

**'Getting It'.
Working with celebrity involvement in good causes overseas.**

Dan Brockington; University of Manchester.
dan.brockington@manchester.ac.uk

Summary

Most of us 'get' celebrity – at least we think we do. Celebrity pervades our media, social interactions and every day lives whether we want it to or not. But what is actually involved when celebrities work with NGOs? How are the relationships negotiated, and the interactions developed? How do NGOs initiate and build support among celebrity circles? How do they work with agents, publicists and managers? What are the constraints that NGOs face, and how do they cope with the interest of corporates in getting access to celebrity? This paper answers some of those questions on the basis of more than 90 interviews with different actors in the NGO and celebrity sectors, and with journalists, based largely in the US and UK. In the process it also sheds light on another issue dogging the interactions between celebrity and NGOs, namely their authenticity. I argue that there are several different reasons for claiming authenticity, and that all claims must be well performed, as well as actually exist, to be credible.

The paper seeks to draw out some common trends and themes from across the interviews, rather than draw out differences. As such it merges and blends extracts from as many difference voices as possible from the different interviews. This risks rendering different experiences homogenous and for that reason (and because I wanted to communicate what I have learnt) I have already sent the first iteration of this paper to interviewees for comment. Their responses were favourable. They did recognize the themes that I have drawn out and none suggested that this paper suppressed differences that should be drawn out.

The purpose of this draft is to communicate these findings, and to elicit further comment and critique. It is deliberately devoid of academic references in order to make it accessible to as large an audience as possible. Please let me know what you make of it.

Introduction

The intensification of interactions between the celebrity industry and development NGOs (indeed all NGOs) in recent years begs an important question: how, practically speaking, has this happened? What are charities and NGOs doing now, that they were not before, that allows such close relationships with public figures to develop? A succinct answer to this query was presented in an early interview with an employee of a talent agency in Hollywood. I was told that not all NGOs can work with talent but the ones that do are distinguished by a key attribute: 'they get it'.¹ This was intriguing, but not enlightening. What could it mean? I reached out to a couple of celebrity liaison

¹ Source 3.

Research Paper 1. ESRC Fellowship RES -70-27-0035

officers² to see if they could explain the secret – what made for effective interactions between talent and NGOs? Again the answers were simple: ‘I get it, I get the relationship’³ said one; the other clarified that, for those involved, ‘by and large everybody . . . gets it’.⁴

Not everybody. They may have been getting it, but I certainly was not. I am not particularly intuitive, and clearly not very good at interviewing, and these handicaps were frustrating my ability to understand how, in practical terms, this flourishing of interactions between the celebrity sector and different NGOs had been worked out on the ground. I had a new quest: I wanted to ‘get it’.

I turned to the written authorities. There is one such explanation by someone famous, to the non-famous, about how to these relationships must be handled:

‘Don't you remember the rules I taught you?’ he said. ‘Hmmm? Friends of the famous? You have to recognize the boundaries. You must accept the inequality without drawing attention to it. Don't behave like a member of the public. Don't stare, don't look around the room for the famous ones and make a beeline, don't put them on the spot, don't demand famous-person favours, reassure, don't lecture . . . you're an old friend now, so you make them feel loyal. You do something non-media so you make them feel deep.’⁵

However there are two problems with this account. First, it is fictional. It comes from Helen Fielding's first novel *Cause Celeb*.⁶ It has some authority in that she had been spending a good deal of time working and filming with public figures for Comic Relief in the early 1990s. Nevertheless this conversation probably did not take place. The more significant issue, however, is that while these interactions may occur among individuals they are not actually that important. What matters is not these forms of interpersonal interaction but how the demands and needs of the organisations, as well as the people, on both sides of the relationship are handled.

In the pages below I have explained what I think ‘getting it’ entails and how the relationships between NGOs and public figures are formed and managed. This report is based on over 90 interviews with celebrity liaison officers of NGOs within and without the development sector in the UK and North America, with press and campaigning officers in the same, with journalists, with agents and publicists and other researchers. The bulk of the interviews have been conducted within the NGO sector, where I have spoken with people who have, in the course of careers spanning from the 1970s until the present, worked in over 100 NGOs, large and small. I have rendered all interviewees, and their organisations anonymous. A preliminary draft has been sent to all whose interviews contributed to my thinking, and the responses I received from those who

² Celebrity Liaison Officers are rarely called that, they are High Profile Personality Managers, Talent Liaison Officers or Artist Liaison Officers, but the shorthand will suffice for this paper.

³ Source 35.

⁴ Source 37.

⁵ Fielding 1994: 210.

⁶ The same Helen Fielding who went on to write *Bridget Jones Diary* and experience some of the Hollywood lifestyle her first book portrays.

Research Paper 1. ESRC Fellowship RES -70-27-0035

read it encouraged me to think that it is an accurate representation of what 'getting it' entails.

Writing this paper has had an unexpected consequence. In seeking to explain how celebrity interventions in development causes come about I have found, to my surprise, that this paper also provides some insights into the rather heated debate about the legitimacy and authenticity of these interventions. Let me summarise this argument briefly. A key criticism of celebrity interventions is that they are not authentic, they are somehow superficial, not real. All the people I spoke to who produce these interventions shared that concern. They dislike sham. They combine that concern, however, with two others. Not only must interventions with which they work be authentic, *they must also appear to be so*, and ideally, the relationships upon which these interventions are based must deepen, *they must become more authentic* over time. Authenticity therefore is not something which is given in the character, history, interest and expertise of the public figures who get involved in good causes. Instead it is constructed, negotiated and mediated over time and between people and institutions.

This position is likely to offend two groups of people on each side of the debate about the legitimacy of celebrity interventions. First, for critics of celebrity, what matters is not appearance but substance. Any claim to authenticity which is based on representation is therefore illegitimate. To such critics I would reply that the paradox of working with celebrity and good causes is that it is only as a result of extensive representation and mediation that the authenticity of these associations can be recognised at all. Second, the people producing celebrity interventions already know how real and substantial the concerns of their famous colleagues are. They may object to any account that focuses on the representation of that concern rather than its reality. Again I would reply that my account of how the relationships are constructed and negotiated between NGOs and public figures is no denial of the authenticity of the motivations, energy and enthusiasms that motivate both groups. Rather, and this is the key, I have sought to clarify what authenticity means, what forms of authenticity are desired and how claims to authenticity, can, practically speaking, be made in the public realm. This paper can be seen as mapping out how the problems of artifice and superficiality are combatted by protagonists deeply embedded in the construction of representations.

The argument has a particular implication for the associations that are forged between public figures and development causes. A frequent criticism of these associations is that they are inauthentic because the public figure does not understand enough about the development situations to speak out.⁷ By this the critics mean that public figures do not have sufficient intellectual or personal knowledge of poor people and places (expert or experiential authority) to speak. But authenticity claims are not often made on such bases. Rather, the negotiations and mediations which construct authenticity are based on complex, and not always consistent, mixes of expert authority, experiential authority, sympathy, empathy and affinity (I define these terms in the closing pages). The work of celebrity liaison in development organisations (and others) requires representing these

⁷ This is an abiding theme of Marine Hyde's criticism of celebrity activism in her Guardian columns and one of the criticisms that clearly wounded Bob Geldof in his long and unguarded response to the documentary *Starsuckers* (<http://www.starsuckersmovie.com/resource/document/Letter-from-Bob-Geldof.pdf> viewed 5/7/11).

Research Paper 1. ESRC Fellowship RES -70-27-0035

diverse authenticity claims, and coping with the contrary forces which can jeopardise these claims

I realize that one of the outcomes of this paper is that, ironically, some readers may well think that I lack the authority (both varieties), empathy or affinity with celebrity interactions to be able to speak on this issue at all. Be that as it may. It is, I think, a sympathetic account, in that its primary goal is to understand how these relations with public figures are forged, and under what constraints. It does not seek to make any judgment as to the consequences of these relationships.

The paper proceeds as follows:

- first, I explore how approaches to public figures are made;
- second, I examine how the relationships thus initiated are developed, maintained and deepened over the long run;
- third, I examine the needs and requirements of working with the celebrity industry;
- fourth, I consider the influence of corporate interest, and
- finally I focus on the thorny issue of authenticity.

Approaching the Famous

The authenticity issue is present right from the start of any relationship between NGOs and public figures: 'there's got to be a relevance when you approach someone'.⁸ When the media's attention is turned to that figure 'they need to be able to establish why they are there'.⁹ If they get that right, then the reporting, and reception, is likely to be favourable. What works well therefore is 'somebody having a genuine connection with the issue we are trying to put through'.¹⁰

When NGOs approach public figures for support therefore (and it is almost always that way round), they have to have worked out how 'their artists [are] going to have credibility and relevance'.¹¹ NGOs, and especially celebrity liaison officers have to control their colleagues such that they do not just seek celebrity for the sake of it for 'where they just want celebrity there is no real impact, no real role for them, no real relevance to the cause'.¹² When agents approach NGOs asking them to take on public figures as patrons or supporters then, if the connection is not there, these relationships have been discouraged or refused.¹³

Relevance is not given. It has to be recognized, and then realized (ie brought into effect) by the NGOs, the public figures and those surrounding them. In the first instance this can require that liaison officers know the field, who is out there in the public eye, and what they are interested in and will respond to well. This takes a good deal of work and

⁸ Source 35.

⁹ Source 35.

¹⁰ Source 37.

¹¹ Source 51.

¹² Source 51.

¹³ Sources 9, 27, 34, 45, 51, 53.

effort exploring people's backgrounds and interests as well as contemporary gossip.¹⁴ As one put it: 'my job is to read everything'.¹⁵ The Red Pages, which provides contact details for some 30,000 public figures, began listing celebrity ailments and charitable interests in the early 2000s precisely in order to improve the value of their list to NGO clients. Tracking people before making an 'ask' (a request for action or assistance) can take longer than a year.¹⁶ It is one of the continual struggles of the job for all but the most prestigious NGOs that so often all the work can fall at the first hurdle. Public figures, their agents and contacts, can receive hundreds of requests weekly to work for free for good causes. They refuse or ignore the vast majority; a thick skin is required to cope with all the refusal.¹⁷ Avoiding an instant rejection requires 'pitching something that they might be interested in and . . . that means doing lots of research'.¹⁸

The increasing numbers of NGOs jostling for the attention of public figures has made successful first requests harder to get.¹⁹ There are coping strategies. The UN agencies, for example, meet quarterly to ensure that they are not approaching the same people with different requests.²⁰ The celebrity liaison officer's forum in the UK can serve a similar purpose. Agents' response to all this attention does not make these initial requests any easier, although it is understandable given the multitude of requests coming in. I was told more than once by agents that their standard advice to their clients is that the clients should chose up to three organisations with which they would work for up to 12 days a year (or 2-3 asks per organisation).²¹ This practice makes it easier for the agents to handle, and to refuse, all the other asks from other organisations which are coming in.

Developing the Relationship

Once a public figure has offered some form of support to NGOs it becomes possible to build and develop relationships with them. This is, perhaps, the hallmark of the professional approach to working with talent which has become widespread within NGOs in only the last decade. Some of the liaison officers with whom I spoke were the first to hold their positions, and they observed that the first thing they had to do was to turn what had been incidental fragmented encounters between their organisation and public figures into more lasting relationships.²² The common goal

'is to avoid having . . . ad-hoc celebrities doing bits and pieces for you which doesn't really form any longevity of work together and is not coming from an authentic place because it is all a bit on the surface. People sense that and there is no genuine feel about it.'²³

¹⁴ Sources 9, 26, 35, 37, 74, 81.

¹⁵ Source 9.

¹⁶ Source 45.

¹⁷ Source 76.

¹⁸ Source 35.

¹⁹ Sources 23, 53, 73, 75, 78.

²⁰ Source 85.

²¹ Sources 23, 35.

²² Sources 65, 71, 77.

²³ Source 69.

Research Paper 1. ESRC Fellowship RES -70-27-0035

As one put it, the liaison officer's role is to 'stay in their lives'.²⁴

There are a number of common ways across the NGO sector of staying in people's lives. Liaison officers are writing bespoke newsletters, sending thank you cards, birthday cards, flowers and sometimes small gifts. They report back the outcome of fundraising ventures and what the funds gained could be, or had been spent on. They provide updates on the welfare of people or projects encountered in the field.²⁵

The asks themselves can constitute one of the means of maintaining and developing relationships where they allow more personal contact, interaction time and all the other things healthy relationships required. Some organisations deliberately designed publicity events as opportunities to initiate or develop relationships with public figures. One liaison officer said 'I'll create situations where talent can come learn about something'.²⁶ Another was 'working to invent' more domestic events to develop their relationships with public figures rather than waiting for the right sort of international trip to become possible.²⁷ Others designed gradations of events specifically to initiate and then deepen relationships.²⁸ Sometimes the only value of lighter asks is the longer term engagements they can lead to: 'the only use of the photo and a quote is as part of a . . . planned engagement programme with an individual celebrity.'²⁹

One of the problems facing smaller organisations is precisely that they are not able to generate the right sort of meetings to which public figures want to come and at which associations are nurtured:

'It is difficult when you work for a small charity to provide the range of things to .. keep people's interests up. Apart from going and taking them to different countries . . . if you are a much more of a . . . smaller focus agency then you find it difficult to think . . . what is . . . the next stage of their journey with us . . . It was easy at [organisation A] . . . there were always events going on. . . so you could always keep people involved . . . you know you wanted someone to keep their involvement on and therefore you could invite them to open something or come to something . . . at a smaller agency that is much more difficult, you don't have those kind of on-going things which you can get them to so you are working much harder . . . to find things which allow you to maintain that relationship with people which is really important as otherwise they forget you and move on.'³⁰

Where organisations manage larger stables of public figures then part of the challenge was thinking up the right sort of event which would be keep them busy and involved. This is especially true when public figures they work with are becoming decreasingly famous.³¹ Agents representing struggling famous supporters have been known to

²⁴ Source 45.

²⁵ Sources 14, 23, 37, 67, 70, 71, 77, 86.

²⁶ Source 61.

²⁷ Source 37.

²⁸ Sources 26.

²⁹ Source 35.

³⁰ Source 48.

³¹ Source 34.

Research Paper 1. ESRC Fellowship RES -70-27-0035

remind liaison officers that their client has not been approached to do anything for a while.³² Failing to include apparently fading stars is risky as:

‘half the trick is always maintaining relationships with everyone as if they are at the height of their career because you never know what these people are going on to go on to do.’³³

‘you spend a lot of time . . . keeping in touch with people that aren’t doing much at the moment and you cannot really use at the moment for that reason and there is not really the interest in them and suddenly they’ll get in a soap and then you don’t have access to them because they are too busy . . . but you have to keep engaged with them throughout that time, because its so fickle and up and down you can’t afford to . . . drop someone when they are not really doing much you have to keep in touch or invite them to smaller things if you can or get them involved in something happening locally.’³⁴

Fixing events to meet the needs of the talent matters a great deal for those NGOs (generally outside the development sector) who work with the more fleetingly famous public figures such as reality TV stars, where credibility and relevance is harder to establish. One such was able to build a good relationship with an agency representing those celebrities because they ‘had some events which . . . [they] could match those supporters to . . . like shopping events . . . where there was the right fit’.³⁵

For many development organisations a key component of relationship building, both with public figures and the contacts that surround them, was the field trip overseas. The field trips serve three purposes. First for the public figures, the trips can be ‘life changing’³⁶ where the public figures on them ‘get converted’³⁷ or ‘get the religion’³⁸:

‘If we can get someone to the field and work around their interests and availability, without a doubt most people find it’s a really moving, engaging and inspiring experience’.³⁹

They are so partly simply because public figures experience the culture shock of being in a poor country and their own reduced circumstances while there.⁴⁰

‘you are not staying in the Four Seasons and waking at noon and what not, you’re up at the crack of dawn [and] you might not have . . . electricity or a pot to piss in’.⁴¹

³² Sources 9, 14.

³³ Source 76.

³⁴ Source 37.

³⁵ Source 76. A shopping event is when a charity takes over a major store (or part of it) for a short time; staffs it and is rewarded with a share of the proceeds of the takings for that period. They use public figures, for example as shop assistants, to drum up interest, footfall and sales.

³⁶ Source 37.

³⁷ Source 34.

³⁸ Source 8.

³⁹ Source 85.

⁴⁰ Sources 26, 76, 85.

⁴¹ Source 85.

Research Paper 1. ESRC Fellowship RES -70-27-0035

It is partly because,

‘everything [in the briefings] will be absolutely reinforced in the most simple black and white way when you go on a trip’.⁴²

‘It enables the people that we work with to speak from personal experience versus trying to memorise a bunch of facts and figures.’⁴³

Second, extending the first, is the effect of this experience on the relationship between the public figures and the organisation:

‘there are just so many examples that I could give you of the difference that a trip like that makes to a celebrity and just in terms of really engaging them and really cementing the relationship.’⁴⁴

Field trips allow for quality time spent with the liaison officers and public figures at a time when these figures are also rapidly changing their world view.⁴⁵

Third, field trips provide the proving ground where relationships between public figures and good causes face their ultimate test – the authenticity test demanded by sceptical publics. Field trips allow

‘each of our [public figures] to establish an area of expertise . . . in order to create a credible voice for an issue that they are passionate about’.⁴⁶

Coping with the difficult circumstances of a field trip ‘provides huge credibility to the role’.⁴⁷ When public figures handle interviews they can speak with so more conviction and ease, they are able to tell stories of people they met, adding much more colour.⁴⁸ Such spokespeople ‘absolutely have to see the work for themselves’.⁴⁹

Field trips can go wrong. The public figure can fail to connect with the people they meet, or cope with the shock of their new circumstances; they can place unreasonable demands on the time of country offices, and they can be poorly portrayed in the press coverage which results.⁵⁰ Memories of these trips still echo around the celebrity liaison and press communities, if not in the public mind.⁵¹ Sometimes field trips are conducted in private, to nurture the affinity between the organisation and the public figure in question.⁵² This is however rare, for some form of publicity is usually required to justify

⁴² Source 74

⁴³ Source 85.

⁴⁴ Source 53

⁴⁵ Sources 37, 85.

⁴⁶ Source 85.

⁴⁷ Source 85.

⁴⁸ Source 53, 74.

⁴⁹ Source 53.

⁵⁰ Sources 25, 26, 29, 31 and 56.

⁵¹ Source 77.

⁵² Source 51.

Research Paper 1. ESRC Fellowship RES -70-27-0035

any trip.⁵³ Besides part of the skill is precisely to avoid problematic publicity through the getting the trip right – negotiating the trips with the field staff who will be the immediate hosts of any visit, inviting the right journalist and communicating effectively with the public figures themselves.⁵⁴ An good liaison officer will be able to cultivate the right relationships with the celebrity and their own NGO and the right connections in the public mind through carefully designed trips which are tailored to meet the interests and concerns of the public figures in question.⁵⁵

Ultimately, successful relationship building hinges on treating public figures as human beings. The fact that they donate their time, and often cover their own costs to boot, makes them effectively major donors-in-kind and they need to be treated as other such donors are and engaged personally by the causes they support.⁵⁶ This means that just asking for things without adequate involvement in the causes could leave public figures feeling ‘prostituted out’.⁵⁷ They want relationships with NGOs which matter and which can be nurtured over time. The associations have to feel authentic for the public figures too.

It also requires complete discretion given the access NGOs acquire to publicly intriguing lives.⁵⁸ One organisation had a specific event where

‘we did not have the press there so [the public figures] could really relax and just enjoy themselves, and be individuals rather than .. feel like it was work’.⁵⁹

It could also mean, paradoxically, ignoring any claim for special treatment that their special treatment might occasion:

‘You have to approach this person as a dedicated volunteer and you have to just be grateful for whatever inch they give you, whatever dime they give you. That is the appropriate response with any donor’.⁶⁰

‘I personally .. see them as human beings and valued supporters .. To me our celebrity supporters are very very valued individuals’.⁶¹

Developing strong relationships also requires negotiating two significant constraints. First it requires understanding the instability and uncertainty that defines the lifestyles of many public figure’s professions. Simply put, they often cannot say for whom they will be working, or where, next week. A job may become suddenly available that can ruin the most carefully laid plans by NGOs with which they enjoy close relations.⁶²

⁵³ Sources 14, 76.

⁵⁴ Source 26.

⁵⁵ Source 35.

⁵⁶ Source 35, 70, 71.

⁵⁷ Source 21.

⁵⁸ Source 23.

⁵⁹ Source 76.

⁶⁰ Source 55.

⁶¹ Source 53.

⁶² Sources 14, 21, 35, 37, 45, 49.

Research Paper 1. ESRC Fellowship RES -70-27-0035

‘Especially at the higher echelons of talent their agents are continually juggling competing demands of work which might fall through, making them available, only for something else to come up making them unavailable.’⁶³

This is sometimes glossed as the ‘flakiness’ of celebrity, but that term fails to recognize the conditions under which many public figures’ work is secured.⁶⁴ It is simply one of the conditions of the job, one interviewee called it ‘Steven Spielberg’: any moment someone more important may call your public figure in to do a lucrative job.⁶⁵

Second, it requires coping with the demands and expectations of colleagues in their own organisations who ‘do not know what we do or understand our world’.⁶⁶ The celebrity liaison managers’ forum began partly as a refuge for employees who needed empathetic professional friends. The fact is that while the liaison officers may ‘get’ the relationships, many other people within NGOs clearly do not.⁶⁷ Some people cause problems simply because of their antipathy to celebrity generally.⁶⁸ Others suffer from the opposite problem, they are keen to use public figures, do not know how to, but think they do. One person found it ‘maddening . . . half of my job, half of my week, is about managing the expectations of my colleagues.’⁶⁹

Celebrity is a field which many people think they know something about, but which few can navigate effectively, or realize why they should want to.⁷⁰ This came out repeatedly in interviews:

‘Quite often the teams themselves will just say “Hi there we need a celebrity”; they don’t really know why or what they will use them for or what they will gain from it’.⁷¹

They say ‘we need a celebrity for this, I’m like no you don’t, you don’t need a celebrity.’⁷²

‘Where they just want celebrity there is no real impact, no real role for them, no real relevance to the cause I don’t want that’.⁷³

These statements reflect the fact that one of the driving forces behind the increasing intensification of celebrity within the development sector is the ambition and dreams of its employees. Part of the skill of the celebrity liaison officer is actually to promote events when celebrity is *not* used. As we shall explore below publicity events need to stand up creatively without any celebrity presence.⁷⁴ Simply adding celebrity because it

⁶³ Source 86.

⁶⁴ Source 37.

⁶⁵ Source 35.

⁶⁶ Source 51.

⁶⁷ Source 35.

⁶⁸ Sources 51, 78.

⁶⁹ Source 54.

⁷⁰ Sources 9, 53, 54.

⁷¹ Source 77.

⁷² Source 54.

⁷³ Source 51.

⁷⁴ Sources 9, 26, 51, 64, 77, 93.

Research Paper 1. ESRC Fellowship RES -70-27-0035

is part of some magic formula creating attention and publicity will not work, 'it still has to come back down to being a good story either to get the celebrity or to get the coverage'.⁷⁵ A related misconception is that work with public figures must involve extremely famous people:

'There is this myth that you need an A-lister for everything. You don't, you need the right person.'⁷⁶

The misunderstandings are not restricted to the NGO domain. Some public figures make the mistake of thinking that they are not sufficiently famous to serve charities' needs:

'when I was first asked to be an ambassador for [Charity P] I was totally flattered . . . and I was actually very surprised . . . and a little bit embarrassed because I was thinking well . . . I'm not as high profile as, you know, as some of these top footballers or celebrities that you see on TV and I was not sure . . . whether I could bring in . . . the kind of sort of support and interest that they wanted but I think they were happy with the stuff that I did and I suppose it was also the kind of message I was able to convey within the charity that they liked as well.'⁷⁷

Those in the celebrity industry can also have unreasonable demands of the NGOs they wish to support, requiring the liaison officers to perform a mediating role:

'a lot of what I have done is sit in the middle of both sides, if both sides were to talk directly to each other they would both think the other were awful or stupid . . . when in truth its just different cultures, different language, different speeds and I sit in the middle and make sure that everyone on both sides stays happy and that requires editing from both sides a lot.'⁷⁸

Working with the Celebrity Industry

The relationships that develop between public figures and the NGOs they support cannot be understood apart from the personal assistants, agents, publicists and managers who surround them. Even the most prestigious organisations can find that the top people have 'lots of layers' and are hard to get to.⁷⁹ Here the practice varies across the sector. There was no consensus as to which routes provided the best access.⁸⁰ One insisted that all contact must be through representatives as it would be 'wildly inappropriate' and 'unprofessional' to call public figures directly even if you are friends.⁸¹ This is because 'celebrities never want to say no to anything because they always want to be viewed as nice easy going people' so you must never put them on the spot with things and risk making them feel uncomfortable.⁸² Indeed it was the agents'

⁷⁵ Source 48.

⁷⁶ Source 35. The right person being some one who is a public figure, who has relevance and authenticity and who has sufficient prominence to capture the attention required in the media, or from funders.

⁷⁷ Source 91.

⁷⁸ Source 55.

⁷⁹ Source 85.

⁸⁰ Sources 49, 51, 55, 61.

⁸¹ Source 54.

⁸² Source 54.

Research Paper 1. ESRC Fellowship RES -70-27-0035

job precisely to take that pressure: 'my whole job is to make my clients look good and it is embarrassing to turn down charity work'.⁸³ Others clearly enjoyed personal contacts with public figures who were also their friends, and relied on their own judgment and nous to determine what they could ask their friends to do.⁸⁴

Agents were particularly important because they could control schedules and shut down potential events. Some liaison officers agents therefore 'treat the agent as well as I treat the celebrity'⁸⁵, others put time and effort into the relationship without that emphasis⁸⁶, either way 'its very much a relationship management job'.⁸⁷ It helps that there is a mutual interest in these relationships working for all sides:

'we all know we need something out of this, both parties need something out of this relationship'.⁸⁸

'Most [agents] . . saw the value of [their client's] involvement with [organisation C] because it was a good thing to do, good for the [client's] reputation and good for them'.⁸⁹

'my goal is not to have anything to be approved by a publicist . . because quite honestly I don't want you to look bad either . . The ideal is for when they have their [organisation M] hat on for me to be their [organisation M] publicist and for that to be enough'.⁹⁰

'our job is to make them look good. We tend to put them in situations where they are not doing . . silly publicity stunts [but] they are doing meaningful advocacy in credible and influential fora'.⁹¹

The NGOs who 'get it' know how to reassure the people managing public figures' lives that they can be trusted, that they will be consulted on quotes and pictures if necessary and that their clients will be looked after well.⁹² In the best cases an agent who is on board will actively look out for opportunities for their client to promote particular campaigns.⁹³

Sometimes NGOs may forget that good agents will have their clients' long term interests at stake, that they will be carefully building their clients' brand and will be carefully assessing the connections between their clients' brands and those of the NGOs who

⁸³ Source 41.

⁸⁴ Sources 51, 53, 55, 69.

⁸⁵ Source 51.

⁸⁶ Sources 14, 37.

⁸⁷ Source 35.

⁸⁸ Source 37.

⁸⁹ Source 60.

⁹⁰ Source 85.

⁹¹ Source 93.

⁹² Sources 35, 37, 71, 76.

⁹³ Source 48.

Research Paper 1. ESRC Fellowship RES -70-27-0035

work with them accordingly.⁹⁴ They must ‘want their brand associated with your brand’.⁹⁵ Indeed, particularly for rising stars:

‘it is all about brand, maintaining the brand. And so charity work would be an extension of that but it will still need credibility and some relevance.’⁹⁶

Successful collaborations are a mixture of balancing the commercial considerations of the celebrity industry with the brand of the NGOs:

‘It works well because it works with everyone’s schedule and it works with our branding and their personal branding, it stays in their voice and therefore is more authentic and therefore resonates more with the audiences who we are trying to reach and influence.’⁹⁷

This is not to imply that there need be no emotional connection between public figures and the causes they support. The press and publics are quick to spot such charades, and for many public figures their own personal engagement with these causes is vital.⁹⁸ The point is rather that celebrities’ interactions with NGOs are tailored to their individual personalities, talents and attributes so that:

‘[w]hat they are really passionate about and what they can speak about first hand in a sincere way will translate effectively either in a press conference or a congressional hearing or an online video or op-ed.’⁹⁹

Moreover, from the point of view of those managing public figures’ careers, brand matters. Indeed, particularly among musicians, work with NGOs is simply not possible because it could detract from their (the musicians’) brands.¹⁰⁰

In the long term it is not just the individual relationships surrounding particular public figures which matter but also the reputational issues of the NGOs themselves which are at stake:

‘I want to present [my organisation] amongst the talent industry as .. we’ll only use their artists [where it will have] value for their time, its going to have huge impact .. or useful impact, and they’re going to get a good experience out of it. Its going to make a difference to us so their time is not going to be wasted’.¹⁰¹

After all in the long term the public figures come and go, but the agents remain.¹⁰²

Probably the defining characteristic of the relationship between the celebrity industry and the NGO sector is its inequality, how much the latter depends on the charity of the

⁹⁴ Source 26.

⁹⁵ Source 26.

⁹⁶ Source 51.

⁹⁷ Source 93. ‘Voice’ is defined in the last section, on page 20.

⁹⁸ Source 51.

⁹⁹ Source 93.

¹⁰⁰ Sources 5, 81.

¹⁰¹ Source 51.

¹⁰² Source 35.

Research Paper 1. ESRC Fellowship RES -70-27-0035

former. In many respects the NGOs need the public figures far more than the public figures needed the NGOs. Working with charities may provide public figures with publicity but,

'I guarantee that if they wanted to get publicity for themselves they could, they don't need the charity to do it'.¹⁰³

But NGOs do matter to the celebrity industry; especially those who get it. We have already seen that liaison officers can be reminded by agents to use their public figures a bit more often.¹⁰⁴ When Princess Diana died those who were associated with her causes were inundated with requests from public figures to take her place.¹⁰⁵ Agents of those public figures were quick to recognize the value of their clients being asked to adopt her former causes.¹⁰⁶ Things are different again with public figures whose celebrity is likely to be fleeting. Reality TV stars for example,

'actually kind of needed the push in their career, they had a 4-6 month window after Big Brother where they could . . . make a killing and really work on raising their profile.'¹⁰⁷

Agents of these celebrities might approach NGOs (and these were generally not in the development sector) in the hope that the NGOs might be able to design the events which catered for them.¹⁰⁸ Some liaison officers refused, others recognized that this was part of cultivating the relationship 'we kind of did them a favour as much as them doing us a favour.'¹⁰⁹ Those working with this sort of public figure would have to find appropriate tasks for them. Shopping events was one such (mentioned above), another was to make them a spokesperson for generic tasks like fund-raising weeks, which are fun, not heavy and the messages are quite light.¹¹⁰

The claim that public figures do not need the NGOs for publicity needs also to be qualified given that certain NGOs (UNICEF, Oxfam, the Red Cross amongst others) have very strong brands, and associations with them are valued highly.¹¹¹ Nevertheless for the vast majority of NGOs the claim is true. No public figure needs to cultivate a special relationship with them in particular, there will be many other NGOs doing remarkably similar work who are probably also asking for their favours. Some accept this weak position, as we have already seen: 'you have to just be grateful for whatever inch they give you, whatever dime they give you'.¹¹² Another officer felt that any offer of support should be encouraged.¹¹³ Others resented this inequality, comparing the sensation to waiting for 'crumbs from the table' of privilege.

¹⁰³ Source 35.

¹⁰⁴ Sources 9, 14, 85.

¹⁰⁵ Source 48.

¹⁰⁶ Source 23.

¹⁰⁷ Source 76.

¹⁰⁸ Sources 51, 76.

¹⁰⁹ Source 76.

¹¹⁰ Source 51.

¹¹¹ Source 23.

¹¹² Source 55.

¹¹³ Source 45.

Research Paper 1. ESRC Fellowship RES -70-27-0035

One of the principle reasons why NGOs are in a weak position is that they resolutely refuse, almost all the time, to pay any form of fees for the time of public figures who work with them.¹¹⁴ There is very little variation here – relationships with the celebrity industry cannot be understood except in the context that NGOs generally demand their public figures work for them for free. The condition of being a celebrity liaison officer is that one's requests are always at the bottom of the pile, if they have made it there at all.¹¹⁵ The joy of working for the more significant NGOs is simply that you are not hung up on by the talent agencies you contact.¹¹⁶ Despite this strong line against payment, agents (who are paid according to the work they bring in for their clients) will still try their luck, asking for, and being refused, payment.¹¹⁷

There are, however, some grey areas. NGOs do not expect public figures to pay for their own travel expenses.¹¹⁸ They would also pay for people who are doing their job.¹¹⁹ If a musician or comedian is to be reliably booked to perform for an important event which is scheduled months in advance then it is reasonable to pay them. The uncertainties in their schedules means that such a commitment could incur considerable opportunity costs for them.

Agents, publicists and managers are not the only constraints that NGOs working with the celebrity industry face. Those who work with the music industry have had to cope with some profound changes to the structure of that industry.¹²⁰ The demise of record sales in the past ten years means that recordings rarely make much, if any, money. Few people buy any recordings these days, let alone charity albums. This in turn means that many artists now rely upon concerts for their income. Performing for charities can therefore make a significant dent in their businesses both in terms of revenue forgone, and in the delayed opportunities of performing again to that audience. Nevertheless organisations which specialize in such events are still able to make them happen if they are creative enough. If it has musical merit, if it is entertaining, fun and good for their image and reputation they will want to take part even if it incurs opportunity costs.¹²¹

The creative edge, or lack of it, is the other main constraint that can limit NGOs interactions with famous artists and talent.¹²² Many of the more prominent public figures have gained their recognition because of their creative energy and abilities. They prefer to work on projects which have a similar creative edge and ambition. The failure to provide such projects, the want of imagination behind some charitable asks, is part of the reason why some relationships can be hard to build. A number of interviewees mentioned the importance of not working with celebrity on occasion (including those with access to the most famous people of our times), because the story and message worked better creatively without it; or complained of the laziness that could creep in

¹¹⁴ Sources 5, 6, 9, 14, 26, 35, 37, 51, 53, 54, 71.

¹¹⁵ Source 76.

¹¹⁶ Source 71. Even then there are agencies which proclaim on their website that they will not countenance any charitable activity: <http://www.mikeleighbassoc.com/x/corporate.html> viewed 16/2/11.

¹¹⁷ Sources 23, 51, 53.

¹¹⁸ Sources 5, 6, 9, 14, 26, 35, 37, 51, 53, 54. This generosity does not extend to any entourage, at least I have not encountered an organisation which would pay for it.

¹¹⁹ Sources 27, 51.

¹²⁰ Sources 5, 6, 80, 81.

¹²¹ Sources 5, 80.

¹²² Sources 5, 80.

Research Paper 1. ESRC Fellowship RES -70-27-0035

among their colleagues who believed that a story might fly merely by having a celebrity attached to it.¹²³ Conversely what resonated among the successful celebrity interventions I was told about is that they were events whose creativity made them, spectacular or moving to watch or take part in.¹²⁴

'What works well is not going in with a lot of preconceived notions and a canned template of what you want the celebrity to do, what works well is to listen to the celebrity and partner with the celebrity and ask her what her vision is and how much time she has to give to it and what her availability is and then collaborate and be mutually respectful, that really works well. And then what often emerges is not what either one of you would have proposed initially but its a true collaboration . . Its never a matter of "we want you to do this appearance or a film or a song on a cd or something." Its "we want to change the world, we would like to do that with you, if you share this vision or values lets talk about how we could do that. so shall we brainstorm?" And then the possibilities are endless and then at the end you get something that works for everyone. So we never come in with a preconceived notion of how we would like them to behave.'¹²⁵

The Corporate Interest

One of the strongest and persistent themes that emerged across all the interviews was the importance of corporate interest in celebrity. Corporates are 'star struck'¹²⁶, they 'really liked having celebrities involved'.¹²⁷ The corporate teams within NGOs can be those who make the most requests for celebrity involvement.¹²⁸ This interest is both a vehicle for driving the presence of celebrity within NGOs and a powerful force shaping the conduct of negotiations between NGOs and the celebrity industry. It is an important part of the context in which contemporary celebrity interventions are produced and requires careful examination.

The origins of this upsurge of corporate interest in celebrity owes much to the rise of corporate social responsibility. Companies are now expected by their customers, and by their own employees, to give back to charities and they seek associations with NGOs which will be most advantageous to them. The association NGOs enjoy with celebrities can provide that advantage:

'Its very expensive for a corporation to get a celebrity spokesperson, so they love it when by doing good works they also get to grab a few photos .. or do a joint press conference with a celebrity. It's a big added benefit. . . They love getting that opportunity to be associated with a celebrity for free'.¹²⁹

NGOs cultivate that enthusiasm. Numerous charities now seek to cultivate support from businesses, and be chosen as that business' charity of the year by offering associations

¹²³ Sources 48, 64, 77, 79.

¹²⁴ Sources 5, 23, 38, 40, 55, 61, 71, 80.

¹²⁵ Source 93.

¹²⁶ Source 35.

¹²⁷ Source 48.

¹²⁸ Source 77.

¹²⁹ Source 55.

Research Paper 1. ESRC Fellowship RES -70-27-0035

with their celebrity supporters on their website. Celebrity newsletters can be used to strengthen promotions to corporates.¹³⁰ The presence of public figures may explain the successful outcomes of these bids:

'I think that was why a lot of people came on board with [organisation D] is because we had very good celebrities.'¹³¹

The increasing presence of corporates in relationships between NGOs and public figures also reflects the rise in cause-related marketing. It is good business sense to build relationships with NGOs, particularly if it then results in associations between that business and famous faces:

'in the first instance the draw is going to be that to have [public figure E] associated with their product is highly desirable and to sponsor an event that we do at [location F] which is very elite which an awful lot of very rich or famous people come to is perfect to their brand'.¹³²

In one instance (beyond the development sector) the very level of celebrity involvement in one particular fundraising campaign was determined by the corporate preference for celebrity involvement:

'[We asked] do we in fact even involve celebrities or is it that we have real women . . . in the ads.. We came to the conclusion that actually the corporates like to be associated with the campaign because of the kudos it holds and because of the level of celebrities it has supporting it. Because the majority of the income is raised through corporate partners . . . we do actually need to have celebrity support to keep them engaged.'¹³³

But it is not just about brand and business based-decisions. One of the reasons why corporates are star struck is because being part of an corporate elite is gives you the possibility of personal access to publicly desirable figures:

'A lot of middle aged men melt at the idea . . . A lot of middle aged business men, and young ones and older ones actually just kind of fawn at the idea of somebody reasonably well known and reasonably attractive. I'm sure that there are equally a number of business women [who are similar]'.¹³⁴

'[Company G] absolutely loved [public figure H] . . . she's very special to a group of men of a certain age . . . She's . . . lovely and charming and articulate . . . she delivers both emotionally and rationally and . . . appeals to the softer side of them'.¹³⁵

Similarly many observers commented on the power of celebrity to give them access to high level political circles¹³⁶:

¹³⁰ Source 65.

¹³¹ Source 48.

¹³² Source 67.

¹³³ Source 63.

¹³⁴ Source 75.

¹³⁵ Source 48.

Research Paper 1. ESRC Fellowship RES -70-27-0035

'You might be able to meet with someone lower down in the office but suddenly you are meeting with the chief of staff or with the principal instead of a staff member two or three levels below because you are accompanied by a celebrity. You also might be able to get a hearing on Capitol Hill because one of those testifying would be a celebrity . . . That happens all the time.'¹³⁷

'If you find a Bono politicians will meet them . . . at the end of the day they all love to meet celebrities, they really do, its incredible. Their faces light up when they see [public figure D]coming at them.'¹³⁸

The consequences are not always good for the creative energy, or authenticity, of the associations resulting. One interviewee complained that events with corporates can require public figures to attend for the only reason of having the (unreciprocated) pleasure of such companions.¹³⁹ I have come across instances where NGOs became obliged to deliver public figures to corporate events and resorted to buying in the talent for a day from appropriate agencies.¹⁴⁰ But it can be possible for corporate associations to be quite useful, for example, where the associations resulted in events which 'were beneficial to the celebrity team because it enabled us to offer our celebrities something to do.'¹⁴¹

Corporate interest complicates the lives of celebrity liaison officers in two ways. First, corporates' work with the public figures can be expensive. Accordingly some will try to access public figures cheaply through NGOs. This was a common refrain:

'Corporate partners, a lot of the time they use charities as a free celebrity agency'.¹⁴²

'A lot of companies use charities as a cheaper way of getting [at public figures]'.¹⁴³

'A lot of the corporates obviously see it as a way to get free talent'.¹⁴⁴

But the more intelligent businesses will think through carefully the associations involved:

'There are times . . . where you do have to be, as a corporation, cautious about exactly who you are partnering with and how extensive is the campaign. Are you just asking them for a quote maybe to show up at an event and use their name or are you asking them to jump in 100% and be part of your marketing campaign, your advertising, being the face of your brand? That's where it gets to be a very . .

¹³⁶ Sources 40, 77, 81, 93.

¹³⁷ Source 93.

¹³⁸ Source 81.

¹³⁹ Source 51.

¹⁴⁰ Sources 34.

¹⁴¹ Source 76.

¹⁴² Source 51.

¹⁴³ Source 76.

¹⁴⁴ Source 63.

Research Paper 1. ESRC Fellowship RES -70-27-0035

thoughtful process where you're wanting to bring in the agent and the brand manager and the corporations and the publicists.¹⁴⁵

But the NGOs have added reason to be cautious. Public figures will endorse charities without charge, but they do charge companies for that service. When corporates become involved with charitable events there is a risk that the associations could amount to a free endorsement. This would be depriving public figures, and their agents, of their income, and the agents would 'have a fit'.¹⁴⁶ The standard practice is, when a potential conflict arises, for the celebrity liaison officer to withdraw and let the business and agent concerned negotiate the event, if necessary with the assistance of the NGO's corporate team. Getting things right here is so important that more than one organisation was producing written guidelines as to how to behave in such circumstances.¹⁴⁷

But the dividing line between what can be done freely for the charity, and what must be paid for by the corporation, can be thinly drawn. Public figures can endorse the relationship that companies may have with NGOs but not the company itself. It would be acceptable for a public figure to model a t shirt saying 'If you go to Debenhams and buy this t shirt the charity will get £5', but they cannot say, 'I love shopping at Debenhams'.¹⁴⁸ Furthermore, some associations with particularly well known charitable causes can result in further opportunities for corporate endorsement for the celebrity. Some public figures take the work and endorsement opportunities resulting.¹⁴⁹ Others refuse to take on such endorsements saying 'it is an insult to be offered to be paid' as a result of any association that arises out of work for charity.¹⁵⁰

The second complication is that public figures' corporate endorsements can threaten the brand of the NGOs with whom they then associate. For the larger NGOs the risks of association with public figures were 'all about the brand' ie what these figures might do to the NGO brand.¹⁵¹ For, 'that is the other side of celebrity . . if you screw up you screw up in the headlights'.¹⁵² Some undertake careful due diligence on the public figures with whom they build relationships, before they get serious, to prevent any embarrassment.¹⁵³ Even then things can go wrong, if public figures subsequently develop relationships with companies who are doing things the NGOs oppose.¹⁵⁴

These self-same endorsements by public figures can be useful for campaigning organisations who employ them to embarrass public figures in the interests of drawing attention to their campaign.¹⁵⁵ However it does not always work that way around. Sometimes the stature of the celebrity can protect the company they are associated with:

¹⁴⁵ Source 68.

¹⁴⁶ Source 51.

¹⁴⁷ Source 61, 71.

¹⁴⁸ Source 35.

¹⁴⁹ Source 71.

¹⁵⁰ Source 71.

¹⁵¹ Source 14.

¹⁵² Source 80.

¹⁵³ Sources 34, 53.

¹⁵⁴ Source 34.

¹⁵⁵ Source 34, 73.

'Why was I going to try and use [public figure X] to go against [company Y] . . . to do something that it wasn't going to do? . . . I didn't want to ruffle the feathers of [public figure X]. I didn't want to make trouble for him because he is so good. I do not need to score some publicity points by making [him] look bad, plus that would be impossible. No one could make [him] look bad, they [the critic] would always look bad . . . It wasn't strategic to do it.'¹⁵⁶

Authenticity

Q: 'So what works well?

A: 'Somebody having a genuine connection with the issue we are trying to put through . . . like here, where they have visited and seen for themselves and they can speak really passionately and really care . . . because I think it also gives them the confidence to talk about an area that otherwise . . . they are not a specialist in. What would they know about that particular strand of development or that particular type of work? But if they feel . . . some emotional connection with it they suddenly feel qualified to talk about it and more comfortable to talk about their experience because they can relate it directly to [that experience]'.¹⁵⁷

Authenticity, and the credibility it provides, are perhaps the most important issues for the people negotiating relationships between public figures and NGOs. Some pride themselves on working only with the world's most committed philanthropists whose 'passion is authentic'.¹⁵⁸ Others deliberately sought out much more minor figures with the same reasoning: 'what works well is when local celebrities get involved with [small-scale] fundraising as [then] there is an affinity'.¹⁵⁹

Unless the relationships are deemed to be authentic and credible then their messages will not be heard and the work wasted:

'it does have to feel authentic and it does need to be a proper relationship between the celebrity and the charity because otherwise the investment does not pay off'¹⁶⁰

Authenticity in these encounters is forged in the public domain. It is *performed* to publics and represented by the media. This is sometimes expressed as the need to keep the work that celebrities do with NGOs as 'staying in their voice':

'Voice has to do with personal branding, . . . celebrities are very conscious of how they are perceived in the world and often celebrities like to work with the [organisation U] because they understand that they will be presented in ways that they are talking about substantive policy issues in depth and talking about specific changes that are transformative and systemic changes that can really

¹⁵⁶ Source 73.

¹⁵⁷ Source 37.

¹⁵⁸ Source 21.

¹⁵⁹ Source 65.

¹⁶⁰ Source 26.

Research Paper 1. ESRC Fellowship RES -70-27-0035

make a difference. Often they don't want to be misperceived as dilettantes who are indulging in some sort of a cause-of-the-weak flirtation, but they really want to really learn about an issue often go to the country themselves on one or more trips to talk to people directly and speak in a very personal way.'¹⁶¹

In the worse case scenarios messages will not merely be ignored, but mocked or derided:

'for the pieces to work on TV . . the celebrities involved have to have an organic connection or have made a connection to the cause in some way that is real it cannot be like a photo-op I think the public sees right through that.'¹⁶²

'the media can often pick up on celebrities who are working on charity work for their own gain and not because they are passionate about the charity.'¹⁶³

The work of celebrity liaison officers is characterized by an abiding set of tensions which attend their attempts to establish authentic relationships between public figures and NGOs. They will seek to establish enduring relationships with public figures and be rebuffed by their agents, or they will set up meetings and events which public figures' fickle commitments then undo. Alternatively they will find unsuitable figures, or unsuitable events, foisted upon them by the demands of corporate partners or the foolishness of their colleagues. The events and interactions they arrange must both demonstrate an authentic relationship with a cause and at the same time be a means of deepening and extending that relationship, making it more authentic. Sometimes, when they are 'establishing a reason to be there' to the press, they are also establishing a reason to be there with the NGO. And even when everything goes well, authenticity still has to be performed and enacted before publics who may well expect something more innate and essential. These are not problems which are solvable in every instant. They are issues with which liaison officers have to become skilled in dealing every day.

This practical difficulty is accentuated in the case of development NGOs. They serve needs in poor countries. Many people can claim connections with cancer or children through their personal lives or their close friends and relations, but most public figures in the global north rarely have much personal experience of life and problems in the global south.¹⁶⁴ The task of forging and demonstrating close connections with distant places and strangers just makes these practical problems all the more trying.

They are also merely practical constraints. There is, in fact, a deeper issue to be addressed which is again most keenly felt by the development NGOs. For the problems of development can be immensely complex – virtually intractable. How can anyone claim authentically to know about, to have 'organic connections' with, these places, peoples and problems to others?

The answer is that authenticity is certainly possible, but it can be rooted in several different sorts of 'organic connections' with the cause:

¹⁶¹ Source 93.

¹⁶² Source 61.

¹⁶³ Source 14.

¹⁶⁴ Source 5.

Research Paper 1. ESRC Fellowship RES -70-27-0035

'Authenticity . . can mean several things. Have you seen the problem? Have you been there, do you go there regularly? Do you have empathy with the issue and with the audience – e.g. if its a story about children, are you a mum or dad? Are you concerned with issues of injustice?'¹⁶⁵

We can name these sources of authenticity:

1. Expert or Experiential Authority: an intellectual knowledge or practical life experience that provides special insights into other people's condition.
2. Affinity: some sort of structural similarity with others (being a parent, living on the wrong side of unequal power structures).
3. Empathy: the shared emotions one has with others as a result of some shared experience or affinity.
4. Sympathy: the emotions provoked in you by another's fate.

And, having named them, it is easy to see how debates about them can be so heated. First, these different claims can be assembled in confusing ways in the representation of celebrity relations with development NGOs. The people at the centre of the relationships may misrecognize the grounds for authenticity which they are claiming. Then journalists may misrepresent the claims. And then audiences will fail to read these claims properly, demanding intellectual expertise for example, when affinity is offered. Furthermore there is the lack of clarity as to who is meant to empathise / sympathise / has affinity with whom. Is it with the poor and oppressed? Or is it with the reader who is interpreting the representations before them. Is it with both? For example, in the statement which begins this section the interviewee suggested that emotional connection makes public figures feel 'qualified' to speak. That verb could be inferred to mean an expert authority. I am not sure that this is what the speaker intended, but the fact that it is ambiguous makes my point.

Clarity is possible. Some public figures, and those reporting them, will be quite clear as to their claim to authenticity:

'There was one actress . . [who] had never been to the developing world before and ok you could say that well that was a risk . . but it actually gave a real freshness to it because she gave a very honest fresh open account about what she had experienced out there. [She] conveyed what she had experienced really well. She was an engaging person anyway who went out with a friend and their collective experience was informative and honest – about their uncertainties, shock and hesitations.'¹⁶⁶

In this case the claim is based on an affinity and empathy with the reader who is confronting complex development issues. That very clarity can then fuel another moral debate about which authenticity claims are most legitimate and wholesome. This is the second source of heat. Some are upset because they believe that only expert authority provides legitimate reasons to speak for distant others or about their problems. Some

¹⁶⁵ Source 64.

¹⁶⁶ Source 59.

Research Paper 1. ESRC Fellowship RES -70-27-0035

are disturbed because they fear that authenticity based on an empathy with the reader invites narcissism (ie reflection on the celebrity's similarly with the reader) rather than any deep and rigorous concern for distant strangers.¹⁶⁷

Those issues take us beyond the scope of this paper and I want to end on a different note. There is an intriguing paradox which follows from the particularly steep uphill battles that celebrity liaison officers of development NGOs face. The Look to the Stars website¹⁶⁸ has been tracking the support of public figures for good causes for about five years. Its founders were generous enough to share their data with me and from it I learnt which causes attract most celebrity support, and which individual NGOs have the most public figures working with them. Their records show that the most popular cause in terms of number of NGOs supported are children's needs. This is unsurprising because it is easy to express a connection to children's needs; we have all been children. What is surprising is that some of the NGOs which have enlisted the largest number of celebrity supporters are development NGOs. Paradoxically the tribulations I have documented do not seem to have handicapped these NGOs compared to those supporting domestic causes. The celebrity liaison officers of development NGOs have built working practices with lasting and significant appeal to the celebrity industry itself. They 'get it' very well indeed.

Acknowledgements

My thanks to all the interviewees who have taken part in this research, to all who commented on the first iteration of this paper and to Katja Neves, Bram Buscher, Rob Fletcher, Jim Igoe and Lisa Richey who advised on earlier drafts.

¹⁶⁷ Lillie Chouliaraki (of the LSE) carefully examines this issue.

¹⁶⁸ www.looktothestars.org