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The Value of Fame: Preadolescent Perceptions of Popular Media and Their Relationship to Future Aspirations

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In line with Greenfield's (2009) theory of social change and human development, current popular preadolescent TV shows suggest that fame, an individualistic goal, is an important and achievable aspiration (Uhls & Greenfield, 2011). Such messages may be particularly salient for preadolescents, ages 10–12. This study used focus groups and mixed analytic methods (qualitative and quantitative) to examine how popular media, passive and interactive, are interpreted by preadolescents and how their interpretations relate to their media practices and future goals. Quantitative analysis revealed that fame was the number one value, selected as the most important value for participants' future goals significantly more frequently than expected by chance. Qualitative analysis of focus group discourse suggested that (a) youth absorb messages in their media environment regarding fame as a future goal and (b) their interpretations of these messages highlight the importance and value of public recognition. Enacting the value of fame, the majority of preadolescent participants use online video sharing sites (e.g., YouTube) to seek an audience beyond their immediate community.

Keywords: fame, preadolescent, media socialization, YouTube, social networking sites

In this article, we provide evidence that the value of becoming famous is the major aspiration of children from 10–12 years of age. Our theoretical framework is P. M. Greenfield's (2009) theory of social change and human development, with which we begin. Next, we review both television (TV) and interactive media, showing how these media have, in recent years, come to model and encourage both the value of fame and its expression in the public display of self. Placing our study in historical context, we conclude our introduction with evidence that adolescents and young adults have, over the decades, become more focused on the self, unrealistically ambitious, and oriented toward material success—all individualistic values that resonate with the value of fame. Our data come from focus groups concerning children's experiences with television and interactive media, notably YouTube and social networking sites. We examine the focus group discussions for evidence related to the twin desires for fame and for an audience.

The Theoretical Framework

P. M. Greenfield's (2009) theory of social change and human development predicts that, as learning environments move toward more complex technology, as living environments become increasingly urbanized, as education levels increase, as commerce develops, and as people become wealthier, psychological development should move in the direction of increasing individualism. As a value system, individualism prioritizes the independent action of the individual as well as the development and expression of individual character and personality (Individualism, n.d.; Stein & Urdang, 1966).

According to the theory of social change and human development, sociodemographic shifts drive changes in cultural values, which in turn alter the learning environment; a changed learning environment in turn transforms individual development. There is accumulating empirical evidence that individualistic values and independent behavior augment with increases in urbanization, formal education, commercial activity, and technological development (P. M. Greenfield, 2004; P. M. Greenfield, Maynard, & Martí, 2009; Manago & Greenfield, 2011; Uhls & Greenfield, 2011). For example, in a Maya village, the influence of commercial activity transformed weaving apprenticeship; learners became more independent as the function of weaving changed from clothing the family (subsistence) to participation in textile commerce (e.g., selling one's weavings; P. M. Greenfield, Maynard, & Childs, 2003). In the area of technology, the development of a local taxi service in the same village increased independent action by allowing both passengers and drivers to travel in private rather than group vehicles (P. M. Greenfield, 2004). When one is able to satisfy needs (e.g., shopping) by interacting with the Internet, one is able to function more independently of other people.

Over time in the United States, the population has, in fact, become more urban, more educated, and wealthier (Bauman &

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Graf, 2003; ClearPictureOnline.com, 2008; U.S. Census Bureau, 1943, 1983a, 1983b, 1992, 2004). However, the most rapidly changing sociodemographic element in recent decades has been communications technology, especially the Internet. In the United States, the population using the Internet grew 157% between 2000 and 2011 (Miniwatts Marketing Group, 2011). For young people age 8–18, computer use has grown 300% in the last decade, increasing from less than .5 hr a day to nearly 1.5 hr a day (Rideout, Foehr, & Roberts, 2010). According to P. M. Greenfield's (2009) theory, although each sociodemographic element is in principle equipotential, the element undergoing the most rapid change in a given period becomes the driver of value transformation and shifting developmental trajectories (P. M. Greenfield, 2009). At present, in the United States, this element is interactive communication technologies.

According to the theory, the increased development and spread of these communication technologies should drive cultural values and learning environments in an individualistic direction. A desire for fame, the focus of this study, is by definition a strong manifestation of an individualistic value system. It represents the extreme of wanting to stand out, an accepted component of individualism (e.g., Owens, 2008). For present purposes, our definition of a desire for fame is motive or behavior to seek either positive or negative public recognition on a large scale beyond one's immediate network of friends, community, and family, independent of accomplishments in a specific endeavor.

The synergistic relationship among wealth, individualistic goals, technology, and a desire for fame emerges in cross-cultural data. Adolescent boys from the wealthiest countries (United States, the Netherlands, Norway, and Switzerland) draw their ideal man as a man relaxing or playing sports—enjoying personal pleasures, a component of an individualistic value system. In contrast, boys from poorer countries such as Sri Lanka typically draw their ideal man as a man with adult responsibilities such as work (Gibbons & Stiles, 2004). Most relevant here, “The heroes for the boys from the wealthy countries tended to be sports stars and media celebrities” (Gibbons & Stiles, 2004, p. 227). The authors attribute this phenomenon to the high media exposure of teen boys from wealthy countries. Exposed to video games, TV, and action films, boys from wealthy countries become impressed by fame. Although there may be a small number of famous people in poorer societies that emphasize extended family rather than the individual (P. M. Greenfield, 2009), the phenomenon at issue here is the mass diffusion of this goal and its early socialization through mass media.

The Historical Transformation of Media as Learning Environments

In the United States, TV, the most popular medium with children and adolescents and a potent influence on attitudes and behavior (Bandura, 2001; Rideout et al., 2010), is a learning environment whose nature has shifted as communication technologies have expanded. As predicted by the theory of social change and human development (P. M. Greenfield, 2009), central values portrayed on the most popular preadolescent shows have changed over the last five decades in an individualistic direction from community feeling to fame (Uhls & Greenfield, 2011). Content analysis revealed that the value of fame, along with other individualistic values such as personal achievement and financial success,

grew significantly in importance from 1967 to 2007, with an accelerating expansion between 1997 and 2007, the same period in which the Internet and other communications technologies saw their rapid expansion. In fact, fame was the most important value portrayed in the two most popular preteen programs of 2007, *Hannah Montana* and *American Idol*, whereas it ranked near the very bottom for those broadcast over the previous 40 years. It is important to note that *Hannah Montana* is a fictional show, whereas *American Idol* is reality TV. In addition, as *Hannah Montana* illustrates, recent TV has come to feature an inordinate number of shows with famous teenage protagonists (Martin, 2009). These characters, close to the age of their audience, may be particularly salient and potent role models (Bandura, Ross, & Ross, 1963). The present study was designed to assess the uptake on the part of preadolescents of the value of fame through exploring their interpretations of their favorite TV shows.

In addition to observational learning, new communication technologies have added enactive learning (learning by doing) to the tools available for acquiring fame as a concept and value. Both observation and action are potent learning mechanisms (Schunk, 2001) that develop in the first 2 years of life (Piaget, 1952). Apprenticeship learning, in which the learner both observes and participates enactively in the activity to be learned, is a particularly potent and effective form of learning (Childs & Greenfield, 1980; Meadows, 1998; Rogoff, 1990). The advent of YouTube where people can post videos of themselves and see themselves in videos that others have posted enables them to actively and enactively participate in reaching a broad audience. One can also receive concrete feedback concerning one's fame and that of others—in the form of counted “hits” and ratings of liking.

The site's tag line, “Broadcast yourself,” communicates a clear mandate to display oneself to a worldwide audience. YouTube is presently the number one online video destination for American youth ages 2–11 (Nielsen Online, 2008). As a consequence, YouTube could be an important potential influence in increasing the developmental importance of fame. Although we do not yet know exactly how many members of the young YouTube audience post videos or play in them, this issue is explored in the present study.

But YouTube is not the only new technology that promotes public display for an audience beyond one's immediate community. Social networking sites, such as Facebook and MySpace, also cater to a desire to display oneself in a semipublic format (Manago, Graham, Greenfield, & Salimkhan, 2008; Salimkhan, Manago, & Greenfield, 2010). These sites, where one posts text, photos, and videos for a network of friends, stimulate the urge to share updates about one's life, and one's potential audience typically numbers in the hundreds (Manago, Taylor, & Greenfield, in press). In the present study, we explore whether social networking sites are also part of the preadolescent learning environment and, if so, how preadolescents relate to them.

The Role of Cognitive Development

The concept of fame is an intrinsically abstract notion, for fame is the idea of being known by large numbers of people who are not perceptually present to any given individual. In a certain sense, understanding the concept of fame requires the societal perspective; children at this level of perspective-taking are able to take the generalized perspective of society, beginning around age 12 (Sel-

man, 1981). However, with programs like *Hannah Montana*, one of the two most popular programs with preadolescent audiences in the present era, fame has become concretized in the dynamic audiovisual imagery of a television narrative. With YouTube and camera phones, posting videos becomes a very simple, concrete activity, able to be carried out in middle childhood. Hence, fame becomes cognitively accessible at a younger age than would have been possible in an earlier era. One would therefore expect these TV programs and media tools to communicate the concept and importance of fame to younger children who are not yet able to take the generalized perspective of society. Indeed, cultures provide precocious socialization for skills that are particularly valued in a given culture (LeVine, 2010). New communication technologies provide tools for the precocious socialization of fame as behavior and cultural value.

Historical Change in Later Development

Although most people should agree that the media landscape has drastically changed, not everyone may believe that today's children are so much different than those of previous generations. Recent research conducted at later points in the developmental pathway from childhood to adulthood indicates otherwise. Surveys show that adolescents and emerging adults have, over the decades, become more focused on the self (Twenge, Konrath, Foster, Campbell, & Bushman, 2008), unrealistically ambitious (Reynolds, Stewart, MacDonald, & Sischo, 2006), and oriented toward material success (Dey, Astin, & Korn, 1991; Twenge, Campbell, Hoffman, & Lance, 2010)—all individualistic values that resonate with the value of fame. If adolescents and emerging adults are becoming more self-focused, unrealistically ambitious, and oriented toward material success, are these changes reflected in earlier stages of development? How do shifts in media content and tools toward increased emphasis on fame and

public display of self affect child development? In this study, we examined these questions.

The Present Study

Focus group methodology explored whether preadolescent children (a) perceive a relationship between the value of fame and popular TV programs, (b) connect fame and future aspirations, (c) relate social networking sites to the fame motive, and (d) use YouTube or other platforms for posting videos as tools for achieving fame. Because this was new territory, a qualitative in-depth method was chosen to begin exploring these issues. Given the importance of peers during this period of development (Cohen & Cohen, 2001), when friends and media use often go hand in hand, focus group methodology also allowed us to examine how peers might take part in the co-construction of media-related values.

Although qualitative analysis of group discourse was our main method, we also used one quantitative measure, the number one value independently selected by each child. Hence, this is a mixed-methods study. On the basis of our historical study of values in preteen TV (Uhls & Greenfield, 2011), we predicted that the top value for fourth and sixth graders in 2010 would be fame. Given our prior results and theoretical framework, we thought other individualistic values might also be important.

Method

Participants

Twenty children (9 girls, 11 boys) between 10 and 12 years of age participated in a total of five focus groups, ranging from three to five participants, with a median size of four (see Table 1). Interviews were carried out in same-sex groups of elementary

Table 1
Gender, Number, Age, Ethnic Composition, and First-Choice Values of Each Focus Group

| Group | Gender | <i>N</i> | Age and grade | Ethnicity | First-choice value ^a |
|-----------------------|--------|----------|---|--|--|
| I. Elementary school | Female | 4 | Three 10-yr-olds (4th grade), one 11-yr-old (5th grade) | Two European Americans, two Latinos | Fame (2) Benevolence Community feeling |
| II. Elementary school | Male | 4 | Three 10-yr-olds (4th grade), one 11-yr-old (5th grade) | Three European Americans, one Latino | Fame Achievement Benevolence Have a lot of fun ^b |
| III. Middle school | Female | 5 | Three 11-yr-olds, two 12-yr-olds (all 6th grade) | Four European Americans, one Middle-Eastern American | Fame (2) Community feeling Kindness ^c |
| IV. Middle school | Male | 4 | Three 11-yr-olds, one 12-year-old (all 6th grade) | One European American, one African American, two Asian Americans | Achievement Fame (2) Benevolence Achievement |
| V. Middle school | Male | 3 | One 11-yr-old, two 12-yr-olds (all 6th grade) | Three European Americans | Fame Financial success Kindness ^c |

Note. When more than one child selected the same first-choice value in a group, the numeral in parentheses represents the number who selected that value. yr = year.

^a Because the "votes" on values were anonymous, first-choice values cannot be linked back to particular participants. ^b One child produced this response, even though it was not in the list of seven values. ^c The focus group leader defined benevolence using the word *kindness*. Two of the children used this word on their slips of paper; these responses were aggregated with "benevolence."

(fourth and fifth grade) or middle-school (sixth grade) students in an after-school classroom of a public elementary or middle school on the Westside of Los Angeles. Each school has a socioeconomically diverse student population with at least 20% enrolled in the free-lunch program. The mean age was 11, with the breakdown being six 10-year-olds, nine 11-year-olds, and five 12-year-olds. Participants comprised three Latino Americans, one African American, two Asian Americans, one Middle Eastern American, and 13 European Americans. The grade level, gender, age, and ethnic composition of each focus group are presented in Table 1. Participants were offered a coupon for a scoop of ice cream at a local store for their participation.

In terms of media habits, the most notable characteristics were that 80% owned cell phones and that all participants reported going online on a daily basis. Concerning TV/video, both YouTube and conventional TV were popular sources, with all children viewing video from one platform or another on a daily basis.

Focus Group Procedure

The after-school director from each school provided students with parental consent forms describing the study. Focus groups were scheduled during time normally slotted for an after-school class. Children, the moderator, and research assistants sat on chairs in a circle in front of a classroom whiteboard. After the children were told about the process, they were asked to fill out a consent form. Next, we turned on the audio tape recorder. Each child gave their age and talked about their favorite media.

Measurement of values. The moderator listed seven values—community feeling, image, benevolence, fame, self-acceptance, financial success, and achievement—on the board. These values were chosen from a previous study in which participants ranked how important they judged each of 17 values to be in popular preteen TV over the last five decades (Uhls & Greenfield, 2011). The top two values were taken from each decade, but because the top two were the same for many of the decades (e.g., community feeling was ranked number one or two in 1967, 1977, 1987, and 1997), this resulted in a total of six values. One value was then added to this list, financial success, making the above list of seven values. In the prior study, although financial success never made the top two, it increased significantly in importance across the decades.

The moderator explained the general concept of values, and what each specific value meant at a developmentally appropriate level. The complete list, with the given explanations, is provided in Table 2. The children were then handed small pieces of paper and

asked to write privately and anonymously one or two values from the list that were important for their future: “What do you value, what is important to you, secretly or public, for when you grow up?” They then placed the paper into a hat. If two values were listed, the first listed was considered the top value.

A ranking rather than rating procedure was used for two reasons: First, relative priorities were of interest. Second, this type of procedure made possible the use of the top-ranked values in the focus group discussion that constituted the next step: The moderator read each listed value out loud without ascribing it to any particular child. The participants next discussed what these answers meant to them and why they might be important.

Videos. Next, the group chose a video to watch from a preselected group of three videos, all of which featured successful real-life personalities or fictional characters. The three TV shows, all downloaded from iTunes, were *iCarly* (Dornetto, 2008), *Hannah Montana* (Lieblein, 2007), and *NBA All Star Game* (NBA, 2009). Each group, regardless of gender, chose the current hit *iCarly*. When Internet access and thus iTunes were unavailable for one group, they asked to watch a sports video from YouTube on a cell phone. The *iCarly* episode summary is: Carly needs to intervene when Spencer becomes addicted to playing a video game. Sam tricks Freddie into believing that he’s being plagued by bad luck when he refuses to forward a “chain email.” (iTunes Store, 2011).

The group watched the first 5 min of the program (begins with Carly and her best friend Sam being filmed for a webcast, then a set-up about the chain letter, then opening credits and, finally, introduction to main plot line about Spencer and video games) then discussed their interpretation of the themes and characters. After this discussion, the moderator wrote on the whiteboard the children’s ideas about how they felt one might prepare for the kinds of activities in which the characters participated. The discussion flowed in a more open direction for the next 5–10 min.

Questionnaire. After about 50 min, the participants were asked to fill out a short questionnaire on media. Information from this questionnaire was used to describe the sample (see the Participants section). The groups lasted just under 1 hr each.

Data Analysis

Quantitative analysis. We calculated how often each of the seven values appeared as a child’s first or only choice. Binomial tests were used to see whether any single value appeared in the number one spot with more than chance frequency. Additional binomial tests explored whether individualistic values as a group

Table 2
Values and Their Explanations

| Value | Explanation |
|-------------------|--|
| Fame | The most important thing for your future is to be famous. |
| Benevolence | The most important thing will be to be really kind. |
| Community feeling | The most important thing will be to be part of a group. |
| Achievement | The most important thing will be to be very successful. |
| Financial success | The most important thing will be to make a lot of money, to be rich. |
| Self-acceptance | The most important thing will be to love and accept yourself. |
| Image | The most important thing will be to look good. You will care about what you look like. |

significantly exceeded chance frequency for appearing as top values. Fisher's exact tests were also run to determine whether gender or school level (i.e., elementary or middle school) made a difference in selecting a number one value. Although the top values were written anonymously, they could be identified by gender and school level because each group was composed of a single gender and came from either the elementary school or the middle school.

Qualitative analysis. Focus group audio files were fully transcribed, preserving ungrammatical discourse when it occurred. Transcriptions were individually read three times by the first author and each of four research assistants looking for instances in which children explicitly and implicitly connected the value of fame and public recognition to messages in their media environment. The group met with transcripts in hand to discuss each focus group individually and the sample as a whole and to agree on the most prominent themes. Themes were considered significant when three of the four research assistants as well as the first author agreed that the theme appeared across at least three of the five focus groups. In addition, the first author and a research assistant further identified subthemes in the discourse in order to examine how participants ascribed meaning to fame, the most important value. (See the Appendix for a full list of themes and subthemes.) The Results section follows the outline of the Appendix and provides illustrative examples of each theme and subtheme.

In reporting the discourse, the groups are labeled by a Roman numeral, school level (e.g., elementary or middle), and gender, corresponding to Table 1. Within each block of quotations, participants are labeled by gender and number (e.g., Girl 1, Girl 2, etc.), whereas the letter *M* labels the moderator. In order to clearly illustrate a theme or subtheme, at times the discourse of an individual participant was edited to eliminate comments irrelevant to the point at hand; these edits are shown by the convention of multiple dots. If the multiple dots appear between conversationalists, this means that entire lines of dialogue from an intervening speaker were eliminated. At times, several children spoke at once; this was denoted by listing the gender and the number of each of the participants (e.g., Girl 1/2/3). Words within parentheses offer extra detail, not spoken by the participants, to aid the reader's comprehension.

Results and Discussion

Quantitative Analysis

We found that eight out of 20 children, or 40%, listed fame as their top choice for what they wanted in their future, more than any other aspiration (see Figure 1). Fame was the only top choice to occur significantly more often than expected by chance (with seven possible values, the chance level is 14%; binomial test, $p = .006$). In each individual focus group, anywhere from one quarter to half the children listed fame as their most important value (see Table 1). However, contrary to expectation, individualistic values as a group (fame, achievement, financial success, self-acceptance, and image) did not occur more frequently than expected by chance.

According to Fisher's exact tests, the difference between the distribution of fame as a top choice among girls (four out of nine) and boys (four out of 11) was not significant, nor was there a significant difference between elementary-school students (three out of eight) and middle-school students (five out of 12) in the

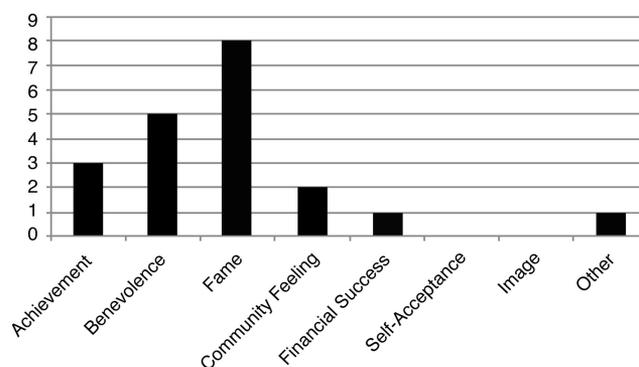


Figure 1. Number of participants (out of a total of 20) who listed various values as their number one desired future value/goal. Other: One child produced the response "having fun," rather than selecting from the seven values. No one selected image or self-acceptance as a first-choice value.

frequency of selecting fame as their top goal. In summary, fame was the most frequent first-choice goal for the sample as a whole, for both boys and girls, and for both elementary and middle-school students. Our qualitative analysis elucidated its meaning.

Qualitative Analysis

What does fame mean to these young people? We asked each group to discuss the meaning of fame as a goal in order to explore our participants' interpretations of this most popular value. The discourse below, responding to the moderator's question about why the participants listed fame as something they desired for their future, demonstrates the predominant belief—fame is connected to money and attention:

[Boy 2] Oh, so when I'm famous, I'll get more rich. And I'll become a millionaire. [Group II, Elementary boys]

[Girl 1] Um, fame, being famous to me means like the world kinda knows you, and you know, just like being on the red carpet, and with like cameras flashing . . . [Group III, Middle girls]

[Boy 2] You have a lot of money, everybody likes you. [Group IV, Middle boys]

In addition, many of the children believed that fame would mean that people liked them and knew who they were.

Messages about fame in the media environment. Preadolescents expressed both explicit and implicit awareness of messages about fame and public recognition on different platforms and in a variety of content: in fictional TV, reality TV, and online. Moreover, a mixture of media conveyed repeated messages about famous young characters, real life and fictional, at times creating a synergy that reinforced their significance.

Messages about fame in fictional TV shows. Children were explicitly aware of the connection between fictional characters and fame, as the following quote demonstrates:

[M] Um, *iCarly*? You think *iCarly* and *Hannah Montana* are similar?

[Boy 3] Yeah.

[M] You do?

[Boy 2] I do.

[Boy 1] Well, they both get famous from sponsors, so yeah. (Group V, Middle boys)

In addition, the peer interchange reinforces each boy's conception that both popular TV characters are famous, with similar pathways to success.

In every focus group, all the children knew the TV show *iCarly* and were aware that the two lead characters hosted their own online show that boasted a large audience. The message that this kind of online audience translated to offline status, even with adults, is reinforced through the narrative as the quote below indicates:

[M] (Who watches . . .) Um, I don't mean this show. I mean their web show.

[Girl 2] Um, a lotta people in their school.

[M] School?

[Girl 4] Actually, grown-ups watch it too. Like their principal watches it.

[Girl 2] Yeah, there's this episode, it was the principal's daughter's birthday. And he wanted to be on the show, . . . (Group III, Middle girls)

The show seems to validate the desirability of this kind of audience, even suggesting that adults desire the public platform that these teenage characters have created.

Messages about fame in real life. As we discussed different media content and platforms, the participants gave many examples of real people who were famous. In this first example, the group discussed the title of a video clip choice, *NBA All Star*. The discussion demonstrates that these boys connect fame to other sports, each with its own version of "stars:"

[M] I thought stars were movie stars.

[Boy 2] No, it can be baseball. Baseball, the all-stars game.

[Boy 1] You didn't know that?

[M] I'm just asking.

[Boy 2] The all-star game in football is the best.

[M] So football people and baseball people are famous too?

[Boy2/3] Yeah. (Group II, Elementary boys)

In addition, the reality TV genre often provides examples of regular people, perhaps like our participants and their families, interacting with successful people and achieving renown themselves. The discussion below arose as we discussed one participant's goal of becoming a fashion designer:

[M] Have you ever seen a fashion designer in any media?

[Girl 5] Yeah.

[M] Or shows? Which shows?

[Girl 5] Um, well my mom, she really likes to watch "The Real Housewives of New York," and they go to fashion shows all the time. (Group III, Middle girls)

Numerous examples showed children were aware that a large online audience translated to becoming a celebrity. For example, when the moderator asked whether a "kid" could be a successful

Internet star, these sixth-grade boys talked about one popular Internet phenomenon:

[Boy 1] Look at Fred, he's annoying and everyone likes him.

[Boy 2] Look at, look at.

[Boy 3] I know! Fred is like.

[M] Who's Fred?

.

[Boy 1] He's like the number three most subscribed on YouTube video.

[M] And how old's he?

[Boy 3] Like sixteen, and he's acting like a baby.

[Boy 2] Oh yeah, the guy who made that, like that Christmas song? (Group V, Middle boys)

Media provide messages about fame and its desirability not only with fictional characters but also with "real" people. The examples of teenage Internet celebrities may also reinforce the notion that young people can achieve renown.

Synergy across different media. Messages about fame multiply as they are populated across platforms. Thus, youth see a real-life figure or fictional character in one medium such as TV and then later learn more about them online, perhaps while watching YouTube. The boys below knew about popular sport stars not only from watching them play live games on TV but also from clips of them on YouTube:

[M] Anyone got a YouTube video they wanna talk about? . . .

[Boy 3] I have one . . .

[Boy 2] Could it be, like, a basketball player or something?

[Boy 3] Michael Burger remix?

[Boy 2] Um . . . LeBron, LeBron dumps on Kevin Garnett? (Group IV, Middle boys)

Although the moderator's question was not about sports clips on YouTube, the boys first suggested videos of their favorite sport celebrities. As the group discussed one famous basketball star, they bring up seeing him in a film on their video game console:

[Boy 2] Yeah, I've seen his movie.

[M] You saw the movie?

[Boy 2] Yeah. It was cool. I have it on my Xbox.

[Boy 3] I wanna see that.

[Boy 4] It was cool. (Group IV, Middle boys)

As the above quote illustrates, a real person's life was portrayed in a film and then played on a medium that youth easily access (i.e., Xbox). This kind of synergy may increase the power of the messages.

Connection between messages in media and future goals. Our discussions also explored how children connect messages about fame to their future goals.

Explicit connections to future goals. In each group, at least one participant stated fame as their future goal or most important value. We were thus able to ask the group as a whole if they thought about how someone might achieve this goal, and we found

many connections to messages from media. When asked whether anyone had seen examples of people in media doing a job they were interested in, a female participant tells the group how she was inspired toward her stated goal to be a singer:

[Girl 1] Well, um, ah, for like, ah, um, like, I knew when I wanted to be like a singer was when I like went to this concert, and I was in the third grade. And it was a Miley Cyrus concert, with the Jonas Brothers. . . . So I like saw her on stage, and you know and um, it seemed like she really was having a really good time. And like, it showed me that like I wanna have a good time, you know, like people cheering my name, and you know, singing the songs that I wrote. . . . [Group III, Middle girls]

Girl 1 connects her desire to be a singer to the real-life actress, Miley Cyrus, who plays Hannah Montana, a popular fictional character on a Disney show. The actress, who is also a rock star and just a few years older than our participants, exudes an appealing aura that her audience seems to enjoy, playing to this girl's desire for attention, recognition, and fun. She has no trouble imagining herself on the stage with an audience singing songs she wrote.

Later in the conversation, the group brings up a show called *True Jackson*, in which a 15-year-old is vice president of a fashion company. The moderator asks whether anyone knew how the character got her job, and Girl 4, who previously stated a desire to be a fashion designer, answers:

[Girl 4] Okay, and then she was wearing this like orange thing or something, and it went good with the outfit, and the boss says, "Oh, I like that." And so, and she's always been dreaming to go to that like 'Mad Style.' And then she's like, "Why don't you be the vice president?" And that's it.

[M] You guys think that that could happen? Do you dream about that happening?

[Girl 1] Yes!

[Girl 2] Maybe, there's a chance.

[Girl 5] Hopefully! [Group III, Middle girls]

The connection between the girl's desires and the television show are explicit, and the peer interchange underscores the possibility that this kind of success is real and attainable for a teenager.

In the sequence below, the sixth-grade boy who told us that Fred was the number 3 subscribed YouTube star talks about his immediate goal for a large Internet audience. In response to a question from the moderator whether anyone made a video to post online, he says:

[Boy 1] Um, my friends and I are making a YouTube Channel . . .

[M] Why are you doing that? . . . For fun? Or do you have a goal?

[Boy 1] Our goal is to try and get a million subscribers. (Group V, Middle boys)

As we saw in the earlier quotes, all of these boys knew of Fred, and Boy 1 seemed to have even studied his success, hoping to achieve an audience in the same manner. Fred, as an example of a regular teenager achieving Internet fame, may be a particularly salient role model.

Judgments of realism and applicability to their own life. Many of the children had explicit dreams for success, whereas others did not express the same level of concrete thinking about

vocations. We explored whether these children had connected the pathways to fame and success from the fictional characters on TV to their own budding future goals. We thus asked whether what they saw on *iCarly* seemed possible, and if so, how they would do the same thing:

[M] . . . Do you really think that could really happen? Can kids have a web show? How would you do it?

[Boy 1] I would set up a website and I would tape videos and then I would put it on there like YouTube . . . I would just tell people, like i (boy's name).com. (Group II, Elementary boys)

[M] You guys think you could . . . did they have any grown-up help?

[Girl 1/2/4] No.

[M] Do you think you need a grown up, or any kid can do it?

[Girl 1] Any kid can do it.

[Girl 5/2] Yeah. [Group III, Middle girls]

The path to Internet success may seem particularly achievable at a young age, given nearly anyone's easy access to YouTube. In one group, at least one participant believed that the concept behind *iCarly* came from real life, even though the lead character had previously been on another popular fictional TV show. When asked what the show is about, the group responds:

[Girl 2] . . . just about like three teenagers, who are really close together and, they do a web show, it just shows their normal life and how they are on the show.

[Girl 3] Like, I think, I actually heard from somebody it, their show, actually did start out as a webcast. (Group I, Elementary girls)

This kind of "achievable" pathway is also modeled in reality TV, as this discussion about *American Idol* indicates:

[M] Can kids become, can kids go on that show?

[Boy 2] Yeah. Sixteen to twenty-eight.

[Boy 3] Yeah sixteen year olds. (Group V, Middle boys)

As demonstrated by the above quotes, children witness teenage Internet celebrities and young reality TV stars. Even children who do not explicitly desire a career similar to the characters they observe seem acutely aware that the pathway exists, beginning at a young age.

Video sharing and social networking: Enacting the value of fame. Even when children did not explicitly endorse the value of fame, they used digital media to find an online audience. The majority of participants had either posted their own videos online or knew of others, an adult or a peer, who had posted a video to attract an online audience. As such, a normative desire for peer recognition could become a desire for public recognition achieved through online media, amplifying the motivation for a broad audience.

Video sharing by others: Peers and adults. Group I girls bring up a boy who is not their friend; yet, they were aware of his videos and his burgeoning audience beyond the school playground:

[M] Did you ever talk to him . . . why did he put those up?

[Girl 3] Because, um, actually no, because he does it at school and everyone thinks it's funny. So I guess he thought it would be a good idea to put it up [Group I, Elementary girls]

In other cases, we heard about adults who encouraged the message that an audience of one's immediate community is inadequate. When asked whether he had ever posted a video of himself online, Boy 2 tells the group that although he himself has not posted one, his piano teacher did.

[Boy 2] So, um, ok so, I, I did my act right, with another kid, and then my, my piano teacher was there, it was (a) piano act, and um, she, she filmed it and put it on YouTube . . . I'm on YouTube and I didn't (pause) do it. But she filmed it. [Group V, Middle boys]

In the following example, another adult encourages the children to perform specifically for a video to be posted online. Boy 4 who claimed never to have posted his own video online tells the group about an adult who posted a video of him.

[Boy 4] I was in a church, um, and doing music, and then, um, my pastor, he said, um, all junior highs were going to make a video on YouTube. So we did this, like, a few months ago, and then, yeah um, we did this dance, and, it was this Korean pop kinda yeah. It was, of this, yeah, idol?

[M] Idol? Like a, religious thing? Or, uh, like, a singer? Was it serious or funny?

[Boy 4] Funny, and I was real bored, then, I don't know if he put it up or not, or, but it was really funny after, um, we, um, I'm not sure if you can see it or not, yeah. [Group IV, Middle boys].

Whatever their intent, in deciding to film and post online, the message these adults model is that an activity or interest should be seen by an audience beyond the people who participated in the activity or saw the performance in person. If children begin to internalize these implicit messages, they may look for a bigger audience in any capacity in order to validate what they are doing. These youth, and the adults they interact with, may be no longer satisfied with attention from their own communities and instead seek a larger platform.

Online audience for self: Video-sharing platforms. Nearly all of our participants made and posted online videos, a trend exemplified by the following middle-school group:

[M] . . . Have you guys ever made a video for YouTube?

[Boy 3] No.

[Boy 2] Yeah.

[Boy 4] Only once.

[Boy 1] I did.

.

[M] And did you put it up on YouTube?

[Boy 1] Um, yeah we did. We have like eight episodes.

.

[M] And did you get people to see it?

[Boy 1] Um, yeah, we got, I got a couple of my friends and they got a couple of their friends and I think it stopped there because we only got like 200 people to watch it, in like a year.

[M] That's not bad, do you feel like that's good or bad?

[Boy 1] Um, it's pretty good except other things have been out for like, a week and they've gotten like a million views and stuff so.

[Group IV, Middle boys]

This boy showed creativity and agency. But his video's audience of 200 seemed inadequate to him, because he compared the audience for his video with bigger audiences for other videos.

Youth who post videos are conscious of their online audience, and sensitive to its size. The following quotes are all in response to discussions about which participants had posted videos online.

[M] Have you posted something?

[Girl 1] . . . I have a Facebook account too, and I usually go on it. Like, I go on it every single day. I have posted like three videos so far.

[M] On your Facebook?

.

[Girl 1] And, they're like, videos of me being bored, and, but kinda like doing comedy at the same time. And like my friends, some of my friends have watched, but they have commented on it. But . . . um . . . you know, I think people watch it. [Group III, Middle girls]

[Boy 3] I did one video once, but it only got like, four views.

.

[Boy 3] And no comments.

[Boy 2] It's a video website.

[Boy 3] It was sad.

[M] Yeah. Have you ever put one up?

[Boy 1] Uh, yeah. It was of my little cousin messing with my computer. It currently has fifty-four views and five comments. (Group V, Middle boys)

[Girl 5] And so we posted that on the Internet, and I don't know how many views it has, but, ah.

[M] You don't know?

[Girl 5] Yeah, I don't have that many views, but . . . (Group III, Middle girls)

Digital media have increased the average person's ability to gain an audience. Given their easy access to tools that invite public display, young people who grew up with digital media may be more comfortable than older people with performing on a virtual stage for an audience they may never see face to face.

Online audience for self: "Friends" on social networking sites. Our young participants were already aware of how many people "watch" them online on social networking sites such as Facebook, as the next quote illustrates. When asked how many "friends" the girls have on social networking sites, Girl 1 answers, while Girl 2 chimes in:

[Girl 1] And I have like, two hundred and

[Girl 2] something friends.

[Girl 1] Like two hundred and ninety something or eighty something friends.

[M] That's a lot of friends. You know them all.

[Girl 1] Most of them.

.

[Girl 1] Yeah, it's about the 5th graders, um, a lot of them are adding me on Facebook because . . . And I didn't even know them, and like, I remember their faces but I didn't really know them and I was like, but I like confirmed it and they were like Oh my God! You are so cool. I can't believe we're friends on Facebook, and I'm like . . .

[M] Well, would you ever sit next to them or hang out with them if they were here on campus?

[Girl 1] Um I don't think so, no. [Group III, Middle girls]

Even though some of these “friends” are not people this girl would want to talk to face to face, she was aware that they were watching her and in some sense may have performed for them. Her ability to acquire an audience could be feeding into a desire for fame, and the consequent attention that all these groups believed went with fame.

In the exchange below, several boys make clear how many “friends” they have.

[M] How many, you know, when you friend people? They count how many friends you have.

[Boy 4] Oh. 180 I think?

[Boy 2] I have 9.

[M] You have 9?

[Boy 2] My dad has like, 1,072.

[Boy 1] Whoa. Oh my gosh.

[M] How did he get that many?

[Boy 2] 'Cause he goes to find them. He's like, naw, like,

[M] And how did you get 150?

[Boy 4] 80.

[M] 80?

[Boy 2] Oh there's a lot, a lot of people have that much, like, 1,000.

[Boy 4] It's been a few weeks, few weeks, since I made it. Few weeks, and then, um, I added all the people in my church, and in school.

[M] And that's 150 people?

[Boy 4] 80. (Group IV, Middle boys)

Boy 4 says he “thinks” he has 180 friends, but as the exchange goes on, and he corrects the moderator several times (e.g., when she says 150 friends, he points out several times by saying “80” that he means 180), it is apparent he knows exactly how large his network is. Boy 2 also knows the size of his “audience” and that of his father's. He tells Boy 1 that a network of 1,000 is not unusual, underscoring that a big network is normative. The interchange between peers about network size seems to highlight the status that may be associated with a large online audience.

Desire for individual fame in group or communal activities. We found evidence that the individualistic value of fame and public recognition crossed into domains traditionally associated with teamwork or making a social contribution. In the example below, a boy elaborates on his plan to become an NBA star, even though earlier he told us that he was not on a team, nor did he have plans to try out. The moderator asks him how he plans to get into the NBA:

[Boy 2] First, I'm gonna take it seriously, play, um, travel basketball, and, um, I'm going (to) college for one year, see if I'm really good, and, I wanna be on a really bad team, so, I can be like the star.

.....

[M] Bad team in the NBA?

[Boy 2] If I ever won a championship, and like, be the most famous guy.

.....

[Boy 3] . . . cause if your team's not good, then you're going to be pushed to try to play your best then, um, better teams will see that, and he'll . . . and then teams will see and he'll be able to, and then they'll, um, trade him and so he'll get on the really good team and then, um, probably win a championship . . .

[Boy 2] I wanna be on, like, the [sports team], I wanna be on a team that's never won a championship. [Group IV, Middle boys]

Although basketball is a team sport that requires shared goals and group commitment, this boy has no desire either for his team to win or to begin the hard work of learning to play basketball. His only goal appears to become famous. The peer interchange reinforces this boy's fanciful path toward becoming famous even if his team has to lose for his personal goal to be met.

The generality of the motivation for attention and audience was highlighted when a group discussed a community service activity. The following example came from a discussion about the meaning of community feeling, one of the value choices. The girls were asked what is important about community.

[Girl 4] The same as (Girl 1's name) and helping out in the community, like going green and helping.

[Girl 3] . . . But like, I'm in “Waste Warriors” here, and like we give speeches to the younger kids and stuff and we put on performances and like, we recently just went to town hall to collect our . . . our grand prize for recycling and we got to meet the governor and um, the mayor, so that's really . . .

[Girl 4] We were on television.

[M] Oh wow, oh you guys got, who got, every, all the fifth graders?

[Girl 4] No. Only “Waste Warriors.”

[Girl 3] No, it was just the group of maybe, ten people.

.....

[Girl 4] We were on television and in the newspaper. [Group III, Elementary girls]

In this transcript, a conversation about the meaning of community feeling transforms into a conversation about exposure on television and in the newspaper, as well as about access to famous political figures. Moreover, the community service activities mentioned in the greatest detail are performance based: The older children give speeches and put on shows for the younger children. Although Girl 4 begins the discussion with an explanation of activities that benefit a community, when Girl 3 brings up a school club connected to community feeling, she talks about meeting the mayor and governor. Girl 4 then describes this club's exposure to other audiences through television and newspaper. The peer interchange reinforces this extrinsic reward. Thus, the motivation for this organization, which may have initially been connected to service or community, becomes linked to rewards such as public attention and social access.

Conclusions and Implications

By showing fame as the number one cultural value in a preadolescent sample, the present study supports the prior historical

comparison of popular preteen TV show content over five decades; in that study, fame first emerged as the top cultural value in 2007 (Uhls & Greenfield, 2011). Our qualitative discourse analysis revealed preadolescent uptake of the twin values of fame and audience from (a) the most popular preteen shows, *Hannah Montana* and *American Idol* (Bryson, n.d.), as well as other shows with similar themes; (b) YouTube; and (c) social networking sites. Because the reality genre (e.g., *American Idol*), YouTube, and social networking sites have developed so rapidly and recently, the historical content analysis of cultural products for preadolescents (Uhls & Greenfield, 2011) combined with preadolescent interpretations of their media environment in this study support the theoretical proposition that the most dynamic sociodemographic variable—arguably communication technologies at the present time—is the one that transforms cultural values and developmental trajectories (P. M. Greenfield, 2009).

In the prior content analysis of popular preteen television (Uhls & Greenfield, 2011), not only fame but also other individualistic values, including financial success and achievement, rose significantly in relative importance over the decades. Contrary to those findings and to theoretical expectation, individualistic values as a group did not occur more often than chance in the children's number one choices. Perhaps this result has to do with the fact that fame, more than other individualistic goals, is highly accessible for both observation and enactment in the children's multimedia learning environment.

Focus groups provided an in-depth portrait of preadolescents' interpretations of fame portrayed in favorite programs and their use of interactive media tools to search for an audience for themselves. Popularity is a developmentally normative motive in this age group (De Bryn & Cillessen, 2006). Accordingly, at this developmental stage, when children seek peer acceptance and recognition, messages about fame may be especially appealing. When, however, an abundance of messages in the media environment promotes fame and when interactive media tools give youth the potential for broad public recognition, the desire for attention from an audience, manifest in the value of fame, may become amplified, as is the case for emerging adults using social network sites (Manago et al., 2008).

The notions of fame, audience, and performance were firmly embedded in the discourse. The new media environment concretized and emphasized these concepts so that they were precociously acquired, appearing even before the age when the societal perspective generally develops (Selman, 1981). Fame, audience, and performance revealed themselves as extrinsic motivators for a variety of activities. Our example of the discourse around one group's community service showed that the value of public recognition may be spreading from online content creation (Ito et al., 2010) to arenas normally associated with communitarian values. Similarly, performing for an audience had expanded from more traditional venues into the domain of community service. Moreover, the children's discourse, as well as responses to the poll asking for one or two values important to their future, indicated the perceived relevance of fame-oriented media to their own futures.

Although children's aspirations may become more realistic as they grow up, children in this age group are beginning to form their achievement values and self-concepts (Wigfield & Eccles, 1992). It may therefore be reason for concern that none of the children

mentioned a particular skill associated with the concept of fame such as excelling at a sport or acting. Only longitudinal research can tell us whether fame will remain an overarching goal, one that is more important than the deeds for which one is known. When youth see messages about fame in nearly every aspect of their pervasive media environment—fictional TV programs, reality TV shows, sports programs, and online—coupled with same-age models who achieve fame, these aspirations could remain central. In addition, children now have tools that provide access to a virtual audience, giving an impression that fame is at their fingertips. These tools may be cultivating a culture of reward from a virtual audience, amplifying a desire for fame and public recognition for any and all actions.

Fame is an aspiration that narcissists fantasize about achieving (Raskin & Novacek, 1991); our findings suggest that the documented historical increase in narcissistic personality in emerging adults (Twenge et al., 2008) begins in the preadolescent years with a desire for fame. A potential synergy exists between *observing* the fame-oriented content of popular TV shows and *enacting* the value of fame by participating in or posting online videos. Now even children can and do achieve their 15 min of fame, in the words of Andy Warhol.

In summary, our focus group findings indicate that watching fame narratives with young protagonists in popular TV programming, both fictional and real, playing in or posting videos online, and developing an audience of "friends" on social network sites make the concept of fame highly accessible to children between 10 and 12 years of age, transforming fame into a key value and goal for children in this age group.

Limitations and Future Directions

Without historical data, we do not know whether children's aspirations have changed over time. The only relevant study from an earlier period was of a different age group, high school boys and adult men. Only 4% of the boys and 2% of the men indicated that they desired a job that would make them famous (Singer & Steffle, 1954). In sharp contrast, 40% of our sample of preadolescents desired fame. However, we do not know the extent to which the developmental factor of increasing realism with age, rather than historical change, is at play in this historical comparison. Aspirations undoubtedly become more realistic with age; it will be interesting to follow these children over time, in order to explore this issue.

Because of openly discussing the value poll in the focus group, the children were not asked to put their names on their value choices. However, this procedure meant that we could not connect children's value choices in the poll to their discourse during discussion. Building on our findings, a future survey will connect value priorities to reasoning about fame and fame-oriented practices on an individual level. We cannot conclude that our findings are representative of American youth: Besides being small, our sample was in Los Angeles, a city in which fame is more apparent, given that it is home to many Hollywood stars and studios. Because youth trends beginning in media-saturated Los Angeles subsequently go national (L. Greenfield, 1997, 2002), the logical next step is to conduct a survey with a large sample of preadolescents in diverse socioeconomic and geographical settings, thus

continuing to fill a knowledge gap on media influences in this sensitive developmental period.

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Appendix

Qualitative Analysis: Themes and Subthemes

1. What does fame mean to young people?
 2. Messages about fame
 - a. Fictional TV shows
 - b. In real life
 - c. Synergy across different media
 3. Connection between messages in media and future goals
 - a. Explicit connections
 - b. Judgments of realism and applicability to their own life
 4. Video sharing and social networking: Enacting the value of fame
 - a. Video sharing by others: Peers and adults
 - b. Online audience for self: Video-sharing platforms
 - c. Online audience for self: “Friends” on social networking sites
 - d. Desire for individual fame in group or communal activities
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