Identity is the way we see ourselves and in turn, the way different groups in society see us. While social media, despite its iconic status, is a relatively new concept that allows audiences the luxury of digital, social interaction as well as importantly the ability to produce and distribute media via peer to peer sharing. The key question is, has social media reinforced or liberated values and ideologies and to answer this question I will be exploring the representation of celebrity culture in the media. The construction of identity in social media is an interesting concept as sites like Facebook and Twitter suggest a form of self-identity, within the framework of the identity of others. Social media, whether referencing blogging culture, file sharing sites like YouTube, general social media like Facebook, photo sharing sites like Flickr, film social media like MUBI or even the online sharing pinboard Pinterest has widened media consumption across a range of convergent platforms. Using celebrity culture as case study, this arguably has meant more celebrity culture, more constructed memes, more ways of accessing celebrity and the ability to create and originate celebrity. With this, constructing an identity on these platforms has become commonplace – David Gauntlett’s prosumer evidences this concept as the boundaries of media celebrity and self identity are blurred across digital platforms, arguably making the notion of celebrity identity more abstract.

Celebrity culture is historical, promoted in tabloids like The Sun and the Daily Star, gossip magazines like Heat, Closer, Reveal, Now and Take a Break and also through television genres – Reality TV has reinforced celebrity appeal with commercially successful programmes like The X Factor creating a production line of celebrities. Social media is another platform that has allowed for audiences’ obsession with celebrity identity to be maintained and extended using a range or rich media. Social media has indeed played a positive role in the construction of identities but for commercial reasons perhaps rather than artistic. Comedy programmes like The Mighty Boosh and Black Mirror’s 15 Million Credits have offered postmodern parodies and pastiches of celebrity obsession as theorist Fredric Jameson would argue. Social media has acted like an opinion leader using Katz and Laserfeld’s Two Step Flow model by acting as a conduit for the creation of celebrity identity. Users of social media have the ability engage in interactive participation in terms of discussing celebrity lifestyles but also having the ability to offer opinion and pass it on via file sharing.

Examples of memes in recent years that support the argument that celebrity identity has become abstract are Sy and his video Gangnam Style (2.3 billion hits) but also the song One Pound Fish that on YouTube has received nearly 14 millions hits with the performer securing a record contract with Warner Music Group on the strength of the interest and popularity from social media. This evidences the positive impact of social media in constructing identity but again for commercial reasons. Celebrity identity always had been a commodity to be bought and sold with social media acting in this regards as a distribution platform. Facebook as a case study also promotes celebrity identity through file sharing but also is a platform where users create their own online identity using categories including name and profile. Anthony Giddens would argue the concept of Facebook and Twitter ensures self reflexivity and the ability to construct and develop ones own biographical narrative or identity – identity is created as a reflection of society and in many ways, using the work of Zygmunt Bauman this identity can be problematic. Facebook is frequently used as a vehicle for vehement criticism of anything from media products and celebrity identity to political ideological doctrine.
Celebrity identity tends to be associated with mainstream media with magazines like *Heat* and *Reveal* having a stable circulation with the primary objective of directing readers to their websites. On social media, fans often own constructions and fake celebrity sites are common media as followers seek to possess part of the identity of a celebrity. Celebrity identity positions audiences through association with popular culture and ideas of ‘the fake’ are not restricted to fan based social media – Twitter has been a social media site that for some time has allowed celebrities to create and maintain the myth of personal relationships with their fans. Twitter has allowed the construct of celebrity to have more longevity as performers/artists etc. who may previously have been ‘replaced’ with newer versions by a fickle public have managed to maintain a presence in social media. Social media has also promoted a culture of nostalgia that has also been positive for the representation of celebrity identity.

Social media has reinforced existing values and ideologies – in terms of celebrity identity social media has promoted the construction of an identity in a culture that frequently constructs identity in other media like Reality TV, print and online newspapers and magazines. For celebrity identity, social media has had a significant positive impact but of course with the ability, as in some traditional media to rapidly disseminate information and gossip that is not always positive in its reflection of celebrity culture.
**Love is Strange** is a 2014 American film directed by Ira Sachs. In making the film Sach states that he drew heavily on personal experiences as an openly gay New Yorker - the film is based on characters he has himself been familiar with but importantly, also on a news article he read about an elderly gay man who had been in a relationship for over 30 years who, after finally tying the knot with his partner lost his job as a choir master suggesting bigotry and a lack of understanding and tolerance. In terms of narrative, characters Ben and George are a same-sex couple who, like the news story get married after 39 years together. The film is about the latter days of a life long love with the second scene in the film the joyous occasion of their wedding. This is attended by a significant number of their non-stereotypical heterosexual and homosexual friends to whom they are a source of warmth and inspiration. The opening shots of the film show Ben and George in bed together with characterisation and mise-en-scene reinforcing their normality as a couple – Ben bumbles around their artsy west side Manhattan apartment looking for his glasses while George ensures everything is prepared for when the guests return from their wedding and the celebrations.

Soon after their wedding however, narrative disruption sees their normality shattered with George losing his job as a music teacher in a Catholic school – George conducts a choir as the Priest at the back of the church seems ill at ease with what he is about to do. The act of Ben and George getting married has lead to the Catholic Church terminating his employment as a result of the ensuing publicity (they were happy to employ him for many years previous to this). In the meeting between George and the Priest, ideological binary oppositions are very much apparent with the Priest asking George if he wants to prey together after sacking him, to which George replies he would prefer to prey alone. It is important for the film to establish, and maintain perceptions of Ben and George’s life as long-term homosexual partners being ‘normal’ and one way of achieving this is by George having a clear Catholic faith. This is often contrary to mainstream Christian ideology and challenging, as Dyer would argue the idea of stereotypes legitimising the dominant culture (George could have been represented as a gay atheist).

Casting is important to the film to establish verisimilitude with Sachs as an openly gay director crucial to this but also Molina and Lithgow as having been involved in projects before that positively represent homosexuality. Lithgow for example has appeared in theatrical productions that explored the overturn of California’s ban on same-sex marriage while Molina is an AIDS advocate, undertaking research, donating and participating in fund raising events. Verisimilitude was also established by the 20 year off screen friendship of both actors and location shooting in several places in New York that Sachs himself lives near including diners, bars and specific subway locations. Using an English actor in Molina to play the role of George was an interesting choice but only served to reinforce the cultural diversity of a city like New York – two of Ben and George’s gay friends are openly gay New York Police Officers who are frequently seen in uniform to anchor this pluralistic representation while Kate and Elliot, and their son Joey are a middle class family who are the closest to the couple. Kate is a novelist and husband Elliot a filmmaker.

The mise-en-scene pays homage to the beauty of New York and is almost a film about a city as it is a film about sexuality through Ben and George and their wider community/circle. Ben and George have to sell up and live under difficult conditions with friends until they find a new condo or apartment because George losing his job has financially caused them to run low on funds while Ben is retired. Iconic shots show box apartments, subways, roof top vistas, galleries and classical concerts representing New York as a culturally rich but also an
politically ‘in touch’ part of the world which is reinforced by some of the younger characters. Joey, Kate and Elliot’s teenage son is in many ways one of the central characters of the film with the last shot of him skating down a street in slow motion with his new girlfriend into the beautiful sun fragments of a new day sparkling though the trees. Audiences are positioned for much of the film into thinking that like his parents’ friends, Joey is also gay. He has a friend called Vlad that he is close to, his only friend at school and two years older than him and they spend a significant amount of time in Joey’s room doing homework together. Using Stuart Hall, dominant readings suggest that he is simply isolated as a angst ridden teenager while oppositional readings could infer that he has experimented with homosexuality/bisexuality with Vlad and discovered that this is not for him (there is a moment towards the end of the film that Vlad disappears and Joey starts talking about a new girlfriend).

George and Ben are represented as struggling with being physically apart from each other as the film’s narrative develops into a strong love story – Ben is staying with Kate, Elliot and Joey and getting under their feet while Ben is staying in a vibrant, noisy gay drop in Manhattan apartment. They phone each other every night as eventually George, via a chance meeting finds accommodation for them both. The happiness and sadness of their life long union culminates in an evening at a music recital and in later in a bar where they celebrate their new apartment which they have not moved into just yet – as they declare their love again for each other and embrace, Ben disappears down into the subway and this is the last time George sees him alive as it is implied he has died from heart failure. Ben’s death is represented as almost a rite of passage, life-changing moment for Joey as the next scene sees him visit George in his new apartment. Ben’s death is seen to allow Joey to understand love and acts as a release and a catalyst in allowing him to move forward more positively into his teenage years – Ben and George’s relationship is seen to have a profoundly positively influenced the life of a young boy.