biographies expose a tension between the feminine requirements of the auto/biographical narrative and the masculine celebrity persona. The chapter analyses how male stars use masquerade and role-play to construct masculine personas. However, the feminine texts of auto/biographies work to expose the insecurity and vulnerability of male stars. However, masculinity is reasserted through a representation of male stars through the myth of the creative genius, whose talents and artistic sensitivities make them vulnerable to the feminine maladies of mental illness. Robbie Williams and Russell Brand also exemplify the importance of personal failure for a construction of a celebrity image. Part of the masculine persona is constructed through drug/alcohol addiction as male stars are often given the licence to behave badly or abuse substances and be redeemed, whereas, as seen in the case of Jordan and Jade Goody, for female celebrities redemption does not come so easily. Brand and Williams' auto/biographical narratives construct an image of the male star as transgressive. Picking up from the previous chapter, Brand and Williams' narratives also examine how 'authenticity' is constructed through addiction and mental illness. Masculinity, however, needs to be reasserted through descriptions of promiscuous, emotionless sexual adventures and the use of humour to divert attention away from painful or serious subjects. The chapter shows how male auto/biographies often rely on exaggeration and masculine bravado. Therefore, there is a clear tension between the feminine nature of the text and the discursive construction of a masculine persona. The chapter analyses how celebrity lives are turned into storylines which are possibly more dramatic than the reality, exposing the entertainment value of a well-written auto/biography. This chapter also examines the differences between autobiography and biography, coming to a conclusion that currently the differences are minimal as both forms rely on the personal and the intimate, placing emphasis on overcoming failures in order to achieve success.



Moving on to an analysis of a more traditional gender discourse, chapter 5 investigates the classed and gendered representations of female reality TV celebrities Jade Goody and Kerry Katona. The chapter examines how autobiography has the potential to give a voice to those otherwise excluded from public discourse. As a narrative, Goody and Katona's autobiographies offer a 'rags to riches' story in which their celebrity and their perceived 'authenticity' is closely tied with their working-class background. The chapter shows how celebrities construct and reconstruct personas in response to media's reporting. Goody and Katona's autobiographies are seen to adhere to a gendered discourse that is more clearly based on divisions between masculinity and femininity than the other auto/biographies studied in this thesis. Goody and Katona are constructed through gender and class, making being female and working-class central to the narrative of betterment within the autobiographies. As celebrities borne out of reality TV, Goody and Katona maintain their fame through confessional means, a tendency which is firmly embedded in their celebrity personas. An examination of their autobiographies reveals that the apparent honesty that these celebrities display is a construction, as for 'famous for being famous' celebrities autobiography is often above all a means of constructing a likeable persona. The chapter also shows how female celebrities' autobiographies often adhere to the script of female celebrity in crisis, usually found in the media in relation to female 'train-wreck' celebrities. For Goody and Katona, autobiography works as a counter-narrative to press reports on crisis and scandal. Their autobiographies reveal the extent to which autobiographies are used to construct a likeable image, to counter negative stories in the media, to excuse transgressive behaviour and to expose guilt and insecurity. They also reveal a difference in the representation of guilt between male and female autobiographies. Women are required to confess to their guilt whereas for men any guilt is disguised behind masculine bravado, infantile fascination with the transgressive or simply omitted altogether.

Celebrity deaths expose the ruthlessness at the heart of celebrity culture. The media revel on deaths, stretching out their reporting into continuous death narratives where the truth doesn't matter as much as the story. Death exposes the hypocrisy of contemporary journalism as previously derided stars are elevated into saints and icons through the construction of counter-narratives negating previous, negative stories. The mourning for celebrities has become somewhat recreational and deaths have become commodified. As a result, celebrities often achieve their greatest successes in death. Even though death as an end of life is a failure, it often leads to unprecedented success in career terms. Celebrity deaths also work to vilify fame. Regardless of the actual cause of death, the death discourse often finds a way to blame fame. The fear of failure and the fear of losing celebrity allegedly pushes the stars too far and results in premature death, it is often claimed. This assumption only works to commodify dead stars further as it encourages further speculation

about the 'real' person behind the public face and the lifestyles that lead to death. Celebrities seem to have very little influence on the way that their lives are reported in the media. In death, this control is completely lost. What has replaced the previous discretion in the face of death and mourning is a mentality that seeks to commodify dead stars as well as to reveal all there is to reveal about their lives, lifestyles and personalities. Past successes and failures are once again front-page news as the growing 'death industry' seeks to profit from dead stars. This is why media reporting of death has faced a lot of criticism, especially in terms of reporting the process of dying that Jade Goody went through in such a public manner. Although Goody made a conscious decision to stay in the limelight, tabloid newspapers came to be seen as rather predatory in their relentless interest in her death. Jackson and Ledger's deaths provoked similar reactions, in particular in relation to published photographs of dead Jackson in hospital and dead Ledger on a stretcher in a body bag.

The media's continuous fascination with 'authenticity' and the 'real' is sustained by the commodification of celebrities. As the media report any revelations of the rift between 'authenticity' and the public performance of a celebrity, the auto/biography has become the site for a construction of an 'authentic' image that responds to media's allegations through counter-narratives. This thesis has discovered autobiographies as one of the few controllable sites that celebrities can use as a counter-narrative. The thesis reveals that as feminine texts auto/biographies blur the boundaries of gender through a play with performance and 'authenticity.' Auto/biographies allow celebrities to construct gendered personas which can take on either masculine or feminine characteristics. Auto/biographies retain some traditional stereotypes based on gender such as that of the male creative genius, and construct new representations, such as Jordan's play with masculinity in relation to her business woman persona and the excessive femininity of her glamour girl persona. In between these two is her persona as a traditional wife and mother. Like celebrity culture itself then, auto/biography blurs rigid gender boundaries whilst at the same time retaining some traditional understandings of gender. The feminine nature of the confessional renders even male autobiographies feminine, creating a tension between the need to represent a masculine persona and the need to confess to personal feelings.

The choice of celebrities limits the scope of this study. As it happens, the female celebrities in this thesis fall within the category of 'celebrity' and all of them could be described as 'famous for being famous'. The men are more readily described as stars because they are seen to possess talent and charisma, and represented as creative geniuses. It is not therefore simply a question of gender but also of talent. Even though Jordan, Goody and Katona have achieved a lot during their careers as celebrities, the fact that they are mainly

reality TV celebrities influences the way they are seen and categorised. Reality TV exists at the more trivial and fleeting end of the celebrity hierarchy. Jordan, Goody and Katona are understood through their confessional practices and their ability and willingness to reveal all about their private lives. Williams, Brand, Ledger and Jackson, regardless of how turbulent, strange or compelling their personal lives as celebrities are, are considered to have talent, which distinguishes them from those who exist through reality TV and self-promotion. The choice of celebrities according to Rojek's categories of achieved and attributed celebrities could have been balanced further so that both categories would include male and female celebrities.

In a crowded celebrity marketplace, celebrities need to distinguish themselves from other celebrities to stay on top. The reason the celebrities/stars examined in this thesis have managed to maintain their fame is precisely because they offer something unique. They also show signs of determination and desire for fame, or a desire to be acknowledged as exceptional. Apart from Michael Jackson, they have all also promoted themselves as ordinary. Dyer's (1998) assertion that stars are both ordinary and extraordinary thus applies here. Something has distinguished these individuals as different and compelling whilst at the same time they remain ordinary people who were extraordinarily lucky to achieve fame. Despite failures and self-destructive tendencies, none of them has lost their fame. For critics, the current emphasis on famous personalities exemplifies cultural decline based on the sensational. Even though critics have predicted the death of celebrity, interest in public figures is far from abating. The tension between auto/biographies and newspaper discourse is fascinating. I have a great interest in autobiography as a counter-narrative and would like to take this study further to a comparative study between celebrity autobiographies, stories in the tabloid press and celebrity magazines. Celebrity magazines are seen as a way to promote the celebrity through confessional interviews so it would be interesting to see how these are positioned in relation to autobiographies as controlled counter-narratives and the tabloid press as a source for uncontrolled, misleading or false stories. Adding celebrity magazines to the analysis would also provide further insight into the gendered representations of both male and female celebrities within confessional discourses.

Success and failure can be defined in either career terms or personal terms. In contemporary celebrity culture both are increasingly measured through the personal. The public and private realms blur into each other, as do success and failure. Personal successes reflect societal values. Divorce is seen as a failure and a happy family as a success. Addiction is seen as a failure and overcoming an addiction is seen as a success. Putting on weight is seen as a failure and losing weight is seen as a success. Celebrity culture places emphasis on traditional values through celebrity narratives. As a result,

celebrities become more than trivial entertainment. The increasing openness of celebrities themselves to report every triumph and every downfall in their auto/biographies results in a permanent tension between the media and the celebrities. The media look for scandal and the sensational and the celebrities search for ways to control their media image and output. Even successful celebrities often seem dissatisfied, unhappy or disillusioned with fame. Despite success fame generally denies the famous the rewards of happiness and satisfaction. At least in narrative terms, the personalities that achieve fame appear to be insecure and in a permanent state of anxiety and drama. Many also cleverly use this to their advantage – to stay ahead in the fame game.

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