

**Another 27 Club Member: An Examination of Amy Winehouse's Life and  
Death Through Lifestyle, Media, and Death Ritual**

by

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### **Abstract**

This study examines representations of Amy Winehouse's death in mass and social media to better understand the ritual of collective mourning in regards to celebrity death. It uses the concept of mediatization to characterize this ritual and the ways that media culture shapes representations and the formation of community within the rock 'n' roll culture. The study examines the tabloids' narrative of Winehouse, as well as statements shared on social media, to better understand the media ritual of celebrity death. The implications of this study call for a closer look at the tabloid expression of celebrity death and a spotlight into the way community and culture form through communication in both mass media and social media.

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## Chapter 1: Literature Review and Rationale

### Introduction

With the 2006 release of her albums *Frank* and *Back to Black* in the United States, Amy Winehouse shook the music world (Wolk, 2007). Winehouse first emerged in the music industry in October of 2003. Her voice was different, and she had a stigma surrounding her raunchy behavior which led people to be very intrigued by her. Her musical appeal within the jazz, pop, and rock communities made her marketable to just about anyone. She went on to become the first female British musician to claim six Grammy Awards and her music still gets radio play today.

Born in London on September 14, 1983 to a Jewish family, Winehouse's childhood started out strong and healthy. When she was 9, her parents divorced due to her father having an affair. She was very close with her father growing up, but now it seemed that she was never enough to him since he had a new family (Landoli, 2015). He later came back into the picture, but he is blamed by media for ignoring Amy's health issues as well as creating the start of a path for unstable relationships with men in the future (Landoli, 2015).

The way she lived her life in the spotlight ended up taking a large toll on her health. She suffered from eating disorders, became an alcoholic, used crack cocaine, cocaine, and heroin (Landoli, 2015). The drugs and alcohol directly impacted her health and even her performances. During her last tour, she took the stage in Serbia in June of 2011; she was so drunk that she ended up getting booted off stage

by her own fans (Zimonjic, 2011). It was clear that she needed help. Sadly, about a month after her Serbia performance that had worried many, she passed away on July 13, 2011 from accidental alcohol poisoning. Obituary articles began to be released, and both fans and celebrities began to collect their thoughts on comment sections of the articles as well as on Twitter, Facebook, and Tumblr. The release of obituary articles which memorialized her life, exemplified that the mourning process was collective within in the mainstream media.

This study will look at the collective, ritualized mourning of Amy Winehouse and will address how people construct meaning around rock 'n' roll performer deaths. Her lifestyle, the media portrayal of her identity, celebrity discourse, and the mediatized ritual of her death placed her firmly into the rock 'n' roll death culture. Mediatized ritual is a concept described in research on media and celebrity; it is applicable to celebrity deaths because there is an order to which the media ritualizes a death of a star. When people think of ritualization of death, they often think of funeral ceremonies, headstones, and religious mourning obligations. However, ritualization can also be evident in the way media are deployed in response to events. More specifically, this study will examine the way Amy Winehouse's death was portrayed in the media through ritualization such as obituaries and social media content. This study will focus on the discourse used in articles, research, and social media platforms to better understand the framework being used in creating Winehouse's posthumous identity.

Rock 'n' roll culture often pairs itself with a reputation that is formed by the behavioral patterns of individuals that are associated with it. The 27 Club is a group of artists who all died, coincidentally, at the exact age of 27. This mythical club was originally recognized between the years 1969 and 1981, but later was brought into the light due to Kurt Cobain's passing. The Club, which extends back to blues man Robert Johnson, also includes famous rock stars such as Jim Morrison, Kurt Cobain, Jimi Hendrix, Brian Jones, Janis Joplin, and Amy Winehouse among others. Associating an artist to this club helps fans mourn while also recognizing and appreciating the impact the celebrity's life on the overall culture and community.

Forming community is important when it comes to grieving death since everyone encounters death at some point in their life, and now the media is there to assist us in processing it. There are no limits to the media; we are all engrossed in it. Whether we are using the internet, talking to our friends online, reading the newspaper, reading a book, the media is always finding ways to present information to us. People use media to participate in mourning within communities as well as express the loss of a loved one they knew personally. It is also important to note that there is no celebrity without media. We decide as a public who we look up to in society. With the rapid growth of the internet, there is now a forum for individuals to mourn as a community. People, like us, make sense of Winehouse's death through the discourse that is presented through mediatized figures on social media, which leads to helping fans cope with her death. I will be analyzing news stories,



obituaries, and celebrity posts on social media while using the framework of ritualized media theory to support the claim that the ritualization of celebrity death is a unique process within global culture and society. This study will look at the following to gain a better understanding of how the death of rock icons is represented through media and how communities form through participation in mediated rituals of mourning:

- Mediatized ritual
- Media discourse surrounding her death
- Her lifestyle
- The use of gendered language surrounding Winehouse's behavior
- The 27 Club
- Community formation through grief and mourning
- Her face as a cause

**Mediatized ritual.** Mediatized ritual theory is the best framework to understand why celebrity deaths can be associated within a certain culture because it allows us to examine the impact media has on our lives and our interpretations of events. Mediatized ritual can be defined as “recurring and patterned forms of symbolic communication that allows us, through performance, to attach ourselves to the surrounding media-related world” (Sumiala, 2014, p. 9). Ritualization of artists in the media has been seen on many occasions and allows us to grieve, mourn, and form community. For example, Sumiala (2014) discusses Michael Jackson's influence on her. She describes her relationship to the artist as “entirely mediatized and dependent upon the media” (Sumiala, 2014, p. 16). The media brought his death to a personal level for fans. This personal grief is often obtained due to the language media uses to report about the artist's life. Emotional engagement with

celebrity death becomes apparent as the primary news of their death spreads through media. The ritualization of mourning creates a way for fans to gather and display their grief (Jones & Jenson, 2005). By creating a space for fans and celebrities alike to grieve, it shows that death is universal and can bring people together; that grieving death is not just exclusive to rock 'n' roll fans, rather it can occur with fans of any genre. What is particularly intriguing in the rock 'n' roll culture is the connection fans have in relating one death to another to processing grief, as exemplified through associating artists to the 27 Club.

Sumiala (2014) claims that death ritualization can be separated into three parts. The first part includes writing a will, last farewells, and funeral decisions such as coffins and what the person will wear. Second, funerary rituals including ceremony, family grief, wearing black, candles, and obituaries. Third, commemorating the loved one who passed through addressing the anniversary of their death, their birthday. These three parts of ritualizing death help individuals and society to come to terms with the death (Sumiala, 2014). The power of ritual helps to create awareness of a social crisis and shapes social relations in the community by reinforcing and reintegrating social order (Sumalia, 2014).

Hjarvard (2008) explains that within the process of mediatization there are direct and indirect forms of mediatization. Direct mediatization occurs when situations that were not mediated activity convert to a mediatized form through interaction with a medium. Hjarvard (2008) gives the example of the game of chess, which used to be a physical chessboard and now has been converted into a computer

game. Alternately, indirect mediation is when an activity is “increasingly influenced with respect to form, content, or organization by mediagenic symbols or mechanisms” (Hjarvard, 2008, p. 115). Here, Hjarvard (2008) gives the example of the increased merchandising of fast food restaurants such as Burger King. People often go for the burgers themselves, but now young children want to go for the cartoon characters and toys they receive. This is important to understand because it shows that we consume what is marketed to us. With death, rituals of mourning are marketed to us as well. The marketization of Winehouse’s death includes sales of merchandise with her name and face often included, vinyl albums being released, and the continuation of her recognition in being compared to live artists, one such as Adele. When it comes to mediatization and the death of rock musicians, direct mediatization occurs predominantly through the new online platforms people use to mourn musicians. Mediatization of post death rituals has become an outlet for people who cannot attend the funerals, memorial services or travel to graves. These online platforms such as social media and webshrines allow people to come together to mourn in a way that was not available prior to the internet.

Within the 27 Club, Winehouse was the first musician who passed away at a time where online mediatization of ritual was available. The media repeatedly blames drugs and alcohol for her death (Landoli, 2015). By addressing her as a part of Club 27, people came to terms with her death more easily because she was portrayed as “one of many” who have fallen at a young age in rock ‘n’ roll, and this

time, they could use online platforms to grieve and come together with other fans who had similar reactions to her death.

**Media discourse.** The media framed Winehouse's death in simple terms as they addressed her with words such as "tragic", "troubled", and "destructive." This reference to drugs and alcohol allowed fans to mourn easily because there was something to blame for her death unlike Kurt Cobain, who took his own life. There were no loose ends as to why she passed away; it was something that people saw coming due to her behavior and habits.

The morality of mortality and how to deal with death and grief in regards to celebrities is addressed in past research (Hearsum, 2012). Media consumption becomes a key part of grieving for fans. People gravitate to different media outlets to read about celebrity deaths and to gather information on rituals to follow such as ceremonies, remembrance pages, and foundations. It becomes difficult for fans to grieve based on just reading about a celebrity online because they often feel isolated in their grieving process. Jensen and Jones (2005) have argued that "we absorb ourselves in celebrity," and therefore, create our own personal connection to them. Fans who feel loneliness in grieving often turn to online communities to share their grief. The socially shared mourning and consumption of collective memory allow fans to grieve with one another in a way they could not before the internet, which connects back to mediatization of her death.

The socially shared aspect of mourning is considered larger scale grieving; therefore, it is more inclusive than disenfranchised grief, which is more

individualized (Harju, 2015). The rock 'n' roll community comes together in creating their own fan pages, webshrines, and commentary to recognize that they are feeling the loss along with many others. Amy Winehouse's fan base extends all over the world, therefore, leading to different publications using different language to describe her. This study will examine both language from publications in the United Kingdom and the United States. The discourse used from publications like *The Guardian*, *Rolling Stone*, and *Pitchfork* becomes somewhat of a base for what language is used in commemorating Amy Winehouse within different communities.

**Lifestyle.** Fame can cause stress on someone's life. With trying to maintain attention from her parents, while also balancing an unhealthy relationship with her on-again-off-again husband, Blake Fielder-Civil, Winehouse's self-destructive behavior affected the way fans perceived her. Fans also turned to film, media, and her music to understand her death (Andrews, 2017). Prior research by Hannah Andrews discusses how the archived footage of Winehouse can be viewed as commentary of her life story (Andrews, 2017, p. 2). The footage shows Winehouse's life experiences in a pure and raw form as she sorts through her own personal struggles and fame. Andrews (2017) argues that although Winehouse was always surrounded by the paparazzi, cameras, and media, and although she was truly never alone, the portrayal of her showed that she was quite alone. The constant attention was not healthy for her, so she often turned to drugs and alcohol to get away. She was deemed a troubled star or struggling star in most obituary articles that will be addressed in this study. Drug and alcohol abuse ultimately led to her

death, but her fame is now heavily associated with her alcohol and drug abuse, rather than appreciating her obvious talent (*Amy*, 2015). The film *Amy* became her most visual obituary that showed the cultural concerns about understanding death through narratives (Andrews, 2017).

The framing of Winehouse's life in the media was created through her private persona and public persona of herself, as shown previously through Polaschek's (2017) research. She liked her public and private persona of being a rebel. The torn and revealing clothing she wore and missing tooth that she embraced showed that she was comfortable with herself and did not care about what other people thought of her. She addressed her struggles with drugs and alcohol very openly, and embraced her contemporary feminism. Yet, her struggle with drugs and alcohol would seem to indicate that she was not happy with some aspect of her life and felt pressure in some form from the public to fit into a certain public persona (Polaschek, 2017). This allowed for different mediatized representations of her within the media.

**27 Club & gendered behavior.** The rock 'n' roll lifestyle often identified with members of the 27 club has been classified as a male practice in past research (Berkers & Eeckelaer, 2014). This lifestyle often included hard partying, drug and alcohol use, and sex. Yes, it falls into the "sex, drugs, and rock 'n' roll" attitude that the genre has thrived on.

Berkers and Eeckelaer (2014) identified five rock 'n' roll frames along with five rock and fall frames that they gathered from British media articles in

discussing both Amy Winehouse and her ex-boyfriend, actor Pete Doherty. The rock 'n' roll frames included "living on the edge, hero, independent individual, authenticity, and success", while the rock and fall frames included "concern, cannot deliver, media victim, dependent individual, and crazy" (p. 4). Berkers and Eeckelaer (2014) found that these frames categorized the language used in the articles and created a clear understanding that the language music critics used in portraying both artists, who had similar behavior, differed based on the gender of the artist. Berkers and Eeckelaer (2014) also found that music critics often act more like 'men' than journalists when representing women musicians, and they compare female musicians strictly to other female musicians. Research showed that Winehouse's behavior was perceived as "damaging, harmful, and unhealthy", while Pete Doherty's similar lifestyle was labeled as "an artist who dares to live on the edge" (Berkers & Eeckelaer, 2014, p. 10). The research argues that the rock 'n' roll lifestyle is depicted as a masculine practice that women do not fit into. They propose Janis Joplin and Amy Winehouse were both thrown into a category strictly associated with men, and this challenged the subject of masculinity in the rock 'n' roll world. The way media portrayed Amy Winehouse shows that she lived the rock lifestyle, but it was discussed in a different way solely because she was female. Berkers and Eeckelaer's (2014) research shows that the music critics might be to blame for the way she was represented in the tabloids post death.

Obituary articles written about Amy Winehouse focused on the drug and alcohol abuse she struggled with and compared her death to other 27 Club members

such as Janis Joplin and Kurt Cobain (Sisario, 2011). These reflections of Winehouse's life become critical to understanding the ritualizing of her death. Being associated with the 27 club as a rock musician shows that Winehouse's talent lives on next to other musicians who died in early age as well. Kurt Cobain's partying lifestyle fit in with the culture of the 27 Club. His cause of death, which was suicide, did not fit the character of the artists in the club who passed before him. His death was right at the beginning of a new technology called the internet. His passing was one of the first notable deaths that people could look up online (Mazzarela, 1995). With Winehouse's death, however, there was not just Google, there was social media. Social media became a major outlet for people to find out information about her family, life, and death. It also allowed for family, fans, and other celebrities to mourn as a community. With the rapid spread of news over social media platforms, it was easy to see the many obituaries and dedication pages to Winehouse immediately after she had passed away. This new way to communicate has now become an additional ritual of death and is heavily impacted by the mediatization of Winehouse's life. It carved out a space in which fans and celebrities could participate in the conversation from a more personal level than ever before. In this study, the language used in grief and mourning posts on these social media platforms will be examined in comparison to the language the tabloids used to describe her life of fame (Mazzarela, 1995) to reveal the, almost predetermined, framing and narrative being told by the media.



**Community.** The way fans come together to mourn within communities creates a better understood perception of the artist's life. Having other fans to grieve with allows independent fans to feel a part of the larger impact the artist had within the rock 'n' roll culture. Their para-social relationship with the artist is used to make this connection with other fans grieving too. Para-social relationships are formed when the fan feels that they have a personal relationship with a celebrity (Horton & Wohl, 2006). This is not a real-life relationship, but the fan is aware of that, while still feeling this pull towards knowing the celebrity. This creates grief in a different light that only other fans can relate to. As discussed prior, fans will often turn to online platforms to express this grief with other fans due to the feeling of being disenfranchised (Harju, 2015).

Jones and Jenson (2005) identify webshrines as a venue for fans to express their grief to one another; they argue these help fans feel less disenfranchised. Webshrines are a space of "reconstruction of the celebrity [in which] allows fans to be more intimate with the celebrity than they could ever be in life because they are now in control of [her] image" (Andsager, 2005, p. 27). It is also important to take into consideration that the participants expressing their grief in webshrines are engaged in discussion from all over the world.

On Facebook, Amy Winehouse had a page dedicated to sharing news about her upcoming tours and engaging with fans; it has now turned into a memorialization page and is used as way for fans to stay updated on news regarding her. Many fans use it to commemorate and appreciate her talent rather

than focusing on her drug and alcohol abuse. The posts now focus on her posthumous achievements for the most part. About a year after her death, it was announced on Amy Winehouse's Facebook page that there would be an Amy Winehouse Foundation. This foundation serves to support and educate young people about drug and alcohol abuse and continues to help youth today. It is evident that Amy's family took advantage of the community formed by the death of their loved one and used it to share a positive message and give others struggling with addiction a resource to turn to. It is important to recognize the positive impact surrounding celebrity deaths, such as the Amy Winehouse Foundation, that can grow from the mediatized ritualization of a celebrity.

**Face of a cause.** Amy's family addressed her cause of death and wanted to give others an outlet if they were struggling. While this can and should be a positive outcome, it is important to recognize that there are negative implications in giving attention to her struggles. In the past, families of celebrities have ignored the issues that their loved ones faced such as in the case of Karen Carpenter. Karen Carpenter was a singer in the band the Carpenters with her brother Richard, they sold over 100 million records and additionally another 20 million records posthumously (Bowers & Grey, 2005). Unfortunately, she passed away from anorexia at the age of 32 on February 4, 1983. She became the face of women fighting eating disorders, and her parents often ignored that she had the issue. The media took it into their own hands to address the issue and importance of understanding that many women go through what she went through. The family wanted her to be remembered for

her music, but the community of fans wanted to remember her as an icon in spreading awareness of the disorders she had (Bowers & Grey, 2005). Karen's family's disapproval of addressing her struggles led the media to take it into their own hands. This caused pain for the family and allowed for negative association to not only her name, but her family's as well. Fortunately, Amy's family did not take this approach in addressing her health and addictions.

Amy's family did the exact opposite posthumously. They acknowledged drugs and alcohol as being a problem in her life, which they openly acknowledge as the cause that ultimately led to her death, and created a foundation that could support others who are struggling. This framed her death as having somewhat of a positive outcome on a community within society and gave the issue of alcohol abuse the attention that her family felt the world should see. Whether this is right or wrong, can be discussed, but it takes strength for a family to accept the issues their loved one faced and fight it head on like the Amy Winehouse Foundation is doing.

In conclusion, Amy Winehouse's life and death impacted many people and fans all over the world. The media reflected a certain persona of her, and people turned to many forms of communities to grieve. After researching prior literature on celebrity deaths, mediatized ritual, as well as media portrayal of rock 'n' roll artists, there seems to be a missing piece. All three are interrelated, but there has never been research that examines their relationship. This study will use the mediatized ritualization of Amy Winehouse's death to show there is more to the picture than what people read online. The community that forms from grief leads to more than

just a deep connection between fans and the artist. Associating celebrity deaths with a group, such as the 27 Club, can help fans cope with the loss of another young rock musician's death. The community relies upon this connection as closure. In the end, Amy Winehouse's lifestyle, the media portrayal of her identity, media discourse surrounding her death, and mediatized ritual created a path for others to associate her within rock 'n' roll death culture as closure. By examining the representation of Amy by the media and how her life became ritualized within society, this research will show that there is a connection between how the representation of dead rock 'n' roll artists in the media can initiate communities to form through mediated rituals of mourning.

## Chapter 2: Methods and Overview of Chapters

This study examined fan and celebrity collective mourning drawing from social media contexts to examine the discourse used to create community within the rock 'n' roll culture. Netnography “allows for observation of practices and discourses taking place online as the researcher spends time in social media sites observing the communities and their interactions” (Harju, 2015, p. 133). It also allows for participation and interaction with the community under study, but for this study the researcher will remain an observer. Twitter and Facebook will be the primary sources for this commentary because they were the most prevalent outlets at the time of Amy Winehouse’s death.

In addition, excerpts from obituary articles as well as other reports of her death were used to compare the similar use of discourse between both the media and personal posts from social media. These articles will come from the following news sources: *Rolling Stone*, *The Guardian*, *Daily Mail*, *The Sun*, *Mirror*, *Pitchfork*, *Business Insider*, *BBC*, *NPR*, *The New York Times*, and *CNN*. These news sources include both United States and United Kingdom publications to better understand the portrayal and language used in both her home country as well as the United States. Along with both posts and articles, I will be examining prior academic research.

The reader should be aware that the tabloid texts are written to inform an audience about Amy Winehouse’s death from a media perspective, while the academic texts allow for a deeper understanding of why the media portrays her the

way they do. By connecting both the texts, it is possible to gain a better understanding of how community forms through the ritualization of mediatization.

The social media texts were gathered by looking up the date Amy Winehouse passed away on Facebook and Twitter. There seemed to be a lot of fan commentary from all over the world, but not much of value. The fan texts included emoji icons and simple condolences' statements on the subject. The texts that I found that were meaningful came from fellow musicians commemorating her. These texts are interesting because they address more than her death, most address her behavior too. While examining this, I found their statements closely resembled the language used in the articles reporting her death. This connection between the texts is what drew this research to focus on how community is formed through mediatized ritual online. These texts connect mediatized ritual to celebrity deaths as well as create a framework for this study.

The mass media chapter examines the tabloid press along with other mass media news outlets. These sources bring out majority of the repetitive language used in discussing Winehouse's passing both within mass media itself and as reflected in celebrity/fan commentary. This chapter examined the story told by the media, reflects upon the rhetoric being used around Winehouse's death, and examined the ritualization presented by the mass media.

The social media chapter analyzed statements by celebrities and fans that not only reflect the mass media's portrayal of Winehouse, but some also fight back against the mass media's representation of her. This chapter will look at fan and

celebrity engagement on social media as well as the use of The Amy Winehouse Foundation's page to better understand how community forms around the mediatization and ritualization of her death.

### Chapter 3: Mass Media

James Carey's (1989) cultural approach to communication identifies the ritual view of communication closely with terms such as sharing, participating, association, and possessing a common faith, thus creating both community and communication. These values, norms, and stories that are told through communication are what creates a culture and community. In examining the media texts surrounding Amy Winehouse's death, the stories being told through the media create a space for friends, family, and fans to mourn as a community.

Through multiple media and media logics, culture creates Winehouse's identity as someone of high importance to society. With the creation of her as celebrity, the images and language that the media chose to use to portray her life after her passing shaped the discourse used in collectively mourning her. The ritualized mediatization of a celebrity death allows for the media to shape what is collectively mourned. The media helps "shape how collective mourning does and can take place" (Harju, 2015). Collective mourning and mediatization draw out a picture of how we, as a culture, experience death events. In a mediatized society, the ritual function of media is arguably intensified as media logics increasingly set the tone for culture, directly relating back to the Carey's (1989) cultural approach.

It can be assumed that the mass media tells a story with the intention to provide information to as many people as it possibly can reach. The way events are framed and consumed create a better understanding of why our culture views events through a particular lens. It would be foolish not to address that the tabloids



had been heavily amplifying Winehouse's misbehavior and destructive lifestyle prior to her death, partly because the sensationalism drew in a large audience. It is also important to understand that when it came to her death, the storyline they used in portraying her in the tabloids post-death was already set due to this. By examining Winehouse's death through the lens of the mass media, it is evident just how powerful mass media can be. These findings provide a better understanding of how the mediatized ritualization of mourning happens and the importance of understanding the mass media in relation to ritualization of celebrity death. It will be clear that there are certain words and themes repeated throughout different media sources following her death. Some of these words and themes help constitute the stories and shared meanings of Winehouse. To exemplify this, this study will be looking at media discourse at and surrounding the time of Winehouse's death.

In researching this, the similar language used in the headlines of articles reporting her death was not so surprising, while the negative language repeated was. With a quick Google search, some of these titles popped up: "Amy Winehouse: The Diva and Her Demons" (*Rolling Stone*, 2007), "Troubled Singer Amy Winehouse Found Dead" (*NPR*, 2011), "Amy Winehouse's Death: A Troubled Star Gone Too Soon" (*Rolling Stone*), and "We All Destroyed Amy Winehouse" (*Pitchfork*, 2015). On the other hand, obituary articles were labeled generically with titles such as "Obituary: Amy Winehouse" (*CNN*, 2011). The obituary articles had more of a respectful display similar to reading a relative's obituary in the newspaper.

Steve Jones (2005) stated the following in relation to community sense-making of a celebrity death:

Who does the work of making sense of the dead? Obviously, family and friends of the deceased do. But when it comes to celebrity deaths, many others do as well. Certainly, journalists are implicated in the process of sense-making and mythmaking. Biographers are often involved too, too. But fans are part of that process as well (Jones & Jenson, 2005, p. 5).

Jones makes the point that journalists and biographers are often the first to make sense of a celebrity's death, while we often leave behind the thought of fans. Fans are commemorating, collectively memorializing, and collectively ritualizing the death of a celebrity. Fans are just as important to the process of collective mourning as biographers and journalists. As a community of people, humans mourn together to make sense of death. Meanwhile, for some kinds of celebrities, the tabloids seem to be the drive behind informing the community on the event, sometimes in a not so picture perfect, peaceful manner. This chapter on mass media, in relation to community and collective mourning, will explore the story the tabloids told, the rhetoric surrounding her death, as well as the rituals exposed through the media.

### **The Story**

The tabloids amplified Amy's destructive side, which made it natural for fans and celebrities to fault her lifestyle before the cause of death was even announced.

In the excerpt below, British tabloid, *The Sun*, first reports of her death and allows the reader to draw their own assumptions.

The Rehab singer, 27, was discovered at the property in north London by emergency services at around 3.54pm on Saturday afternoon. She is feared to have died from a binge on drugs and booze. A Sunday tabloid reported that she was seen buying substances, believed to be cocaine, heroin, ecstasy and ketamine, from a dealer in Camden just after 10:30pm on Friday. The Grammy-winning star had a well-publicized battle with drink and drugs during her short life. Just weeks ago pals feared she was drinking herself to death after blacking out on vodka three times in a week (Christine Jennings and Beci Wood, 23 Jul 2011).

*The Sun* also included a statement from nearby fan/neighbor Jann Meyer, 33, in which she stated, "It's not really a shock, it was to be expected sooner or later. She was 27, and all good rock stars go at 27. She was very talented, she was amazing" (Jennings & Woods, 2011). Through Meyer's statement, it is evident that there is a strong cultural relationship between the mythological group known as the '27 Club' and rock and roll deaths. Her expression did not show grief, rather it showed Winehouse's death as a normality within a cultural context. Meanwhile, celebrities were also beginning to share their thoughts to the tabloids. Fellow female British musician, Lily Allen said, "It's just beyond sad, there's nothing else to say. She was such a lost soul, may she rest in peace." Her statement to the press

feeds into the story the tabloids are trying to tell. To reiterate, the tabloids sensationalized her identity and behavior, which happened to work in their favor as readers continued to share and engage with the dramatic narrative being told.

The connection of her death to the 27 Club expanded across many of the first reports of her death. Jenny Elscu, of *Rolling Stone* stated:

Whether or not Winehouse's autopsy shows that her death was drug- or alcohol-related, her premature death is nothing short of a tragic loss to the music world. And so, in a sad footnote to an already tragic story, Winehouse now joins the ranks of the so-called 27 Club — a group of iconic musicians who died at that age including Jim Morrison, Jimi Hendrix, Janis Joplin, the Rolling Stones' Brian Jones, and Kurt Cobain (Elscu, 2011).

By associating her with the 27 Club, Elscu (2011) drew upon the true tragedy of Winehouse's death, at the same time displaying appreciation for her talent. With her name, next to the group of “iconic musicians”, she exemplified that this tragic loss is a big loss for fans all over the world, just as the other musicians' deaths were. She joined a community of legendary musicians, while collectively the mourners could hold her spirit along the names of other world-famous influential musicians. Would her death be as big of a deal if she had not passed at the age of 27? Maybe, maybe not. The reality is that her association with the 27 Club allowed the press to draw upon the haunted, yet mythical, group as another way to sensationalize and

grasp a larger audience that might not have otherwise had interest in Winehouse's death.

Paul Willis, a scholar and journalist who has written on culture and current affairs in the media for multiple respected news sources, discussed the impact the British tabloids had on their audience in reporting Winehouse. In doing so he stated:

The troubled star was frequently a target of the tabloid culture that Murdoch [owned *Sun Newspaper*] helped to foster. Her battle with her private demons was very public, detailed in a nearly constant stream of lurid tales in the tabloids (Paul Willis, 26 Jul 2011).

Addressing Winehouse's struggle with the tabloids gives some insight into the continuation of how the media represented her death. The brutal language and exploitation of her personal struggles evidently framed her as a "troubled star" as the tabloids expressed heavily in their headlines. Meanwhile, the language that shaped her when she was alive, also shaped how she has been perceived posthumously.

On a positive note, the negative language in reports surrounding her death, created a spotlight on the issue of substance abuse. Virtually everyone knows someone, whether it be a family member, friend, or acquaintance, that has been impacted by substance abuse. The connection between Amy Winehouse death and substance abuse created space for a different kind of collective mourning. It called for a different emotional connection that fans created through the tragic ending to

Winehouse's life. Even after she passed, though, she could not catch a break from the attacks on her "self-destructive" behavior. *New York Times* reporter Sam Yenigun reflected on Winehouse's past and tabloid attention by stating:

As YouTube rose in popularity, so did videos of train-wreck performances from a drunken and belligerent Winehouse. The singer did check into rehab in 2008, 2009 and then again in 2011. She was often on the front pages of tabloids for her behavior off stage: fighting with fans, marriage problems, substance abuse. Hoffman says that this was the essence of her celebrity (Yenigun, 2011).

What Yenigun failed to address is that the "essence of her celebrity" was formed by the media itself. Yenigun's language used in this excerpt is exactly what brought that portrayal of her to stick, become entertainment, and therefore, be remembered of Winehouse. What should rightfully have been her personal life was transformed into the public's perception of her. Ignoring the media's influence on creating this identity of her left out the truth of who she was and did not often address her talent, but amplified her faults. Statements like this not only feed issue of the influence the media has itself, but also leaves space for the media to ignore their own faults.

### **Rhetoric**

Her "self-destructive", "disastrous", and "troubled" behavior was examined as an artifact and displayed as though she lived under a microscope for the world to see. Though we saw her life shatter before our own eyes, and soon become

(seemingly) better before her death, there was still no safe zone for Winehouse in the eyes of the media. They exposed her any which way they could, even after her death. The mediatized rituals examined posthumously did, however, create a light at the end of the tunnel.

Meanwhile, other UK articles, such as one published by *Mirror*, have a somewhat different objective than some of the other tabloid articles. The author herself, claims to be a friend of Amy Winehouse, therefore making it harder for her to report on her death as such a tabloid crazed ‘opportunity’. Her opening statement began with the following:

Amy’s talent was so huge it is completely incomprehensible to believe that we’ve lost this voice. When she sang you stopped, looked and listened. She’s was truly magnificent. Raw, attention grabbing and full of emotion (Dean Piper, 23 Jul 2011).

The language used to describe Winehouse is less hostile than what was evident in articles prior. While addressing her talent more than her struggles, it created a different incentive for the reader to read. The credibility of the author became the ‘pull’ into reading the article. The reader can feel her grief as she describes Winehouse’s impact on grasping a close connection with her audience. Her statement also connects back to Lily Allen’s use of the word “lost”.

Soon after her death, fans from all over the world were participating in mourning by attending vigils and sharing their condolences to the media. *The*

*Guardian*, an intelligent, left-leaning alternative to the tabloids, shared statements of grieving friends of Winehouse, stating:

Tributes began to pour in to one of the most celebrated and troubled British artists of recent times. Mark Ronson, who produced *Back to Black*, said: "She was my musical soulmate and like a sister to me.

This is one of the saddest days of my life" (Cherry Wilson, 23 Jul 2011).

Mark Ronson addressed her talent and personal connection rather than addressing her troubles, while the statement written before quoting him continued to set up her life as "troubled." The use of the word "troubled" has come up numerous times in researching Winehouse's death. Although sad, yet true, this narrative, established prior to her death, became the frame the media used both at the time of her death and weeks/years after her death. Headlines have included the word, while also identifying similar words to create a frame of who Winehouse was and how she should be seen as. The framing of Winehouse as "troubled" creates a drama that we as consumers love and have no problem sharing. As a culture, and as the consumers of this tabloid rhetoric, we are more actively involved in the framing of a celebrity than we think. We also as a culture cannot resist these headlines. Does that mean we are the problem? The audience exposure and interest is what feeds and pays the tabloids...



## Ritualization

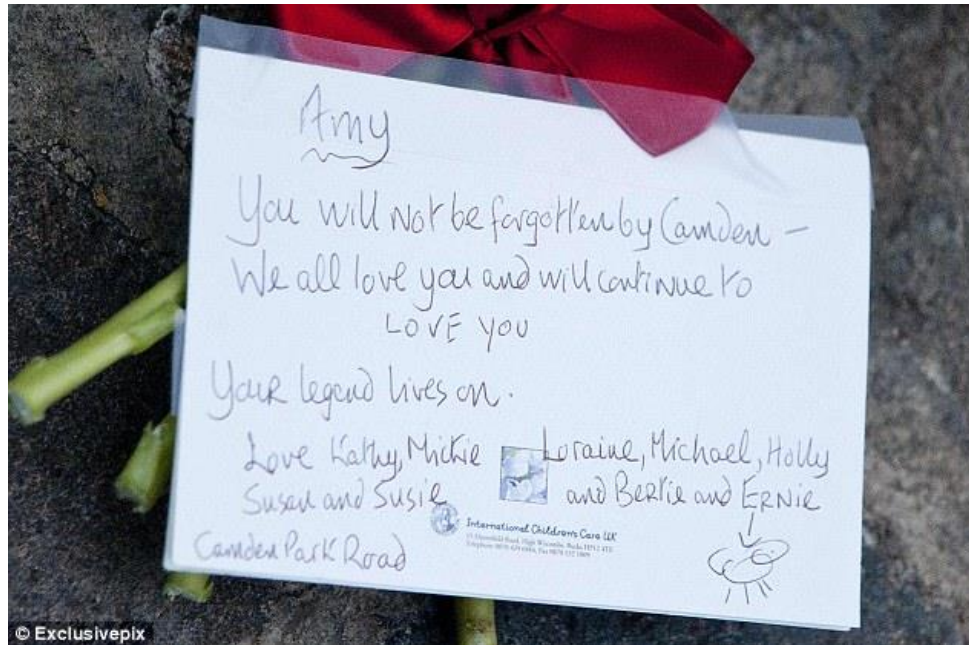
Other British Tabloids such as *The Telegraph* and *Daily Mail* displayed intimate photographs of her covered body being carried out of her home as well as photos of her family and fans paying tribute to her outside her London home.



*The Sun* (Jennings & Wood, 2011)



*The Sun*: London News Pictures (Jennings & Wood, 2011)



*The Sun*: Exclusivepix (Jennings & Wood, 2011)

The use of imagery in these tabloid articles exposes another level of emotional appeal. The pathos implemented in the text and images draws the reader to want to read more and form their own conclusions shaped by the tabloids representations of Winehouse. It is important to understand that there is not just an emotional appeal, but also emotional expression displayed by fans. This is a collective drama that the press, along with fans help make possible. These photographed ritualized ways to mourn became a gold mine for the press. While in the real world, participants in laying flowers down could visit a real space, rather than a virtual one to grieve on behalf of themselves, fans, friends, and family members from all over the world. In the handwritten note, there is a sense of personal grief and dedication to remembering Winehouse. The location mentioned, “Camden Park Road” also indicates that her own community came together to mourn. It also might indicate that the writer wants to distinguish her family from

the rest of mourners. The display of flowers is a ritualized way of mourning a celebrity. In the past, we have seen this at Michael Jackson's home (Jensen & Jones, 2005).

Overall, these images contribute to the "typical way" to mourn a celebrity, but the larger display of images of these rituals in the media show that there is more than one way her fans and community mourned her. Although there is an understandable order and expected order to ritual, these shared images help bridge the gap between the Camden community and fans throughout the world. The combination of the mass media's drama of her story, the rhetoric used, and the imagery presented, created a larger culture and community of fans ritualizing and experiencing Winehouse's death in many ways.

### Chapter 4: Social Media

Social media has become an increasingly popular form of collective remembering in which personal tributes to celebrities become “sites of public mourning” (Harju, 2014). With the increasing presence that social media have in our lives, the more social support and community there has been, along with more trolling and gawking too. Digital mourning, however, has become more acceptable, accessible, and visual than ever before. Having a space to mourn without judgment through a kind of mass personal engagement allows for humans to grieve in a way they could not prior. Communities are more easily formed around celebrity death than ever before, memorial pages are created, fan posts are marked, but more importantly these interactions both reflect and form our own social norms about collective mourning. In other words, the process of mediatization has changed the way that both mass and networked publics mourn celebrities’ deaths. This chapter examines different social media outlets such as Twitter and Facebook and how they have and do act as spaces for collective mourning. The mediatization of her death has been carried through social media platforms since the day Winehouse passed away. Unlike reading a newspaper or tabloid articles, these spaces allow other celebrities, fans, and family to actively engage with one another as a community.

Winehouse’s death was the first of the 27 Club to gain social media attention. By reflecting on Winehouse’s influence, other celebrities had the power to shape the image of Amy Winehouse’s posthumous identity alongside the tabloids. Her friends

and family could participate, share, as well as, view the impact Winehouse's life had on musicians and fans around the world through different posts.

There was no commentary on her Facebook page on the exact day that Winehouse passed away, but the following image was posted:



On the other hand, many of Winehouse's friends, fans, and fellow celebrities took to social media outlets such as Twitter, blogs, and Facebook, to share their own personal thoughts on her passing. The reactions to her death varied in addressing her many identities. Some addressed her musical talent, others talked about her influence on them, while former addicts shared their thoughts on her struggles tied to their personal experiences, and some became critics of the media in fighting back against the tabloid narratives and comments regarding the language used around Winehouse's death.

## Twitter/Blogs

George Michael, well known English singer-songwriter, posted a series of tweets [excerpted below] in which he expresses his sadness in her musical career ending, but even as a celebrity himself, he was able to express how big of a fan he was of Winehouse.

Amy was, in my opinion, the most soulful vocalist this country has ever seen. And her album *Back to Black* was the best album I had heard since the seventies. No question. It's a tragedy on two levels. Most important of course, the waste of such a young life and the pain of those who knew and loved her, but it's also a tragedy for all of us that we won't be hearing the exquisite music that she would have given us if fate had spared her life. I can't quite believe it. PLEASE PLEASE would her record company re-release her tenderest love song, 'Love is a Losing Game' soon. I seem to remember it getting lost in the chaos of Christmas releases a few years back. It would be HUGE now, and it's the way she should be remembered. As one of the greatest singer songwriters of all time. I hope she is at peace now. (George Michael, 25 Jul 2011)

Not only did Michael express his sorrow for the loss of someone so talented in the industry he, himself is a part of, but he also brought light to a specific song that meant a lot to him, that he felt deserved more attention. Listening to this song

could be his way of coping with her death, while sharing it virtually allows for his own fans to grieve along with him.

Kelly Clarkson, American Idol singer, addressed her own pain in trying to understand why Winehouse's life choices came to destroy her, given such talent and voice to share widely with the world. She posted:

She was a beautiful and talented girl. I'm angry. What a waste of a gifted person. What a shame she saw no hope and continued living her life in that manor [sic]. I have been that low emotionally and mentally and that is overwhelming. I keep asking myself why some of us are spared and the others are made examples. (Kelly Clarkson, blog post, 25 Jul 2011)

Her own experience in dealing with fame is reflected in her post, while she believes that she is lucky for having her life being "spared". The intensity of fame is relatable for Clarkson, but there seems to be a gap in understanding why Winehouse allowed this to happen to herself. Clarkson seems to be demonizing her own "low" emotions and mentality that she has overcome during her own career. Is this self-justification or a coping mechanism? Either way, her statements tie very closely to the concerns of the press without deliberately stating that Winehouse had a drug addiction.

Meanwhile, Courtney Love, party girl, and widow of Kurt Cobain, stated:

I'm not even going to say, 'Waste of glorious sublime talent," which I feel. I'm fucking gutted. I tried with her, I tried twice. (Courtney Love, to *Rolling Stone*, 26 Jul 2011)

With her own experience in losing her loved one Kurt Cobain--fame, partying and death is a bit too familiar to Courtney Love. Her statement clearly expresses anger, while also identifying that Winehouse is the one who was responsible. She claims that as a friend of Winehouse's, she "tried" to talk some sense into her, even though she herself, is not known to be an angel in the eyes of the press.

With the clear, yet indirect references these artists are making when talking about Winehouse's cause of death, many express their sorrow in a way that they can personally relate, but surely indicates that Winehouse made her own life choices, which sadly resulted in death. Russell Brand, comedian and actor, took this as an opportunity to address how addiction shaped his life and how the mediatization of a celebrity shapes our perceptions of them. He stated:

Amy increasingly became defined by her addiction. Our media though is more interested in tragedy than talent, so the ink began to defect from praising her gift to chronicling her downfall. The destructive personal relationships, the blood soaked ballet slippers, the aborted shows, that YouTube madness with the baby mice. In the public perception this ephemeral tittle-tattle replaced her timeless talent. (Russell Brand, 25 Jul 2011)



He continued on to discuss his own experience with going to rehab at the age of 27. The way he addresses the fault of the media in regards to celebrity downfalls, such as Winehouse's, sheds light on an otherwise ignored issue. The mediatization of Winehouse's death was formulated by harmful rhetoric that had been used years prior leading up to her death. Her personal struggles became the media's clickbait. Brand's powerful push against the tabloids, directly relates to the prior research done on identity work in the eyes of the media, which I addressed earlier.

American sing-songwriter, Robert Thomas, also fought back against the naysayers in a statement on Twitter:

So many people saying that because it's not a surprise Amy Winehouse passed, it's not sad. I hope you have more compassion for friends. (Robert Thomas, 23 Jul 2011)

On the other side, Adele, a British female musician often compared to Winehouse, posted a lighthearted happy-toned message on her blog addressing Winehouse's death. She stated:

Amy paved the way for artists like me and made people excited about British music again whilst being fearlessly hilarious and blase about the whole thing. I don't think she ever realized just how brilliant she was and how important she is, but that just makes her even more charming. (Adele, on her blog, 25 Jul 2011)

Adele was able to capture the pure joy of Winehouse as well as address the impact her music had on many, including herself. The lighthearted tone Adele used

is quite the opposite of many statements about the “troubled” dead star. Her talent outshined her behavior and addiction in the eyes of Adele.

Lady Gaga joined in on addressing the importance of Winehouse’s impact on the music industry by stating:

Amy changed pop music forever, I remember knowing there was hope, and feeling not alone because of her. She lived jazz, she lived the blues. (Lady Gaga, on Twitter, 24 Jul 2011)

Tony Bennett, who had worked with Winehouse on the song “Body and Soul” also looked beyond the tabloids’ hurtful rhetoric in discussing the loss of Winehouse.

Bennett stated:

[she was] an extraordinary musician with a rare intuition as a vocalist and I am truly devastated that her exceptional talent has come to such an early end. She was a lovely and intelligent person and when we recorded together she gave a soulful and extraordinary performance.

(Tony Bennett to *Us Weekly*, 23 Jul 2011)

Her influence even made its’ way to famous DJ’s, Diplo and Chromeo as well as pop singer Rihanna. They tweeted:

Amy winehouse [sic] was a legend. I feel bad today.. She had a voice like no one else in our generation. Goodbye Amy. (Diplo, 23 Jul 2011)

RIP. An icon of our generation. (Chromeo, 23 Jul 2011)

#DearAmy U made a MAJAH impression on this industry and throughout the world, in such a short space of time...too short!

#ICONSneverDIE. (Rihanna, 23 Jul 2011)

Both Diplo and Chromeo identify Winehouse's talent rather than her "destructive" behavior, counter to what the press was publishing. They express their disappointment and sadness, but also reflect on Winehouse's contribution to her peers. While Rihanna, somewhat addresses how young Winehouse was, without saying the phrase "lost talent" nor mentioning addiction as seen in prior tweets discussed.

Overall, celebrities are in a unique position when it comes to addressing another celebrity's death and are an essential part of the ritualization and collective mourning process. Since they are celebrities themselves, it easy for them to relate to living under the pressures of fame, and their statements become quite personal at times. For example, Russell Brand's statement stands out because he went through struggles of addiction in the limelight of fame just as Winehouse did, so his statement drew from personal experience and concern. Rihanna, Diplo, and Chromeo expressed their sadness in losing a talented peer, and those who worked closely with her, such as Tony Bennett, gave insight into working with her and gave recognition to her talent instead of her struggles.

These shared messages have become a ritual in the process of mourning celebrities. Celebrities' comments serve to start a more positive conversation rather than confirm what regular people and the tabloids are saying. They understand

more about fame, putting them in a unique position in addressing the passing of “one of their own”. Some celebrities tie into their own experiences of fame, others stick to talking about the effects Winehouse had on their creative work, and some participate as fans. Nonetheless, they have become a vital part of the conversation, ritualization and mourning process.

Winehouse’s case was the first of many where celebrities could utilize social media to lead conversations, share insight, and address a problem within the culture that they themselves live in. It is important to notice that some of these statements include personal reflections of Winehouse that seem to contradict, justify, fight against and/or ignore the narrative of Winehouse that was circulating in the mass media during the same timeframe. A larger effect that these celebrity posts had was *exposure*. Since they were shared with hundreds of thousands of followers, fans from all over the world could also take part in the ritual of mourning her life on social media without having to engage with the mass media’s framing of her.

### **Fans**

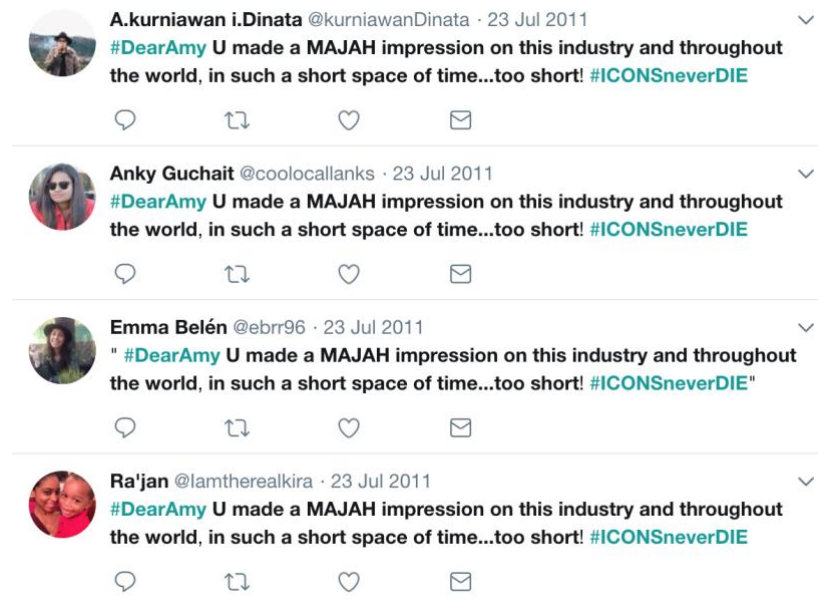
Winehouse’s fans posted on their own Facebook pages and Twitter feeds, interacted amongst each other, as well as commented, reposted, and retweeted celebrities’ posts addressing her death. Here you can see a fan post, with another fan’s comment on the intensity of the tabloid press.



Facebook User, Alan Hammond addresses the tabloid exploitation on Winehouse's life in responding to a person/page. The mediatization of her life, including family statements to the press, allow for open dialogue to be had online. Many families ask for privacy in the limelight of losing a famous loved one, but here you can see the worry Hammond has with the tabloids allowing space for the family's privacy. It seems as though the mediatization of her death turned Winehouse's life into a tabloid spectacle which became amplified through YouTube, and social media on the one hand, while also creating space for ordinary people to voice their own comments as well as push back against the tabloids and tabloidization of both her life and death.

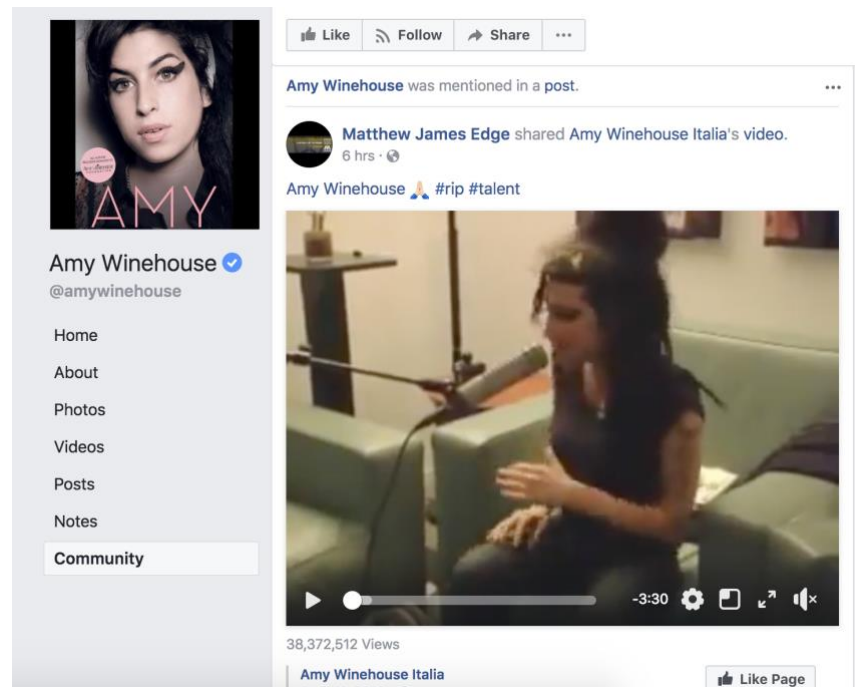
The tweets in response to Winehouse's death posted by celebrities, had anywhere from 10 to 5,000 retweets depending on the celebrity's following. This number might be low in comparison to a celebrity death now, due to Twitter's number of users back in 2011 compared to now. Twitter was still a way to reach

mass numbers of people and the news of Winehouse's death was able to spread via retweets without people's personal commentary. This is what it looked like on Twitter:



Fans from around the world continue to post about Winehouse today. They have and continue to be actively engaged in the cultural construction of celebrities through social media. They tend to position themselves as fans of her music, commentators, observers of her life, and critics of the media. They add more to the picture, simply contrasting their comments to those chosen and written by the press. Some might argue that this can complicate the mourning process, while this study argues they are a necessary element to seeking the truth behind the tabloid's language and cultural assumptions. Fans are also expressing what they take to be the meaning of Winehouse and her life at the time of her death. Fans are continuously engaged and they are given the platforms to do so. For example, there

is a community tab on her Facebook page that shows users the most recent posts they mention her in.



Fans even participate in singing contests to commemorate her as well as raise awareness for the Amy Winehouse Foundation. Here is a link to a contest winner a statement on the contest winner performing a song in recognizing the 10-year anniversary of Winehouse's *Back To Black* album: [Back To Black Video Contest Winner](#). The statement given at the end of the video shows exactly how influential the social media has been post Winehouse's death. It is stated:

We would also like to say a big thank you for our campaign partners; Island Records, Vevo, YouTube and Twitter, without whom we could not have made this such a success and fitting celebration of Amy and the Back to Black album. (Amy Winehouse Foundation”

With the acknowledgement to social media as their main way of grasping the attention of the contesters, it is evident that the mediatization and ritualization of Winehouse's death is still prevalent today.

### **Amy Winehouse Foundation/Merchandise**

The connection between Winehouse's death and substance abuse sparked a large-scale discussion about the importance of seeking help when one is struggling. Amy's family understood this and about a month later created the Amy Winehouse Foundation. This foundation was formed and marketed through both Facebook and Twitter, while the shareable posts about it informed followers about the importance of caring for struggling loved ones. T-shirts, bags, postcards, and contests were marketed for fans to support the foundation. There were also posts of songs in which fans could download knowing that the proceeds would go towards the foundation as well.



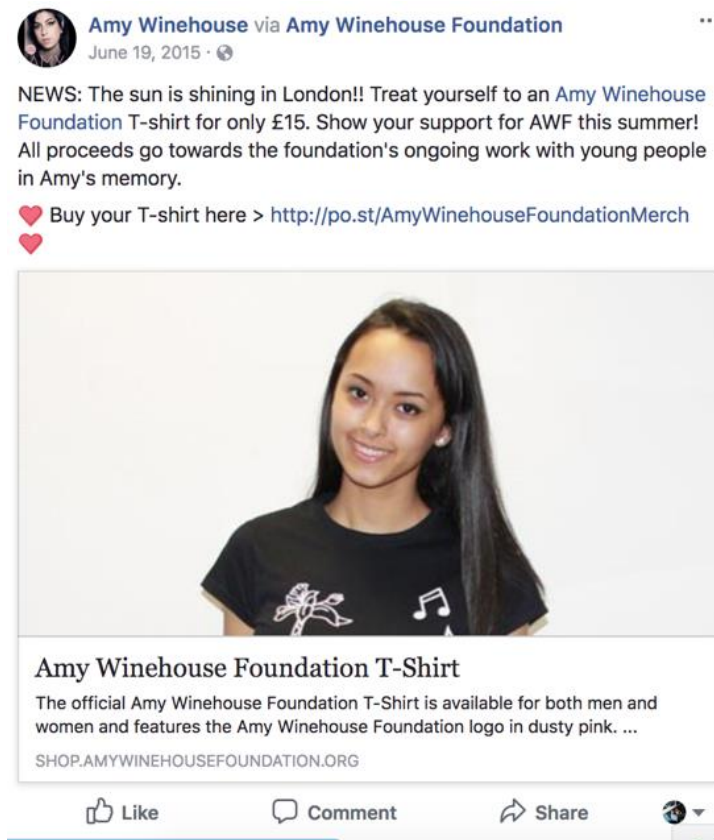



**Amy Winehouse**  @amywinehouse · 30 Oct 2013

NEWS: The Amy Winehouse Foundation store is live - you can purchase exclusive merchandise & artwork [@amysfoundation](#)

**Amy Winehouse Foundation**  
The only place to purchase official Amy Winehouse Foundation merchandise.  
[shop.amywinehousefoundation.org](http://shop.amywinehousefoundation.org)

240 799 1.8K



**Amy Winehouse** via **Amy Winehouse Foundation**  
June 19, 2015 · 

NEWS: The sun is shining in London!! Treat yourself to an [Amy Winehouse Foundation T-shirt](#) for only £15. Show your support for AWF this summer! All proceeds go towards the foundation's ongoing work with young people in Amy's memory.

♥ Buy your T-shirt here > <http://po.st/AmyWinehouseFoundationMerch>

**Amy Winehouse Foundation T-Shirt**  
The official Amy Winehouse Foundation T-Shirt is available for both men and women and features the Amy Winehouse Foundation logo in dusty pink. ...  
[SHOP.AMYWINEHOUSEFOUNDATION.ORG](http://SHOP.AMYWINEHOUSEFOUNDATION.ORG)

Like Comment Share

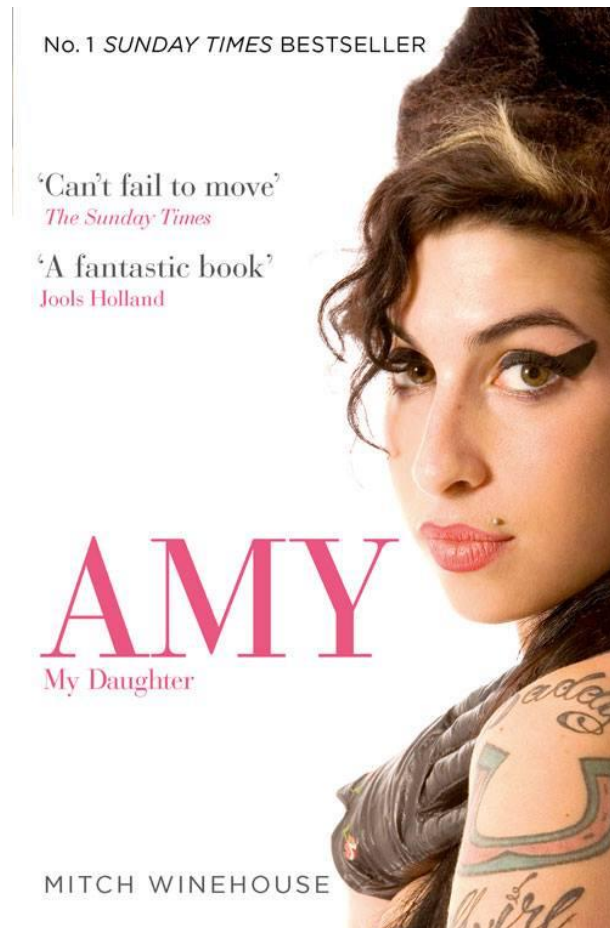
The sales of merchandise created a way for customers to feel good about supporting a community of people going through similar addiction issues, while also allowing the continuation of mourning and remembrance of Winehouse. With fans

and families impacted by Winehouse's life as well as impacted by the Winehouse Foundation itself, it allows for the expression of her loss and how her life continues to impact others in a positive way.

It is interesting that they used a wholesome young girl to model the unisex Amy Winehouse Foundation T-Shirt. The portrayal of an innocent girl wearing a t-shirt to support those struggling with behavior deemed by the media as "damaging, harmful, and unhealthy" seems quite contradictory to the media's portrayal of Winehouse. There is also an underlying message of unity being portrayed by this young girl, with possible hope to show the public that there can be many different people included in the Winehouse community. It also gives a positive tribute to her life, just as her music does as well. Meanwhile, it seems that her father was taking advantage of Winehouse's behaviors and descriptions. Often deemed as "daddy's little girl", many drew interest to his contribution to gaining more press for a positive remembrance of his daughter. A wholesome young girl modeling, and a wholesome cause, allows for a community to form of different ages, gender, and connections to the cause. It also fits into the "daddy's little girl" innocent narrative in which Amy was often portrayed as in the press during her career's earlier days.

A little over a year after Winehouse's passing, her father released a book on June 25, 2012 titled: *Amy, My Daughter*. This book's cover photo (below) was marketed through both her personal Facebook page as well as the Amy Winehouse Foundation page. The proceeds of this book went towards the Amy Winehouse Foundation as well. It seems a bit chilling that her father would be the one to write

this, when he was often blamed for some of the distress Winehouse was going through throughout her life. Even more chilling is the image of her on the cover; it shows a healthy, promising girl with her eyes wide open.



NEWS: The paperback edition of *Amy, My Daughter*, the official biography of Amy’s life, is now available on [Amazon UK](https://www.amazon.co.uk) (and coming to other territories soon): <http://amzn.to/17DMPtR>. All author proceeds are being donated to the [Amy Winehouse Foundation](http://www.amywinehousefoundation.org).” The caption given in the news post via Facebook.

Overall, social media became a great way to share memories, photos, videos, and statements about Winehouse. This platform allowed for an immediate

conversation as soon as her death hit the Breaking News. It is evident that her life has had a strong impact on a large community of people who were able to collectively mourn and continue to collectively mourn her death, while also addressing issues such as substance abuse, fame, and talent. The ongoing media discourse surrounding her death seems to have died down since the date she passed, but her death is constantly posted and written about in the eyes of both social media and mass media. Our culture has succumbed to the normality of exploiting a celebrity to gain an audience, but fails to address the good “aftershock” such as The Amy Winehouse Foundation. Fans and celebrities both become a critical element in engaging with the cultural construction of framing artists such as Amy Winehouse. The multiple ways in which fans participate in ritualized mourning, the voices of those who chooses to engage, and the many platforms that allow for this participation, are instrumental elements to understanding how the death of rock icons, such as Winehouse, is represented through media and how communities form through participation in mediated rituals of mourning.

## Chapter 5: Conclusion

By looking at the collective ritualization of mourning of Amy Winehouse, this study addresses how people construct meaning around a rock 'n' roll artist's death. I found that meaning was constructed initially through the story being told by the mass media. After the initial meaning was under wraps, celebrities and fans constructed their own meaning of her death in a different light. Through Russell Brand's statement, it was evident that he was protective of her identity as a talented musician and fought back against the tabloid's prejudicial verbiage. While some fans words on social media mirrored those of the mass media, it was interesting to see how The Amy Winehouse Foundation used it to their benefit in spreading awareness about addiction. Throughout my research, I found that the media's discourse, portrayal of her lifestyle and identity were all key elements in how people constructed meaning, participated in ritualizing, memorializing, and mourning her in both social media and mass media.

James Carey's (1989) ritual view of communication directly relates to the formation of community and culture surrounding Winehouse's death. Although Carey's (1989) research was conducted in the late 1980's it is still applicable to cultural studies today. Carey (1989) states, "A ritual view of communication is directed not toward the extension of messages in space but toward the maintenance of society in time; not the act of imparting information but the representation of shared beliefs" (p. 5). His statement expresses the importance of the representation of shared beliefs, rather than the actual act of sharing itself. In regards to this

study, Winehouse's story being shared was not of much importance, it was the shared meaning and beliefs of the representation of her that made such a large contribution to society. A concern with future research on this subject is that this will not always be true, with time comes change. This paper questions past research by looking at how online platforms used for sharing, participating, associating, and possessing of common faith changes/adds to the ritualization of a celebrity death, which overall contributes to the formation of community and culture (Carey, 1989).

What is particularly interesting with this case study is Winehouse's association to the 27 Club. By associating her to this club, it attracted an older generation to dig into Winehouse's music, death, and fan base. This grieving process has become familiar to those who understand the culture of rock 'n' roll and while people might associate and question the culture's numbness to losing talented musicians at a young age, it does not seem to stop the consistency in the media's narrative of young rock 'n' roll musicians (Andrews, 2017).

People look at the event of a dead rock star as a spectacle. They look for the familiar and dominant narrative associated with the rock star "lifestyle", but the real identification, appreciation, and feelings brought out by fans and celebrities often pushes back against and questions the spectacle (Berkers and Eeckelaer, 2014). Death within rock culture has become a ritualized event in of itself, but that does not mean that there is a so-called numbness to the news of another rock musician passing.

Harju (2015) found that “social practices of mourning are changing” and that “social media is transforming what used to be private into a public, networked and social activity”. This paper supports that claim, while also diving in to gain a better understanding of how mass media and social media work together to create a collective representation of a celebrity posthumously. Harju (2015) primarily talks about ordinary people, but her research has become applicable to celebrities in this study. Everything is public, including the narrative formed by the mass media, which is often mirrored in individuals’ comments. It is evident that collective representation, ritualization, and mourning of a celebrity not only complement one another, but they also tend to intersect. But, that is not to be confused with the expectation to follow a certain order in grieving one’s death (Harju, 2015).

It is also important to recognize that death impacts more than just the rock ‘n’ roll culture. Winehouse is one of many musicians who we have lost, but her case was special. Her association to the 27 club in of itself was enough to create mystery around her death. With the advancements made in technology, she became the first member of the club where you could see the rapid spread of news posts, tabloid articles, celebrity posts and fan posts, creating a different type of mourning community than that at the time of 27 club members’, Kurt Cobain’s or Jim Morrison’s, deaths (Sisario, 2011).

To understand why a celebrity death, like Winehouse’s, can be supported and associated to a specific culture, such as the rock ‘n’ roll culture, this study examined the impact the media had on how we interpret and talk about a celebrity’s death. I

looked at specific mediatized rituals that the mass media included in their articles like online photos of her body being carried out of her home, flowers being left for tribute, digital mourning platforms, celebrity statements, fan statements, and the Amy Winehouse Foundation. These rituals created a better understanding of how the death of a rock icon is represented through mass media and how communities form through participation in mediatized ritualization and collective mourning.

On social media, celebrities and fans could express and participate in their para-social relationship to Winehouse without judgement by friends, family, and other fans (Horton & Wohl, 2006); while the press took advantage of telling a narrative of her that would interest mass numbers of people, which was evident in the tabloid excerpts. It is safe to conclude, both the mass media and social media are very significant in creating and understanding how people participate in the conversation, mourn, and ritualize a celebrity's death. While, funerals, tribute sites, and holy sites are all places where one can be physically present to mourn, another space for friends, family, and fans to give tribute is in the mass media and social media. Through both social media and mass media the mourning of Winehouse's death became global, and both community and cultural understanding came along with it.

The mass media chapter examines the narrative being told to the public; a narrative which set the stage for individuals to construct their own meanings from, while the social media chapter examined how different social media outlets such as Twitter and Facebook, allowed for discussion where people could add, support or



question the mass media's dramatization narrative of Winehouse (Mazzarella, 1995). Mass media and social media create an event that only exists within the media itself. In examining the mediatized rituals, media discourse, and gendered expectations associated within the rock 'n' roll culture, it became clear that both the mass media and social media were critical components of the collective mourning process and in forming community.

While my research shows aspects of the creation of cultural meaning, it also has limitations that might be addressed in future research. First, while technology is quite important to this study, it is also necessary to recognize that technology is constantly changing, allowing for different ways to communicate globally, and this could impact further research on this subject. Second, having access to how many times someone opened a specific press article could also add to the conversation. Knowing which articles were shared and viewed could give more insight into why people formed their shared opinions the way they did. Along with that information, there would be room for more research on what exactly keeps us engaged with the celebrity's death. Lastly, this study is based on a Western world perspective of mediatization and collective mourning. If research were to be done on an Eastern world musician, the findings could be quite different.

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