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SOCIOLOGY

The Modern Celebrity as a Unique Form of Stratification

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Social strata are horizontal layers of persons occupying positions with approximately equal access to social values of communities. Every society provides a unique arrangement of social strata with respect to one another. The modern mass society is no exception. Social positions of high rank resting on notoriety—the modern celebrity—are a foundation for prominence in a manner found nowhere else.

The Celebrity as a New Dimension of Stratification: The majority of social stratification studies during the last decade fixed attention upon the small town and local urban community. The studies by Warner (1949), Hollingshead (1949), Centers (1949), the contributors to the volume by Lipset and Bendix (1953), and the recent study by Vidich and Bensmen (1958) are representative investigations. Only a few attempts like those of Mills (1956) and Baltzell (1958) have been concerned with the formation of strata within the framework of a national society. One result of this inattention to national strata has been to obscure the social ranking accorded the modern celebrity. Mills (1956) stands almost alone among social scientists in considering the location of the celebrity in the mass society, while some comparable observations about the prominence of the celebrated person have come from authors and journalists like Cleveland Amory (1961).

The professional celebrity approaches the pure case of an engineered public image supported by a manufactured reputation. Whatever the celebrity does or plans to do has news value. Nothing, perhaps, is a greater testimony to the emergence of such national recognition than the appearance of the *Celebrity Register* (1961). This is a listing of personalities constantly before the public eye. It is not an index of persons whose high social rank is located in achievement or in ascribed status. The critical governing test for inclusion is notoriety.

Although the *Celebrity Register* appeared for the first time in 1960, several partially successful listings of celebrated personalities had preceded it. As early as the

* The present data were collected in Spring, 1961. I wish to express my gratitude to Professor Don Martindale of the University of Minnesota who was consulted on problems arising during the study.

1920's gossip columnists made their appearance, reporting to their audiences through large syndicated newspapers. Distinctions were drawn between "Cafe Society" and members of the old metropolitan upper classes. As the distinction became a focus for new status claims, a few columnists (the most notable being Maury Paul and Frank Crowninshield) enacted the role of special social arbiter, providing lists of acquaintances or potential acquaintances. With increasing clamor for shares in the new arena of prominence, the clubs and cafes became a forum for the distribution of new social honors. Ever since, the idea that Cafe Society is a way of life founded on publicity has served as a basic reference point.

The local reference to metropolitan areas was dropped with the crystallization of channels for gaining and sustaining national notoriety. Contributing to this organization is a vast network of amateur shows, booking agencies, talent scouts, night-club circuits, sports arenas, public relations agencies and studio build-ups. In parallel with these developments is the apparatus of the large scale corporations which serve in the creation of favorable consumption images for their products, their primary officers, and the organization itself. In 1953, when a list of the "New 400" was produced by one columnist, it contained not only "professional" celebrities, but members of the older metropolitan upper classes and notable leaders of business, government, science and education. (Cassini, 1953).

The *Celebrity Register* claims in its introduction that it is not an index of prominence through ascription or an index of prominence through achievement, so that the book represents not "Society" at all but "Celebrity". The compendium denotes the celebration of accomplishment in the sense of popular, or highly publicized, temporary success. Whatever their origin or occupation, the well-known man or woman—the name "name"—is likely to be included.

A Sample of Modern Celebrities: The present report is part of a larger study concerned with the emergence of new social strata (Althouse, 1961). It involves persons located only in the Boston and Philadelphia metropolitan areas. The samples were taken from the *Celebrity*

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Register and exhaust the complete population of celebrities denoted in these two cities. The immediate problem is to examine the sample properties.

The celebrity's social prominence is related to publicized success or accomplishment above the ordinary organization of human conduct. In Philadelphia and Boston two general types were discerned. First, there were professional celebrities which included personalities in the arts, stars of the entertainment industries, champions of sports, and elites of mass communications. The second major category included celebrities in major institutional hierarchies which were formed by notable figures in the worlds of business, government and education (see Table 1). Professional celebrities make up the largest proportion of Philadelphians, while the majority of notable personalities in Boston are fixed in institutional hierarchies. About 6 persons in every 10 in Boston and some 3 in every 10 in Philadelphia are located in such major institutional arrangements. The heavy weighting of institutionally located celebrities in Boston is in considerable measure related to the high esteem of Harvard and MIT and the recruitment policies for these two schools. In both cities about a fourth of the sample is associated with the arts and another fourth is located in business or government. Main variations in occupational structure of the sample are largely explained by the unique historical and organizational development of the two cities.

TABLE 1. Occupational Distribution of Bostonians and Philadelphians in the Celebrity Register.

Occupation	Boston		Philadelphia	
	No.	%	No.	%
Business	7	14	4	15
Communications*	2	4	4	15
Independent Professionals	3	6	1	3
Clergymen	1	2	—	—
Educators	14	27	—	—
Artists*	12	23	7	26
Government and Military	6	12	3	11
Entertainment*	6	12	8	29
Totals:	51	100%	27	100%

* Indicates categories grouped as professional celebrities.

However, it is the mode of activity an individual performs continuously, or an occasion, in some occupation that warrants the claim to notoriety. Achieving the top positions in large organizations is not especially significant to a bid for a share of such prominence, although it may mean the possibility to bid for such identification in some cases. Primarily, when men capture the public imagination as spokesmen or representatives for modern business or for government and military power, their policies are lauded, their actions esteemed. It is the person characteristically moving in uncertain areas or breaking through the routinized pattern of organizational activity who is quite likely to be a celebrated figure. In a similar way, the educator as intellectual spokesman on contemporary issues and delineated solutions is apt to become another character in the panorama celebrated in the new

arena of honor. All of them will share the spotlight with the professional celebrity.

The elements of notoriety are symbolic credentials to the individual. They are items of personal identity which differentiate the celebrity from the masses of men and from their professional or vocational confreres (Martindale, 1960: 61-66). With remarkable consistency, each

TABLE 2. Key Elements of Notoriety of a Selection of Boston and Philadelphia Celebrities.

Occupational Grouping	Elements of Notoriety
<i>Business:</i>	
Ernest Henderson	President of the Sheraton Corporation — Yankee Trader in hotels.
Serge Semenenko	Financial angel of the movies — a figure in Cafe Society.
William Levitt	A leader in the housing revolution and the pillar of the "General Motors" of the housing industry.
Joseph N. Pew Jr.	Republican financial angel, oil-baron and fourth richest man in the U.S.
A. M. Sonnabend	The "marrying Sam" of the corporation merger business.
<i>Communications:</i>	
Walter Annenberg	One of the "Lords of the Press" and head of Triangle Publishers.
Ben Hibbs	The "modernizing editor" of the <i>Saturday Evening Post</i> .
<i>Independent Professionals:</i>	
Sara Jordan	"Nip and nap" remedy of digestive ailments for her famous clients.
Joseph Welch	Counsel for the Army in the '54 hearings and the "perfect foil" to Joe McCarthy.
<i>Educators:</i>	
P. W. Bridgeman	Nobel Prize physicist—"the philosopher's scientist."
David Reisman	The lawyer turned social scientist who found the <i>Lonely Crowd</i> .
A. Schlesinger, Jr.	Controversial Pulitzer prize historian from Harvard.
Paul Tillich	The architect of New Protestantism.
<i>Artists and Authors:</i>	
Conrad Aiken	Prize winning author-critic and "poet of creative dissolutionment."
Arthur Fiedler	Conductor of the Boston Symphony Pops Concert since 1930.
James Michener	Pulitzer prize novelist who renovated the image of the Orient.
Walter Piston	The leader of the American Neo-classical movement.
Edmund Wilson	The Dean of American literary criticism.
<i>Government:</i>	
W. Curtis Bok	Defender of freedom to print—celebrated opinion on obscenity.
Joseph Clark, Jr.	Silk-stocking Republican turned Democrat and U.S. Senator from Pennsylvania.
James Gavin	Critic of American defense planning, ex-paratrooper hero General.
<i>Entertainment:</i>	
Tenley Albright	Youthful winner of figure skating championships.
John Crawford	The Philadelphia Gentlemen world's champion at cards.
Dick Clark	Dictator of pop songs in the pony-tail set—his word is law.
Ted Williams	The "Hamlet of Baseball."

publicized biography is woven to intensify its public consumption. A few examples will highlight the main elements of notoriety (see Table 2).

A man repeatedly in the news, A. M. Sonnabend's speciality is merging an ailing company with a thriving one. Called the "marrying Sam" of the corporation merger business, Sonnabend speculated in real estate, becoming one of the largest apartment house owners in Boston. Next a series of hotels was organized, and a restaurant chain added in. Since 1954 Sonnabend has gained control over the American Hotel Corporation, Childs Company, Botany Mills, Consolidated Retail Stores, the operations of Studebaker-Packard, and a dozen or more subsidiaries of these firms.

Curtis Bok, a Pennsylvania judge, was lifted to prominence through his celebrated opinion on the question of obscenity in printed literature. Described as "an American Montaigne" with a strong Quaker tincture, he contends in his several books that vindictive measures do not halt crime.

Among educators a person like James Killian emerged as national news when he was appointed the President's Special Assistant on Science and Technology, during the crisis precipitated by the Russian Sputnik in 1957. Others like Bridgeman, Bush, Shapely and Wiener are penmen for the scientific solution to international issues, Tillich has offered a new faith to the new modern man, and Peter Viereck's "conservative manifestoes" also reflect attempted solutions to present problems confronting the psychological existence of modern man.

Popular figures associated with the world of sports are men such as Joe Cronin and Bert Bell — examples of "big league" executive eminence. Cronin became American League President after an applauded career as player and manager. His election to the executive position was a major sports story in 1959. Bell was the iron-handed commissar of the National Football League since 1946. Others like Tenley Albright skated to sports stardom by being the first American to win the Worlds Ladies Figure Skating championship in 1953, while John Crawford is a combination of boast, old family and championship bridge, gin and canasta.

In the artists world notable conductors like Ormandy and Munch or authors like James Michener and Cathrine Drinker Bowen are representative. Other influential name "names" of high ranking prominence are Edmund Wilson, Conrad Aiken, and Robert Frost.

The preceding examples represent highly summarized formulas of the personalities of modern celebrities. The mass publics hold communion with their vicarious images and identify with their identities. The celebrities, on the other hand, stake new claims for the use of their influence, running a zig-zag course across the structural scrimmage lines drawn in the past (Cogley, 1956). The news value of the name, not achievement or family status, provides the foundation for the celebrity. As an elaborate image accumulates around the name, the name carries influence by itself.

Whatever an individual does to become a celebrity,

such activities are usually initiated within some chosen vocation. As a matter of fact, they may display considerable accomplishment in vocational tasks. Yet to be lifted into the world of the celebrity means notoriety. In considerable measure this is reflected in the relationship between the level of education and the type of celebrity. Professions like medicine and education demand a college training. Occupations in modern business and government are more accessible with college education. However, other occupations like those in sports and entertainment industries can be secured without formal training. About 68% of the Bostonians and some 74% of the Philadelphians have received college training, yet two-thirds of all professional celebrities without college are in entertainment. Only about 5% of the institutionally located celebrities have not attended college.

TABLE 3. College Education of Boston and Philadelphia Celebrities as related to Major Occupational Types.

Education	Boston N = 51		Philadelphia N = 27	
	Professional	Institutional	Professional	Institutional
College	70%	96%	68%	88%
No College Listed	30	4	32	12
Total:	120%	100%	100%	100%

A similar association between occupational type and private school background does exist, although only one-third of the sample in either city note such private schooling. Celebrities located in business and government show this background most strongly — just over 50% — while 14% of the professional celebrities denoted some private schooling.

This evidence on educational background seems to support the contention that for at least the professional celebrity a highway of mobility like education can be bypassed. A successful bid for entry into the charmed circle of the celebrity can be made without a command of the current standards of education demanded for the ordinary organization of personal careers.

Another characteristic which indicates considerable similarity in distribution is age. By and large, the professional celebrities fall into younger age cohorts, the institutionally located celebrity into the older age groupings. However, there is no absolute dichotomy of the two categories. The artist and musician are apt to be older than their celebrated counterparts in sports and theater, and, again, the notable intellect or scientist may be as well known at forty as another scholar is at sixty. Between 30 to 40% of all professional types were below fifty years, while nearly 90% of all those located in major institutional hierarchies were more than fifty years old. Some 40 to 50% of those persons fixed in institutional structures were 65 or over. Such broad variability indicates that notoriety lifts a person to prominence at any age.

Finally, about three-fifths of the celebrities were originally from the East. Of these about 35% were native Bostonians and Philadelphians. The Midwest region pro-

TABLE 4. Age Cohorts of Celebrated Bostonians and Philadelphians as related to Occupational Type.

Age Cohorts	Boston N = 51		Philadelphia N = 27	
	Professional	Institutional	Professional	Institutional
Under 40	10%	1%	16%	0%
49-49	20	13	21	0
50-64	35	36	47	62
Over 65	35	50	16	38
Totals:	100%	100%	100%	100%

vided a slightly larger group than expected. The South, however, was extremely under-represented. While biographical description provides more complete accounts of the circumstances surrounding immigration, it is worthwhile noting that at least 16% of the persons commanding prominence were not native to the United States. This latter group is represented particularly among educators and artists.

Some Contrasts with Older Dimensions of Prominence: Social Prominence entails access to the community's values, however, in modern complex society the forms of prominence are specialized. At least three special dimensions are clear: first, there is the prominence of the modern celebrity fixed by notoriety; second, there is ascribed prominence resting on family status; third, there is the social prominence attained through outstanding achievements. Each form of prominence is recognized by a formalized index. The *Social Register* (1961) is made up of persons with high family status, while *Who's Who* is taken to represent individuals with high social rank because of their achievements. The relationship of the *Celebrity Register* and notoriety has been discussed already.

Begun in 1887, the *Social Register* is the oldest of the present day published devices for recording social prominence in the United States. It is said to be an attempt to blend well known old families and prominent new wealthy families into a single acceptable list. Since it offers documentary evidence of arrival into high ranking social strata, the families listed are accorded social prominence. One sociologist insists that it lists a new, associational, national upper class (Baltzell, 1958:386-96). To the outsider, the *Social Register* in which members of high ranked families are listed is a certification of social prominence. Like the club hatband or style of clothes worn as symbols of status, a listing may come to mean "I am a gentleman patented after investigation and probation and guaranteed of my membership." (Weber, 1946:308).

Who's Who (1960) denotes peers in achieved prominence. For a person to be included means he is one of three people in 10,000 who has become recognized as a national figure. It does not confer status, but merely recognizes prominence.

The index emerged in the period when the railroads, public utilities, and great new national industrial trusts were forged. From the outset *Who's Who* has been keyed to national developments and the forms of prominence associated with it. It was perceived by its founder and continues to be understood by its editors as a national

compendium of prominence, concerned with those men and women who are making history for the nation, creating and leading the people in all the innumerable useful and reputable efforts most representative of the country (*Who's Who*, 1960).

Some comparisons between the three indices will clearly indicate significant contrasts. (For a discussion of the theory and method of the study, see Althouse, 1961:-113-15.) When occupational categories are compared in terms of the indexes of stratification it is evident that different forms of prominence are recognized. Occupations classed under Major Institutional Hierarchies are business, military and government, education, clergy, independent professions, labor leaders, while those included as Modern Mass Occupations are entertainment, sports, communications and the arts.

TABLE 5. Occupational Type as related to Type of Index of Stratification.

Type Occupation In Individuals Listed in	Celebrity Register	Who's Who	Social Register
Major Institutional Hierarchies	50.0%	89.1%	95.7%
Modern Mass Occupations	50.0	10.9	4.3
Totals:	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Some 50% of the *Celebrity Register* sample are in modern mass-type occupations, but only 11% of the *Who's Who* group and less than 5% of those in the *Social Register* are associated with such occupations. Closer examination reveals that whereas 42% of the celebrity group have developed major careers in entertainment and the arts, less than 4% of those in *Who's Who* and about 1% of those with *Social Register* background are in these vocations. On the other hand, about 63% of the *Social Register* and 41% of the *Who's Who* samples, contrasted with 14% of the celebrities, are connected with business careers. Of those persons fixed in business organizations, more than 60% of the *Social Registerites* are involved in banking and investment, compared with 26% of the achievers in *Who's Who* and about 2% of the celebrities. That different occupational characteristics are recognized is vividly demonstrated.

Although more than 80% of all three samples have some college training, variability between the groups is qualitatively different. About nine-tenths of those with ascribed family prominence are Ivy League trained. On the other hand, just over half of the college trained celebrities and *Who's Who* group have noted an Ivy league background. Further demonstration of this difference is shown in that some two-thirds of the *Social Register* sample have private school background—a good proportion in highly esteemed institutions—while about two-fifths of the *Who's Who* sample and less than one-third of the celebrities received private training in special surrogate organizations of this sort.

Additional to such differences in basic characteristics, the modes of affiliation between individuals listed in the different indexes stand out in relief. For example, the metropolitan men's club, modelled after the older Eng-

lish social clubs, facilitate intimate association among high ranking strata. By and large, the men listed in the *Social Register* share the greatest interest in sustaining membership and control over these clubs. However, this form of association is important among persons listed in *Who's Who* where careers have been built predominantly within major institutional structures. Nine of every 10 persons in the *Social Register* compared with some 5 of every 10 in *Who's Who* have listed at least one membership in a prominent social club. On the other hand, club membership appears unimportant to the creation of a celebrity. The strategy for notoriety is not worked out through proper association with the right club but "a high powered celebrity society runs rampant on a field of cocktail parties" and spotlighted cliques.

Other characteristics as age, region of origin, directive and executive offices, association with cultural, social, and welfare groups provide similar distinctions. It therefore appears that different dimensions of prominence are recognized by the several compendiums observed.

Summary: Stratification theory has been in ferment in recent years. While the social strata in smaller communities have grown less important in the modern society, new strata appear to be in the process of formation. Some recent studies have been concerned with the sources of power on a nation-wide level, and these analyses provided evidence of new dimensions of prominence.

The present report highlights some of the characteristics associated with one especially unique dimension in the process of crystallization. At no other time in history has notoriety provided the basis for the formation of a distinctive elite strata. This, however, seems to be occurring in our present society.

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