

MEASURING FAME QUANTITATIVELY. V. WHO'S THE MOST FAMOUS OF THEM ALL? (PART 2)

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Abstract

Donald Trump.

1. Introduction

In this fifth paper on measuring fame quantitatively, we summarize the changes in fame over the past 15 years and identify the person we believe to be the most famous person in the world at the present time. Our previous research ([Schulman 1999](#), [Schulman and Boissier 2001](#), [Schulman 2006](#), and [Schulman 2009](#)) showed that many people are famous to some extent and that Internet search engines can measure the exact fame of such people by comparing the number of search engine hits for the person to the number of search engine hits for a universal standard of fame.

2. Methods

We use the methods of [Schulman \(2009\)](#) to measure the current fame of the 49 subjects in the longitudinal study first described in ([Schulman 2006](#)), who asserted that people we perceive as 'A' List celebrities are on average ten times more famous than people we perceive as 'B' List celebrities, who are on average ten times more famous than people we perceive as 'C' List celebrities, and so on. The 49 subjects are from seven different fields (business, film, music, politics, religion, science, and sports) and their fame has been measured five times between 2001 and the present using the logarithmic international standard unit of fame, the dBHa ([Schulman 2009](#)):

$$\text{fame}(\text{dBHa}) = 10 \log [\text{fame}(\text{Ha})],$$

where fame(Ha) is the number of Google hits for the person divided by the number of Google hits for [George Harrison](#), the archetypal 'B' List celebrity whose fame is 0 dBHa by definition. Other celebrities are therefore classified as follows:

'A+' List	fame > +15 dBHa
'A' List	+5 dBHa < fame < +15 dBHa
'B' List	-5 dBHa < fame < +5 dBHa
'C' List	-15 dBHa < fame < -5 dBHa
'D' List	-25 dBHa < fame < -15 dBHa
'E' List	-35 dBHa < fame < -25 dBHa
'F' List	-45 dBHa < fame < -35 dBHa
'G' List	-55 dBHa < fame < -45 dBHa
'H' List	fame < -55 dBHa

This factor of ten difference between categories is analogous to the concept behind the Richter magnitude scale, in which a 6.5-magnitude earthquake has a shaking amplitude that is ten times larger than that of a 5.5-magnitude earthquake.

3. Results

Table 1 shows our classification of the 49 longitudinal study subjects since January 2001.

Table 1. Classified Celebrities

Name	Field	January-01		October-05		October-08		February-09		August-16		List
		Hits	Fame	Hits	Fame	Hits	Fame	Hits	Fame	Hits	Fame	
Jesus Christ	Religion	1,320,000	11.79	18,100,000	9.11	31,400,000	9.39	40,700,000	9.93	98,400,000	10.18	A
The Beatles	Music	436,000	6.98	12,300,000	7.44	16,100,000	6.49	26,300,000	8.03	59,400,000	7.99	
Jennifer Lopez	Film	298,000	5.33	7,600,000	5.34	14,700,000	6.10	27,900,000	8.29	58,500,000	7.93	
Albert Einstein	Science	261,000	4.75	12,200,000	7.40	12,600,000	5.43	22,200,000	7.29	47,500,000	7.02	
John Lennon	Music	269,000	4.88	6,030,000	4.34	11,100,000	4.88	35,700,000	9.36	38,800,000	6.14	
Bill Gates	Business	620,000	8.51	19,900,000	9.53	17,800,000	6.93	29,900,000	8.59	38,100,000	6.06	
Bill Clinton	Politics	811,000	9.68	18,300,000	9.16	16,700,000	6.65	24,100,000	7.65	33,500,000	5.51	
Paul McCartney	Music	129,000	1.69	7,120,000	5.06	9,260,000	4.09	15,300,000	5.68	30,400,000	5.08	
Tiger Woods	Sports	703,000	9.05	6,580,000	4.72	13,700,000	5.79	14,700,000	5.50	18,100,000	2.83	
George Harrison	Music	87,400	0.00	2,220,000	0.00	3,610,000	0.00	4,140,000	0.00	9,430,000	0.00	
Ringo Starr	Music	43,300	-3.05	1,940,000	-0.59	2,350,000	-1.86	2,760,000	-1.76	2,360,000	-6.02	
Nadia Comaneci	Sports	11,700	-8.73	190,000	-10.68	541,000	-8.24	898,000	-6.64	708,000	-11.24	
Monica Lewinsky	Politics	133,000	1.82	1,780,000	-0.96	1,080,000	-5.24	1,140,000	-5.60	663,000	-11.53	
Carl Sagan	Science	46,700	-2.72	1,920,000	-0.63	1,910,000	-2.76	2,140,000	-2.87	575,000	-12.15	
Marisa Tomei	Film	14,600	-7.77	934,000	-3.76	1,130,000	-5.04	2,460,000	-2.26	514,000	-12.64	
Anna Kournikova	Sports	90,100	0.13	2,570,000	0.64	1,970,000	-2.63	4,590,000	0.45	478,000	-12.95	
Jason Mewes	Film	4,870	-12.54	238,000	-9.70	274,000	-11.20	329,000	-11.00	461,000	-13.11	
Ryan Zimmerman	Sports	279	-24.96	54,600	-16.09	452,000	-9.02	241,000	-12.35	447,000	-13.24	
John Calvin	Religion	42,900	-3.09	1,090,000	-3.09	1,110,000	-5.12	1,130,000	-5.64	430,000	-13.41	
Jerry Yang	Business	13,400	-8.14	227,000	-9.90	1,190,000	-4.82	3,380,000	-0.88	425,000	-13.46	
Leonard Mlodinow	Science	179	-26.89	44,900	-16.94	93,900	-15.85	73,900	-17.48	341,000	-14.42	
Murray Gell-Mann	Science	5,500	-12.01	168,000	-11.21	122,000	-14.71	131,000	-15.00	191,000	-16.93	
Gerald Gardner	Religion	3,750	-13.67	90,400	-13.90	82,600	-16.41	74,500	-17.45	169,000	-17.47	
Esther Dyson	Business	21,300	-6.13	586,000	-5.78	229,000	-11.98	264,000	-11.95	160,000	-17.70	
Rush Holt	Politics	6,110	-11.55	173,000	-11.08	167,000	-13.35	136,000	-14.83	118,000	-19.03	
Eddie From Ohio	Music	2,460	-15.51	88,700	-13.98	59,100	-17.86	55,500	-18.73	47,600	-22.97	
Marie Pillet	Film	69	-31.03	796	-34.45	37,000	-19.89	41,100	-20.03	44,400	-23.27	
Allison Powell	Science	241	-25.59	724	-34.87	5,310	-28.32	5,660	-28.64	44,100	-23.30	
Mary Furlong	Business	1,500	-17.65	16,100	-21.40	15,400	-23.70	15,400	-24.29	31,700	-24.73	
Charlie Melancon	Politics	8	-40.38	54,500	-16.10	153,000	-13.73	50,400	-19.15	30,900	-24.85	
Shelagh Fraser	Film	617	-21.51	16,500	-21.29	23,000	-21.96	21,100	-22.93	25,500	-25.68	
Israel ben Eliezer	Religion	313	-24.46	16,100	-21.40	16,800	-23.32	16,400	-24.02	20,200	-26.69	
Michael Clem	Music	430	-23.08	1,310	-32.29	6,930	-27.17	5,540	-28.73	16,800	-27.49	
Robbie Schaefer	Music	104	-29.24	641	-35.39	13,700	-24.21	15,100	-24.38	13,600	-28.41	
Lisa Moscatiello	Music	646	-21.31	13,300	-22.23	11,900	-24.82	10,600	-25.92	8,880	-30.26	
Melanie Rapp	Politics	139	-27.98	1,030	-33.34	4,060	-29.49	3,530	-30.69	6,160	-31.85	
Chinmoy Kumar Ghose	Religion	80	-30.38	688	-35.09	2,640	-31.36	2,630	-31.97	4,260	-33.45	
Kerry Donley	Politics	190	-26.63	533	-36.20	1,550	-33.67	2,400	-32.37	3,880	-33.86	
Eddie Hartness	Music	64	-31.35	295	-38.77	996	-35.59	1,150	-35.56	3,120	-34.80	
Earle Spamer	Science	119	-28.66	197	-40.52	343	-40.22	386	-40.30	1,970	-36.80	
Eithne Fennel	Film	2	-46.40	303	-38.65	1,100	-35.16	1,480	-34.47	1,670	-37.52	
Julie Murphy Wells	Music	36	-33.85	490	-36.56	1,180	-34.86	1,620	-34.07	1,290	-38.64	
Joshua Gitelson	Film	5	-42.43	30	-48.69	952	-35.79	1,360	-34.83	1,140	-39.18	
Wendy Seligman	Music	10	-39.42	52	-46.30	292	-40.92	180	-43.62	1,030	-39.62	
Angela Sodalak	Politics	1	-49.42	11	-53.05	38	-49.78	123	-45.27	616	-41.85	
H. Leon Denizard Rivail	Religion	0		55	-46.06	21	-52.35	324	-41.06	336	-44.48	
James Kibo Perry	Religion	0		143	-41.91	16	-53.53	1,160	-35.53	221	-46.30	
Daniel T. Arcieri	Science	0		19	-50.68	15	-53.81	59	-48.46	201	-46.71	
Elisabeth Scheneman	Politics	2	-46.40	3	-58.69	8	-56.54	10	-56.17	167	-47.52	

The Hits columns show the number of Google hits that each subject had in January 2001, October 2005, October 2008, February 2009, and August 2016; the Fame columns show their fame in dBHa; and the List column shows their celebrity category as of August 2016. The Hits, Fame, and List entries are color-coded so that 'A' List celebrity entries are red, 'B' List celebrity

entries are orange, 'C' List celebrity entries are yellow, 'D' List celebrity entries are green, 'E' List celebrity entries are blue, 'F' List celebrity entries are called indigo but are really light purple, 'G' List celebrity entries are called violet but are really dark purple, and 'H' List celebrity entries are called ultraviolet but are really white. The names and fields of one typical celebrity in each category are similarly colored (there were no 'F' or 'G' celebrities who have been in those categories since 2001, but each category had one subject who has been in that category since 2005).

Note that all the fame observations in Table 1 were taken in the United States and the results in other countries could be different. In order to assess the potential impact of this effect, fame observations of seven 'A' List through 'E' List celebrities were made in Australia and the United Kingdom. The Australia and United Kingdom fame of six of the seven celebrities was within 1% of the United States fame. The seventh celebrity, George Harrison, was 10% less famous in Australia and 13% less famous in the United Kingdom compared to the United States. It is unclear why the archetypal 'B' List celebrity would have the highest fame variance. Researchers outside the United States are encouraged to study this issue more thoroughly.

4. Discussion

Table 1 provides a wealth of data worthy of comment. For example, the Lennon Theorem (1966) stated that The Beatles were "more popular than Jesus," but this has not been true in any of the fame observations since 2001. A determination of whether the Lennon Theorem was true in 1966 is beyond the scope of this paper, but we can state that The Beatles are not currently more popular than Cristiano Ronaldo, who is 1.6 dBHa more famous. Another item of note is that the percentage of 'B' List celebrities in the study has decreased dramatically, from 18% in 2005 to just 4% in 2016. This is even more remarkable because of the fact that there must, by definition, be at least one 'B' List celebrity in the study (George Harrison). Of the nine 'B' List celebrities from 2005, one (John Lennon) has become an 'A' List celebrity and six have become 'C' List celebrities. The sole 'H' List celebrity from 2005 to 2009, Elisabeth Scheneman, is now a Chief of Staff at the Pennsylvania Department of Health and has become a 'G' List celebrity.

Although it is simple to determine who the most famous is among a particular group of subjects, determining the most famous person of all is non-trivial. [Schulman \(2009\)](#) concluded that Barack Obama was the most famous person in the world in February 2009, and since his fame was greater than +15 dBHa (+16.3 dBHa), he was in a celebrity category by himself: an 'A+' List celebrity. This is no longer the case, as his fame has dropped to +12.1 dBHa over the past seven and a half years and he is now an 'A' List celebrity. In fact, he has been overtaken by one of the people seeking his job: Donald Trump now has a fame of +14.0 dBHa (for those who are curious, Hillary Clinton has a fame of +12.0 dBHa, Gary Johnson has a fame of -1.9 dBHa, Jill Stein has a fame of -2.7 dBHa, and Evan McMullin has a fame of -10.7 dBHa).

5. Conclusion

Donald Trump is the most famous person in the world, but he is not as famous as Barack Obama was in 2009.

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