

The original creator of the electric hedgehog Pokémon: an internet existence

Introduction –

Christine Weston Chandler, formerly known as Christian Weston Chandler, is the transgender, autistic creator of Sonichu, the original electric hedgehog Pokémon. In 2007, Chris sought fame and respect by debuting her original character on the internet and on YouTube, in a short video called, ‘Christian Weston Chandler’s FUTURE MESSAGE’. Her message stressed the importance of heterosexuality and cisnormativity, attending school, and avoiding drugs.¹ From this video, and her internet presence, Chris has become one of the most well-documented and highly discussed individuals on the internet – yet not for advice or her artistic creation, but for her strangeness, and the entertainment exploiting her idiosyncrasies provided. From this, Christine has gained a kind of celebrity that could not exist without the internet. This fame is created and sustained by her interaction with a cult of enablers, admirers and enemies that document her every move even today; she is the product of the intersection of Web 2.0 culture and the evolving conceptions of American celebrity, on a scale that is as shocking as it is captivating.

In this essay, I will examine how the interaction between Chris and her trolls repeatedly socially entrenches both individuals into the digital space – whilst enemies, both players come to rely on each other for social connection and identity. I locate this project within American Studies as it examines how social interactions, even at their most extreme, have been warped and influenced by these changing conceptions of Web 2.0 and celebrity.

Web 2.0 made media representation, and therefore celebrity, accessible to everyday Americans like Chris, who sought fame and attention for their own talents. Web 2.0 simultaneously democratised internet spaces, in a way that made space for trolls to create and inhabit hateful forums that coordinate and document the anonymous and remote harassment of vulnerable individuals.

¹ CChan6789, “CWC’s Important Message 02242007,” YouTube video, September 25, 2008, 5:17 to 8:30, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Iw9IybMbsI8>.

Celebrity –

Celebrity is an American concept, often cited as emerging from Hollywood and the way it valorised its stars for their beauty and talent.² According to Sharon Marcus, celebrity manifests as a relationship between the star, media, and their audience. In this relationship, all three are in competition and cooperation to “assign meaning and value” to a celebrity.³ Traditionally, celebrities were considered as shining figures, known for a skill, talent, or their beauty, curated by film directors and tabloids.⁴ With the contemporary fame of outrageous individuals like Kim Kardashian in mind, someone who became famous despite a marked lack of talent, I argue that a celebrity is not just someone who is talented, but someone who is valorised through media attention, for admirable, remarkable, or shocking qualities. Graeme Turner justifies the fame of such characters under what he calls ‘the demotic turn,’ the increasing visibility of the ordinary person.⁵ Reality TV played a direct role in this shift through showrunner’s use of editing depicting an ordinary person experiencing real emotions and reacting to extraordinary circumstances.⁶ American viewers learnt that watching this was even more captivating and shocking than a scripted narrative. However, even reality TV stars like Snooki were responsible for maintaining their celebrity by manipulating the media, and paparazzi to stay in the tabloids. This was the case until something changed around the early 2000s that shifted this relationship between celebrity, media, and audience; the advent of Web 2.0.

Web 2.0 –

² Richard Dyer, “Introduction,” in *Heavenly Bodies : Film Stars and Society* (New York: Routledge, 2006): 4.

³ Sharon Marcus, “Introduction,” in *The Drama of Celebrity* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2019): 4.

⁴ Olivier Driessens, “Celebrity Capital: redefining celebrity using field theory,” *Theory and Society* 42, no. 5 (2013): 544.

⁵ Graeme Turner, “The mass production of celebrity : ‘celetoids’, reality TV and the ‘demotic turn’,” *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 9, no. 2 (2006): 153.

⁶ Crystal Abidin, “What is an Internet Celebrity Anyway?,” in *Internet Celebrity : understanding fame online* (Bingley: Emerald Publishing Limited, 2018): 7.

Web 2.0 was a shift in internet culture that began in the very early 2000s and has preceded until present day. It is defined as the period in which internet usage shifted toward user-generated content; rather than the corporate generated businesses of the dotcom boom, the internet began to be filled with food blogs, dog pictures, movie reviews and cooking videos.⁷ The internet was no longer a product, but a “democratising digital technology”, built on the “libertarian” and “self-improvement” ideals of Silicon Valley.⁸ The internet no longer featured people’s content; it was made from it. Web 2.0 directly depends on social media and the users that inhabit it.⁹ This is likely why many sources cite Time Magazine’s election of ‘You’ as the 2006 Person of the Year as a turning point for the beginning of Web 2.0.¹⁰ In this space, users are empowered to pool knowledge and collaborate with others to create or commentate on media.¹¹ It was this empowerment that shifted celebrity and communication, allowing Chris to seek her fame independently, and permitting the trolls to find her and each other.

Web 2.0 and celebrity – how the ratio shifted.

This new web culture shifted how celebrities, and their fans functioned. Web 2.0’s democratisation of celebrity furthered the fame of the ordinary person by creating the DIY celebrity. Crystal Abidin argues that this began with cam-girl celebrities; girls gained a small fanbase by streaming online from their bedrooms and chatting about their life.¹² This fame was also accessible to bloggers, who discussed their interests and personal lives. A key element of the celebrity for these individuals was awareness and primarily, interaction.¹³ You didn’t need a publisher, or a studio to get your face recognised, but what you did need was

⁷ Sam Han, “Introduction: Remediation or convergence?,” in *Web 2.0* (New York: Routledge, 2011): 1.

⁸ Alice Marwick, “A cultural history of Web 2.0,” in *Status Update: Celebrity, Publicity and Branding in the Social Media Age* (London: Yale University Press, 2013): 22-23.

⁹ Sam Han, “Introduction: Remediation or Convergence?,” 6.

¹⁰ Alice Marwick, “A cultural history of Web 2.0,” 21; Sam Han, “Introduction: Remediation or Convergence?,” 1.

¹¹ Han, “Introduction,” 13.

¹² Abidin, “What is an Internet Celebrity Anyway?,” 11.

¹³ Abidin, “What is an Internet Celebrity Anyway?,” 16.

fans. Just as content was user-generated in social media, so too did celebrity become user generated, through fan comments, likes and fan blogs.

This shift to fame via fan interaction changed the traditional star, media, and audience relationship for celebrities. The star was in control of their celebrity, generating their own media. They pocketed the money independently and curated their own identity. If we consider the relationship between star, media, and audience as a 1:1:1 ratio, some may argue that when media sources are removed, power within this ratio would be distributed 2:1, star to audience. Yet this was not the case; when the media was removed, power was redistributed between star and audience, each sharing equal shares of celebrity. While celebrities produced the content, fans gave it weight by viewing it, commenting, liking, and creating their own media surrounding the celebrity. It is an equal share. Justin Bieber could have never reached fainting-13-year-old-girl fame without the views, shares, and comments on his singing videos. Bloggers like Ashley Rous, known as @bestdressed, could have never modelled for Miu Miu without reposts on Tumblr.

This celebrity is potent, and at the same time more volatile. Tabloids and paparazzi are fickle, but when one's entire empire rests upon public opinion, fame can be fleeting. Beauty guru James Charles, lost three million subscribers when he was exposed for grooming his young fans.¹⁴ For internet celebrities, this means the end of sponsorships, losses on merch, and reduction of ad revenue. For some, this can make or break a career.

It was this powerful fame that Chris sought to mobilise when she created, 'CWC's Sonichu Site!', a homepage for her comics, and her original character.¹⁵ She saw herself as a talented artist, a DIY celebrity; she sought to utilise this democratised celebrity to bring her art to Nintendo. She became famous for Sonichu, but not in the way she imagined. She placed herself in a vulnerable space, ultimately offering herself and her creation up to the internet. She was not aware of who Web 2.0 had empowered would create her.

¹⁴ Harmeet Kaur, "YouTuber James Charles has lost nearly 3 million subscribers since his feud with Tati Westbrook," *CNN Entertainment*, May 14, 2019, <https://edition.cnn.com/2019/05/12/entertainment/james-charles-youtube-subscribers-trnd/index.html>.

¹⁵ "CWC's Sonichu Site!," CWCKI, last modified 12 November, 2023, https://sonichu.com/cwcki/CWC%27s_Sonichu_Site!.

Trolling – a Web 2.0 concept

In any social space, anti-social people exist; yet they typically struggle to find like-minded people, and their behaviour is almost always stifled by the social norms which discourage it. However, during Web 2.0, these people were not shunned into silence, but instead found community and identity through trolling behaviour. Trolling as a concept is frequently conferred with any kind of internet mischief. However, when connected to celebrity, it can be understood as the use of deception and false identities to provoke the naïve and vulnerable in order to obtain entertainment, and the amusement and the respect of their peers.¹⁶

Trolling is not just something that occurs on the internet, but something that occurs because of it. The anonymity that the internet provides allows trolls to deceive more effectively as false identities are easily minted.¹⁷ Furthermore, in this democratised, user-generated space, trolls could create their own websites and forums to document, encourage, coordinate, and discuss their exploitation and humiliation of others.

Chris' trolling (and fame) began in October 2007, when a comedy forum called *Something Awful* discovered her at a library handing out business cards to find a girlfriend. She quickly achieved virality, as trolls discussed her strange fashion sense depicted in the included photo, critiqued the unoriginality of Sonichu, and poked fun at her child-like fashion sense despite Chris being in her twenties.¹⁸ It prompted trolls to begin researching her online and documenting every known fact about her on *Encyclopaedia Dramatica* (ED).

¹⁶ Marta Dynel, "'Trolling is not stupid': Internet trolling as the art of deception serving entertainment," *Intercultural Pragmatics* 13, no. 3 (2016): 357-368

¹⁷ Dynel, "'Trolling is not stupid': Internet trolling as the art of deception serving entertainment," 368.

¹⁸ Gremlynn009, "Heard that Lowtax (founder of SomethingAwful) passed yesterday, so here's one of the very first mentions of Chris that came from the forums. Pretty interesting that this is where it all started.," *Reddit*, November 13, 2021, https://www.reddit.com/r/ChrisChanSonichu/comments/qshgxr/heard_that_lowtax_founder_of_somethingawful/.

At present, ED describes Chris as a “fat, [r-word], degenerate, motherfucking, [t-slur]-loving, bitch...”;¹⁹ this is just a sample of the racist, over-sexualised and ableist language used on this website. This use of language highlights trolls’ frequent use of ‘transgressive humour’, a key feature of their behaviour.²⁰ Fuller et. al. argue that trolls’ love of breaking social norms comes as a response to the use of the internet by corporations and celebrities, a sort of resistance to the intrusion of society into the dark corners.²¹ Publishing trolling on these websites is a key aspect of the behaviour, that inflates the troll’s ego, creates amusement for onlookers, and highlights the inferiority and stupidity of the victim.²² Trolls do not publish their trolling schemes to elevate their victims, but to gain the recognition and respect of fellow trolls. These grabs for power through hateful humour are given a voice through Web 2.0, as it empowered subcultures to create spaces where these directed insults and language are acceptable. However, it also highlights the exposure trolling provides to their victims and demonstrates the intense focus and thought that trolls provide to them.

Therefore, trolling behaviour is a direct result of Web 2.0’s structural changes to the internet. Understanding trolls’ behaviour as acts of self-recognising, anonymous, attempts at humour through the internet is key to comprehending Chris’ fame. Just as Chris was empowered to communicate with others and seek her fame through democratised access to media, so too were the trolls empowered to create their own hateful spaces. In these spaces, trolls earned respect, discussed trolling victims, and created comedy; it enabled a community to be mobilised via the democratising digital space. This was a community for Chris that inadvertently emerged as the producers of her fame.

The Julie Saga – how trolling Chris operated.

¹⁹ “Chris-Chan,” Encyclopedia Dramatica, last modified November 5, 2023, <https://encyclopedia.dramatica.online/Chris-chan>.

²⁰ Jonathan Bishop, “Trolling for the Lulz? Using Media Theory to Understand Transgressive Humour and Other Trolling in Online Communities,” in *Transforming Politics and Policy in the Digital Age* (United States: IGI Global, 2014): 161.

²¹ Glen Fuller, Christian McCrea and Jason Wilson, “Editorial: Troll Theory?,” *The Fibreculture Journal* 22 (2013): 4.

²² Dynel, “”Trolling is not stupid”,” 365 and 373.

The desire for trolls to create amusement and identity collided with Chris' vulnerabilities and efforts for fame to create the content that made Chris famous – the trolling schemes.

Examining one of Chris' most iconic trolls, Julie, is one example of how trolls produced her celebrity. Despite being motivated by humour, the trolls were acting in the star : audience role to produce Chris' content.

As trolls and internet celebrities both inhabit the democratised Web 2.0 space as empowered content generated individuals, internet celebrities are more likely to be trolled. Dynel argues that to respond to a troll is to make them feel empowered and intelligent.²³ Trolling is stifled by not “feeding” them, a mantra used by many celebrities.²⁴ Trolling relies on reaction, and without reply, these celebrities grant none of the ‘lulz’ trolls seek.²⁵ However, for internet celebrities, avoiding trolls is more difficult. Their fame depends on audience-star interaction; they must exploit this relationship, by engaging with comments, retweets, and fan content to incentivise their user-generated celebrity. This increases their chances of interacting with a troll, therefore as a result, internet celebrities have more trouble avoiding the “bait” than conventional celebrities with record labels and agents.

As an autistic and lonely internet celebrity, Chris found this especially tricky. Her attempts to mobilise the ‘DIY celebrity’ of Web 2.0 and bring fame for Sonichu were made difficult by her personal issues, resulting in being vulnerable to trolling. Chris was lonely and isolated for the majority of her life and had few recorded friends after graduation.²⁶ She lived in a hoarder's home with two elderly parents.²⁷ She was desperate for social connection, and hopefully a relationship. According to Chris, she was on a “Love Quest,” her journey to find a “boyfriend-free girl”, something that was picked up in the original *Something Awful* post.²⁸

²³ Dynel, 373.

²⁴ Amy Binns, “DON'T FEED THE TROLLS! Managing troublemakers in magazine's online communities,” *Journalism Practice* 6, no. 4 (2012): 548.

²⁵ Jonathan Bishop, “Trolling for the Lulz?,” 156.

²⁶ “Chris and socialization,” CWCKI, last modified October 23, 2022, https://sonichu.com/cwcki/Chris_and_socialization.

²⁷ “Barbara Chandler,” CWCKI, last modified November 21, 2023, https://sonichu.com/cwcki/Barbara_Chandler.

²⁸ “Love Quest,” CWCKI, last modified September 9, 2023, https://sonichu.com/cwcki/Love_Quest.

Furthermore, Chris is autistic, meaning she struggles to identify social cues more than others. This is evidenced in a 2018 study by the University of Kent, which found that autistic individuals were less likely to be able to detect deception and were at a greater risk of manipulation.²⁹ This made her the perfect trolling victim: someone desperate, sincere, and less likely to comprehend an ulterior motive.

The trolls' behaviour toward Chris was a coordinated effort to manipulate these vulnerabilities, with the side effect of turning her into an internet celebrity. Trolling created Chris' celebrity, by generating her media. The cruelty of trolls like BlueSpike generated the reactions, the touchpoints that make Chris iconic and give her the longevity and celebrity she currently possesses. In this way, I argue that through their trolling schemes, trolls act as the media producers of Chris' internet celebrity, through their manipulation of Chris for content.

In December 2009, a 13-year-old boy, calling himself BlueSpike, posed as a 19-year-old Sonichu fan, Julie, and began an online relationship with Chris.³⁰ For Chris, meeting Julie meant the conclusion to her Love Quest; she professed her love for her and even asked for photos of Julie to put as her video game console backgrounds.³¹ Chris' willingness to fall for Julie after two weeks highlights her gullibility due to her life experiences; as a lonely autistic man with no relationship experience, she was thrilled by the concept of a beautiful young girl falling in love with her. BlueSpike was a part of the Miscreants, a trolling group headed by Clyde Cash created to discuss trolling activities and plans;³² they discussed these over Mumble, an open-source voice chat application, and on their website. They artfully utilised the accessibility of communication provided through Web 2.0 to orchestrate this. BlueSpike maintained the Julie persona for over a month,³³ relying solely on the anonymity of the internet. The anonymity this provided simultaneously allowed Chris to be deceived, whilst

²⁹ ScienceDaily, "People with ASD risk being manipulated because they can't tell when they're being lied to," via the University of Kent, May 22, 2018, <https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2018/05/180522114817.htm#>.

³⁰ "BlueSpike," CWCKI, last modified November 12, 2023, <https://sonichu.com/cwcki/BlueSpike>.

³¹ "BlueSpike PSN Chat 4," CWCKI, last modified August 29, 2020, https://sonichu.com/cwcki/BlueSpike_PSN_Chat_4.

³² "Trolls." CWCKI, last modified August 18, 2023, https://sonichu.com/cwcki/Trolls#The_Miscreants.

³³ "BlueSpike," CWCKI. <https://sonichu.com/cwcki/BlueSpike#Julie>.

also granting BlueSpike impunity for his actions. BlueSpike also engaged in more sinister activities, such as uploading a sex-tape that Chris had made for Julie with a sex doll, onto a porn website;³⁴ this would become one of the most common memes surrounding Chris, as she can be heard exclaiming, ‘JULAY!’, Julie’s name, in the video.

This saga ended with a bang, as BlueSpike revealed Julie was not a real person, whilst holding Chris’ PlayStation account hostage. In this intense emotional experience under duress, BlueSpike forced Chris to say the n-word, and insert her Sonichu Medallion inside herself, an experience which Chris described as one of the most traumatising experiences of her life.³⁵ This was all captured on Skype recording and is easily accessible on the internet, immortalising the iconic moment. The trolls acted and directed in creating this media; they utilised their half of the star : audience relationship, acting as media producers, creating a storyline, characters, and plot for Chris to star in.

The cruelty, extent and coordination of this trolling behaviour goes beyond simple trolling. It goes beyond forum trolling, which casted a wide net and caught a few gullible fish.³⁶ The Julie Saga demonstrates the unique trolling Chris experienced. It was coordinated over extended time periods and targeted her specific weaknesses. Only through the anonymity that the internet provided, could BlueSpike manipulate Chris’ emotions through a false female identity. Only through the democratised social media space, could the Miscreants collaborate so effectively to manipulate a single individual. This is just one trolling scheme that the trolls presented; Chris was baited with identities countless times and extorted repeatedly from each scheme.

In this way we can see that for Chris, and her trolls, Web 2.0 played a constitutive role in their engagement with the internet. For Chris, the internet was a place to establish her celebrity and forge a relationship. For the trolls, Web 2.0 provided a means for entertainment through exploitation and deception; it established the means of communication and archiving

³⁴ “For Julie’s Eyes Only,” CWCKI, last modified November 3, 2023, https://sonichu.com/cwcki/For_Julie%27s_Eyes_Only.

³⁵ “BlueSpike,” CWCKI. <https://sonichu.com/cwcki/BlueSpike#Julie>.

³⁶ Dynel, 356.

that celebrated and spread their trolling successes. These two goals collided to make Chris become famous on the internet for her ability to be manipulated and abused. Her celebrity originated from the troll's extraction of her suffering, secrets, and idiosyncrasies.

So why not leave?

With this much suffering occurring on Chris' part, many ask why Chris does not simply leave the internet. Chris' unwillingness was partially due to her desire to redeem her name and fight back against the trolls. Yet, as she gained more infamy for herself from trolling, Chris began to mobilise the trolls as part of her brand, and her art. She began to recognise her connection to the trolls as a kind of strength, despite her trauma. Utilising the fierce connection between star and audience in internet celebrity, Chris has remained on the internet and has chosen to allow herself to increasingly be defined by them.

Whether planned by Chris or not, the trolls brought recognition to Sonichu and herself through their behaviour, fulfilling one of her main goals to achieve fame. Chris has increasingly begun to identify with the trolls throughout her time as a minor internet celebrity. The trolls, like Clyde Cash and BlueSpike, feature as villains within Chris' comics and art.³⁷ She directly recognised the trolls attempt to correct and discourage her autistic quirks in her attack on trolls, 'Rollin' and Trollin'. In the video, she claimed she had never been autistic, had a full-time job to support her family, and had been "trolling" the trolls the entire time; she replaces her iconic wire frame glasses for sunglasses, and wears dog tags instead of her Sonichu medallion.³⁸ Through this, she acknowledges how iconic her identity, dress, and lifestyle has become to her brand; she acknowledges how the ire of the trolls directly relates to her identity.³⁹ In 2020, when voice acting a past version of her male self,

³⁷ "Sonichu Special 1," CWCKI, last modified January 2, 2022, https://sonichu.com/cwcki/Sonichu_Special_1; "BlueSpike," CWCKI. <https://sonichu.com/cwcki/BlueSpike#Julie>.

³⁸ IBACHandlar, "Rollin' and Trollin' Those Damn, Dirty, Stupid Trolls," YouTube video, July 30, 2009, 0:00 to 7:56, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MD4AulkdJE>.

³⁹ "Rollin' and Trollin'," CWCKI, last modified July 19, 2023, https://sonichu.com/cwcki/Rollin%27_and_Trollin%27.

she referenced the Julie saga, quoting the iconic “JULAYY” line from her leaked sex tape.⁴⁰ Chris’ characterisation of herself by her trolling experiences alongside their integration into her identity and art, reflects her realisation that trolls are central to her fame and identity. Chris did not leave the internet for this reason; she knew her celebrity was connected to her exposure by trolls, by their role as media producers in her fame, to select aspects of her identity and behaviour to immortalise.

Why is Chris famous?

Chris is not the only person to be trolled, but she is one of the more famous victims. I argue this is true because of the entertainment value she provides to trolls and onlookers, through her attempts to fight back from the trolls, her active part in trolling, and her unique personality. Her fame is also in part to the ‘demotic turn’, allowing the ordinary American to be famous.

Primarily, it was Chris’ personality which initially and continuously drew eyes to her. Prior to her transition, Chris was staunchly homophobic; she advocated against it in her “FUTURE MESSAGE” video and within her comics. In the Sonichu canon, Chris created a gay vaccine in 2015 to cure homosexuality.⁴¹ Trolls exploited this, frequently calling Chris gay, to the extent she frequently had to address this. She had never even said the word “gay”, until 2009 when she was forced to by Clyde in a YouTube video to save Julie from his clutches.⁴² This led to Chris destroying a sex toy she owned in a YouTube video with a sign attached to her foot, “Christian Weston Chandler is straight!!!”.⁴³ Trolling behaviour in this way acted as corrective humour, disparaging Chris’ homophobia by actively forcing her to confront the uncomfortable feelings she had. Trolls and viewers gained entertainment from her inability to accept homosexuality.

⁴⁰ “Sonic World,” CWCKI, last modified May 8, 2023, https://sonichu.com/cwcki/Sonic_World#Human_Form_Modern_&_Classic_Chris_Chan_Sonichu_Mod.

⁴¹ Christine Weston Chandler, 2009, *Sonichu 10*. Ruckersville, https://sonichu.com/cwcki/Sonichu_10.

⁴² “Chris Comes Out of the Closet,” CWCKI, last modified July 20, 2023, https://sonichu.com/cwcki/Chris_Comes_Out_of_the_Closet.

⁴³ The CWCville Auditorium, “The Chronicles of Chris-Chan: Christian Recants,” YouTube Video, December 14, 2015, 1:20 to 1:26, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v_uQFeFaxfg.

Furthermore, Chris had a slanted view of women, viewing them primarily as objects for sex. In the original *Something Awful* post, trolls drew attention to Chris' Love Quest, her journey to find a 'boyfriend-free-girl'. Her in-person efforts toward this culminated in the 'Attraction Sign', a cardboard sign which Chris would hold in public to attract women. It demanded strict characteristics in a woman, "slender body type," no smoking or drinking, for her to be "white" and "peaceful".⁴⁴ When Chris did meet with troll-created sweethearts for her, she expected sex from them, and was repeatedly reported to be extremely touchy upon meeting them – to the extent that most women who met her would bring a male troll with them for safety.⁴⁵

These are just two of the traits Chris possessed that drew trolls' attention and were sources of power for their trolling behaviour. For these conservative values, some trolls argue Chris deserves to be trolled and humiliated.⁴⁶ Primarily, the intrigue of Chris that keeps eyes on her is the insight her internet presence provides into her life. It is captivating to examine the ordinary American's life, as was a rising trend under Turner's 'demotic turn'. Chris' conservative values reflected the average American in her small town of Ruckersville, Virginia. These values being blown to a large scale and being confronted and challenged is an apt source of entertainment.

Secondly, whether intentional or not, Chris was an 'ideal' trolling victim because of her attempts to fight back at trolls. This differentiated her from a typical trolling victim, who moved on once they realised they were being trolled. When Chris discovered inaccuracies on ED, she contributed to the forum, providing embarrassing stories, family videos and personal information; she corrected trolls when they argued she never graduated, arguing back that she did graduate, but was so frustrated with the school system that she ran off the stage without

⁴⁴ Christine Weston Chandler, *The Attraction Sign*, January 3, 2010, paper sign, <https://sonichu.com/cwcki/File:511-JumboLoveQuestSign.JPG>.

⁴⁵ "Catherine," CWCKI, last modified September 6, 2023, <https://sonichu.com/cwcki/Catherine>.

⁴⁶ FlexGoalsBongwater, "Does Chris deserve to suffer?," *Reddit*, August 7, 2022, https://www.reddit.com/r/ChrisChanSonichu/comments/wi76kd/does_chris_deserve_to_suffer/.

her diploma.⁴⁷ The more they antagonised her, the more she saw them as an enemy to be vanquished, and the more content she produced for their amusement. This is reminiscent of reality TV producers often attempting to pick the largest personalities in order to generate the most exaggerated responses to their script.⁴⁸ The hotheadedness of Pauly D made *Jersey Shore* and the spoilt rich girl act made Paris Hilton's *The Simple Life* in the very same way. Again, the link between trolls as media producers with Chris as the star is seen.

In this way, trolls acted as a sort of scout for talent. They recognised what could be a source of amusement, and entertainment, and manipulated Chris' personality and beliefs through the internet to produce content. Her political views were complicit in this, and the fame that Chris received as a result has brought her to icon status among the internet community.

Conclusions –

At present, Chris still exists on the internet; she makes money from Sonichu merch, and streams regularly. Her fame could not exist today without the empowering nature of Web 2.0; its user generated structure democratised celebrity culture, creating the DIY celebrity that Chris used to seek her fame. It facilitated trolling structurally by granting anonymity to trolls, allowing them to coordinate the large-scale trolling plans that created Chris' iconic moments and made her famous. Chris and trolls were empowered in parallel, and through the star : audience relationship, relied on each other for content and amusement respectively. Chris' personality traits, beliefs and vulnerabilities made her susceptible to the orchestrated trolling schemes prompting her suffering. Yet, she came to fame due to this, and was able to mobilise and accept the crucial role trolls played in her brand.

Was her life changed for the better? I'd argue that it was certainly not; Chris can never live as an everyday American again and has experienced trauma from trolling that irreversibly warped her life path. Nevertheless, if you search her name, her photo appears. If you search for Sonichu, you will find Chris' comics. Her fame is irrevocable. She will forever be

⁴⁷ "Manchester High School," CWCKI, last modified October 23, 2023, https://sonichu.com/cwcki/Manchester_High_School#Graduation.

⁴⁸ Abidin, "What is an Internet Celebrity Anyway?," 6.

remembered, as the hedgehog-loving, glasses wearing, striped sweater, Peter-Pan-esque adult who never wanted to grow up. Who had a dream for herself and her characters that came true.

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