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JUST LIKE US:

EVERYDAY CELEBRITY POLITICIANS AND THE PURSUIT OF POPULARITY IN AN AGE OF ANTI-POLITICS

In a supposedly 'anti-political' age the scholarly literature on celebrity politicians argues that politicians gain popularity by adopting strategies from within the world of entertainment. This article offers the findings of a research project that has detected a marked shift in the interplay between celebrity culture and the presentational strategies adopted by politicians. At the heart of this shift is an increased focus on the concept of 'normality' as politicians increasingly attempt to shake-off the negative connotations associated with 'professional politicians' and instead attempt to appear 'just like us'. As such, this article offers an original approach by distinguishing between 'superstar' celebrity politicians and 'everyday' celebrity politicians before identifying three aspects of each strategy (i.e. media platform, marketing technique, and performative role). It offers numerous empirical examples that serve to underpin this distinction before using the example of Boris Johnson as a case study in the attempted shift from 'superstar' to 'everyday' celebrity. This focus on normality offers a fresh entry-point into the analysis of contemporary political statecraft while also posing distinctive questions about the tension between political popularity and credibility in an anti-political age. As such, the approach also has significant implications for normative ideas about how celebrity can be 'democratised' to remedy anti-politics.

Political leaders have always been confronted by an unenviable paradox: how to appear above us (i.e. the statesman-like image) so we trust them to govern, while also appearing 'like us' (i.e. as 'normal' people) so they can claim to represent us and to be authentic citizens themselves (see Kane and Patapan 2012; Medvic 2013). This age-old paradox – Kane and Patapan (2012) call the 'paradox of the democratic leader' – is compounded in this increasingly mediatised age by a corresponding rise in what has been termed 'anti-political' sentiment (**REFERENCE REMOVED**). As numerous scholars have observed (for review see **REFERENCE REMOVED**), political elites and professional politicians in particular are increasingly the subjects of declining trust and popularity. As such, they have resorted, particularly in western liberal democracies, to populist tactics (Albertazzi and MacDonnell 2015; Moffitt and Tormey 2014), or 'personalized' and professionalized campaigns (see Cairney 2007). Elite politicians who have been successful at garnering support in this 'mediatised' age – Barack Obama, Tony Blair and Kevin Rudd, for example - have been termed *celebrity politicians* (Street, 2004, 2012, Marsh et al, 2010, Wheeler, 2013). This is because they utilise the contemporary 'post-democratic' (Crouch, 2004) obsession with entertainment to their advantage in order to garner votes by appearing on television shows, adopting the marketing techniques of film stars, and being endorsed by other celebrities. The conceptualisation of 'celebrity politicians' by John Street (2004) and subsequent development by Marsh et al (2010) and Wheeler (2013) can be seen as important developments in the search for potential solutions to this 'paradox' and a source for reinvigorating democracy. Street (2004) in particular argues that celebrity is a potentially important phenomenon that

politicians can use entertainment media to connect better with a disaffected public (see also Inthorn and Street, 2011; Street, 2012; Wheeler, 2012).

This article agrees with the democratic potential of celebrity politics, but argues that this depends upon the *type* or *form* of celebrity that is advanced. To date, we argue the academic literature on celebrity politics has yet to fully consider the differentiated nature of 'celebrity' in its assessment of 'celebrity politicians', and how the form of celebrity itself may be changing. Street (2004), for example, argues that 'analysis of political representation does not commit the analyst to celebrating all forms of celebrity politics'. Instead, he rightly argues that 'the process of discrimination must acknowledge the aesthetic character of the representative relationship, in which notions of 'authenticity' or 'credibility', style and attractiveness, are legitimate terms' (Street, 2004, p.449). And yet, the particular type of 'celebrity' that would be preferable, or even that which predominates in general, remains largely unknown.

This article seeks to fill this gap by turning the existing research literature on its head and offering the first analysis of 'normality' as (paradoxically) an increasingly significant element of contemporary celebrity politics. Celebrity politicians want to promote an image that they are 'normal' or 'just like us' as opposed to one in which they are clearly 'different' and insulated from common life challenges. This is therefore a type of celebrity politics that uses the power of the media to present an image of almost the anti-celebrity politician in order to resonate and draw support from the broader anti-political social context. Put slightly differently, we identify a shift away from the glamour of the red carpet and film star friends towards something more akin to the medium of reality TV where an individual's ability to appear ordinary, imperfect, 'everyday' and 'normal' is celebrated. In an age that is arguably not 'anti-political' but 'anti-establishment', and in favour of a 'different way of doing politics' (see **REFERENCE REMOVED**) there is much to be gained by rejecting carefully orchestrated professional media performances in favour of a rawer and less predictable mode of engagement. This, in turn, has enabled figures who use these strategies successfully – like Beppe Grillo, Nigel Farage or Sarah Palin - to foster highly positive affinities with voters (at least temporarily), enhancing their electoral prospects at a time when politicians as a group are deeply unpopular. In order to account for this important distinction concerning how celebrity is enacted by politicians, we add a distinction to Street's (2004) 'seminal' (Wheeler, 2012) framework of celebrity politicians by introducing a distinction between 'superstar celebrity politicians' (SCPs) and 'everyday celebrity politicians' (ECPs).

We construct this conceptual framework by building upon Street's criteria for politicians who utilise celebrity tactics (his 'CP2s') and posit a framework for distinguishing SCP and ECP strategies across three dimensions: media platform; marketing technique, and performative role. SCPs and ECPs tend to use different media ('broadcast' television versus 'post-broadcast' interactive media), different marketing techniques (structured versus unstructured) and perform different roles (the strong, distant leader versus the 'humanising' personal portrait). We argue that those employing ECP strategies are increasingly successful having tapped into broader changes in the nature of 'celebrity society', which increasingly focuses on 'ordinary' people in 'extraordinary' situations, as witnessed in reality television shows such as 'X Factor' (Driessens, 2013). To show the utility of the framework we apply it in a detailed case study of Boris Johnson, arguably the archetypal contemporary celebrity politician, but whose celebrity is contradictory and paradoxical in a way not easily reconciled in existing frameworks. Drawing on documentary evidence from newspaper reports, speeches,

biographies, television interviews and twitter data, we show how Johnson's celebrity is comprised of a contradictory set of SCP platforms and techniques, on which Johnson has performed the role of the ECP to great effect. As these have converged around a fully fledged ECP strategy since the late-2000s, however, Johnson's celebrity has become more contested. This analysis, we suggest, has important implications for how scholars should view claims to 'everyday' or 'normal' celebrity. In sum, this article makes three key arguments that advance the literature on celebrity politics:

1. By distinguishing between SCPs and ECPs the article provides an important update to Street's (2004) celebrity politicians framework that accounts for the differentiated and often contradictory ways in which 'celebrity' is constructed;
2. By applying this framework to a case study of Boris Johnson, the article sheds light on the evolving strategy of a celebrity politician whose celebrity appears paradoxical; and,
3. The article makes an important contribution to the debate about the democratic value of celebrity politicians by arguing that the rise of 'post-broadcast' social media enables a potential democratisation of celebrity (challenging its false usage as a statecraft strategy of otherwise elite politicians).

In order to substantiate these arguments this article is divided into sections. The first section reviews the literature on celebrity politicians, emphasising how it does not distinguish sufficiently between celebrity as 'superstar' or 'A-list' fame, and the quite different 'everyday' or 'ordinary' celebrity increasingly identified within celebrity studies. The second section then develops this argument by distinguishing conceptually between the aspects of SCPs identified by Street (2004) and our own ECPs across three dimensions. Having offered this framework the third section then offers a detailed case study of Boris Johnson in order to begin to highlight some of the insights and questions produced by a focus on 'normality-as-celebrity'. Of course, the notion that Boris Johnson – or the majority of other leading politicians around the world – are 'just like us' is for a number of reasons incredibly problematic. But this does not off-set the value of normality claims in the current context. It is for exactly this reason that the final section reflects on the implications of the Johnson case and our conceptual framework for broader debates about the democratisation of political celebrity.

I. THE EVERYDAY POLITICIAN

The literature on celebrity politics and celebrity politicians (Marsh *et al*, 2010; Wheeler, 2012) is associated with the pioneering work of John Street (2004). The key distinction he made is between the celebrity *politician* ('CP1') and the *celebrity* politician ('CP2'). CP1s are 'the traditional politician – the legitimately elected representative (or one who aspires to be so) – 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). By contrast, 'CP2s' refer to 'the entertainer who pronounces on politics ... without seeking to acquire elected office' (Street, 2004, p.438). Examples include rock and film stars engaging in political campaigns and supporting specific causes. Here we are focused on 'CP1s' or politicians attempting to secure celebrity status in order achieve political power. Our argument is that in an era of 'anti-politics', the way politicians become celebrities is subtly shifting from attempting to be

seen as ‘superstar’ leaders with exceptional talents, to attempting to be seen as more ‘in touch’ with regular people, more *everyday*, more *normal*, more *ordinary*.

Most literature on celebrity politics begins by ‘seeing political communication ... as a branch of ... *show-business*’ (Street, 2012, p.86, italics added). Politicians attempt to achieve celebrity by, for example, appearing on television chat shows, being photographed with famous musicians, business leaders, philanthropists or film stars, talking about how they watch popular television shows or listen to popular music. These strategies might be associated with a form of ‘superstardom’ where ‘politicians ... act like stars or artists’ (Street, 2003, p.87). Wheeler (2012, p.409), for example, suggests ‘that the media coverage of celebrity politics publicises issues in such a way as to ‘frame’ politicians and celebrities as global ‘superstars’’. Analysing the ‘superstar’ aspect of celebrity politics/politicians has been a primary concern of existing studies, from Kellner’s (2010) analysis of Obama’s ‘super-celebrity status’ to Wheeler’s (2011) study of ‘transnational celebrity diplomats’ and Smith’s (2008) analysis of Gordon Brown’s paradoxical ‘celebrity’ portrayal as the ‘Son of Manse’ (see also Parry and Richardson, 2011).

In order to understand this article’s focus on ‘the everyday’ and the concept of ‘normality’ it is necessary to acknowledge broader and well-documented shifts in ‘celebrity society’. More specifically, it highlights an apparent erosion or shift away from traditional notions of the ‘superstar’ celebrity (Nayar, 2009). Here, Driessens (2013, p.644) identifies the ‘democratization of celebrity’ and its spread across various social fields and the gradual ‘devaluation of meritocracy’. He argues there ‘has been a shift from *achieved celebrity* to *attributed celebrity*’ (Driessens, 2013, p.646). Contemporary notions of ‘celebrity’ thus tend to adhere to Andy Warhol’s famous dictum that ‘everyone has their 15 minutes of fame’ (Leslie, 2011). Now ubiquitous reality TV shows like *X Factor* and *The Great British Bake-Off* make (temporary) celebrities of ‘ordinary’ people who are placed in ‘extraordinary’ situations (Potter and Westall, 2013). This makes their ‘celebrification’ less a matter of their ‘exceptional’ qualities, but more because of the ‘rags to riches’ story of otherwise unexceptional individuals achieving success. The prominence of these particular processes of celebrification has increased due to the cheap access to (potential) fame afforded by social media such as YouTube, Facebook and Twitter (Marwick and Boyd, 2011). This links to a broader argument about the instability of ‘late modernity’ (Marsh *et al*, 2010), the decline of ‘broadcast democracy’ (Prior, 2007) and how political authority is increasingly difficult to exercise (Hajer, 2009). Indeed, of particular significance for the focus of this article is Braidotti’s (2013) argument that changes in the nature of ‘celebrity society’, and the growth of debates about who counts as a ‘proper’ celebrity are the result of a broader crisis of what it means to be a ‘normal human’.

The central argument of this article is that this changing ‘celebrity society’ has important implications for how politicians gain celebrity, which, we argue, rather than appearing as ‘special’, ‘exceptional’ or ‘unique’ is increasingly coming to be framed as more ‘everyday’ and ‘normal’. Braidotti (2013, p.1) argues that in a technologically interconnected, but disparate and alienated world ‘there is widespread concern about the loss of relevance and mastery suffered by the dominant vision of the human subject’. In the more mundane world of politics, this concern is manifested in a number of ‘anti-politician’ sentiments casting politicians as ‘out of touch’ with ‘ordinary’ people (**REFERENCE REMOVED**). The challenge for politicians interested in achieving power and effective ‘statecraft’, especially those from traditional elite backgrounds, hence shifts from emphasising their ‘exceptional’

talents, to proclaiming their down-to-earth similarity to the public. On the one hand, this argument speaks to a growing literature on populism, which shows how politicians claiming to speak ‘for the people’ have achieved success across Europe (Stavrakakis, 2014). Our argument, however, is more subtle. We contend that there is a distinct ‘everyday celebrity politician’, who overlaps with, but is neither reducible to, the ‘superstar’ celebrity politician of general concern in the celebrity politicians literature, nor the ‘populist’ politicians in contemporary European democracies (Albertazzi and McDonnell, 2008). These ‘humanized’ politicians, we argue, achieve power through becoming celebrities in a way that responds to the crisis of ‘being human’ that has not, until now, been examined in great detail. Despite often being very ‘abnormal’ in the sense of being rich, well-connected and part of an elite ‘establishment’, these politicians have cultivated a popular persona through appearing ‘human’ to the public, and have achieved success as a result. Having established this, we show how their strategies can be conceptualised as a precursor to empirical analysis and testing.

II. CONCEPTUALISING STRATEGY

Our purpose in this article is to conceptualise a distinction between ‘superstar’ celebrity politicians (SCPs) and ‘everyday’ celebrity politicians (ECPs), and to illustrate how this latter form of celebrity strategy is becoming more prominent, and requires greater empirical attention by political scientists. Table 1 sets out the conceptual distinction across three dimensions: media platform; marketing technique, and performative role. Each dimension builds upon and augments Street’s (2004) seminal typology of the characteristics of celebrity politicians by focusing on how celebrity can be utilised by politicians seeking to appear ‘above us’ but also ‘like us’. To capture this we propose a typology that captures three dimensions – platform, technique and role – of how politicians enact celebrity in a late-modern age. Our dimensions are inspired by Street (2004) but in addition to adding the ECP category, we have substantially revised and updated the characteristics he identifies (see also Marsh et al 2010).

Table 1: Strategies for achieving political celebrity: Superstar versus Everyday

Dimension of celebrity	Superstar Political Celebrity (SCP)	Everyday Political Celebrity (ECP)
<i>Media platform</i>	<i>Broadcast media</i> : politicians appear on ‘traditional’ one-way broadcast	<i>Post-broadcast media</i> : politicians appear on non-traditional two-way mediums, like

	programmes like <i>Have I Got News for You</i> or <i>Michael Parkinson</i>	reality television, twitter and other ‘post-broadcast’ interactive forums
Marketing technique	<i>Structured</i> : politician presented in self-consciously staged environments with highly structured visits and interviews	<i>Spontaneous</i> : politician engages in apparently ad hoc visits and acts in a friendly and open manner during interviews. They regularly make ‘gaffs’ but these add to their appeal.
Performative role	<i>Exceptional</i> : politicians are constructed as strong, decisive leaders as opposed to ordinary citizens who are ‘weak’, ‘emotional’ or ‘vulnerable’	<i>Authentic</i> : politicians are constructed as inevitably flawed individuals which gives them an ‘authentic’ quality contrasted with distant and aloof politicians

1. Media Platform: Broadcast versus Post-Broadcast

The first dimension starts from Street’s (2004, p.437) view that a celebrity strategy typically involves ‘the exploitation of non-traditional platforms or formats to promote the politician: Bill Clinton playing the saxophone on the *Arsenio Hall Show*, or the MP Charles Kennedy presenting the satirical quiz show *Have I Got News for You?*’. So, the particular media platform used is important in the ‘celebritisation’ process. In a ‘post-broadcast’ age (Prior 2007), however, Street’s definition of ‘non-traditional’ has been challenged by the advent of interactive mediums including new social media and reality television. Drilling into how politicians engage with these ‘interactive’ media can give us a deeper understanding of the form their ‘celebrity’ takes, and a better grasp of the way in which they pursue a ‘celebrity’ strategy. Appearances on largely ‘one-way’ broadcast celebrity television shows in which celebrities ‘are allowed to move on the public stage while the rest of us watch’ (Marshall, 1997, ix) increasingly compete with ‘two-way’ interactive mediums including reality television programmes like *Big Brother* or *I’m a Celebrity Get Me Out of Here*, or social media such as Twitter and Instagram. While the former programmes Street focuses on are still prominent, he also noticed, for example, the emergence of the reality show *Big Brother* as a tool for achieving celebrity:

The *Big Brother* housemates are no more typical of the population than are MPs, but what is important to the perception of them as ‘representative’ is the ordinariness of their preoccupations: what to eat; when to sleep; wanting to be liked (Street, 2004, p.442)

Connecting directly with voters via post-broadcast or new media is a growing trend. Most politicians attempt to use these new mediums, like twitter, in much the same way they as old media; they are platforms on which they broadcast their message (Grant *et al*, 2010; Small, 2011). A select few, however, have utilised the platform to greater effect. Former Mayor of Toronto, Rob Ford, now a famous celebrity by virtue of his well-publicised cocaine addiction, initially cultivated electoral support via appearances on radio chat shows in which he interacted directly with voters, unmediated by the local press. Later he trailed a TV chat show – it was cancelled after one episode – but developed his own You Tube channel. Likewise, former Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd developed a cult following on Twitter during his successful 2007 election campaign. His use of the medium captured the imagination of younger voters in particular. Perhaps the most illustrative example of this trend, however, is the political rise of the Italian comedian Beppe Grillo, the former Italian comedian, whose party received 25 per cent of the vote at the 2013 general election. Grillo’s Five Star Movement is built around a growing web-based membership – he did not stand for election

himself – that purposefully eschews many of the symbols and structures common to mainstream parties.

Conversely, the use of post-broadcast media to enhance celebrity can fail spectacularly. British MP George Galloway appeared on the 2006 version of *Big Brother* (see Cardo 2014 for a full discussion). Widening his personal appeal by appearing engaged and in touch with ordinary people was a key reason for his involvement. The move initially met with hostility among sections of the public concerned that this was not a respectable medium for a member of parliament to be associated with. Hostility increased, however, once the show went to air, as the audience did not find his performance as an ordinary person authentic. Rather, his attempts to be more like his fellow contestants were deemed disingenuous and cringe worthy. In her analysis of the affair, Cardo (2014) concludes that Galloway underestimated the power of the platform as well as its audience, and as a result lost the public vote. This failure has not dissuaded others from trying their luck on similar shows, however: former Conservative MP Ann Widdecombe appeared on *Strictly Come Dancing* and ex-Liberal Democrat MP Lembit Öpik was a contestant on *I'm a Celebrity... Get Me Out of Here*. Indeed, part of Galloway's failure may well be a result of his being ahead of his time.

2. *Marketing Technique: Structured versus Spontaneous*

Our second dimension distinguishes between 'structured' and 'spontaneous' marketing techniques. For Street (2004, p.438), celebrity politicians borrow the 'techniques and expertise of those who market celebrities' in order to further their political careers. 'Accreditations have to be applied for, there are waiting lists and you only get three timed questions with the star', he argues. Street's (2004, p.437) premise that a celebrity strategy involves 'the use of photo opportunities staged to link entertainment stars with politicians'. The marketing of SCPs is highly controlled by party political operatives and private agencies who are employed to craft the image of the politician in the manner of a film or television star. Street uses examples of 'superstar' photoshoots including Tony Blair posing with the England football team; German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder on stage with the Scorpions rock band; and the Japanese prime minister, Junichiro Koizumi singing Elvis Presley songs with Tom Cruise.

While there is no doubt that photo opportunities are an important part of celebrity politics, the particular type of photo opportunity may be crucial for understanding how the celebrity strategy is being employed, and the expected effects. This is where we depart from Street. Our argument is that politicians, and particularly their parties, are increasingly keen to create an image with almost the opposite effect. Politicians are often marketed as authentic and spontaneous as opposed to rigid and distant from the public, their celebrity arising from their (apparent) ability to engage in ad hoc settings. As Table 1 sets out, photoshoots can also promote an 'everyday' form of celebrity by positioning politicians with ordinary people in local pubs, factories, markets or other 'ordinary' situations.

A recent example of this strategy is the way UKIP leader Nigel Farage constructs his identity as an extension of British ‘pub culture’ (Measham and Brain, 2005). As one political commentator noted, ‘Nigel Farage revels in being "the man in the pub", the political outsider who, to adopt an old beer-advertising slogan, "reaches the parts other politicians cannot reach"' (Parkinson, 2014). In the run up to the 2014 European elections, Farage launched several regional campaigns by inviting camera crews to film him in pubs. Upon victory in the elections, Farage ‘celebrated’ in the Westminster Arms in London (*BBC News*, 26 May 2014). He also attempted (unsuccessfully) to film a press conference at Belfast’s iconic Crown Bar (*The Guardian*, 14 May 2014). Crucially, in these reports Farage is shown both as a celebrity (people know his private life well, his is popular and exciting) and a ‘normal’ individual, engaging in ‘banter’ in the pub but with an international media following.

Not all enactments of this strategy work this well. Photo opportunities in which politicians are placed in ‘ordinary’ situations in order to appear authentic can drastically backfire. A classic example of this is the unsuccessful Prime Ministerial campaign of academic turned Canadian politician Michael Ignatieff. Ignatieff returned to Canada after a long and distinguished period as a professor of political science at Harvard University. Widely seen as a superstar candidate he rapidly rose to take leadership of the Liberal Party in opposition. Despite repeated attempts to demonstrate an authentic connection with the Canadian people, Ignatieff remained an aloof and remote figure in the eyes of most commentators and voters; to borrow from his opponents attack ads, he was ‘just visiting’. The problem, for many Canadians, was that he was - quite simply - a well-healed superstar celebrity politician.

In both examples the key factor is the *technique* of how the politician is marketed rather than the particular platform on which they perform. As we saw, politicians can use post-broadcast media in a very traditional way. By contrast, the combination of post-broadcast *platforms* and spontaneous *techniques* can create a potent mix of celebrity, as we will demonstrate in the analysis of Boris Johnson (below). Platform and technique alone, however, do not make a successful ECP. Indeed, the third dimension – performative *role* - we identify is perhaps the most important in the authentic performance of an ECP strategy.

3. *Performative Role: Exceptional versus Authentic*

Our third dimension is the most radical departure we make from Street’s analysis. The emphasis in this dimension is on the way politicians use appeals to their imperfection and emotional vulnerability – their *authenticity* - to achieve celebrity status by appearing more ‘human’ (see Moulard *et al*, 2015).¹ In making this distinction we draw from work on female political celebrity (Holmes and Negra, 2011), to highlight a particular gendered aspect to the way in which celebrity is constructed in the political sphere (Van Zoonen, 2006; Van Zoonen and Harmer, 2011). Rather than Street’s emphasis on remote and distant leadership, Nunn and Biressi (2010, p.53) argue that ‘it is not simply high achievement (the fame, fortune, power of having ‘made it’) that propels the celebrity story forward: rather, it is suffering, dysfunction or the personal flaw, once concealed but now revealed to the public’. Developing this distinction, it can be argued that SCPs behave in the manner of Max Weber’s ‘charismatic’ leader, the ‘superman’ who displays strong leadership traits, and traditionally ‘masculinised’ leadership qualities.

By contrast, the ECP is typically pictured in a domestic setting, at home with his or her family. This type of appeal is not strictly new: US President John Kennedy is famous for using his family as a means of enhancing his popularity while Franklin D. Roosevelt is still remembered for his “fireside chats”. But, the use of domestication as a strategy by politicians takes on greater significance in an age of popular disaffection. One example of this comes from Australia where the TV show *Kitchen Cabinet*, in which a popular political reporter goes to the homes of different politicians and cooks a meal with them, has become extraordinarily popular. The show, which borrows elements from other reality series like *Come Dine With Me*, *My Kitchen Rules* and *Masterchef* was recently moved from a secondary channel to prime time on the mainstream public broadcaster. Appearances on the show by party leaders in particular played a key role in the lead up to the 2013 election campaign. Commentary of these episodes tended to focus heavily on how adept and ‘at home’ the leaders were in a domestic setting. In both cases the leadership contenders – Kevin Rudd and Tony Abbott – enlisted the help of their daughters, thus adding to their image as family men.

ECPs also openly exhibit emotional imperfections and fragilities; they may cry on camera whilst making a public apology, or pour out intensely personal familial feelings. On *Kitchen Cabinet*, several politicians became extremely emotional when reflecting on their upbringing and the price their families and marriages had paid for their political involvement; an episode in which a Senator ‘opened up’ about her partner’s sex change is the most extreme example but others included a senior politician talking openly about her husband’s drug addiction. They also resonate with a new subset of dramatized TV representations of politicians, including *House of Cards* and the Danish show *Borgen*, that explicitly employ domestic scenes to demonstrate the emotional elements of political life. Vulnerability, in this context, can be an extremely successful form of enacting ordinariness and authenticity, thereby generating sympathy with their audience, with politicians who use this strategy often cast as ‘brave’ and even ‘heroic’ due to their willingness to make certain aspects of their life public.

These instances are clearly distinct from the ‘strong celebrity leader’ portrayed, for example, by Vladimir Putin. We argue here they still legitimately come under the rubric of the ‘celebrity politician’, but should be dissected so as to enable a more nuanced analysis of the particular ‘celebrity strategies’ employed. The key point here is that ‘superstar’ and ‘everyday’ strategies often interact and are employed by different politicians in different contexts. The apparent ‘openness’ of the politician in interviews, talking about their personal lives – what they have for breakfast, where they walk their dog in the mornings – is, we suggest, importantly distinct from them being seen as distant and removed from the public – being questioned about the exceptional and very unusual life they live. For celebrity politicians, how they mix these competing strategies is crucial. As van Zoonen (2005, p.84) has argued, ‘the ultimate celebrity politician ... is able to balance the contradictory requirements of politics ... build(ing) on a unique mixture of *ordinariness* and *exceptionality*’ (italics added). The following section examines this interaction in more detail, arguing that ‘everyday’ celebrity strategies are becoming more prominent. Numerous politicians employ everyday strategies but few have done so as successfully as Boris Johnson.

III. BORIS JOHNSON: THE EVERYDAY SUPERSTAR CELEBRITY POLITICIAN

Boris Johnson has arguably one of the most ‘traditional’ backgrounds of any celebrity politician. He was educated at Eton College and then at Balliol College, Oxford, before going into a career in print journalism. Via posts at *The Times* and *The Telegraph*, Johnson’s career peaked as editor of *The Spectator* magazine from 1999-2005. During that time he became MP for Henley-upon-Thames, before being elected to two terms as Mayor of London in 2008 and 2012. In many ways, Johnson’s background and credentials suggest, on paper, that he would not be prime material for a ‘celebrity’ status rooted in notions of ‘normality’ or ordinariness. And yet, as Purnell (2011) argues, Johnson exhibits all of the aspects of a ‘celebrity politician’ stipulated in the first section of this article, which distinguish him from ordinarily ‘popular’ politicians. A YouGov poll in 2012 Johnson was one of only two politicians to get a net positive ‘respect’ rating, demonstrating the level of popularity required for ‘celebrity’ status (the other being Margaret Thatcher). This popularity, however, has a particular source in Johnson’s perceived ‘celebrity’ status. During the 2012 mayoral election campaign, YouGov asked voters what they thought Johnson’s defining qualities were. The majority - 51 per cent - of respondents marked out ‘charisma’ as his defining quality (YouGov, 2012, p.5). Moreover, when asked ‘Which of the candidates, if any, would you most like to go for a drink with?’, 35 per cent chose Johnson compared to 16 per cent choosing Ken Livingstone, his closest competitor. Peter Kellner suggested in light of one particular poll that Johnson was ‘Britain’s Heineken politician: refreshing parts of the public that other politicians can’t reach’ (*The Independent*, 12 September 2012). How has Johnson ‘paradoxically’ (Dommett, 2015, p.166) achieved celebrity status, despite having a background and upbringing very much in line with most ‘elite’ politicians? As Purnell argues, Johnson has a number of ‘contradictions’:

He resembles a ‘human laundry basket’ and has a habit of forgetting to shower. Yet women adore him – even otherwise sensible ones ask him to sign their underwear ... one side of Boris is an outrageous right-wing toff, famous for peppering his vowels with obscure Latin tags ... Yet now he’s an all-conquering TV superstar in the age of anti-politicians (2011, pp.2-3)

How can we understand this successful, yet contradictory celebrity politician? This section argues that he has done so through an evolving celebrity strategy that includes a mix of ‘superstar’ and ‘everyday’ strategies, with a growing ‘everyday’ approach in the second decade of the twenty-first century. The case of Johnson is thus useful as an ‘ideal typical’ case whereby an important celebrity politician has achieved celebrity by mixing superstar and everyday strategies. While in Street’s framework Johnson’s status as a celebrity politician is confusingly paradoxical, our framework makes it more visible and easily reconciled by dissecting how he employs very different notions of celebrity.

Post-Broadcast Media

As Street states, Johnson became widely famous in the early 2000s as editor of *The Spectator* and, most prominently, a regular host of the satirical quiz show *Have I Got News For You*. After first appearing on the show in 1998, Gimson (2012) argues that ‘Boris [Johnson] started to acquire a vast new public through his appearances on television ... by going on programmes on which most politicians would have been unable to cope, and on which most Cabinet ministers would consider it beneath their dignity to appear, he bolstered his democratic credentials’. Dommett (2015, p.172) supports this argument, suggesting that ‘his [Johnson’s] appearance on *Have I Got News For You* ... forged an appeal which whilst not disavowing his personal views is distinct from them – allowing him to expand his public

support beyond those who simply share his perspective'. During this period Johnson also appeared on programmes including *Parkinson*, *Question Time*, *Breakfast With Frost* and *Top Gear*, as well as being interviewed for *GQ* magazine in 2003 (Gimson, 2012).

These are very much traditional 'broadcast' media platforms, which establish a 'one-way' interaction between the audience as live or pre-recorded entertainment or print journalism in which the 'stage' of the SCP is set and they 'perform' with little or no direct interaction with the wider public. More recently, however, Johnson has evolved his celebrity strategy to focus more on interactive social media. Since he became Mayor of London in 2010 Johnson has moved towards the 'post-broadcast' medium of twitter. Johnson undertakes monthly 'Ask Boris' twitter question sessions in which he responds to the views of Londoners. Johnson also hosts his own live radio phone in shows on the London talk radio station LBC, and his speeches are available as free podcasts. Moreover, during the 2015 general election, Johnson joined twitter in a personal capacity to support his candidacy for the constituency of Uxbridge and South Ruislip. This shift towards a more 'everyday' approach to engaging with voters directly has arguably worked less well for Johnson than the 'superstar' approach. In one direct radio phone-in, 'he was given a humiliating dressing down by Paul Bigley, brother of Ken [Bigley, a soldier who was kidnapped and murdered during the Iraq War in 2004], who told him: "You're a self-centred, pompous twit; even your body language on TV is wrong."' (BBC News 2008). By exposing himself to more to 'two-way' media Johnson has arguably become more vulnerable, and his 'celebrity' status more open to challenge. This is, however, only the beginning of the story, as the techniques and performances used by Johnson have enabled him to shape and manage even these challenges.

Spontaneous Marketing Technique

The second key element of the ECP is that he or she is marketed 'spontaneously', meaning that the ECP engages in 'zany' or off-kilter public appearances rather than highly 'structured' interviews befitting the SCP. In the few highly structured interviews Johnson has undertaken he has not been incredibly successful. One very prominent example is an interview with the BBC journalist Eddie Mair, described by *The Guardian* as a 'bicycle crash' in which Mair brought up several allegations of impropriety that Johnson did not respond well to:

"Let me ask you about a barefaced lie. When you were in Michael Howard's team, you denied to him you were having an affair. It turned out you were and he sacked you for that. Why did you lie to your party leader?"

Johnson squirmed. "Well, I mean again, I'm ... with great respect ... on that, I never had any conversation with Michael Howard about that matter and, you know, I don't propose ..."

Mair interrupted: "You did lie to him."

Johnson: "Well, you know, I don't propose to go into all that again."

Mair: "I don't blame you" (*The Guardian*, 24 March 2013)

Johnson is far more comfortable undertaking apparently 'spontaneous' public appearances and making eye-brow raising comments that make him appear more 'human' or accessible. This 'spontaneous' image is created in his routinely reported 'gaffes' - from 'accidentally'

insulting the cities of Liverpool and Portsmouth to getting stuck on zip wire in central London during the London Olympics - which, as Ruddock (2006) and Dommett (2015) argue, are critical to this purported 'authenticity'. Johnson also responds to personalised questions during his Ask Boris twitter sessions in a very 'quirky' and non-formalised way:

Q: Can you eat a bacon sandwich with dignity?

A: Never mind dignity I eat them with ketchup frankly (#askboris, May 2014)

Q: Do you think there are too many people with your type of background in politics today?

A: Yeah - there are too many people like me and ed miliband who went to primrose hill primary school!! (#askboris, February 2014)

This informality is important as it positions Johnson as being accessible, open and easy-going about his upbringing and eating habits. It is this 'human' element of Johnson's rhetoric, and the implicit/explicit appeal to his 'normality', that is particularly salient for this article in understanding how he achieves celebrity status through a 'politics of normality'. Johnson's 'spontaneity' is promoted by his party, but also by the media who comment on his antics. Johnson's decision to stand for election to the House of Commons in 2015 was hailed by the *Telegraph* as 'a burst of hoopla and stardust', since 'He apparently bumbles through life, good-hearted but without direction. Yet within, he is as full of guile and strategy as Bertie's Spinoza-loving valet' (D'Ancona, 2014). Similarly, the *Daily Mail* (7 Aug 2014) proclaimed the return of 'the great entertainer' to national politics: 'the cheeky chappy, who pretends to treat politics as a bit of a lark, who transcends traditional party loyalties and deploys wit to order'. The link between his 'celebrity' status and his political success is established through his mundanely 'bumbling' and 'cheeky' qualities. The appealing normality of Johnson's bumbling qualities are even reinforced by otherwise hostile commentators. *The Guardian*, for instance, comments that 'he was clever enough to wing his way through most of life's difficulties, cheerfully lazy enough to let others do the heavy lifting' (White, 2014). Meanwhile, the *New Statesman* (26 September 2014) criticises 'the cult of Boris ... rising on a plank of authenticity' with a 'recklessness that frightens the establishment horses'.

Performative acts

The third key element of the ECP is how they establish a close, almost personal, emotive connection with the audience, rather than appearing 'exceptional' as an authoritative orator (like the SCP). Johnson's interviews, for example, are often focused on his own personal emotive experience of being a politician. An interview with the *Financial Times* (2008) marking his first 100 days as London mayor proceeds as follows:

Interviewer: It seems amazing that 100 days is up already. I believe you'll be on holiday somewhere on the 100th day?

BJ: I am unashamedly and with full knowledge of British electorate, taking a holiday abroad ... without hesitation or compunction or scruple, I am getting into a plane and flying.

Interviewer: Where to?

BJ: Abroad. Destination in the Mediterranean which I can't name for security reasons, but not unadjacent to Sardinia.

Here, Johnson is establishing an emotive connection with his audience by appealing to a common social norm (going on holiday), but situating this statement within his personal experience of being mayor, and the pressures and stresses associated with the position. At a question session in Bromley shortly after his election as London mayor, he adopted a similar style:

Every day I wake up with a sense of joy and wonderment that the people of London have done me the honour of electing me their Mayor, and I know that millions of Londoners awake with a sense of wonderment, if not joy. People say 'Are you enjoying it?' It is the most wonderful job in the world (People's Question Time, 2008 November 7)

Johnson's 'joy' and 'wonderment' at the role he finds himself reflects how 'ordinary' people would feel in that position. He also employs a self-deprecatory reference to those who may not have wished to see him elected, hence exhibiting a form of 'emotional imperfection' – an acknowledgement of deference to his opponents. Johnson also often refers to his 'gaffes', for instance at 2013 Conservative conference he states: 'It's wonderful to be here in Manchester, one of the few great British cities I have yet to insult and I intend to keep a clean sheet today' (Johnson, 5 October 2009). Again, the technique of self-deprecation can be seen as a way of establishing an emotive connection with the audience, appealing to norms of fallibility and imperfection. Similarly, in the BBC interview with Eddie Mair (see above), Johnson is accused of agreeing to have someone assaulted whilst having a phone call with a friend, to which he responds:

The case of my old friend Darius, yes, it was certainly true that he was in a bit of state and I did humour him in a long phone conversation, from which absolutely nothing eventuated and...you know, there you go. But I think if any of us had our phone conversations bugged, they might, you know, people say all sorts of fantastical things whilst they're talking to their friends (*The Andrew Marr Show*, 24 March 2013, p.6)

Here, Johnson is again relating his own personal experience to those of the 'ordinary' person, emphasising his imperfections and acknowledging he made a mistake. While the context of a television interview is clearly different to a party conference, Johnson's rhetoric similarly displays a self-deprecatory emotive connection, albeit with a very different tone and purpose (to diffuse political criticism).

Here it is clear that Johnson is using 'everyday' strategies of the ECP in a strategic and often contradictory way. He continues to appear on 'one-way' broadcast media, but is moving towards using 'two-way' post-broadcast media in an imperfect and uneven manner. His main approach to developing his celebrity is appearing in off-kilter, impromptu and unstructured public appearances, making strange (and sometimes ill-judged) comments that are lauded by the media for their authenticity – the 'spontaneous' marketing technique. Moreover, he attempts to manage his political weakness of being a 'distant' Etonian Conservative by being self-deprecatory and quirky – the 'authentic' performative actor. This section has shown how Johnson has deployed contradictory tactics to further his celebrity, which presents a puzzle within Street's (2004) framework but is more readily understandable through our conceptual lens, distinguishing between ECPs and SCPs. While no celebrity politician can do without both of these two – they are of course faced with having to be both 'close' and 'distant'

(returning to the ‘democratic leader paradox’) – distinguishing between them conceptually and applying this in detailed empirical analysis can tease out the particular (often contradictory) ways in which powerful politicians construct and maintain their ‘political celebrity’.

IV. ON BEING NORMAL

This article has shown how the framework of SCPs and ECPs enables us to better grasp the contradictory and paradoxical ways in which elite politicians such as Boris Johnson achieve celebrity fame, and which tactics for achieving celebrity are becoming more prominent in our ‘late modern’ age. Why, though, does identifying ‘everyday political celebrity’ as a distinctive political celebrity strategy *matter*, in particular for the broader relevance of this article for democracy, representation and the ‘paradox of the democratic leader’? It is at this point that we return to the problem of ‘anti-politics’ stated at the beginning of this article. We specifically suggest this article has implications for two often-proposed solutions to public anger with politics: democratic representativeness and authenticity.

Traditional studies of celebrity politics emphasised how celebrity is a social construct used to secure consent from the governed (Marshall, 1997), or ‘a cynical expression of desperate populism’ (Street, 2004, p.436). Up to now this article has implicitly carried this normative assumption: constructions of the ‘normal’, ‘everyday’ politician are intended to secure electoral support and a politically successful coalition, rather than to improve democratic representation.ⁱⁱ John Street (2004), however, provocatively makes the opposite argument ‘in defence of celebrity politics’. Street (2004, p.447) argues that ‘adoption of the popular trappings of celebrity is not a trivial gesture towards fashion or a minor detail of political communication, but instead lies at the heart of the notion of political representation itself’. Drawing on ‘an aesthetic account of political representation’, Street (2004, pp.444-445) notes that ‘resemblance’ or ‘substitution’ are central concepts in democratic representation, and hence celebrity politics ‘is not to be understood as a betrayal of proper principles of democratic representation, but as an extension of them’. This intrinsic democratic value, Marsh *et al* (2010, p.333) suggest, has potential benefits in re-engaging disaffected citizens: ‘Celebrities have a unique capacity to reach out to and mobilise otherwise apathetic publics, and sometimes manage to give powerful voices to the disenfranchised in society and on the world stage’.

Celebrity, then, can be seen as important for democracy as aesthetic ‘likeness’ is a central part of any ‘representative’ democratic system. Moreover, in an age of anti-politics, politicians are more likely to reach out to disaffected voters via what Turner (2013, p.94) calls ‘democrataintment’ as ‘the consumption of celebrity has become a part of everyday life in the twenty-first century’. However, as stated in the introduction, the democratic benefits may only come from certain forms of celebrity. Our case study suggests, firstly, a conceptual distinction between a very ‘distant’ form of celebrity politician – the SCP – that does not fit easily with the democratic celebrity envisaged by Street. By contrast, the more ‘down to earth’ or ‘normal’ celebrity politician – the ECP – seems to hold greater promise, with a greater emphasis on direct personal connection with the everyday lives of the public. However, the empirical analysis of Boris Johnson shows that both personas – the SCP and ECP – are difficult to reconcile with the hope of democratic renewal, because they are essentially used

to market or 'brand' an otherwise very distant and ab-'normal' politician. In other words rather than promoting Street's hope for a 'democratic' form of celebrity, they in fact seem to reinforce celebrity as P. David Marshall (1997) conceptualised it: as a 'form of cultural power' deployed to achieve political success and manage the 'democratic leader paradox'. The question, in sum, is not whether celebrity simply as a concept is or is not 'democratic', but how *could* celebrity politics be made more democratic?

This point leads to the second implication, which is the importance of *authenticity* and the need to reflect upon broader issues concerning the need for more 'normal' politicians. The question, put simply, is how *could* celebrity politics be made more democratic? Our case study of Johnson may provide evidence of how a more democratic approach may proceed. On the one hand, Johnson has been very successful mixing SCP and ECP strategies to achieve public appraisal. Johnson's 'celebrity statecraft' strategy has, however, become particularly difficult since the advent of social media and greater opportunities for critique.

The openness and accessibility of contemporary social media may open up opportunities for pushing the 'everyday' element of celebrity further, and potentially enable a more thoroughgoing democratisation of celebrity in the process. In disability studies (Davis, 2006), a field which has considered these issues in great depth, scholars have attempted to reconstitute the notion of what counts as 'normal' ('able') or 'normalcy' away from 'a biological constant made readily apparent by 'nature'' towards a more inclusive notion (Erevelles, 1996, p.521). 'Normal', for these scholars, should be seen as 'a project of claiming the human (i.e. what is considered to be a 'normal' human being) while simultaneously seeking to trouble, to reshape and revise the human ... with the day-to-day lives of disabled people' (Goodley and Runswick-Cole, 2014, p.13). What is 'normal', and hence what is 'human', should be considered in a pluralistic and reflexive manner that reflects the diversity of everyday lives and counteracts ideas of 'normality' that are falsely constructed and imposed (Braidotti, 2013).

The implication of this article is therefore that 'normality' as a category for being a representative politician ought to be emphasised not through looking for the 'quirks' in politicians from otherwise traditional backgrounds (like Johnson) but questioning why a broader range of 'normal' people do not run for parliament. Why do female politicians so often get criticised for the particular clothes they wear rather than admired for reaching the political heights women have traditionally been barred from? Why are ethnic minority politicians so often portrayed as 'the exception', or working class politicians mocked for their particular dialect, rather than admired for their ethic in representing their constituencies? Any revised notion of celebrity politicians ought to be more inclusive and diverse, in a way that promotes this wider variety of people wishing to be successful in the 'arena' of politics. So, we agree with Street (2004, p.450) that the rise of celebrity politicians 'might ... indicate an added dimension to our appreciation of political representation, one which needs to be sensitive to the aesthetics and politics of its performative character'. However, we would caution that any such appreciation should also involve a critical normative focus, potentially drawing on accounts of 'normality' and 'the human' (Braidotti, 2013), on what grounds celebrity status is granted, and whether those grounds are narrow and exclusive, or broad and inclusive.

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ⁱ Throughout this section it should be noted that 'authenticity' is in many ways *inherently* performative. Hence, politicians do not 'perform' authentic identities in order to 'unveil' their somehow 'true' selves, but in order to *construct the image* of authenticity, regardless of how 'authentic' they might, on an abstracted set of criteria, be judged by the political analyst.

ⁱⁱ Indeed, the very concept of 'success' as a celebrity politician ought to be interrogated further. What would count as a 'successful' celebrity strategy for a politician? While we have led with an intuitive conception of success in this article (popularity and electoral success), policy success and implementation has been included by some studies (Kellner, 2010). Further research may examine the relationship between differential celebrity strategies and divergent forms of success, and indeed failure.