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Teaching Celebrity: Editor's Introduction

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This special issue of *Teaching Media Quarterly* is dedicated to teaching celebrity. The assumption that motivates its publication is that teaching celebrity is important because celebrity itself is pedagogical. As Jennifer Wicke (1998) tells us, it is precisely the zone of celebrity where, for many, some of the most important cultural concepts and concerns are brought into “cultural play” and thus negotiated (390). For instance, celebrity culture has not only helped attune audiences to consumer culture, it has also articulated the self as something produced in and “through the public world” (Marshall 2020, 46). Today, celebrity culture’s influence is most visible in the context of digital culture. Social media platforms like Twitter are rife with users of all types who approach their networks as audiences and take up the practices of micro-celebrity accordingly (Marwick and boyd 2010, 122).

On its surface, celebrity culture can appear frivolous, and there are certainly many people who dismiss it quite casually. Dismissal, however, would rob us of critical work like Brooke Erin Duffy’s (2017) intervention into the ways that the celebrity-fueled fashion blogger economy circulates a pervasive discourse of labor and entrepreneurship that obscures precarity and perpetuates inequities. As educators, teaching celebrity is all the more important because of its significant reach among younger audiences who are increasingly oriented by contemporary culture to value, desire, and even pursue celebrity status (Rui and Stefanone 2016, 402).

Celebrity also warrants attention in the classroom because of its pervasive nature. As Driessens (2013) has demonstrated, celebrity is “not the exclusive domain of media, entertainment and sports” but has instead, in various ways, seen its logics take hold across a variety of social fields (647). Indeed, the workings of celebrity have been studied in the context of politics (Inthorn and Street 2011) and academia (Williams 2006), as well as among those with various types of lifestyle expertise (Lewis 2010). It is only through careful attention that celebrity’s influence across these various domains becomes visible. The lesson plans included here provide instructors with the ability to guide students toward understanding the influence of celebrity in how we understand both politics and identity.

Caitlin E. Lawson provides instructors with guidance for introducing students to the various ways that celebrity can be studied and places particular emphasis on its social function and representational power. The readings, lecture material, discussion questions, and activities in this lesson plan provide the opportunity to review the historical development of celebrity and introduce celebrity figures as fundamentally intertextual. In this spirit, this lesson plans utilizes material from a range of media sources, including news coverage, interviews, music videos, and social media posts, and includes an activity designed to inspire critical reflection on the ways



media content both informs celebrity personae and, in turn, shapes their ideological significance and cultural messages about race, gender, sexuality, and class.

In **Amanda Konkle's** lesson, "Teaching Political Celebrity and Melodramatic Rhetoric in the Age of Trump through Hindi Cinema," students explore the intersection of melodrama, affect and political celebrity. Students begin by engaging with literature on celebrity and politics before examining a number of US-based case studies as part of an in-class activity. After laying this ground work, the lesson asks students to consider what literature on melodrama can bring to critical inquiry into politics and celebrity through in-depth analysis of the Hindi political thriller, *Rann* (2010). The lesson concludes with an in-class writing activity in which students bring their insights from analyzing *Rann* to bear on an example from US political culture and think through the presence and power of melodramatic rhetoric in the production of celebrity politicians.

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