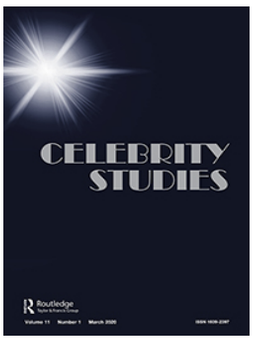

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Taking down the sacred: fuck-me vs. fuck-you celebrity

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ABSTRACT

I argue that we must talk about fucking in order to dissect the tangle of power, gender and sex that has upheld Hollywood-built celebrity. Celebrity has always been a machinery of desire organised around acts as well as fantasies of fucking, which processes of medial sublimation turn into the aura of the sacred. In the spirit of desublimation and desecration, I make a distinction between fuck-me and fuck-you celebrity, drawing on examples such as Caitlyn Jenner, Tess Holliday and Rose McGowan. Whereas fuck-me celebrity abides by standards of feminine beauty, fuck-you celebrity openly addresses sex and power. In the post-Weinstein era, it may be that the celebrity system, which has heavily favoured the fuck-me over the fuck-you, is beginning to shift.

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Introduction

My intent in this article is not to be sacrilegious, strictly speaking, nor to profane celebrity (which seems an unlikely consequence of scholarship), but rather to track celebrity through its own profanities. In homage to Gayle Rubin's declaration in 1984 that 'the time has come to think about sex' ([1984] 2007, p. 150), my premise is similar, if coarser: the time has come for those of us who study celebrity to talk about fucking. That, after all, seems to be what everyone else is talking about, in an effort to name, dissect and desacralise the toxic tangle of power, gender and sex that has upheld the hallowed halls of Hollywood-built celebrity. Celebrity, I will argue, has always been libidinal, a machinery of collective desire organised around fantasies of who-is-fucking-whom as well as who-is-fucking-with-whom. In her article 'Thinking Sex', Rubin reflects on the importance of emphasising sex 'in times of great social stress' because '[d]isputes over sexual behaviour often become the vehicles for displacing social anxieties and discharging their attendant emotional intensity' ([1984] 2007, p. 150). Presumably, this becomes even more true when, as in our current stressful climate, it is less a matter of *displacing* social anxieties onto sexuality than of feeling anxious about sexual behaviour itself, especially when that behaviour takes place within a sphere that so consistently blurs sociality and sexuality – the sphere of celebrity.

Not so long ago, in June 2015, Caitlyn Jenner was unveiled in the pages of *Vanity Fair* as the hot new babe of L.A., all eyes upon her as she channelled Hollywood glamour to achieve the height of 'fuck-me' celebrity. Her poses and poise were perfect, so much so that Jon Stewart (then of *The Daily Show* 2015) ironically praised her for winning the TV

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commentators' game of 'comparative fuckability'. The fact that Caitlyn is a transwoman, however, exposed the rules and norms of 'fuck-me' celebrity at the same time as she became its newest poster-girl. Far less visible, although at least as loud, have been the fight-the-system proponents of 'fuck-you' celebrity, from the self-conscious punk aesthetic of 1990s' Courtney Love, arguably the progenitor of contemporary resistance movements like Pussy Riot and the Pussyhat Project, to the visual and verbal resistance campaigns of models who set out to @effyourbeautystandards (an Instagram site launched by Tess Holliday). But there are signs that the celebrity system, which up until now has heavily favoured the fuck-me over the fuck-you, is beginning to shift: the sudden shake-up in the star-making apparatus, followed by the seismic effects of the #metoo movement, has radically destabilised the old balance between fuck-me and fuck-you celebrity, as women such as Rose McGowan and Stephanie Clifford, a.k.a. Stormy Daniels, (re)build their own celebrity by talking back to the celebrity men who have used and abused them. Whereas fuck-me celebrity requires a demure agreement not to talk about what we're really talking about, in the name of decency and displacement, fuck-you celebrity talks openly about sex and its imbrications with power. In the spirit of harnessing some of this fuck-you attitude, I will here address the dynamics of celebrity and fucking to ask whether celebrity as we know it has in fact been desacralised in our norm-busting, Trump-meets-Weinstein time.

In terms of individual star images, of course, celebrity is buoyed up on cycles of consecration and desecration, reflecting not just the brevity of fame that is buried in the etymology of the word 'celebrity' (Rojek 2001, p. 9) but also the rise and fall of social value that accrues to stars as they slip in and out of the spotlight on waves of self-construction and -destruction. Su Holmes and Sean Redmond refer to the negative side of this pendulum as 'fame damage' (2006, pp. 287–293), part of what Redmond later calls the 'metronome' of discourses about celebrity which 'swing this way, then that' (2014, p. 5). Despite the con/desecration cycle being business as usual, however, 2017–18 seemed to mark a period when it was the *institution* of celebrity that was desecrated, and indeed, desecrated by exposure of its own workings. Central to this take-down was the figure of Harvey Weinstein, who, as the powerful and highly visible studio head of first Miramax and then the Weinstein Company, embodied the overlap between the institution, the industry and the person.

Weinstein and fucking

A brief timeline of events in this intensive period might be helpful to jog our memories. On 5 October 2017, the *New York Times* published an investigative report by Jodi Kantor and Megan Twohey, entitled 'Harvey Weinstein paid off sexual harassment accusers for decades', which details interviews with former female employees and the actor Ashley Judd (alongside a number of actors who refused to comment for the article) to reveal Weinstein's long-standing practice of sexually preying on young women and, when pushed, hushing up the evidence with pay-offs (Kantor and Twohey 2017). The article itself came not without context, as the reference to payment in the title indicates; although this was the first mention of Weinstein's name in sexual harassment allegations, the journalists' investigation followed on the sacking in July 2016 of Roger Ailes, chairman and CEO of Fox News, and then in April 2017 of Bill O'Reilly, the top-rated Fox News host,

for harassment allegations and settlements worth millions. Whereas Ailes and O'Reilly, who did not exactly go quietly, sank into the annals of misbehaving oligarchs, the Weinstein revelations were only just beginning. On 8 October, Weinstein was fired from the Weinstein Company by its board (including his brother and co-founder Bob); on 10 October, *The New Yorker* published an exposé by Ronan Farrow with the subtitle 'Harvey Weinstein's accusers tell their stories' (Farrow 2017), which significantly shifted the discourse from sexual harassment to actual assault of women; on 11 October, Bafta suspended Weinstein's membership; and on 14 October, in a nearly unprecedented move, the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences voted to expel Weinstein, as further accusations by women in the industry piled up thick and fast, and police in the UK and US moved to investigate allegations. From this hornet's next of investigation, accusation and commentary, one accuser in particular took the lead, namely actress Rose McGowan. Although named in the original *New York Times* article but declining to comment for it, McGowan became the most publicly and articulately furious of Weinstein's accusers, from revealing on 12 October via Twitter that he had raped her in 1997 to publishing a memoir, *Brave*, in January 2018 alongside the release of a four-part documentary, *Citizen Rose*, one day later (*Citizen Rose* 2018; McGowan 2018).

The exposure of Harvey Weinstein's treatment of women is central to the topic of desecrating celebrity because it reflects not just the exploitative nature of the celebrity apparatus, but also the way in which such exploitation mines power differentials. In one sense, the Weinstein allegations, however shocking, came as no surprise to a film industry that had been skating over the long-standing complicity of his colleagues, board members and assorted whisperers at Hollywood cocktail parties. In another sense, however, it soon became clear that these were not just the events of one man's downfall; rather, it is worth recalling that the initial Weinstein accusations sparked the viral spread of the #metoo movement. Instigated on 15 October with a tweet from actress Alyssa Milano, which reignited activist Tarana Burke's coinage of the phrase 'Me Too' in 2006 by calling on 'all the women and men who have been sexually harassed, assaulted or abused [to write] "me too" as a status' (Stevens 2017), the movement took form as a cascade of social media activity that very quickly became about much more than abuses in the film or celebrity industries. Originally developed by Burke to provide a community for marginalised girls and women, especially of colour, who had experienced sexual abuse, the 'Me Too' tag, once attached to the visibility of the Hollywood elite, opened the floodgates to countless devastating stories of women who had suffered abuse, rape and sexual trauma. What was exposed at this explosive juncture between Weinstein's outing and the #metoo movement is the gender/power nexus (one, moreover, that is racialised[1]) at the core of social organisations and industries, with the celebrity-making machinery of Hollywood as the prime exhibit with the longest reach. Weinstein was not just a larger-than-life celebrity himself, but also a *maker* of celebrities, an agent of celebrification (Rojek 2001) as both institution and process.

Moreover, the #metoo movement, followed closely by the Time's Up movement founded in January 2018 by Hollywood celebrities, has made it very clear that the celebrification process is a toxic tangle of gender, power and *sex*. To no one's surprise, given the longevity of casting-couch tropes, the Weinstein, #metoo and Time's Up maelstrom revealed that sex has been, and continues to be, the currency of celebrity. I mean this in strictly economic terms: sex is the down-payment demanded by powerful men from powerless women (and in some cases men) in exchange for the potential pay-

off of celebrity status. Over and over again, Weinstein's accusers confirmed that they acquiesced to hotel-room meetings with him because they were hoping for a movie role, just as not doing so would have hurt their careers, that is, their status in the celebrification process. But this nexus is not about sex as an abstract attribute of media value, that is, about the extent to which the media frame can present someone as 'sexy'. Rather, it is about fucking – who is doing and being allowed to do what to whom, within institutional hierarchies of power that have little to do with sex appeal. This is why we need to be talking about fucking.

Thus, despite McGowan referring in her book *Brave* almost mythically to Harvey Weinstein only as 'The Monster', this desecration of celebrity is about much more than just the exposure and (currently ongoing) prosecution of Weinstein. Rather, we need to be asking questions about what has happened to the sacred status of celebrity itself. If the currency of sexual exchange underpins celebrification, then the purpose of that exchange, from the perspective of the disempowered, is to wreak for themselves some of the aura or afterglow that is produced by the apparatus of the celebrity industry – an aura that is an effect of our own desire as celebrity consumers. To fuck or be fuckable are positions converted from the basely economic to the auratic by media enterprises and consumers. In this regard, the responses to Weinstein, as agent, institution and process of celebrification, expose the media mechanics of Hollywood halo-making. The mechanical convertibility of private to public desire, however, also enables the more abusive perversion of sexual exchange as its currency. The movement from classical fuck-me celebrity to contemporary fuck-you celebrity hinges on the technologies of mediated desire, taking us beyond the cinematic aura, in the Benjaminian sense, that has projected the sacredness of celebrity and sustained its value system.

From desecration to desacralisation

To talk about the desecration of celebrity implies addressing the ways in which it is (or is not) sacred. There is broad agreement that, with the decline of the centrality of organised religion (the 'death of God' theory), religious impulses continue to exist but have become secularised. Since the mid-20th century, spurred by the publication of Malcolm Boyd's *Christ and celebrity gods* (Boyd 1958), religious scholars have debated the extent to which 'celebrity worship' – a telltale metaphor – indicates that celebrities are treated as (religious) idols and even taken to be gods. Gary Laderman, writing in 2009, has claimed outright that 'celebrity icons arouse the religious passions of followers in modern society', producing 'new gods' worshipped on the sacred altar of celebrity culture (Laderman cited Ward 2011, p. 4). On the side of celebrity studies, Chris Rojek cogently argued the point in his field-setting book *Celebrity*, aligning celebrity behaviour with shamanism because of stars' ability to create 'frenzy' amongst fans from auratic spectacle (2001, pp. 53–56), which led him to deduce a 'considerable partial convergence between religion and celebrity' in secular society (p. 58). The word 'partial' interleaved into that phrasing indicates Rojek's unwillingness to grant celebrity the full status of the sacred on the grounds that '[c]elebrity culture is a culture of faux ecstasy' (p. 90), since it is based on 'para-social interaction' (p. 52) and 'staged authenticity' rather than 'genuine forms of recognition and belonging' (p. 90). Rojek's insistence on the para-social mirrors Pete Ward's conclusion, after careful consideration of the relationship between religion and

celebrity in *Gods behaving badly*, that celebrity culture is a 'para-religion', in which 'the sacred appears to be present, but … has somehow been (sub)merged in the profane' (2011, pp. 80–81). All of these terms – 'partial', 'para', '(sub)' – indicate both an intellectual and a moral reluctance to conflate 'the superficial, the gaudy' aspects of celebrity (Rojek 2001, p. 90) with the spiritual, transcendental, implicitly 'genuine' experiences of religion.

I do not wish to conflate religious transcendence with celebrity worship, yet two points are worth noting about this caution regarding the sacral status of celebrity. Firstly, just as Ward insists on the ambiguities of celebrity culture (2011, p. 81), so Rojek is fascinated by the 'celebrity ceremonies' of ascent and descent (2001, pp. 74–90), arguing in effect for an oscillation between the sacred and profane status of stars. This oscillation suggests that especially in moments of desecration (the) celebrity can descend only because he/she was held to be sacred in the first place – and vice versa. Secondly, whereas religion is arguably a set of practices, the sacred is a *feeling*, a collective experience of affect that the anthropologist Emile Durkheim, in his influential book *The elementary forms of religious life* ([1912] 1995), called 'effervescence'. As such, no amount of caution about the para-social or the para-religious will take away from the fact that what feels sacred is in fact held sacred at any given moment, at least for the person experiencing the transcendental swell. This is not far off from what Ward, in referring to the 'subjective turn' in religious studies, calls the alignment between celebrity and the 'sacred self' in popular culture, which 'gives birth to a multiplicity of possible gods' (2011, p. 95). Nonetheless, this emphasis on self, whether as the source of divinity or embodied in ascending/descending celebrities, does not address the institution of celebrity or, more significantly, the way our desire is caught up within it. If we grant that individual stars can be worshipped as gods (such as Elvis; see Frow 1998), and grant, too, that the sacred can overflow individual bounds to colour the institution, then – in light of ascents and descents – can the sacral nature of celebrity itself be tarnished? The short answer is yes, because the sacred-effect of celebrity is riven with fucking, indeed grounded in the currency of sex, whereas the 'properly' sacred in mainstream religions is abstracted from sexual exchange.

I have been using words like sacred, sacral and desecration loosely, but I would like to pause for a moment to better define my terms. To start with, 'desecration' as an action means 'damaging or showing no respect towards something holy or very much respected' (Cambridge English Dictionary), that is, violating the sanctity of something, hence profaning it. Semantic examples usually involve a shrine, temple or mosque being desecrated by vandals, e.g. 'There are still reports of vandalism and desecration of synagogues' (Cambridge English Dictionary). But we should note that the disrespectful, irreverent or outrageous treatment of something holy does not necessarily affect its sacred status; it is perfectly possible that a shrine which has been desecrated will continue to operate as a shrine, even if it has been defaced, provided there is no consensus that it has thereby become ordinary or profane. The emphasis of desecration is thus on the action as well as authority, in a performative sense: if desecrators lack the authority to rescind the shrine's sacred status, then it will continue to be treated as sacred (hence the outrage that commonly arises from acts of desecration). Moreover, desecration is enacted on objects, but what happens in the abstract realm, if we are talking about something that is not strictly a 'thing' available for desecration? To overcome some of these linguistic limitations, I want to introduce another term: desacralisation (admittedly not a word – as yet). As the opposite of 'sacralisation', which according to the Collins English Dictionary

means 'the act of making something sacred', desacralisation would refer to the *un*-making or destruction of sacred status rather than the vandalisation of an object that has been, and may well remain, consecrated. Desacralisation is thus a term that can be applied in the abstract, for instance to institutions. Now, if we accept that the Weinstein revelations and #metoo movement have had destabilising effects on celebrity as an institution, and if, moreover, we accept that structural as well as symbolic, not to mention industrial, change is afoot, then we may well be seeing the *desacralisation* of celebrity, at least in some form.

But what, we should ask, is sacral about celebrity in the first instance? Why is it appropriate to talk about desacralisation as an un-making of its sacred character? As I outlined above, the question has been addressed from the perspective of both celebrity studies and religious studies, but always with a nervous qualifier that whatever 'effervescence' may arise through and around celebrity should be designated para-sacred. The 'para', however, does not help us to understand the sacral aura of celebrity, that aura which Walter Benjamin ([1936] 1969) insisted had been stripped away by mechanical reproducibility, but which Daniel Herwitz argues has resulted in a 'lost sacredness' which leaves, as its remainder, 'a new kind of aura' (2008, p. 60). Indeed, David Ferris astutely notes that 'aura thrives in its decline, and that the reproductive media are particularly conducive to this thriving' (1996 cited Herwitz 2008, p. 66). Such remarks seem particularly pertinent to the celebrity system built in and by Hollywood, which took a much longer tradition of theatrical and literary fame and successfully reshaped it into auratic spectacle through the mechanics of 20th- and now 21st-century media. In the process, stardom, and eventually celebrity, became the new zone of the auratically sacred, providing objects of (sometimes literal) worship in the form of star images available for intense emotional and psychological investment. The emphasis on investment, or sacralisation as meaning 'to *imbue with* or treat as having a sacred character or quality' (https://en.oxforddictionaries.com; my emphasis), takes us to the question of the relation between celebrity and desire.

The libidinal economy of celebrity

Celebrity, as developed on the Hollywood model of spectacularity, has always been libidinal; that is to say, it has been organised through the medial sublimation of sex and formulated around fantasies of who is fucking whom, on- as well as off-screen. Two case studies, one from pre-Hays Code Hollywood and the other from the millennial era of profane experimentation, should help to make the point. Exhibit A is the romantic drama *Flesh and the Devil* (1926) with Greta Garbo, who was beginning to come into her own in her third American film, and John Gilbert, then at the peak of his popularity as a silent film star. Despite following a typical vamp plot (and, per requisite, ultimately killing off the seductress played by Garbo), the film is remembered today for the intensely affecting first-kiss scene between Garbo and Gilbert, filmed in minimal light in a night-time garden. Framed in a close two-shot as they talk, Garbo's character Felicitas absentmindedly plays with an unlit cigarette, which she places between her own lips before languidly removing it, swivelling the cigarette around, and inserting it into Gilbert's mouth. Cinematographically, this is merely a ploy that allows Gilbert's character Leo to light a match, thereby setting Garbo's famously beautiful face aglow in a white halo. Narratively, the lit match is another kind of lure, setting the stage for Felicitas to blow it out as an invitation to a kiss – duly followed by Leo removing the (still unlit) cigarette from his mouth and plunging forward to meet her proferred lips.

This is a scene of sexual sublimation, with erotic contact initially enacted via a mediating prop: the cigarette as literal go-between. But it is also a scene of medial sublimation, turning Garbo's face, through the technical means of lighting and cinematography, into a halo of light that dazzles our eyes. Ultimately, though, despite its hackneyed fictionality, this scene is most compelling as a sublimation of 'real sex', of who-is-fucking-whom, since not only is this the film in which Garbo and Gilbert met and became a celebrity couple, but it is this scene, the second they shot together, that director Clarence Brown recalled as 'the damndest thing you ever saw. . . . Those two were alone in a world of their own' (cited Golden 2013, p. 119). The collective 'effervescence' of this auratic moment, which is a product of props, cinematography and studio industry, was underpinned by a private affair. Contemporary gossip magazines helped publicise the film by spreading news of Garbo and Gilbert's intimacy, and audiences flocked to the cinemas to see their chemistry, or what we might call the halo-effect of their real-life desire. As Gilbert astutely put it, the film functioned for others as 'a brazen display of sex lure', although (or precisely because) for him it was important due to 'my meeting with a glorious person called Garbo' (cited Golden 2013, p. 122).

Fast-forward some seven decades to Exhibit B: *Eyes Wide Shut* (1999), the last film directed by Stanley Kubrick, which was delivered to Warner Brothers only days before he died of a heart attack. Although in many ways a benighted production – holding, as it does, the Guinness World Record for longest continual film shoot as well as saddling Tom Cruise with a stubborn reputation as a wooden actor (Nicholson 2014) – *Eyes Wide Shut* remains compelling as an exploration of conjugal sexuality and fantasy in a film that knowingly oscillates between the sublimation and desublimation of celebrity desire. Kubrick intentionally cast a celebrity couple, the then-married Tom Cruise and Nicole Kidman, in the lead roles of Bill and Alice, going so far as to 'psychoanalyz[e] his stars, prodding Cruise and Kidman to confess their fears about marriage and commitment to their director in conversations that the three vowed to keep secret' (Nicholson 2014, para. 7). Although lightly masked as Bill and Alice,[2] Cruise and Kidman are the actual draw-cards of *Eyes Wide Shut* – a celebrity couple whose desire for each other is embedded in our desire to know the 'truth' of their fucking. Indeed, in a gesture towards the ultimate desublimation, 'fuck' is the last word of the film, spoken by Alice in a stilted conversation held in a toy store with a nervous Bill, who fears the end of their marriage. Instead, Alice/Nicole declares them fortunate to have survived their 'adventures' and, in keeping with the source text of Artur Schnitzler's *Traumnovelle* (Dream Story), artfully questions whether these adventures were dream or reality, before asserting, while staring intensely into Bill/Tom's eyes, 'There is something very important that we need to do as soon as possible. . . . Fuck'. Immediately the screen goes black, the final cut falls, and those of us who have been wanting Tom and Nicole to fuck – leave aside Bill and Alice – know that we have been had. In this moment the film reveals that the desire of and for celebrity is fundamentally *our* will to know and experience, courtesy of the camera, the truth of their fucking, however sublimated into aura. The only difference here from *Flesh and the Devil* is that, *sans* cigarette and well into the age of on-screen profanity, Kubrick is in a position to self-reflexively make a film about sexual, medial and celebrity sublimation that turns his work into an endless deferral of our desire.

Against this sped-up film genealogy, I want to pause on the term 'sublimation' to explore its relation to the sacred aspect of Hollywood-built celebrity. In a psychoanalytic sense,

sublimation can be traced back to Freud, who defined it as a re-routing of libido (the drive aligned with the sexual and ego instincts together) into non-libidinal forms, that is, into more socio-culturally 'valuable' pursuits such as art, education or politics. Simply put, sublimation means desexualisation, whereby sexual energy is channelled into less profane activities by means of the psychical process of displacement (*Verschiebung*), which Freud had 'discovered' at work in dreams. Nonetheless, Freud makes clear that this desexualised energy, which he refers to as the 'displaceable energy' (*Verschiebungsenergie*) of sublimation, is still connnected to the libido:

> If this displaceable energy is desexualized libido, it may also be described as *sublimated* energy; for it would still retain the main purpose of Eros – that of uniting and binding – in so far as it helps towards establishing the unity, or tendency to unity, which is particularly characteristic of the ego.[3] ([1923] 1995, p. 649)

The radical point to be grasped here is that any displacement of psychical energy retains the traces of where it has come from, leaving behind a breadcrumb trail of its re-routing. In other words, sublimation may be desexualised libido, but it continues to adhere to 'the main purpose of Eros'. Of course, sublimation is also a religious term, precisely in the sense that profane sexual energy is re-channelled into higher pursuits; the will of the body, in effect, is displaced into spirit. My favourite lapsed Catholic explains it to me this way: religious sublimation occurs through the process of squeezing sexuality out of the embodied subject, generating an ethereal affect, a collective yet intensely personal effervescence, that may be characterised as disembodied spirit. In Catholicism, the tried and true mechanism of this squeezing is confession, a practice which Foucault recognised to have been secularised into a *scientia sexualis*, whereby the scientific truth of the subject is produced through confession about one's sexuality (1980). Lacan, whose own mother was an ardent Catholic, was fascinated by the trail of displacement from sexual to spiritual love, aligning his theory of *jouissance* – that pleasure so exquisite that it is experienced as pain – with the religious ecstasy of St Teresa of Avila. Referring to Bernini's statue of St Teresa, Lacan dipped into the language of the profane to explain her sacred ecstasy: 'you need but go to Rome and see the statue by Bernini to immediately understand that she's coming. There is no doubt about it' (1998, p. 76). At the same time, moreover, there is little doubt about the sublimation at work, for 'the essential testimony of the mystics consists in saying that they experience it [jouissance], but know nothing about it' (Lacan 1998, p. 76). The question of how 'one face of the Other, the God face' (p. 76) is related to an 'other' *jouissance* (Barnard 2002) is too extensive to pursue here, but suffice to say that Lacan's notion of this exquisitely painful pleasure takes its lesson from Freud's *Verschiebungsenergie* and connects the sacred with Eros.

Without wishing to conflate the celebrity sacred, riven with fucking, with the properly sacred of an abstract body (that of the Lord), this recourse to Freud re-routed through Lacan offers an approach to desacralised celebrity that is not sacrilegious. Rather, to address the desecration – or, better, the desacralisation – of celebrity means taking seriously its sacred character, in effect if not in name, by understanding the role of sublimation in the history of celebrification as institution, industry and process. In mechanical terms, the sacred is the effect of a sublimation that remains sexualised precisely as a result of its desexualisation. As I have insisted, sublimation is the desexualised libido that upholds the sacred through *Verschiebungsenergie* – that is, the drive

towards displacement and deferral. The traces of this displacement are made obvious by means of confession, which holds historically not only for Catholicism or the *scientia sexualis* but also for the contemporary means by which celebrity is maintained through the media mechanics of the confessional (see Redmond 2011). It is by following this trail of displacement and deferral backwards, away from the sacred and towards its libidinal roots, that we approach the key to the sacred aura of celebrity: simply put, celebrity is about fucking, albeit fucking deferred. Or, more accurately, it is about fucking displaced into the past perfect, into an act that we imagine has already occurred and whose after-effect, as mediated aura, we are now experiencing as collective affect. Garbo and Gilbert, Kidman and Cruise have already in some sense had sex right in front of us, but the cinematic works so that we grasp this knowledge, and the truth of the sexual currency of celebrity, with our 'eyes wide shut'. Of course, if #metoo has taught us anything, it is that fucking is always about power. Thus, we need to add one more element to the equation: celebrity may be all about fucking, but not all fucking is created equal.

Fuck-me celebrity

From a gender perspective, Hollywood-built celebrity has long depended on the institutionalised production of women whose look, stance and performance to the camera signals, first and foremost, their sexual availability. We might call this the Hollywood history of feminine im/posture, or less daintily, the equation of female celebrity with a feminine 'fuck-me' look. In the particular stances of this im/posture it does not matter whether these are the 'good girls' whose eyes are downcast or the bad girls who stare back; as Laura Mulvey has memorably argued, '[a]n idea of the woman stands as lynch pin to the system: it is her lack that produces the phallus as a symbolic presence, it is her desire to make good the lack that the phallus signifies' (1975, p. 6). Signalling availability through the modestly averted look or the brazen stare signifies the woman's 'desire to make good'. This is why, after all, Mulvey has argued that in classical Hollywood cinema woman 'speaks castration and nothing else' (1975, p. 6), a castration threat which must be ameliorated by her disempowered status as object of the gaze. Approaching Mulvey's male gaze from the gendered perspective of fuck-me celebrity, however, suggests two adjustments. First, rather than emphasis on castration, we should focus on sublimation as *Verschiebungsenergie*, which means that actual fucking is displaced into sexual fantasy through the operations of the cinematic apparatus, especially narrative and mise-en-scène (recall Garbo and the scandalous cigarette). Second, rather than focusing on the woman's objectification, which downplays her diegetic as well as extra-diegetic role in her own celebrification, we should instead pay attention to the way that cinematography and the im/posture of femininity displace the source of desire onto the woman, who appears to invite, implore, demand – 'please fuck me'.

Fuck-me celebrity thus names the institutionalised, fully normalised relationship between celebrity and sexuality as situated within the gender/power nexus. This plays out, on the one hand, in sublimated fashion between the screen and the audience through technical processes of the media apparatus, and on the other hand between producers and performers – in often literal ways – through the processes of individual and industrial celebrification. In many ways Marilyn Monroe, who in any case seems to exceed the crucible of gaze theory, is the apotheosis of this relation. As Richard Dyer argues in his

chapter devoted to Monroe in *Heavenly Bodies*, 'Monroe = sexuality', not because this defined her but because 'it is a message that ran all the way from what the media made of her in the pin-ups and movies to how her image became a reference point for sexuality in the coinage of everyday speech' ([1986] 2004, p. 18). Dyer points out, moreover, that Monroe became a star because of the way she embodied sexuality, which was '*felt* to matter so much' at that time ([1986] 2004, p. 17; orig. emphasis). But Monroe is also the star who extended sexuality-based celebrity well beyond the Hollywood industry, not only across ancillary media but to sports celebrity, literary celebrity and even political celebrity through her star couplings, thereby entangling the fuck-me stance demanded of women by Hollywood stardom with the more modern gender/power nexus of celebrification. (Is it too much to suggest that her notorious performance of 'Happy birthday, Mr President' smacks of 'who do you have to fuck around here to get on stage'?).

Today the validation of fuck-me celebrity is more firmly institutionalised and invisibilised than ever before, but at least two important changes have occurred in recent years. First, there is a far greater range of intersecting media forms that allow for its overlapping expression and enactment, often constituting an echo chamber, but also, at least sometimes, allowing for a stance that counter-acts the expected fuck-me im/posture. Second, there are changes afoot to the way that we think about gender, certainly amongst the educated younger generations, whereby gender is held to be fluid, multiple, performative, and so fully constructed as to be a matter of one's own identity choice. This, in turn, has led to a new distribution model of fuck-me celebrity, now attached to bodies less on the basis of a strict male/female binary than on the basis of their availability for judgement on scales of 'hotness'. Indeed, it is my suspicion that as gender leverages itself out of the bed of binarism, there is more pressure being placed on the regulation of sex. Here I don't mean sex in the way that Butler set it out in *Gender Trouble*, as a 'foundational categor[y] of identity' (1990, p. xxix); nor do I mean sex as shorthand for sexual practice, in the sense of the broad spectrum of what people actually do with their bodies in eroticised spaces. Rather, as should be clear, I mean sex more reductively as fucking, because this is a term that usefully marries the often harsh reality of erotically conjoined body parts with sexual fantasy on the one hand and social power on the other. Ensconced as we are in a highly libidinised media culture, it is fair to say that these days we fuck with our screens as much as with our bodies – and we *get* fucked according to our imbrication in highly complex social and cultural systems of value assignation or what we might call (vernacularising Bourdieu somewhat) the 'habitus of the fuckable' in Western media. The extent to which someone appears in this media habitus as 'fuckable' – and as a potential fuck-me celebrity – directly aligns with the regulatory frameworks of sexual 'hotness', which themselves follow and sustain norms of race, age, class, corporeal style, etc. Let us call the value that accrues to such celebrity the 'fuckability' quotient, or FQ, as a measure of personal value stripped down to the core question of how fuckable one is.

Unfortunately, I can't claim credit for the term 'fuckability'. The kudos there goes to Jon Stewart, ex-presenter of *The Daily Show* on Comedy Central, whose satirical analysis of the frenzied media response to Caitlyn Jenner's reveal on the front cover of the July 2015 issue of *Vanity Fair* is a suave lesson in the gender politics of celebrity. Pretending to be surprised at the normally 'awful' media's enthusiastic acceptance of Jenner as a woman, Stewart sardonically praises the various commentators for 'wast[ing] no time *treating* her as a woman' – that is, for tying the very proof of her femininity to the fact that she could, and should, now be discussed solely in terms of her looks. Against a well-chosen montage of enthusiastic

appraisals of the newly revealed Caitlyn, Stewart notes how quickly appreciation for the 'inspirational Olympian' devolves to open-mouthed ogling at her 'hotness', with phrases like 'she's so sexy it hurts' appropriately divided between women commentators feigning (or experiencing?) jealousy – 'she looks better than I do!' – and male commentators experiencing (or feigning?) arousal. Everyone is thus involved as supporting players in an orchestrated heteronormative matrix that secures Jenner's place and role as a woman. Although Stewart glosses this montage with a sardonic, 'now that you're a woman, your looks are all we really care about', the point made by the montage is about more than looks: it is quite clearly about her sexual appeal in heteronormative terms, that is, about assessing Jenner in terms of her feminine fuckability.

But there are, as Stewart notes, two further elements to Jenner's becoming-woman. What Stewart calls 'phase 2 of your transition' is comparative fuckability, that is, the level of fuck-me appeal as qualitatively or even quantitatively compared to that of other women. A female FOX commentator in the montage, for instance, asks 'the most important question: does Caitlyn have a better body than Kim Kardashian?', echoing other commentators who ask whether Jenner is 'hotter' than her ex-wife, Kris Jenner. Such quotients can only be deduced through comparison, preferably of like with like, hence the centripetal urge to assert comparisons within the Kardashian/Jenner clan. As Stewart points out, the slide into comparisons suggests that there is only so much fuckability to go around, a sum total of pie as it were, meaning that the high FQ of one female celebrity necessitates the lower(ing) FQ of another. Or, as Stewart smirks, 'it's how we keep the balance'. There are, however, two more balances in store. First, 'the caveat we were missing', according to Stewart, is the adjustment of feminine FQ based on the handicap of age. In this case, the old-Hollywood glamourisation of Jenner, courtesy of the celebrification powers of veteran photographer Annie Liebowitz, is enough to keep her FQ high and overcome the fact of her age; as a commentator notes, 'she looks good, especially for her age'. Stewart links this to Jenner's successful transition to femininity, the proof of which lies in her being *treated* as a woman – and which includes 'remind[ing] her that she has an expiration date now'. Add in, he says, 'a little slut-shaming and a dash of "anh, she's probably not that hot in person"', as media presenters comment on the effects of make-up and wonder how much of the image is photo-shopped, and the transition is complete: 'welcome to being a woman in America'.

The debut of Caitlyn Jenner, then, is a lesson in celebrity fuckability, which is to say, a lesson in how to be accepted as a woman through the im/posture of fuck-me celebrity. The definition and gender value of 'woman' here come down to being able to present oneself as fuckable, with appropriate modifications and/or makeover as required, which in turn means that fuckability can be distributed across cis as well as trans bodies. As a celebrity transwoman, however, what Jenner's successful transition exposes is that, while gender may be increasingly fluid, the place of femininity in the normative gender/power nexus remains firmly entrenched.

Fuck-you celebrity

Above all, what must be secured for a female-identified body to attain fuckability are the standards of feminine beauty, as defined and repeatedly performed by media instantiations of celebrity. Aesthetic standards relating to the body, hair, face and clothing must be met, whatever it takes, while criteria of race and age are understood to be 'natural'

limitations, less prone to successful modification and hence grounds for backhandedly complimentary discrimination (e.g. Jenner 'looks good, especially for her age'). In terms of body shape, fuckable women are expected to combine a narrow waist and taut belly with fulsome breasts (not necessarily natural) and long legs (heel-enhanced). Unquestionably, the hair must be styled into flowing locks and the face must be perfectly contoured to accentuate big eyes over sharp cheekbones and pillowy lips. While the Victoria's Secret model's size-zero shape is still the gold standard for the erotically stripped-down body, fuckability is also increasingly associated with a big booty – provided that the buttocks round out from a slim waist and belong to a white-as-possible body. As Dyer argues about Marilyn Monroe in the 1950s, '[t]o be ideal Monroe had to be white, and not just white but blonde, the most unambiguously white you can get' ([1986] 2004, p. 40). While the long, flowing locks of our era no longer strictly have to be blonde, whiteness remains a default setting of fuckability, as is evident from the 'Kardashian effect', that is, the popularisation of booty – despite its long association with non-white bodies – through the spectacularly mediated white woman (Sastre 2014). In the echo chamber of concatenated media forms, advice abounds on how to achieve these standards, whether in the form of beauty tutorials or celebrity-endorsed products, but the question of *why* one wants to achieve feminine FQ is suppressed since the premise of desirability as fuckability – and hence the aspiration to fuck-me celebrity – is a given.

There are, however, other modes of embodiment within celebrity culture that explicitly disturb, dismantle or invert the premises of fuckability. This is what I call 'fuck-you celebrity', in both senses of the term: on the one hand, the inversion of fuck-me to fuck-you implies a reversal of (sexual) agency, in the sense that *I* am doing the fucking, while, on the other hand, the rhetorical force of the 'fuck you' serves as a statement of resistance and resilience, a rejection of the feminine fuckability standards that aims to foment a revolution against them. It is this fuck-you stance that articulates a challenge to the sacredness of celebrity, not simply as a desecration which might vandalise its pretty face (Britney Spears' 2007 self-administered buzz cut immediately comes to mind), but as a desacralisation of its institutional conditions. Fuck-you celebrity profanes the sacredness of celebrity as institution by directly challenging the traditional gender/power nexus which upholds the affects and effects of celebrity worship. Fuck-you celebrity thus shifts the terms and channels of desirability, aiming primarily to *de*sublimate the desire of and for celebrity by returning it to its bedrock in fucking. Examples abound, but unsurprisingly they pop up largely on the cultural and industrial periphery, usually in media forms that are attached to subcultures and/or have lower entry thresholds than the moneyed establishments of the traditional media industries. For this reason, fuck-me and fuck-you celebrity modes have very different genealogies.

Although I will not attempt a complete excursus here, there are at least three forms of fuck-you celebrity that are relevant. The first relates to the history of the punk/goth/rebel girl, who expresses a fuck-you sensibility through wearable, inscribable and appropriable signifiers on and of her body, often juxtaposing feminine accoutrements with an aggressively anti-feminine attitude (which includes, no surprise, saying 'fuck' a lot). A foundational example here would be Courtney Love, from her 1990s' days as the lead singer of punk rock band Hole, described somewhat nostalgically by Vivian Pencz as 'a deliciously vicious fuck-up alchemizing pent-up pain and feminist rage into some of the most compelling music of her generation' (2012). Resplendent on stage at the

Glastonbury music festival in 1999, Love appeared in pale-pink bra and bright pink-sequinned short-shorts topped off by pink ballet slippers and fairy wings – a costume that symbolised the joy of reappropriating girliness as the out-of-place face for raucous guitar chords and raunchy lyrics. Not uncoincidentally, this image resonates with the height of Love's musical celebrity, shortly after the release of Hole's acclaimed third studio album, *Celebrity Skin*. Although the wistful nostalgia in Vivian Pencz's description of 1990s' Love as a 'deliciously vicious fuck-up' is a reminder that the punk/goth/rebel girl may have had her day, the tactic of yoking a desublimated girliness with fuck-you messages still prevails in bands like Pussy Riot and movements like the Pussyhat Project.

Another significant version of fuck-you celebrity, I would argue, is to be found in the increasingly visible full-figure girl, in particular, the 'plus-size' model, who explicitly challenges the body-shape standards and body-shaming tactics of the media industries that feed celebrification. One pertinent example here, amongst many, is Tess Holliday, a professional model and Instagram queen (with 1.8 million followers), who founded the Instagram movement @effyourbeautystandards in 2013 and a few years later published a memoir, *The Not So Subtle Art of Being a Fat Girl* (2017) before gracing the cover of *Cosmopolitan* magazine in October 2018. Holliday obviously takes a great deal of pleasure in being the object of the lens, whether on photo shoots or in the selfies and home snaps that she assiduously posts to her Instagram account. At the same time, by insisting on appearing in the 'sexy' poses usually reserved for fuck-me celebrity, she places herself consciously in the firing line of social media fat-shamers and 'concern trolls' (that is, people who write reproofs masquerading as care, such as 'Omg please get healthy' [impeter_parker comment on @tessholliday, 19 September 2018]). Holliday thereby turns the spectacularity of her body – complete with tattoos of other arguably fuck-you celebrity women, such as Mae West, Dolly Parton and the iconically fabulous Miss Piggy – into a political site within the habitus of the fuckable. Holliday is, moreover, very clear in her messaging to the haters: 'To the people that fight on my social media: I don't give a fuck. Get a therapist, phone a psychic or eat a fuckin' burger … grow up' (cited Hoby 2015). It is her 'I don't give a fuck' attitude that grants her fuck-you celebrity while aligning Holliday with the 'body positivity' movement. Notably, the @effyourbeautystandards Instagram account is rife with posts that celebrate a wide spectrum of embodied identities, including images not only of full-figured women but also of non-white, non-Western, non-binary, non-heteronormative and differently abled people – all of whom, presumably, feel themselves to be resonant with the 'effyou' of the hashtag.

As of 2017, however, fuck-you celebrity has been most prominently defined by women 'calling out' the men who sustain the gender/power nexus that upholds fuck-me celebrity. To do so, these women often have had to break non-disclosure agreements, which, on the one hand, materialise and monetise the gender/power nexus, while, on the other hand, they can be put to use in the celebrification of the people who break them. The woman who has become synonymous with a $130,000 pay-out in exchange for signing an NDA is Stormy Daniels, the porn star who had an affair with Donald Trump and was hushed up at the beginning of Trump's political campaign. She then revealed all in a *60 Minutes* interview with Anderson Cooper, followed by the publication of her aptly titled book, *Full Disclosure* (2018a), in which she fully disclosed the fucking that took place between her and Trump. Both the interview and the book caused concentric circles of media attention, resulting not only in Daniels becoming a household name but also in her topping Pornhub search trends

in 2018 (Hassan 2018). While Daniels insisted that her sexual encounter with a powerful man was consensual, even if she had to resign herself to it (Daniels 2018b), this is not the case for Rose McGowan, who accused Weinstein of raping her in 1997 and has since become the torch-bearer for the #metoo movement in and beyond Hollywood. In a pugilistic speech to the Women's Convention held in Detroit in late October 2017, McGowan told the cheering crowd that she 'came to be a voice for all of us who have been told we are nothing, for all of us who have been looked down on, for all of us who have been grabbed by the motherfucking pussy'; she then instructed the crowd to 'name it, shame it, call it out, join me, join all of us as we amplify each other's voices'.

Although speaking from celebrity positions in quite different industries, Daniels and McGowan have at least two things in common. First, they both speak from a stance of shamelessness, or, more accurately, from a position of rejecting the shame that they are expected to feel as the 'porn star turned other woman' and the 'rape victim', respectively. They not only embrace their hard-won shamelessness but turn the shame against the men who had been protected by their institutional power: 'name it, shame it, call it out', as McGowan encourages her audience. In the process, they each deliver a fuck-you message to the men who cornered them into fucking. Second, both of these women have rebuilt, and in the process amplified, their celebrity status, moving from fuck-me celebrity (literally in Daniel's case, given her career in pornography, and figuratively in the case of McGowan's film/TV career) to fuck-you celebrity. This (re)celebrification, morever, arises from the increase they have gained in value and visiblity by publicly talking *back* to the men who have abused them and mistaken their fuck-me im/posture.

Conclusion

The exposure of the gender/power/sex dynamics in the Weinstein celebrity-making apparatus, followed by the #metoo and Time's Up movements, appears to be radically shifting the traditional preponderance of feminine fuck-me celebrity. I have argued that fuck-me celebrity sustains the sacred character of the institution by means of sublimation, by *not* talking about what we're really talking about – namely, sex demanded by powerful men of powerless women (and sometimes men), which is then channelled via the media apparatus into libidinal gratification for audiences. Having squeezed actual sex out of the equation (by forcing it, in too many instances, behind a hotel-room door), the process of celebrification creates a mediated aura that clings to fuck-me celebrity. At the core of what is sacred about celebrity, then, is an exchange: the disempowered must bear the shame and trauma of unwanted/unwarranted sex ('I thought it was me . . . ') in exchange for the possible pay-off of auratic celebrification. Fuck-you celebrity, by contrast, rejects this shame and its traumatic internalisation. The fuck-you celebrity exposes sex and its gendered imbrication with power, desublimating the aura of celebrity even if it means accepting notoriety instead.

If the sacredness of celebrity as an institution is dependent on sublimation, then the turn to openly talking about fucking – which is what I have been doing here – is an act of desublimation and, at least in intent, an act of desacralisation. I cannot say, of course, whether scholars in future will make a distinction between pre-Weinstein and post-Weinsten celebrity, whether the very institution of celebrity is undergoing a profound desacralisation or only momentary desecration. As I write this, there are drum beats suggesting that things may be returning to 'normal', that the excision of Harvey Weinstein from the institution may allow

lesser mortals like Louis CK to return to the screen at the same time that the film *Bohemian Rhapsody* wins awards with a largely male cast that is careful not to thank the suspiciously sacked director Bryan Singer (Golden Globes, 2019). Indeed, some may well say that the power/gender/sex nexus has a terrible way of re-consecrating itself. And yet, in light of the conversations that we are and need to continue having, I remain hopeful.

Notes

1. Although Alyssa Milano promoted the #metoo hashtag apparently without realising its provenance, her failure to credit Tarana Burke, who had founded the 'Me Too' movement to help marginalised and non-white victims of sexual abuse, was taken as evidence of broader problems of structural racism. The initial erasure of Burke, who is African American, repeated a much longer history of the appropriation and silencing of black women's voices in feminist struggles, as pointed out by women of colour who started their own hashtag campaign, #WOCAffirmation. On learning of Burke's movement, Milano hastened to credit her, first via social media and then on *Good Morning, America* (see Garcia 2017).
2. Nicholson (2014) argues that on-set 'the line between reality and fiction was deliberately blurred. The couple slept in their characters' bedroom, chose the colour of the curtains, strewed their clothes on the floor, and even left pocket change on the bedside table just as Cruise did at home'. While this was presumably a tactic by Kubrick to elicit an 'authentic' performance from them, it also had the predictable effect of encouraging audiences 'to project Bill and Alice's unhappiness on [Cruise and Kidman's] own marriage, which was already a source of tabloid fodder' (Nicholson 2014, para. 8). The 'truth' of this projection seemed confirmed in hindsight when Cruise filed for divorce less than two years after filming wrapped.
3. Freud goes on to say, with what mischievous grin on his face we can only imagine, 'If thought-processes in the wider sense are to be included among these displacements, then the activity of thinking is also supplied from the sublimation of erotic motive forces' ([1923] 1995, p. 649). In other words, studying celebrity is its own form of celebrity worship, as many of us know too well.

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