

Celebrities and climate change: history, politics and the promise of emotional witness

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Celebrities and Climate Change: History, Politics and the Promise of Emotional Witness

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Introduction

Given the increasingly pervasive and *spectacular* role of celebrities in humanitarian and environmental campaigning since the late 1990s – as spokespeople for NGO campaigns (Anderson, 2013) and as creators of their own organizations (Alexander, 2013) – it is surprising that relatively little research has been undertaken to explore celebrity involvement in climate change campaigning and communication. Indeed, as the COP21 Paris negotiations in December 2015 indicated, high profile A-list celebrities were the “charismatic megafauna” (Boykoff et. al., 2010) lending global star power to this high-profile political event, ‘expertly’ navigating the intersections between media, politics and science through speeches at the UN conference from actors Leonardo DiCaprio and Alex Baldwin, and former celebrity politician and actor, Arnold Schwarzenegger. With the rise of “Celebritus Politicus” (Goodman, 2013) in recent years, it is not surprising that a global political event about the future of our planet would garner elite celebrity endorsement, yet research on understanding this growing “celebritization of climate change” (Boykoff and Goodman, 2009b, p. 395) is relatively scarce.

Climate change communication scholars and practitioners have over the last decade called for more culturally meaningful and socially relevant forms of climate change communication that connect it to the cultural values, and mediated/social practices of

our everyday lives (Moser and Dilling, 2008; Boykoff et. al., 2009; Doyle, 2011). Celebrities have arguably provided a significant response to these challenges, using their celebrity status to draw media and cultural attention to climate change, helping to bring it within the popular cultural sphere, as well as utilizing their fan bases to mobilize engagement and action via social media (Alexander, 2013). Celebrities also provide an important human dimension to climate change (beyond polar bears and melting glaciers) to signify as a “human embodiment of the spectacle” (Goodman et. al., 2016). Yet concurrently, these visible embodiments may render climate change as a commodity media spectacle rather than related to the intricate social practices of the everyday, or to the political realm.

This article explores these tensions to understand what is politically, socially and ethically at stake in the growing celebritization of climate change. How is it that celebrities have come to be the preferred spokespeople for climate change at global scientific events, and in what ways might their involvement reshape the cultural politics of climate – on a global, national and everyday level? In order to explore these questions this article reviews a set of distinct and interrelated literatures from celebrity and media studies, cultural geography, development studies, and environmental and climate communication. The first part of the article examines the research on the historical developments of celebrity culture within mainly Western contexts in order to situate the changing media and political landscape through which celebrities have gained their authority as political, social and environmental ‘experts.’ In doing so, it explores the emerging literature on celebrity activism in relation to humanitarian and environmental issues and considers the problematic ways in which politics and commodity culture are mutually entwined and reinforced through the practices of celebrity. The article then moves on to examine the small amount of existing research on celebrity involvement

with climate change specifically, and simultaneously draw upon the work of climate change communication scholars and practitioners to consider the possibilities and limitations of celebrity work on climate change. This allows an exploration of the broader socio-political-economic factors that shape celebrity work on climate change in the context of a media consumer culture, and a more specific investigation of celebrity's role in (potentially) making climate change more visible and embodied for western audiences. We then move on to examine celebrity work on climate change from 2014-2016 that offers novel engagements with climate change, helping to move us beyond scientific data and facilitate more emotional and visceral connections with climate change. We end the article by speculating upon the challenges that such emotional work generated when undertaken by celebrities who may politicize emotions that remain circumscribed by neoliberal solutions and action.

1. Celebrity politics, or the politics of celebrity

In order to understand the role celebrities play in the cultural politics of climate change, it is important to establish how celebrities have come to occupy privileged positions within 21st Century media culture and politics. Throughout history, famous or well-known individuals have featured commonly within many cultures across the globe (Braudy, 1997), reflecting and re-inscribing the characteristics held in esteem within their particular societies. Consequently, historical fame reflected social structures that valorised rigid class distinctions and legitimised the inherited positions of social elites (Inglis 2010). Despite these historical precedents of fame, contemporary celebrity culture, as it is commonly understood within academic literature, is considered to be a phenomenon of predominantly Western origin, arising in the 20th Century (Schickel, 1985, p. 21; see also, Rojek, 2012). However, just as historical fame acted as an

indicator of the moral, political, or economic orthodoxies of a society, due to the corresponding elevation of those individuals consistent with such ideals to the level of ‘famous’, contemporary celebrity culture reveals much about current global societies. In this instance, celebrity reflects and validates, to some degree, ideas of social mobility and the political ascendancy of the crowd, and is informed by what P. David Marshall credits as the “twinned discourses of modernity: democracy and capitalism” (Marshall, 2001, p. 4).

As both of these intertwining discourses work to emphasise and centralise *the individual* – in the respective roles of citizen or consumer – it stands to reason that celebrity, with its “capacity to house conceptions of individuality and simultaneously to embody or help embody ‘collective configurations’ of the social world” (Marshall, 2001, p. xi-xii), would assume such a primary position within current global cultures. Celebrities are simultaneously socially exceptional hyper-individuals and the embodiment of the affective will of their audiences. That the 20th and 21st centuries have witnessed a significant increase in the agency and territorial reach of the mass media industries within which many celebrities have forged their fame (Turner, 2013, p. 3), further helps to solidify their position. Richard Dyer, whose work on film stars (Dyer, 1979; 1986) provided a foundation for later scholarly work on celebrity, considers that stars reflect socially acceptable modes of being. They are role models for particular ways of being someone of a certain gender, ethnicity, sexuality, class, etc. This imbues celebrities with considerable power and influence, which led to them being considered a type of “powerless elite” (Alberoni, 1972).

However, in more recent decades, the *political activity* and possible influence of celebrity upon formal politics has become more pronounced, particularly as politics has

become increasingly mediatised and more heavily influenced by public relations. This convergence of celebrity and political cultures is further enabled by publics who, as John Corner and Dick Pels (2003) suggest, “want to vote for persons and their ideas rather than for political parties and their programmes”. In this context, Corner and Pels write, “political style” becomes a key “focus for post-ideological lifestyle choices, which are indifferent to the entrenched oppositions between traditional ‘isms’ and their institutionalization”. Instead, “more eclectic, fluid, issue-specific and personality-bound forms of political recognition and engagement” (2003, p. 7) are enacted. Consequently, the role of the political leader, “who must somehow embody the sentiments of the party, the people, and the state” has become aligned with the role of the celebrity, “who must somehow embody the sentiments of an audience” (Marshall, 2001, p. 203).

Outcomes of this emerging political formulation include the “celebrity politician” and the “political celebrity.” Defining and developing a taxonomy of celebrity politicians is a primary focus for some of the academic literature. John Street, for example, categorises two types. Celebrity Politician Type 1 is represented by “the traditional politician [...] who engages with the world of popular culture in order to enhance or advance their pre-established political functions and goals” (Street 2004, p. 437). Celebrity Politician Type 2 “refers to the entertainer who pronounces on politics and claims the right to represent peoples and causes, but who does so without seeking or acquiring elected office” (Street 2004, p. 438). Van Zoonen (2005) offers a more detailed typology of celebrity politician; the focus of which is the relative distance of the individual to traditional centres of political power. She focuses on four key points along a spectrum that runs from traditional politician and political insider, to political insider with mass media appeal, to political outsiders, to the celebrity performer who is

also a political outsider. This article focuses more on the celebrity who pronounces on politics (Street, 2004) and the celebrity performer (Van Zoonen, 2005), rather than the celebrity politician, to explore the celebritisation of climate change. Consistent with this literature, Boykoff and Goodman (2009) develop a taxonomy informed by the institutional background of the individual. They offer a more diverse range of celebrity types that includes celebrity actors, celebrity politicians, celebrity athletes, celebrity business people, celebrity musicians, and celebrity public intellectuals, thus indicating the potential for different access points for audiences and forms of affective engagements with climate change (explored in more detail below).

What unites the various manifestations of the Celebrity Politician and/or Political Celebrity is that they provoke concerns among some commentators regarding “the trivialisation of public affairs” (Gitlin, 1997, p. 35); concerns which can be traced, perhaps, as back as far Daniel Boorstin’s dismissal of celebrity as the human “pseudo-event” (1963). Indeed, for Eric Louw (2010), celebrity politics amounts to a form of “pseudo politics”. Similarly, Daryl West expresses concerns about a political system “where star power is weighted more heavily than traditional political skills, such as bargaining, compromise and experience” (West, 2008, p. 83). Celebrities, it is thought, might crowd out more expert voices from public discourse. However, any consideration of the role of celebrities in the politics of climate change must account for the necessity of climate change being made culturally meaningful and accessible to a wide range of audiences beyond scientific and political discourse – a function that celebrities may be better placed to undertake given the dependency of their celebrity status on mediatisation (Driessens, 2013).

Other scholars, perhaps taking their cue from Marshall and Street, turn away from

questions of the legitimacy celebrities' political interventions in terms of a potential dumbing down. Seeing this as something of a false dichotomy, they accept that celebrity activists serve as the embodiment of the affective responses of their audiences to a range of social and/or environmental concerns. They seek, instead, to determine the cultural, political, economic and institutional factors that facilitate this and determine its form. One factor is the celebrity's status as outsider to political establishments (Cooper, 2008). This is particularly the case when considering the decline in trust of traditional politicians and institutions, and the suspicion amongst the electorate that "politicians are in it for themselves and that they serve special interests" (West, 2008, p. 79). Nonpoliticians such as celebrities, West argues, are by contrast "considered more trustworthy and less partisan" (West, 2008, p. 79) because "[i]n a world where entangling alliances are the rule, these individuals are as close to free agents as one can find" (West, 2008, p. 81).

Celebrity activism

The celebrity activist's status as an embodied representation of the affective will of their audience, then, both reflects and informs the relationship of both to elite institutions: they are outsiders. However, as Van Zoonen suggests, the successful political celebrity projects a persona that has inside experience of politics but is still an outsider to political institutions (van Zoonen, 2005, p. 84). This distance from formal politics lends celebrity activists a type of *moral authority*, the meaning of which can be transferred onto the cause with which they are associated.

Yet, celebrity activists can provide clear qualitative benefits to humanitarian and environmental causes associating the cause with aspects of their public persona. They can, as Richey and Ponte suggest, "guarantee the cool quotient" of campaigns

concerning issues that might otherwise be unappealing to mass publics (Richey and Ponte, 2011, p. 37). These qualitative benefits, provided by entertainment celebrities to environmental organisations, work in tandem with clear quantitative benefits: celebrities can attract significant public attention for a cause (Anderson 2013). This is a valuable asset for a social or environmental organisation as the competitive nature of the “attention economy” increases (van Krieken, 2012).

Such ideas move scholarship of celebrity beyond concerns of a potential democratic deficit caused by celebrities’ political interventions. This is replaced by an understanding that, as Wheeler suggests, “[c]elebrities engaging in partisan or causal affairs can bring a guile and persuasiveness in using the media, which may reinvigorate politics with new ideas” (Wheeler, 2013, p. 24). The question that prompts much research on celebrity politics is what might these ‘new ideas’ be? In the case of this article, what new ideas can celebrities bring to the politics of climate change? And how might these approaches reflect and reinforce existing political and economic orthodoxies?

Accepting that celebrities might “teach us how to think and act politically” (Ross, 2011, p. 5), academics have questioned the types of discourses and practices into which audiences and consumers are being interpellated. For example, Boykoff and Goodman (2009) point to *branding* as a determinant of celebrity political intervention, hinting at the commercial nature of celebrity culture and opening up the possibility for tensions between the political economy of the celebrity industry, on the one hand, and the needs of social and environmental causes, on the other. Given that the production and maintenance of celebrity status is dependent upon the interrelated processes of commodification, mediatisation and personalisation (Driessens, 2013), these pressures

are not surprising. Lisa Ann Richey's and Stefano Ponté's *Brand Aid* (2011) offers a sophisticated analysis of these tensions, where social and environmental campaigning meet cause-related marketing and corporate social responsibility initiatives, through a series of case studies of brands that give financial aid in a way that gives aid to brands. In other words, through ethical consumerism, initiatives such as Product (RED), for example, rather than focus on poverty in the Global South, celebrate the agency of consumers in the Global North to 'solve' such problems through their choice of consumer purchases. Celebrity, in such instances, becomes a means to market these ideas to citizen-consumers and lends campaigns the types of moral authority described above. Goodman (2013) goes further to identify a "novel 'species' of celebrity called *Celebritus politicus*" whose members "have situated and also have worked to situate themselves as a stylised form of the neoliberalized governance of the problems of environment and development". *Celebritus politicus* both reflects and contributes "to the moral authority of a hegemonic market-led governance of sustainability" (Goodman, 2013, p. 72-73). In a sustained but less empirically grounded critique, Ilan Kapoor argues that celebrity humanitarianism "legitimizes, and indeed promotes, neoliberal capitalism and global inequality" (Kapoor, 2013, p. 1).

Concerns about the commercial imperatives of celebrity involvement in environmental and humanitarian advocacy and activism thus characterises much scholarly work in this area. Other important contributions highlight the colonial nature of Global North-South relations as embodied by celebrity activists (Biccum, 2016) and the gendered nature of celebrity humanitarianism (Repo and Yrjölä, 2011). Taking account of these critiques, this article now examines existing scholarly research on celebrity involvement with climate change to explore the possibilities and limitations of this work in creating more culturally meaningful and affective engagements with this issue, in the context of a

neoliberal commodity culture.

2. Celebrities and climate change - media, politics and commodity culture

Much of the earliest work on celebrity and climate change seeks to provide conceptual and theoretical frameworks through which to make sense of, and analyse, the celebritization of climate change, laying the foundations for specific case studies of climate celebrities in later scholarly work (Anderson, 2013; Alexander, 2013; McCurdy, 2013; Boykoff and Olson, 2013; Doyle, 2016). Anderson's (2010) review article of celebrity involvement in climate change was the first of its kind, signaling a growing academic interest in celebrity work on climate change. However, with very little published research in this area to draw upon at the time (notable exceptions being Boykoff and Goodman, 2009; Smith and Joffe, 2009), Anderson brings together work on media coverage of climate change, news media sources and the PR packaging of news/politics, celebrity advocacy in environmentalism, celebrity culture and democratisation, and public perceptions of climate change, to explore how the contemporary media and political landscape has shifted to include a wider variety of voices, beyond scientists, to publically speak about climate change.

Anderson argues that as news media increasingly rely upon PR agencies to provide content, voices and sources are increasingly more packaged, in turn facilitating the amplification of celebrity voices within news stories. Anderson explains that the symbolic power that celebrities can bring to climate change, particularly if supported by the work of an established environmental NGO (such as Greenpeace), importantly shifts the issue from the domain of science into popular culture. Celebrities thus act as mobilizing agents (like NGOs) to raise awareness and potentially shape public opinion; particularly important at a time when world news coverage of climate change peaked

in 2009 and then fell, following the “Climategate” scandal. As news actors in their own right, celebrities can provide “a powerful news hook with a human interest angle, crystallizing issues that may otherwise be perceived as relatively removed from people’s everyday lives” (Anderson, 2010, p. 535). Yet, Anderson concludes that increasing the visibility of climate change through celebrity work represents a “double edged sword” (p. 543) - particularly for environmental NGOs who have used celebrities for “symbolic leverage” in gaining access to news media - due to the lack of trust the public appear to have in celebrities as spokespeople for the environment and climate change (see Smith and Joffe, 2009). Rather than characterizing celebrity involvement in climate change politics as “either democratization or distraction”, she thus calls for more “ethnographic research into the impact of celebrity advocacy on public perceptions of climate change and trust” (Anderson, 2010, p. 543): a call that is subsequently taken up by researchers working on public perceptions of climate imagery (O’Neill et. al., 2013).

In one of the first journal articles to critically explore the celebritization of climate change, Boykoff and Goodman make the case for a nuanced understanding of celebrities as non-state actors involved in “the cultural politics of climate change” (Boykoff and Goodman, 2009, p. 396), rather than dismissing celebrities as mere distraction (Weikel, 2005). Through the confluence of “science, celebrities, and politics”, they explore how celebrities have become “authorized speakers” on climate change in the context of a “Politicized Celebrity System” (p. 396). By identifying a system, Boykoff and Goodman (2009) call attention to the multifarious ways in which celebrities as authorized speakers operate within a broader media and political landscape that highlights the interconnected and contested dimensions of celebrity as brands, performances and images which circulate through the political economies of

news, media and entertainment, and whose signs are variously consumed by audiences. Calling attention to these spaces of interaction that produce, sustain and contest celebrity work (on climate change), enables a more complex understanding of the socio-economic-political conditions that characterize and shape the ways in which celebrities speak on climate change, and to also help illuminate the material implications of celebrity work in shaping beliefs, attitudes, behaviours, values, and types of (in)action on climate change.

Representative of a more nuanced approach to the study of celebrity climate politics, Boykoff and Goodman (2009) suggest employing a celebrity typology to highlight how different cultural factors (through diverse celebrity types) may shape different forms of discourse and action on climate change (a taxonomy built on by Boykoff and Olson (2013) in their research on celebrity climate contrarians). Drawing upon the “circuits of culture” model (Du Gay 1997) from cultural studies, as well as Carvalho and Burgess’s (2005) reinterpretation of this model in their analysis of news media coverage of climate change in the UK press, Boykoff and Goodman (2009) suggest employing a “Cultural Circuits of Climate Change Celebrities model” to focus our attention upon celebrity status as the means by which celebrities gain their “privileged spaces of interaction” (402). Their framework foregrounds three key relations that underpin celebrity climate work: celebrities as *commodities*; celebrity bodies, performances and *embodiment*; celebrities as *signs/values* (our emphasis). Whilst commodity culture is central to the development of contemporary celebrity culture (Rojek, 2001; Turner, 2004; Driessens, 2013), the implications for considering the effects of celebrity work on climate change in particular are important here. Although celebrities can raise awareness of this issue through their value as celebrity signs that are consumed by audiences, it is the question of *what* is being consumed and the extent to which this

alters audience beliefs and values, or impacts upon courses of political, social or personal action on climate change, that is key: a concern that continues to underpin subsequent scholarly work in this field (McCurdy, 2013; Doyle, 2016).

Individualism as a form of neo-liberal consumer subjectivity arguably has limited capacity to engender large-scale collective changes required for mitigating and adapting to climate change. As such, individualism is a key issue for scholars examining celebrity involvement with climate change communication and campaigning. As high-profile (commodity) signs circulating within culture, both Boykoff and Goodman are concerned about the celebrity being viewed as the “heroic individual” (2009, p. 404), further entrenching individual responses to climate change through neo-liberal commodity actions – such as purchasing green products, or carbon offsetting - that distract from “the articulation of discourses calling on systemic and large-scale political, economic, social and cultural shifts that will likely be necessary to address the multifarious problems and difficult choices associated with modern global climate change” (p. 404). Anderson similarly echoes this concern when she notes that research on celebrity involvement in environmental and climate politics “points to a tendency for the celebritization of climate change to promote individualist rather than collective frames of action” (Anderson, 2010, p. 535). Indeed, in an interesting observation on the rise of celebrity endorsements of climate change in the media, Keeling (2009) notes the impact of such endorsements on climate mitigation practices such as carbon trading: “Celebrities are commodities and increasingly the atmosphere is beginning to be thought of as another commodity, with a price and value being placed on it” (Keeling, 2009, p. 50). While celebrities may have helped bring climate change into the popular imagination, it is the very nature of their celebrity status – and its problematic rise and fall - that could impinge upon media coverage in the long term, as (celebrity) climate

failures are deemed more newsworthy than successes (Keeling, 2009).

Can celebrities help make climate change more visible and felt?

Whilst much earlier (and subsequent) scholarly work on celebrity and climate change importantly situates celebrities within the imbricated socio-economic relations and practices of global media, politics, entertainment, consumer culture and neo-liberalism, with its attendant dimensions of individualism and commodification (as discussed above), there are also important points through which celebrities can potentially reach out to audiences precisely because of their celebrity status as “intimate strangers” (Schickel, 2000) using their affective capacities (Marshall, 1997) and “emotional work” (Nunn and Biressi, 2010). Celebrities’ capacity to communicate and engage with diverse audiences through (social) media and popular culture could bring climate change awareness – and its perceived distance - into different social and cultural spheres, particularly for younger audiences (Alexander, 2013).

Indeed, climate change communication research over the last 20 years (see Moser 2010) highlights that persistent barriers to communication and engagement have prevailed, with climate change perceived as a distant, remote and future threat for Western audiences (Boykoff, 2011; Doyle, 2011), unless its impacts have been experienced personally. As such, scholars have explored the role of imagery, framing/discourse, ideology and values in communicating climate change, and how these forms of meaning-making shape public understanding of, and engagement with, this issue. Researchers and practitioners are increasingly calling for more *localized*, *emotional/affective*, and *participatory* modes of communication that more clearly link to, as well as challenge, people’s existing social values and identity in order to make climate change understood and felt at the level of the everyday - see Moser (2016) for

an excellent summary of climate communication research in the last 5 years, and its potential future directions.

Two key opportunities for climate communication through celebrity work coalesce here: the potential to personify and make climate change more visible and salient as a human (rather than simply an environmental) issue; and the role of celebrities as human signs who can embody and generate a range of feelings and affects about climate change. On the one hand, the confluences of visibility/image and embodiment through celebrity are problematic. Boykoff and Goodman's (2009) observation that celebrities become "embodiments of climate change politics" refers to the commodification of their bodies and the "bodily performances" of celebrities as commodity signs. As such, these human embodiments problematically focus upon the celebrity body as a politicized site that *embodies* commodity relations, transforming into what Goodman later refers to as "spectacular signs" (Goodman, 2010) that deflect attention away from the producers and fair trade's political dimensions.

Whilst maintaining this critical perspective on visible celebrity bodies (to which we return shortly), reviewing the research on climate imagery highlights some of the potential that celebrities offer in terms of generating different types of imagery to make climate change more culturally meaningful. Earlier research by Doyle (2007, 2009) on environmental NGO campaigning highlighted the problematic role of photographic imagery in prioritizing climate impacts to non-human nature (particularly polar bears and melting glaciers) at the expense of humans, as well as reinforcing the notion of 'visible truth' and 'bearing witness' as a representational condition of climate change knowledge and its communication. Focusing upon humanitarian and development NGOs, Manzo (2010) found a wider repertoire of climate imagery used, including

humans and non human-nature, but criticized the ways in which humans affected by climate change were positioned through a colonial gaze that rendered climate change as happening to geographically “distant others” .

More recent work by O’Neill (2013) has demonstrated a broader range of images of climate change within news media in the UK, USA and Australia, with people being the most frequent theme, followed by impacts. Celebrities were present in the people theme - a finding that supports earlier research by Smith and Joffe (2009) into climate imagery in UK press coverage. Smith and Joffe note that celebrities are often visualized in activist modes, for example at demonstrations, and that such images help personify climate change for a British audience. In contrast, research on climate imagery within Canadian print media by DiFrancesco and Young (2010) found that whilst human beings were the most common form of imagery, celebrities made a minimal appearance, demonstrating national differences in terms of celebrity saliency in the context of climate change. Yet, even as celebrities become visually associated with climate change, further research by O’Neill et. al. (2013) finds that people in the UK, USA and Australia, perceive images of celebrities to undermine the saliency of climate change.

Taken together, these findings identify an increase in celebrity signs within the visual iconography of climate change, whilst simultaneously indicating the public’s lack of trust of celebrity involvement with climate change. Celebrities, it is suggested, are not helpful in terms of raising awareness and facilitating action on climate change. However, it is important to acknowledge the current lack of textual or ethnographic research in this area beyond still imagery within print or online media, particularly as social media, rather than print news or news websites, are the main source of news for women and young people (Reuters Institute for Journalism, 2016). Given that celebrity

culture is largely youth and female oriented, different types of imagery (such as video), celebrities, media, and consumption practices would need to be analysed.

Importantly, this research also points towards a diversification of voices in climate change communication beyond scientists and NGOs (Anderson 2010). Historically, environmental NGOs, and particularly Greenpeace, were the main non-state actors making climate change meaningful to the public through their campaign and communication strategies (Doyle, 2007), “bearing witness” to climate impacts through photographic documentation (Doyle, 2009). Goodman and Barnes (2011) have explored how celebrities bear witness to suffering by visiting “spaces of poverty”. Thus, have celebrities become the new witnesses of climate change? What are the spaces that celebrities are visiting/embodying/signifying within the cultural politics of climate change, and how do these reinforce, challenge and/or advance different forms of public and political engagement? These questions will be explored in the next section.

Indeed, if we return to the question of embodiment raised earlier, the potential for celebrities to offer more affective, and effective, forms of public engagement can be explored by diversifying the range of celebrities, media forms, and demographic groups analysed. For example, Alexander (2013) explores the use of Twitter by US actor Ian Somerhalder, star of *The Vampire Diaries*, to engage his youth fan base with environmentalism and climate change. The assumed “authenticity” of Somerhalder’s apparently self-created tweets, including his appreciative tweets to his followers, are important in creating a two-way relationship with his fans, helping build an affective relation. Alexander analyses the forms of communication used by Somerhalder in promoting environmental advocacy, finding both a marketing approach (of small step changes and altering consumption practices) and values-based approach (advocated by

Crompton, 2008) that focuses upon relationship building, rather than external status, as a means of enabling more long term pro-environmental behaviour change. Whilst tensions occur between these two discourses – partly due to Somerhalder’s celebrity status – his use of social media enables the “collectivism of the social media generation” (Alexander, 2013, 364) to be aligned with the ethical/moral values he communicates. In doing so, Alexander is hopeful for the emergence of more “eco-celebrities such as Somerhalder, role models and objects of desire with embedded spiritual/environmental values and collaborative modes of address” (365). Indeed, given the increasing level of overwhelm and hopelessness associated with climate change (Moser, 2016), and the need for more emotionally resonant and participatory modes of communication and engagement, we wonder if celebrities who are able to engage with young people specifically through social media and popular culture, might find more hopeful ways of facilitating social and political action, in “cool” (Richey and Ponte, 2011) and creative ways. The next section explores some of these questions.

3. Emerging Climate Celebrities After Data: Emotion, Affect and Journey in Novel Modes of Climate Engagement

Considering celebrities as contemporary forms of “climate muses”—regardless of how potentially commodified or individualizing in action or outcome—the nature of celebrity reflections and media production around climate have shifted over time. They have changed in both the format —from tell to show/witness—and also timbre—from knowledge and exhortations for action to affective and emotional appeals to audiences and the public. Through a brief overview of some of the key celebrity interventions in climate change discourses, here we explore how celebrity involvement in climate

change pedagogies has formed part of a shift in climate change communication. This has moved from dry accounts of the latest scientific knowledge about the changing climate, to stories of personal and/or literal journeys upon the climate landscape and those of climate-related impacts. Indeed, as the header on Leonardo DiCaprio's documentary *Before the Flood* (2016) suggests, "the science is settled, the future is not". This section works to briefly explore these shifts in what we might call novel "modes" of climate change celebrity engagements, from climate celebrities as narrow pseudo-experts and green lifestyle gurus to the newly expanded role of a climate change witnesses who work as on-the-ground correspondents telling audiences the stories of ordinary people and everyday ecologies at threat from climate change. In doing so, this section builds on the previous research analyzed above to pose questions that, we argue, necessitate further research and suggest where research on celebrity and climate change communication might find fruitful possibilities.

From "An Inconvenient Truth" to "Before the Flood": Getting Emotional about Climate Change through New Modes of Media and Celebrity Performance

Al Gore's Academy Award winning documentary in *An Inconvenient Truth* was designed to provide its audience the latest data, information and knowledge about climate change and the threat it posed to the planet. Simply put, it attempted to educate and convince the public in minute Power Point detail about the rise in CO² emitted by humans and the corresponding rise in global average temperatures. At roughly the same time, the Leonardo DiCaprio-produced documentary the *11th Hour* was also designed to teach the public about climate change. Utilizing the "talking head" appearances of numerous environmental movement figures such as Paul Hawken, Wangari Maathai,

Bill McKibben and David Suzuki, all voiced-over by DiCaprio, it spread the word about climate change exclusively through climate ‘experts’. Equally, 2007’s Live Earth concerts intended to raise global-scale awareness about climate issues educating the public about climate change through ‘enviro-tainment’ in order to make these politicized, educational-focused encounters more audience-friendly. For us, these three celebrity-fronted climate change media events utilized celebrities to not just bring attention to the issue, but also act as public pedagogues who could speak about the science of climate change and vouch for its ‘reality’.

In profound contrast, more contemporary celebrity climate interventions are quite different. While celebrities are still public pedagogues, they intervene in ways that intend and create alternative, novel and more complex outcomes. Such interventions offer, we suggest, “After Data” media modes of discourses, practices and audience connections. For example, one important recent After Data climate change celebrity intervention comes in the form of the documentary *Before the Flood* (2016) (*BTF*). We briefly discuss (*BTF*) in order to illustrate the ways that more contemporary celebrity-fronted climate change media—and the role of the celebrities themselves—have moved us into novel, more affective modes of celebrity climate change engagement and framing.

BTF is a heavily-resourced and visually-stunning documentary film produced and narrated by, but also starring, Leonardo DiCaprio. In the film, he goes on a ‘witnessing’ journey as the UN Ambassador of Peace to see the first-hand impacts of climate change in the arctic, the island nation of Kiribati, the oil sands of Alberta and the polluted streets of Shanghai. Unlike the *11th Hour*, this is a significant personal journey for

DiCaprio shot through with stories of his early childhood to the ways he has been ridiculed and critiqued by conservative pundits. This is a journey that has DiCaprio front and center as our serious, earnest and caring, emotive and affective guide and male ‘lead’. He solemnly implores us to do something about the climate in front of the UN, sheepishly admits he has a larger carbon footprint than most people, and is angrily confronted by an Indian conservationist about America’s grotesque levels of material and energy consumption. As Fisher Stevens, the film’s director, stated about DiCaprio: “... it’s nice to film someone like Leo who has the quality of charisma. We wanted Leo to meet the experts and make the experts more palatable, so that everyone could understand them” (G’Sell, 2016). Importantly, on the ground and emplaced encounters with nature, experts, environmentalists and elite politicians and business leaders are specifically interspersed with ordinary people and communities ‘performing’ their emotive responses to the everyday ways they are being impacted by climate change.

Before the Flood is one of the most watched documentaries of all time with over 60 million views across multiple media platforms (Calvario, 2016). Unlike previous climate change interventions, *BTF* accentuates and showcases emotions and affects throughout the film: the smiles and sincerity of Elon Musk who is ready to deploy his battery business and entrepreneurial skills in service of a carbon-free future, the dire warnings of Ban Ki-Moon and, of course, those of the main witnessing muse of DiCaprio who marvels at the “violence” of icebergs calving into the ocean, the surprise of being confronted about his own personal climate impacts and his hopeful tone in discussions of easy climate “wins”. The “‘debate’ about climate change is over” (*BTF*, 2016) the film’s website shouts—the word debate firmly squeezed between quotation marks—as we move into the human-induced era of the Anthropocene that DiCaprio is

shows us are as emotional and affective at their core as they are ‘rational’ and ‘statistical’ in the climate science that should underpin our feelings. As a review of the *BTF* in *The Hollywood Reporter* states (DeFore, 2016), “Maybe movie stars can sway public opinion more effectively than tightly reasoned activist docs full of hard data and compelling narratives. Here's hoping.” *BTF* illustrates the distinct shift to an After Data mode of climate change intervention whereby the emotional registers of climate change—be they of the ‘star’ celebrity, those they are talking to or those feeling the impacts of global environmental change—are what define and carry the narrative arcs of these new forms of spectacular environmental media (Goodman et al, 2016).

Feeling the Atmosphere through Star Power: Initial Thoughts and Potential Future Directions

While space does not allow a fuller exploration of this novel After Data mode of celebrity climate change media outputs and engagement, we do want to provide some short thoughts on why, we think, this shift has occurred and some of its implications.

Why this shift, then? Several potential and further “testable” reasons come to mind. One of these seems quite simple: According to a Pew Research Center Global study, the majority of those in their study of global attitudes to climate change from the US (74%) and UK (77%) believes global climate change is either very or somewhat serious (Stokes et al, 2015). Moreover, 69 percent of those polled from the US supported action as part of an international agreement, while in the UK 79 percent responded similarly (Stokes et al, 2015). Given these shifting public attitudes and beliefs, narratives and urgings have to shift into new registers to not just gain audience attention but spur

public action for those who ‘believe’ but also as a strategy to engage the remaining “non-believers”. At the same time, however, these polling numbers belie the fact that there are still large numbers who maintain partisan denialist and skeptical outlooks on climate change—including many powerful political figures in the media—as any quick read of the comments section attached at almost any climate change article on the web will lay bare. In particular, there is growing concern over ‘climate silence’ which is the worry that there are not enough public, media or even personal discussions about the severity and impacts of climate change (Romm, 2016); emotional climate celebrities are perhaps working to maintain climate change as a topic worthy of continued urgent and critical public discussion. In a way, no matter what, these shifts in celebrity-fronted climate media are quite astute given the knowledge/action gap—whether that be individual action or policy action—that has come to bedevil larger-scale, immediate solutions to the climate conundrum.¹ In some ways, the moves to these impact and emotional registers through celebrity media interventions is not just about making these new tropes and registers ‘fashionable’ but also utilizing them in ways that might work to cut through not just the normalized, everyday media cacophony, but as a means by which to transcend the knowledge/action gap to spur more and greater action. Furthermore, if Dan Brockington’s (2014) work on the role of celebrities in the realms of humanitarianism rings true, then one of the key audiences for these new interventions might actually not be the general public but rather other elites and those in power in order to make affective connections and get them to work for more and better climate policy. DiCaprio’s position as Peace Ambassador is certainly what this is about so his documentary seems like a logical extension of this elite-to-elite emotionally-tinged

¹ The COP21 Paris Accords are a ray of light here and it might be interesting to consider the impacts of these media interventions and indeed the role of affect and emotion both before Paris and after as well as how further interventions might be called upon in light of the ‘climate change denier in chief’ in form of Trump coming to power in the US.

communication.

A second reason for these movements might also be quite simple, if somewhat problematic: These shifts might be about maintaining and expanding these celebrities' brands as eco-warriors to both use but also expand their fan-base in a desire to create greater cultural, political and economic capital for themselves. As Jo Littler (2008) has so astutely put it, being socially conscious and politically active is now part of the very job description of contemporary celebrities such that caring is not just a part of their brand but caring works to create economic value for the "celebrity industry complex" that is behind even these climate change interventions. Thus, the move to more emotional and impactful registers is not mutually exclusive from the creation of value nor deepening of the celebrity industrial complex, but instead go right to the heart of the "conspicuous redemption" Boykoff and Goodman (2009) discussed as one of the characteristics of climate celebrities. As argued above, climate change celebrities are commodities in human form that generate cultural and economic capital but are also caring commodities that embody, perform and work to elicit the concerns, emotions and behaviours of care and responsibilities in audiences. As the old adage goes, climate change celebrities are "doing well by doing good" and more research is needed to determine not just what the impacts of their notions of "the good" are but also how audiences' react to these changing registers in contemporary climate change media.

4. Discussion and conclusion: From accentuated celebrity emotion and affect to more vociferous climate action?

By way of a brief conclusion, we offer a short discussion of what we feel some of the

implications might with this more emotionally-charged celebrity-fronted climate change media that seems to have ushered in our proposed After Data era of climate communications. First, as suggested throughout this section, the example of *BTF* works through a different set of framings than previously offered by earlier ‘numbers’ and ‘science’ focused climate media interventions by articulating and fully accentuating emotion and affect through narrative arcs and encounters of the impacts of climate change on people and nature, communities and ecologies. Thus, the overall “feel” of these novel celebrity-fronted climate media outputs is one of a greatly heightened emotional register, the desire here for the audiences—and of course wider publics—to emotionally and viscerally connect with and through recognized celebrities to those people and places witnessing and experiencing climate change.

Second, not only have the engagements and outputs of celebrity-fronted media interventions shifted, so too has the role of climate change celebrities themselves: They now work as morally-tinged, affective pedagogues, framing for us through emotional discursive reflections, embodiments, deeds and performances how and in what ways we should feel about climate change impacts and what to do about them. In addition climate change celebrities have taken on the novel roles of emotive climate journalists and investigative documentarians, allowing us to see and feel first-hand the impacts of climate change. Climate change celebrities, through this new “witnessing” mode of their persona and performances become “affective translation devices” who emote about climate change but also report, interpret and explore those communities and ecologies impacted by climate change. No longer are climate change celebrities sales people and endorsers of the products of brand ‘climate science’, but instead they are witnesses to, and the affective voices of, the Anthropocene. In a twist, then, on the

byline from *BTF*, given these contemporary climate change celebrity media engagements, the science of climate change might be settled but how to feel about it is certainly not.

Third, and directly connected to the previous two points, the emotive climate change media and the celebrity engagements and performances that facilitate novel climate affects normalize emotion as a response and as a motivational force to ‘solve’ climate change. In this, celebrity performances of affect also normalize the celebrities themselves: They feel as ordinary people and so should and must we. They care—showing this in words, deeds and affect—and so should and must we. They are ordinary, they are authentic, they are genuine and, most importantly, they are believable. Their performances of ordinary emotion—a kind of performance of a non-performance if as it were—are those designed for maximum authenticity such that we too can and should feel, we too can and should do. For example, as the director put it about DiCaprio’s role in *BTF*,

We wanted Leo to be Everyman. Obviously, he lives a very rarefied life, but in this film he plays a kind of Everyman in terms of this issue. He actually has a good effect on the experts during interviews; they want him to understand, to make it clear. ... It was important to humanize Leo, to make him seem vulnerable. And he was vulnerable; we all were. When you’re walking on ice in the Arctic you have trust people to tell you where to walk or you’re gone. When you’re in Greenland, you take a wrong step and you shoot down the rapids. When you’re in a helicopter flying over bushfires in Sumatra, it can be pretty terrifying. The fact that Leo is willing to go there and do all this — none of us made any money

on this film, and certainly he didn't — it shows that he really cares. (G'Sell, 2016)

Yet, climate change celebrities are also, at the very same time, extra-ordinarily, or better, yet extra-ordinarily ordinary in ways that are also about authenticity and connection. Their extra-ordinariness provides them that heightened perch from which to feel, from which we want to watch them feel and to which we are supposed to respond. They are, but also are not, outside of their elite status through their emotive behaviors and concerned words. It is this vacillation between and amongst elite and not-elite, ordinary and extra-ordinary, everyday and spectacle, through their performing non-performances that allows climate change celebrities that ability and multiple positionality from which to attempt to transcend climate politics. Affect and emotion are wielded here as sorts of “transcending” tools to cut across audience political positionalities and identities and get them in the “gut” or “heart” from which care, responsibility and action will flow. But of course, as we know, there really is no transcending of politics either in general nor in this highly-charged case of climate change. Rather, a better way to see all of this might be that these novel modes of affective climate media and celebrities work to specifically *politicize* emotion and affect in the context of climate change in ways and to ends that have yet to be seen but which have also begun to define the After Data era of the climate mediascape.

Fourth, the proposed pathways to change and climate change solutions through these new emotive climate media interventions have potential implications and offer up important new questions, particularly the gendered modes of engagement and action this may generate. What if emotion and affect, the core entry way to raising awareness and spurring public action, don't gain the traction that these celebrities hope? Moreover,

will these attempts actually overcome the knowledge and now, emotion and action gaps that might appear and be maintained? This begs a further question: perhaps these moves to affect and impacts are missing the point in that some of the issues with lack of rapid movements on climate impacts are less about feelings and more about what the audience does (Mendick et. al 2015) with the science, knowledge and data around climate change? Either way, further research needs to explore the ways that the public and climate media audiences actually engage in shifting everyday actions or broader political action in light of our suggested affective shifts in climate change celebrity media. A second issue of concerns is the ways that climate celebrities and their media interventions, affect and emotion or not, work to set up particular pathways to solutions. Thus, we might be more emotive about climate change but if the solutions celebrities propose include the typical “weak brew” of more and better conscious capitalism, sustainable consumption and individual responses of light-bulb changing, then it seems that even the historic Paris agreement might now not mean much. Critical interrogation of what affective climate celebrities propose as solutions, like the overall public impact of the turn to impacts and emotions in climate media, is greatly needed.

Finally, we end this section with a more speculative and possible set of implications worthy of critical questions. Namely, will science and data return as a celebrity endorsed product as climate change impacts accelerate and we get deeper into the Anthropocene? Will the science of mitigation and resilience come to the forefront of celebrity performances? In particular, it seems as if feeling more deeply about climate change might not be enough as the “climate denialist in chief” of Donald Trump begins to move on reversing US climate policy and creating much wider global impacts in terms of the Paris Agreement. Or will these accentuated affects spur greater and more

vociferous climate action that might cross both social media and city streets in unprecedented ways working to combine knowledge, pedagogy, affect and celebrity in ways unforeseen as of yet? The new roles and performances of climate change celebrities will be fascinating to watch, if nothing else, as we potentially move into even more dangerous times in the Anthropocene.

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