The Dissertation Committee for Anne Helen Petersen Certifies that this is the approved version of the following dissertation:

THE GOSSIP INDUSTRY:

PRODUCING AND DISTRIBUTING STAR IMAGES, CELEBRITY GOSSIP,

AND ENTERTAINMENT NEWS

1910 - 2010

Committee:

Janet Staiger, Supervisor

Thomas Schatz

Michael Kackman

Susan McLeland

Mary Desjardins

THE GOSSIP INDUSTRY:

PRODUCING AND DISTRIBUTING STAR IMAGES,

CELEBRITY GOSSIP, AND ENTERTAINMENT NEWS

1910 - 2010

by

ANNE HELEN PETERSEN, B.A.; M.A.

Dissertation

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of

The University of Texas at Austin

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements

for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

The University of Texas at Austin

May 2011

Dedication

For my mother, who has always modeled intelligence with verve.

Acknowledgements

I would not be the scholar I am today without the tremendous and ongoing support of a number of professors, all of whom have modeled the type of mentorship, scholarship, and dedication to the field that I try to emulate. From my first semester as an undergrad to my final semester as a Ph.D. student, Janet Staiger, Thomas Schatz, and Michael Kackman at the University of Texas, Michael Aronson at the University of Oregon, and Robert Sickels at Whitman College have served as models, mentors, colleagues, and friends.

The dissertation-writing process was an arduous one made enjoyable by the efficiency and editorial guidance of Janet Staiger and the keen eyes of my committee members. I am particularly grateful to Susan McLeland and Mary Desjardins for their close readings and insight on early versions of various chapters.

Over the years, I've accumulated a hodgepodge cohort from older and younger students and colleagues in and outside of the department, all of whom have provided intellectual and emotional support through the Ph.D. process. Courtney Brannon Donoghue, Kristen Warner, Nick Muntean, Matt Payne, Rebecca Onion, Katie Feo Kelly, Colin Tait, Caroline Leader, Kit Hughes, Mabel Rosenheck, Alyx Vesey, and Paul Monticone, I'm talking to you. I've also been lucky enough to enjoy the support and long distance "mentorship" from a bevy of scholars via Twitter, blogs, and conferences, with special thanks to Jason Mittell, Alisa Perren, Chris Becker, Amanda Ann Klein, and Jonathan Gray for their guidance and faith in my work.

My mother kept up our *Entertainment Weekly* subscription for years, thus ensuring my investment in media culture even when we were both certain I'd end up a mathlete. Both She and my brother have read drafts, proofread blog entries, and drank wine with me when I couldn't write any more. I'm so lucky to hail from a family of writers, no matter how divergent our fields.

And because I always promised myself a list of esoteric dedications:
For Lainey, Bethy, Pepper, and Gretchy, my heart and my laughter; For K, His Royal Bunkess, and Bennifer, you are so my favorite. For BFree yoga and for JP's Java, which, let's be realistic here, are more responsible for the completion of this document than any thing else. And finally for Lainey Gossip, the site that, at least for this gossip-minded girl, started it all.

THE GOSSIP INDUSTRY:

PRODUCING AND DISTRIBUTING STAR IMAGES, CELEBRITY GOSSIP, AND ENTERTAINMENT NEWS

1910 - 2010

Anne Helen Petersen, Ph.D.

The University of Texas at Austin, 2011

Supervisor: Janet Staiger

Abstract: This dissertation addresses the industrial history of American-based celebrity gossip over century, beginning with the first Hollywood stars in the 1910s and reaching into "celebrified" culture of the 2010s. Gossip, broadly defined as discourse about a public figure produced and distributed for profit, can operate within the star's good graces or completely outside of the Hollywood machine; it can be published in "old media" print and broadcast forms or online and on a phone. Regardless of form, tone, and content, gossip remains a crucial component of the ways in which star images are produced and consumed. The dissertation thus asks: how has the relationship between the gossip industry and Hollywood in general changed over the last century? And what implications do those changes have for stars, those who exploit their images, and media industries at large?

Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION **1**

Entertainment News 4

The Gossip Industry 5

Scandal 12

Smut 13

Performer/Star/Celebrity 14

Secondary Literature Review 16

Theoretical Methods and Frameworks 23

Industrial Analysis 26

Discourse Analysis 28

Formal Analysis 29

Chapter Breakdown 30

PART ONE: FOUNDATIONS **37**

CHAPTER ONE - THE GOSSIP INDUSTRY (1910 - 1948) **38**

The Gossip Players: The Studios 44

The Gossip Players: *Photoplay* and the Fan Magazines 46

The Gossip Players: The Columnists 53

CHAPTER TWO - INDUSTRIES IN TRANSITION AND THE REEMERGENCE OF SCANDAL (1948-1958) **76**

Industrial Shifts 76

The Rise of Television 81

Case Studies: Mitchum, Bergman, Brando, Monroe 86

"Do I Get Another Chance" 88

"Do You Want Ingrid Bergman Back?" 92

"That Mad Man Marlon" 101

"Hollywood vs. Marilyn Monroe" 107

"Tells the Facts and Names the Names" 117

Conclusion.....127

PART TWO - EXPANSION, RETRACTION, REGROUPING 136

CHAPTER THREE - INDUSTRY BREAK-UPS (1958 - 1961) 137

The Industrial Value of Stars.....140

Expanding Coverage.....147

The Love Triangle 151

Conclusion.....164

CHAPTER FOUR - BACKLASH (1961 - 1980) 170

Jackie Fever.....172

Backlash.....179

Regrouping.....185

Macfadden/Bartell/Downe/Charter.....187

The Laufer Empire.....190

Conclusion.....197

CHAPTER FIVE - PERSONALITY JOURNALISM (1967 - 1980) 204

Form.....213

Content.....218

Mode of Production.....223

Distribution.....226

Conclusion.....229

PART THREE - CONSIDATION AND CONGLOMERATION 236

CHAPTER SIX - THE *PEOPLE* EFFECT (1974 - 1990) 237

Ten Years That Shook Hollywood....240

The *People* Effect: Publishing....250

The *People* Effect: Television....257

Conclusion....265

CHAPTER SEVEN - THE SEARCH FOR SYNERGY (1990 - 2000) 272

Movietime/E! Entertainment Channel....274

Entertainment Weekly....283

Extra....289

Conclusion....298

CHAPTER EIGHT - CELEBRITY DEATHMATCH: *PEOPLE* VS. *US WEEKLY* (2000 - 2005) 308

Us Goes Weekly....310

Us Goes Disney....314

Bonnie Fuller's *Us Weekly*....317

Celebrity Frenzy and the Paparazzi Boom....329

Conclusion....335

CHAPTER NINE - GOSSIP GOES ONLINE (2004 - 2010) 344

Gawker Media....348

Perez Hilton....353

The Conglomerates Strike Back....359

TMZ....361

NBC and CBS....369

Print and Television Outlets....371

Conclusion....373

CONCLUSION - THE ENDURANCE OF THE MACHINE **380**

BIBLIOGRAPHY **399**

INTRODUCTION

In July 1957, *Confidential Magazine* tempted its four million readers with the headline "It was the Hottest Show in Town…When Maureen O'Hara Cuddled in Row 35!" According to *Confidential*'s sources, O'Hara had taken the "darndest position," spread "across three seats," in the company of a "happy Latin American Boyfriend."[1] Nearly forty years later, gossip blog *TMZ* published a mug shot of an obviously intoxicated Mel Gibson following his arrest for driving under the influence. In short order, *TMZ* printed a transcript of Gibson's arrest, which included his anti-Semitic and misogynist slurs.[2] Both stories were obtained using dubious methods, including bribes, pay-offs, and inside informants. As later proven in court, O'Hara's sexual adventure was almost certainly a fabrication, as she had proof of being out of the country on the date of the "cuddle" in question. However, it mattered little that a Spanish passport stamp made it physically impossible for O'Hara to be present at the site of her supposed sexual transgression. That it was suggested, disseminated, and *believed* was enough to sully, or at the very least tarnish, her star image. In contrast, Gibson's actions were thoroughly documented on tape, via official police records, and on film. There was no doubt that the charges against him, both legal and ideological, were true.

Both stories were scandals – moments when a theretofore hidden truth came to light, promising a revised understanding of a star or public figure. Yet each scandal was reported via different media, to different audiences, and using profoundly different technologies. *Confidential* was published once monthly, was widely derided, available only on selected newsstands, and employed bold, garish photo collages to broadcast its star scandals, often sandwiched between stories of "The Vine That Makes You Virile" or "New Cure For Frigid Wives." By contrast, *TMZ* broke the story on its website mere hours after the event, updating repeatedly over the

hours and days to come. Print and online journalists, bloggers, and television news channels picked up the story and spread it cross-media. The original post was available to anyone with a computer and an internet connection.

Importantly, each event served as a crucial turning point for their respective publications. *Confidential*'s inability to substantiate its claims in court led to founder Robert Harrison's sale of the magazine, whereas *TMZ* was turned, virtually overnight, into a go-to internet gossip site. Each scandal also significantly altered the image and industrial value of its subject: O'Hara claimed under oath that she had not been offered a part since the story's publication, and Gibson was rendered a Hollywood outcast, unable to make or star in films other than those originating from his own production company.

The point of these examples should be clear: the gossip industry has changed in the forty years separating the scandals of O'Hara and Gibson, but its symbiotic relationship with stars, and Hollywood more generally, remains. Gossip and entertainment news can operate within the star's good graces or completely outside of the Hollywood machine; it can be published in "old media" print and broadcast forms or online and on a phone. Regardless of form, tone, and content, gossip and other forms of entertainment news remain crucial components in the way that star images are produced and consumed. This dissertation thus asks: how has the relationship between the gossip industry and Hollywood in general changed over the last century? And what implications do those changes have for stars, those who exploit their images, and media industries at large?

To answer these questions, I argue that four overarching phenomena have affected the relationship amongst stars, the gossip industry, and gossip consumers. First, the reorganization of the studio system post-divestment led to the gradual "emancipation" of the stars. Stars

increasingly relied on agents, press agents, and publicists to perform the functions previously performed by the studio. The lack of the studio oversight opened up space for unsanctioned publicity and the reportage of scandal. Second, the new logic of the studios post-divestment led to a gradual de-articulation of the fan magazines from the studios. Over the course of the late 1950s and '60s, the fan magazines began to cover pop idols, television stars, and other celebrities, such as Jacqueline Kennedy, with no official link to Hollywood. This expansion of coverage from Hollywood stars to "people worth knowing about" manifested forcefully in *People* and the "personality journalism" of the 1970s and has reached its logical extension in the contemporary gossip landscape, in which major film stars receive less coverage than politicians, reality stars, teen moms, and royalty. Third, gradual increases in the speed with which information and images are gathered and disseminated, facilitated by the rise of new media forms and digital technology, have significantly challenged the star's ability to control his/her image. Fourth, deregulation and the resultant conglomeration within the media industry have formalized the financial ties between those producing media featuring stars and those exploiting information about them.

As a result of these four phenomena, the gossip industry has expanded, both in terms of the number and diversity of outlets distributing information about stars as well as the sheer volume of information available and the frequency with which that information is updated. While Hollywood and the gossip industry had long forged informal bonds, these now-formal bonds between industries underline the willingness of conglomerates to exploit a star property across as many outlets and media as possible, even if the tone of those means of exploitation clash or conflict.

But for all the change in the speed with which entertainment news is collected and distributed, the increase in the number of outlets, and the placement of these outlets within the

conglomerated mediascape, I also argue that the several crucial aspects of the gossip industry have remained steady. Historically, studio publicity departments labored to produce star images inflected with "ordinariness" and "extraordinariness." Today, a star's publicity team does the same. Historically, outlets affirming proffered star images were challenged by others attempting to tear that image down. Today, the delineation between types has blurred, but the competition and counter-narratives remain. In the late '50s and '60s, the fan magazines framed the scandal surrounding Elizabeth Taylor, Eddie Fisher, and Debbie Reynolds as "love triangle," with a highly sexualized and darkly sensual star image pitted against an "All-American" girl-next door. In the 2000s, gossip blogs and magazines reproduced the selfsame rhetoric to frame the drama surrounding Angelina Jolie, Brad Pitt, and Jennifer Aniston. The means and frequency of delivery, the specific organization of the industry, and the type of behavior audiences consider "scandalous" have all changed. But the guiding logic of the industry — that audiences crave information about stars and their personal lives, both positive and negative — has remained constant.

The chapters that follow thus look to specific outlets, personalities, and star images to simultaneously illuminate the changes in the gossip industry *and* underscore the stability of its foundations. First, however, I would like to address several interlocking terms — *entertainment news, the gossip industry, scandal, smut*, and *performer/star/celebrity* — that form the foundation of the dissertation, followed by a survey of pertinent literature, a discussion of methodological approach, and a preview of the following nine chapters.

ENTERTAINMENT NEWS

I define *entertainment news* as any structured discourse concerning film stars, television personalities, recording artists, and other public figures, including the products in which such

discourse appears. Thus defined, the term expands to include celebrity profiles in mainstream magazines, speculative gossip columns, blind items, posed photos, paparazzi shots, red carpet appearances, print and broadcast interviews, sex tapes, websites, and news concerning film grosses, television ratings, and casting details. Entertainment news reports on and contributes to the visibility of stars and celebrities, building their value within the entertainment industry at large.

THE GOSSIP INDUSTRY

The diverse group of interests invested (either literally or figuratively) in the production and dissemination of entertainment news make up *the gossip industry*. My choice of *gossip industry* — as opposed to *entertainment news industry* — is deliberate. By definition, *gossip* is characterized by "casual or unconstrained conversation or reports about other people, typically involving details that are not confirmed as being true."[3] Yet the bulk of discourse covered in this project is *completely* constrained, meticulously mediated by interests hoping to profit from its consumption. Crucially, the producers and distributors of such information consistently attempt to efface and elide traces of its production, framing it as "casual or unconstrained conversation," or *gossip*, amongst friends.

While some celebrity profiles, columns, and photographs do document "details that are not confirmed to be true," celebrities or those close to them sanction the vast majority of stories, oftentimes under the guise of a "secret" being disclosed. By using the term *gossip industry*, I call attention to the ways in which the industry at large employs intimate address, "exclusive" interviews, and confessions to cloak highly calculated promotional attempts as discussion amongst friends. Put differently, discourse that many view as an organic or spontaneous phenomena is, in fact, a deliberate, complicated, and tremendously profitable industry unto itself.[4]

The first half of the dissertation focuses on fan magazines, gossip columns, and radio broadcasts explicitly oriented towards gossip and Hollywood stars, as they were the dominant means through which consumers obtained information about stars. The second half of the dissertation expands its focus to publications, programs, and channels such as *People*, *Entertainment Tonight*, and E! broadly tasked with promoting the entertainment industry. These outlets may not focus exclusively on stars, but the vast majority of their content and programming is nevertheless related to stars, their private lives, and content in which stars appear. Beginning in the mid-'70s, entertainment news outlets usurped the fan magazines and gossip columns as the primary conduits for information concerning stars. I thus consider my project to be a history of the gossip industry and its placement within the broader field of the Hollywood entertainment industry.

In Hollywood, stars are products – a form of capital. They are likewise contracted labor, property, and an investment. Throughout the history of Hollywood, they have been variously credited with saving or sinking a studio, dismissed as box office poison, or accepted as necessary financial anchors for troubled studios. If we think of stardom, as Richard Dyer suggests, as "the image of the way stars live," that image must be consistently reactivated, highlighting the star's patterns of consumption, loves, and losses.[5] The clothing a star wears, the clubs the star frequents, the people he/she dates, the names he/she gives to her children – all are components of the star image.

The star image is the product of labor. Labor on the part of the star, of course – both in his/her acting on screen and a more subtle form of "acting" in public appearances. Star images also rely on the labor of those producing and proliferating discourse about the star, which Dyer divides into four parts: *promotion*, *publicity*, *films*, and *criticism/commentary*.[6] *Promotion* describes the

"deliberate" attempts to create a star image, usually emanating from the star him/herself and the studio, publicist, or press agent entrusted with manufacturing sanctioned information, whether biographies, glamour shots, or public statements.[7] Under the studio system, a studio contracted an individual, "made" him/her a star, and employed an elaborate publicity phalanx to produce and "plant" gossip about the star in various magazines, columns, and radio programs. With the gradual transformation of the studio system, stars began to hire agents, publicists, stylists, managers, and lawyers to perform the services theretofore provided by the studios; each star became an enterprise, with its own publicity department, unto itself.

Promotion originates with the star and his/her publicity team but manifests in gossip outlets "friendly" with the star's agenda. Promotion may take the form planted gossip bits ("so-and-so was seen at the SoHo House with . . ."), televised interviews from film junkets, "sneak peeks" inside a celebrity's hand-bag, and other stories that reproduce the proffered image of the star. Broadly speaking, friendly outlets are invested in the construction of stars as upright citizens and moral exemplars; their overarching tone is soft, inviting, supportive and generally feminized. They do not *break* scandal, but when scandal becomes public, they often serve as a site for the star to tell his/her "side of the story." In today's media landscape, most friendly outlets are nested within conglomerates or studios where they construct positive images around stars affiliated with other holdings and function as promotional vehicles for conglomerate products.

Publicity forms the second component of the star image and includes articles, tell-alls, photos, and other forms of discourse that are not officially sanctioned by the star. Unlike promotion, publicity does not signify as "*deliberate* image-making," as television hosts, magazine writers, and gossip columnists create scenarios in which intimate information concerning a star's personal life is "discovered."[8] Of course, the majority of "intimate" information is crafted for

"discovery," but the rhetorical set-up or the graininess of a paparazzi photo connote authenticity and non-manipulation. In other words, a large portion of publicity is in fact promotion in masquerade.

Indeed, as Dyer points out, "the only cases where one can be fairly certain of genuine publicity are the scandals," or moments when information that compromises or punctures a star image, such as the revelations surrounding Fatty Arbuckle, Ingrid Bergman, or Tiger Woods, unintentionally come to light.[9] Outlets propagating scandal are still promulgating publicity — they are simply "unfriendly" to the star and his/her publicity team. "Unfriendly" publicity outlets include scandal magazines, tabloids, paparazzi websites, *TMZ*, and independent gossip blogs concerned with challenging or criticizing proffered star images.

Operating without the cooperation of the stars and publicists, unfriendly outlets either rely on their own investigative efforts, tip-offs, informants, and photographers to gather gossip firsthand or concentrate on recycling, commenting, and re-distributing gossip and images obtained by others. In contrast to their friendly counterparts, unfriendly publicity outlets' mode of address is predominantly "hard," accusatory, inflammatory, and masculine. Their aesthetic toes the line of garishness and occasionally crosses the border of "good taste." As a result, these outlets, albeit tremendously popular and profitable, lack overarching social acceptability and have weathered recurring accusations of lowering journalistic standards. Historically, unfriendly outlets have been unaffiliated with Hollywood and the entertainment industry. Today, several conglomerates have realized the potential of "double-dipping" on celebrity content, funding one set of outlets to celebrate celebrities and their images and another to decry and ridicule them.

Of course, the lines between promotion and publicity and "friendly" and "unfriendly" is often muddled. The classic fan magazines, once veritable mouthpieces for studio promotion,

were forced to rely on scandalous and unsanctioned tactics as the stars ceased to cooperate in the 1960s and '70s. Some outlets, such as *Perez Hilton*, oscillate between the role of ridiculer and sycophant; others, such as *Us Weekly*, change their attitude and tone depending on which celebrities provide exclusive access. The audiences for gossip are also indistinct. While some consumers limit their gossip diet to one type of discourse, the vast majority regularly consume gossip emanating from friendly and non-friendly outlets. The gossip industry thus functions as a continuum, with discourse promoting the stars on one end, discourse denigrating them on the other, and all matter of points in between. Crucially, all forms contribute to *and* exploit the star's overarching image.

Dyer addresses the phenomenon of film stardom and, as such, focuses on *films* as the third component of the star image. Given the breadth of this dissertation, the category expands to include television programs, internet web series, music videos and any other text in which the star performs his/her "talent." These texts provide the initial reason for distinction and public visibility, but for many stars images, publicity and promotion quickly outweigh appearances on screen. As proof, Dyer cites the images of Brigitte Bardot and Zsa Zsa Gabor; contemporary examples include Lindsay Lohan and Katie Holmes. For most stars, however, their work as "artists" serves to structure the overarching tone and texture of their respective images. Texts in which stars appear are thus fundamental to the gossip industry. Not only do they provide the basis for stardom, but the interests that produce and profit from films, television programs, and music recordings have become invested in outlets that produce and distribute gossip itself.

The fourth component of the star image, *criticism/commentary*, refers to reviews, profiles and biographies of the star written without his/her approval, and other discourse that guides the "public opinion" of a star. While critics and commentators contribute to the formation of the

star image, they do so in sphere distinct from that of authors, columnists, and interviewers involved in publicity and promotion. A critic in *The Atlantic Monthly* may attempt to "read into" or "break down" a star and his/her societal significance while review in the *New York Times* often critiques a star's performance in a recent film. Alternately, an article in the *Vanity Fair* may offer insight into Lauren Bacall's history with Bogart or attempt to reconstruct and reconsider the last days of Heath Ledger.

The difference between promotion/publicity and criticism/commentary is by no means as simple as promotion/publicity = positive and criticism/commentary = negative. Indeed, some publicity sheds negative light on a star, and during the studio era, angry studio heads were known to plant negative publicity items to keep a misbehaving star in line. Conversely, commentary may celebrate a star's career, his/her philanthropic activities, or a recent performance. Crucially, criticism and commentary, including academic commentary, seems to reside outside of the realm of controlled promotion, and thus signifies as more objective than publicity.

With that said, a magazine, website, or television program's lack of official ties with the star him/herself does not mean that outlet operates outside of the gossip industry. Rather, that outlet is exploiting the star and his/her image as vigorously as a publicity outlet, yet it does so under the guise of disinterest, critique, or academic analysis. Even this dissertation, and the blogging project that I have designed to promote it, attracts visitors on the promise of information about celebrities.

Under this rubric, the trade press serves a unique and complex role, providing promotion, publicity, criticism, and commentary. Studios purchase advertisements to promote specific films and stars; agents and publicists vie for their client's recent deal or contract to make the front page. But the trades also publish editorials and trend pieces that routinely break down the value

and publicity efforts of particular stars. At the same time, trade publications survive on subscription dollars and advertising buys from studios, agents, publicity firms, and other industry interests. The trade press thus functions as ostensibly objective journalistic publications that are, in fact, deeply imbricated within the entertainment industry at large.

Publicity, promotion, films (and other texts in which the star performs), and criticism/ commentary all contribute to a star's image, and, as such, may be considered a part, even if only tangentially, of the gossip industry. Over the course of the next nine chapters, I trace the conflicts between entities (the traditional fan magazines versus the scandal magazines in the 1950s; the studios versus the fan magazines in the 1960s) as well as the tensions as particular outlets shift functions (the fan magazines in the 1960s and '70s; the gossip blogs in the 2000s) or attempt to serve multiple functions at once.

In the interest of space and precision, I have mostly limited my analysis to magazines, newspapers, television programs, and blogs devoted to promotion and publicity. While I periodically address films and other texts in which stars appear as a means of illuminating the parameters of a particular star's image at a given point in time, I shy from close readings of specific film, television, and internet texts. In contrast, I draw heavily on material published in *Variety, Time,* the *New York Times,* and other outlets offering criticism and commentary for background, statistics, and other industrial information. The reliance on these materials is problematic, but as I elaborate below, the paucity of archival and primary documents related to the gossip industry necessitates dependence on second-hand reporting. As such, I depend on these texts, yet remain cognizant of the ways in which they not only discuss and critique star images but *contribute* to them as well. While a thorough interrogation of the role of these outlets

extends beyond the scope of this project, I do attempt to highlight each publication's specific stakes in framing a star, publication, technology, or industrial phenomenon in a given way.

SCANDAL

Within the gossip continuum, speculative gossip about figures who in some way violate the status quo provides the most dynamic, salacious, and valuable form of entertainment news. A violation of the status quo can take the form of a single action (divorcing one's husband) or characterize a star's entire image (Marilyn Monroe). In the hands of the gossip industry, this violation becomes *scandal*. As Adrienne McLean points out, scandal does not simply "upset the status quo temporarily"; rather, it may function as "a wedge driver," illuminating "the vulnerability of many 'primary social frameworks' that together make up what we so often refer to as dominant ideology."[10] Put differently, scandal opens up pre-existing rifts and holes in the ideological fabric, creating individual and cultural crises of identity that require reckoning. Such reckoning works in different ways and to different ends. With the help of the gossip industry, some stars have managed rhetorically to paper over their actions and be welcomed back into the fold, yet not all have been so skilled or lucky.

Often times, scandal participants are subject to intense opprobrium or exclusion. When Bergman left her husband, Taylor "stole" Reynolds's husband, and Jane Fonda radicalized her image, the initial backlash was substantial, as outlets attempted to emphasize the severity of the star's offense. In time, however, various components of the industry helped recuperate each star, framing her actions as motivated by true love or dismissing them as a rebellious interlude, now in the past.[11] Yet scandal can also evade attempts at containment and thus define the star's overarching image. Such a star may seem markedly different, even transgressive, yet his/her difference inspires a greater cultural shift, inciting or illuminating changes in what a particular

society values, esteems, or finds attractive, as evidenced by the iconic and "scandalous" images of Clara Bow, Mae West, Marlon Brando, Marilyn Monroe and Angelina Jolie.

While scandal provides some of the juiciest and most fascinating forms of entertainment news, it is relatively rare. Indeed, at the height of the studio system, the studios ensured that virtually no disruptions to the status quo would emerge save through their careful, all-controlling machinations. Yet the gossip industry demands a steady stream of material, and when no scandal is to be found, outlets focus on stars who simultaneously affirm and express the status quo, as broadly palatable as they are unremarkable. For example, Greer Garson, Rock Hudson, Doris Day, and Jennifer Aniston were/remain tremendously popular stars, and gossip about their unsalacious doings have dominated the fan magazines.[12] The discourse surrounding such stars is benign and innocuous at best. Nevertheless, anodyne, run-of-the-mill news, punctuated with high-selling scandal, fuels the gossip industry.

SMUT

Speculative gossip is often accompanied with the promise of *smut*: a sex tape, topless paparazzi shot, or documentation of a star *in flagrante* (literally, "while the crime is still burning") that compels the reader to click through a link, tune in, or buy a magazine. Smut is shadowed with lasciviousness. It may be clearly pornographic, as in the case of a sex tape, or it may be more nebulously offensive or obscene, as in blacked out shots of Britney Spears's vagina. Crucially, the quality of "smuttiness," like obscenity, is a function of both content and presentation. A nude photograph in a gallery is art; that same nude photograph posted alongside a suggestive headline in a tabloid is "smut." The United States Supreme Court has long debated the definition and legislation of obscenity. Justice Potter Stewart, for example, famously proclaimed that no standard definition could be found, but he "knew it when [he] saw it."[13]

Obscenity and smuttiness are thus predicated on socio-temporal norms: West may have bordered on obscene (and "appealing to prurient interests") in the 1930s, but her sexual puns read rather tamely today.

In this way, Hugh Grant's mug shot following his arrest for soliciting a prostitute, Miley Cyrus's half-naked cell phone self-portraits, and a blind item insinuating George Clooney's homosexuality may all be interpreted as smut. *People Magazine* shies from such material; even *TMZ* claims its material will not cross certain lines. Yet several gossip publications stemmed from unabashedly smutty publications. *Confidential* head Robert Harrison, for example, refined his editorial and entrepreneurial skills with several beefcake and pin-up magazines in the early 1950s. As emphasized above, the designation of "smut" is subjective. When I employ the word to describe a certain publication, it is not because it offends me or even necessarily offended the majority of its audience, but because discourse, often times emanating from "high" journalistic sources and cultural critics, constructed the publication and its content as such.

PERFORMER / STAR / CELEBRITY

Throughout the dissertation, I differentiate among *performers*, *stars*, and *celebrities*. A *performer* can be well-known and well-regarded, associated with an overarching "picture personality" derived from the type of roles he/she consistently portrays on the screen. But he/she does not become a *star* until components of the gossip industry produce, distribute, and encourage consumption of details concerning the performer's life off-screen. The producers of stars (studios, handlers, the media, fans) ascribe stars with some sort of extraordinary or superlative quality, framing individuals as the most skilled, the most beautiful, or the most funny. Such superlativeness contributes to a star's *charisma*, which helps affirm and naturalize his/her power, salary, and level of consumption. While some people refer to distinguished politicians,

chefs, architects, etc., as stars of their field, for the purpose of this discussion, I have limited its use to those affiliated with the entertainment industry. For example, architect Frank Gehry, while certainly a star of his field, is outside the realm of this dissertation, but a chef with a reality show, such as Mario Batali, falls within it.

A *celebrity* shares many of the characteristics of the star: he/she is well-known, charismatic, marked as superlative, and in possession of some sway or influence. Chris Rojek suggests that the Latin roots of celebrity "indicates a relationship in which an individual is marked out as possessing singularity, and a social structure in which the character of fame is fleeting."[14] All stars are thus celebrities, but not all celebrities are stars. For example, military generals, politicians, heroes, philanthropists, inventors, members of the monarchy, socialites, even serial killers, terrorists, and embezzlers are all celebrities as "notoriety" has become an increasingly important "sub-branch" of celebrity culture.[15] Many celebrities lack distinct performative and "private" personalities. A reality star, for example, is expected to be the same on the screen and off as are politicians, which helps explain the scandal that erupts when a senator makes decisions in his/her personal life that conflict with his/her political identity. The star's image operates slightly differently. It is comprised of textual and extra-textual components, but those components are intended to harmonize into a unified image.

The gossip industry initially focused on Hollywood stars although some gossip columns, most notably that of Walter Winchell, reported on the coming-and-goings of celebrities and socialites unaffiliated with the entertainment industry. Since the 1960s, the industry has focused on celebrities of all types. For the chapters that deal with this period, I use "star" to refer to film and television stars and "celebrity" as an umbrella term for all public figures whose images are distributed through the gossip industry.

SECONDARY LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature that informs this dissertation may be broadly divided into four categories: star studies (written or inspired by Richard Dyer), the theorization of celebrity, Hollywood histories, and scholarship explicitly focused on the consumption of gossip.

Dyer's *Stars* is the foundational text for the field of star studies; along with *Heavenly Bodies*, it provides the theoretical underpinnings of the dissertation as a whole.[16] Dyer posits stars as sociological phenomena, as images, and as signs, building his analysis on the scattered foundation of previous star scholarship that included sociology and structural Marxism. As a semiotician, Dyer argues that a star can be read as a sign like any other, inflected with all forms of accumulated discourse and knowledge in circulation. Importantly, the star image does not signify in a unified manner. Rather, his/her image is the result of what Dyer terms "structured polysemy" – a collection of discourses that can be harmonious, discordant, or a fragile amalgam of contradictory and complementary messages manifest in the publicity, promotion, films, and criticism/commentary discussed above.[17]

As a graduate of the Birmingham School's Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, Dyer's work is firmly rooted in the cultural studies tradition. Instead of viewing products of the "culture industries" as inherently mind-numbing and distracting, he looks to the specific ways in which people use and interact with popular culture, whether as a means to identity formation, making sense of the world, or seeking pleasure. As articulated in *Heavenly Bodies*, "stars matter because they act out aspects of life that matter to us; and performers get to be stars when what they act out matters to enough people."[18] In other words, studying stars – who becomes a star and what that star represents – helps go to the very essence of what it means to be a human today.

Since the publication of *Stars*, the field has expanded in several directions, focusing on star production, star consumption, and the individual "star study." In the second half of *Stars*, Dyer performed a detailed star study of Fonda, executing a close semiotic reading and discourse analysis of her image over three decades — a task he repeats with the images of Monroe, Paul Robeson, and Judy Garland in *Heavenly Bodies*. Several scholars have attempted similar examinations, arriving at various conclusions as to the way that a particular star was produced and resonated in a particular cultural moment. Early examples include Charles Eckert's Marxist reading of the image of Shirley Temple, Robert Allen's study of Joan Crawford, and Cathy Klapart's examination of the image of Bette Davis and the use of her star image as a means of product differentiation.[19] In recent years, Marsha Orgeron contextualizes Clara Bow with 1920s consumer culture, Alexander Doty applies the framework to film and television star Lucille Ball, and Adrienne McLean tackles the elaborate production, negotiation, and reception of Rita Hayworth in the years immediately following divestment.[20]

While each of the above star studies underlines the star's intrinsic value, with the exception of Klapart, the scholars focus more on the ideological signification of stars. Paul McDonald has led the scholarly charge to consider the value of the star as capital and calls for close scrutiny of the specific processes that contribute to star production, both historically and in our current industrial moment.[21] In outlining the specific duties of each member of the star's "retinue," as he does in *The Contemporary Hollywood Film Industry*, McDonald draws attention to the complex nexus of labor, communication, and complications innate to star production in contemporary Hollywood.[22] In *The Star System*, McDonald devotes a significant attention to the ways in which the apparent democracy of the internet opens up spaces for myriad voices to contribute to the image of the star, effectively decentralizing and destabilizing the star image.[23]

Like McDonald, I aim to analyze and illuminate the structures of production responsible for stars, working to add context and texture to scholarship that interrogates star images and their consumption.

The perceived rise of celebrity culture over the last thirty years has contributed to the growth of a new sub-field of "celebrity studies," which has recently expanded to include myriad text books, edited collections, and a quarterly journal. Leo Baudy, Charles L. Ponce de Leon, and Tom Payne all trace fame and the "frenzy of renown" through history, starting in antiquity and extending through the twentieth century.[24] P. David Marshall, Graeme Turner, and Chris Rojek examine the sociological and cultural implications of celebrity culture, and Elizabeth Currid-Halkett investigates the "business" of celebrity with a close analysis of the production of images in our highly mediated cultural moment.[25] While Currid-Halkett's discussion of the "geographies" of celebrity and empirical account of the celebrity-industrial complex are illuminating, they again lack context and, as such, suggest the manufacture of contemporary culture as a fascinating yet nearly ahistorical process.

Very little academic scholarship has explicitly addressed speculative gossip and its role in the production of star images. Mary Desjardins's article "Systematizing Scandal: *Confidential Magazine*, Stardom, and the State of California," provides the sole analysis of *Confidential* and its libel trial, theorizing scandal in terms of its social and legal meaning in the state of California in 1957.[26] The title of the piece refers to *Confidential*'s scandal methodology, as the magazine's editor streamlined tactics for gathering and recycling material and pictures, in essence creating a scandal "factory." The state attacked this systemization, claiming it presented "conspiracy to commit criminal libel" and "malicious intent" on the part of *Confidential*.

As Desjardins explains, this charge "put the case into a social arena in which the magazine might be judged as moral contaminant in society."[27] *Confidential's* defense team crafted a cunning response, claiming that 1) *Confidential*'s material was far less "morally contaminating" than other publications, including the bestselling novel *Peyton Place*, and 2) the magazine was actually performing a public service, broadcasting the "truth" about stars, whereas the studios had long disillusioned the public with falsified tales. In essence, *Confidential* was charging that the studios had long "systematized" their own star discourse. Desjardins concludes by tracing the legacy of *Confidential* to the modern-day tabloids and paparazzi but does not push her conclusion to address the specific components of the *Confidential* production culture still at work in convergent gossip providers such as *TMZ*.

On the subject of scandal, David Cook and McLean's edited collection *Headline Hollywood* provides the most substantial and diverse approach to the ways in which scandal has erupted and been negotiated and/or neutralized. Desjardins's *Confidential* article joins dozens of others, ranging from the connection between the Fatty Arbuckle and the "Black Sox" Scandal to the evolution of Fonda's "Hanoi Jane" persona, that explore the scandals and the social frameworks that produced them. These authors likewise trace the ways in which scandal is created and reified, like sexuality, through discourse: by *speaking* an event as scandal, its "identity" is confirmed. While several essays within the collection address the fan magazines and studio publicity departments' role in propagating scandal, apart from the piece by Desjardins, none specifically grapple with how scandal affected the way star discourse was distributed and consumed.

Journalists and historians have performed extensive research into the gossip publications and columnists of the studio system era. Neal Gabler's *Winchell*, Samantha Barbas's *The First*

Lady of Hollywood: A Biography of Louella Parsons, and Jennifer Frost's *Hedda Hopper's Hollywood: Celebrity Gossip and American Imperialism* all offer critical backstory to the genesis and growth of the gossip columns during the classical period.[28] Yet these authors fall short of contextualizing their subjects in terms of the broader history of gossip, its production, and its crucial role in star production, instead focusing on the columnist, his/her rise to power and influence, and, in the case of Hopper, the gradual manifestation of a trenchant political belief system.

Other books, including Anthony Slide's *Inside the Hollywood Fan Magazine*, Ronald L. Davis's *The Glamour Factory: Inside Hollywood's Big Studio System,* and chapters in Kathleen Fuller's *At the Picture Show: Small Town Audiences and the Creation of Movie Fan Culture* and Barbas's *Movie Crazy: Fans, Stars, and the Cult of Celebrity* provide essential background on the creation, growth, and mode of production of studio publicity departments and fan magazines from the silent era through the end of the studio era.[29] While Slide follows the fan magazine to its demise in the early '80s, he gives only a passing nod to the new crop of entertainment news magazines, mostly in order to voice his derision at their lack of glamour and good taste.

Due to their central role in fomenting scandal, shaping identity, and promoting consumption, fan magazines have become objects of intense feminist debate. In the 1980s, Gaylyn Studlar and Jane Gaines analyzed the commodification of culture in fan magazines from the 1920s and 1940s, respectively.[30] More recently, the perceived upsurge in celebrity discourse has prompted several articles examining contemporary star discourse and its readership. Rebecca Feasey looks to *Heat Magazine* in the British context while Kirsty Fairclough examines the manifestation of "bitch culture" and postfeminism in the gossip blog.[31]

All four scholars express profound ambivalence concerning star and celebrity discourse. While the fan magazine and gossip blog certainly afford a modicum of pleasure, they likewise

promote self-commodification, pit women against each other, and engender other problematic ideologies. For these feminist scholars, the fan magazine, like the soap opera or the romance novel, should not be outright dismissed, but it, and the reading strategies it encourages, should be examined critically. All four scholars provide nuanced textual readings and valuable insight into the ways in which stars and discourse about them have been commodified in the magazine or blog. While each scholar skillfully connects the discourse of the magazine to greater cultural discourses concerning women during their respective periods of publication, they do very little to contextualize the magazines as a component of the gossip industry at large.

With the move towards empirical cultural studies research in the 1980s, several scholars have attempted to reconstruct the various ways in which audience members consumed and found pleasure in stars. Jackie Stacey's *Stargazing*, which surveyed dozens of British women concerning their fan practices during the 1940s and 1950, is the most renowned in this tradition.[32] While Stacey does not examine specific practices concerning fan magazines, her respondents offer nuanced accounts of the ways in which they emulated, worshipped, took pleasure in and identified with female stars, and engaged in consumption practices influenced and/or encouraged by fan magazines, gossip, and other forms of extra-textual discourse.

More recently, Hermes has performed ethnographic surveys of the "imagined communities" constructed around celebrity gossip readership. Similar to Stacey, Hermes discerns "strategies" – serious and camp – for approaching stars and star discourse. Both strategies help construct loose communities, both imagined and physical. Most interestingly, Hermes suggests the use, on the part of serious readers, of the "repertoire of melodrama," which fosters community and empathy around shared feelings of dis-enfranchisement. Readers revel in

learning of the misfortune and scandal often available in gossip as, according to Hermes, "enjoying the misery of others can be a way of displacing injustice we feel we have suffered."[33]

On the subject of gossip consumption, Joshua Gamson's *Claims to Fame: Celebrity in Contemporary America* offers the most extensive and nuanced mediation.[34] *Claims to Fame* details the history, production, *and* consumption of celebrity, which included interviews and focus groups with "middle-engagement" fans: those who know of current events in the celebrity world but do not necessarily engage in particularly "fannish" activities. Like Hermes's, Gamson concludes that fans of celebrity gossip engage with its subjects on various levels and for various ends. He isolates five approaches to celebrity (Traditional, Second-Order Traditional, Postmodernist, Game Player: Gossiper, and Game Player: Detective) differentiated according to views of how fame is achieved, level of production awareness, and mode of engagement. Most importantly, Gamson identifies how different types of gossip address different types of consumers: *People* and *ET*, for example, affirm the beliefs of "traditional" celebrity consumers, while *Confidential* and TMZ cater to the "game players" who make sport of celebrity deconstruction: decoding blind items and illuminating the strings of production.

As evidenced by the scholarship of Studlar, Gaines, and Fairlough, it is tremendously difficult to consider fan magazines, entertainment news, or speculative gossip in a vacuum. Gamson's work makes it particularly clear that individual readers negotiate and consume star discourse in ways specific to their needs and wants. A particular star tidbit may confirm one belief for one fan and an entirely different view – of the world, of oneself – for another. As explicit reception studies are outside the scope of my project, I do not claim to offer greater conclusions as to the ways that entertainment news was consumed, used, or rejected by actual readers over the course of the last sixty years — a topic to which I hope other scholars return.

With that said, it is clear that entertainment news products not only distribute star images, but circulate expectations and norms concerning morality, gender, and consumption. At times, these ideological assumptions have been overtly displayed, even pitted against each other in dueling texts; at others, they simmer just beneath the surface, erupting in discourse surrounding scandal and overt transgressions of the status quo. Either way, the ideological potency of entertainment news, and speculative gossip in particular, positions it as a worthy subject of study, both industrially and culturally.

Ultimately, this dissertation stakes a claim on scholarly landscape rarely touched. In providing the history and analysis of the gossip industry and highlighting changes in the way that public media discussed and disseminated star images, my work provides a bridge between star studies and industrial histories of Hollywood.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS AND METHODS

This dissertation was inspired, for lack of a more appropriate word, by the field of cultural studies. Cultural studies takes interest in the "everyday," viewing quotidian practices as essential for nuanced understandings of greater societal trends, ethos, and ideologies. Gossip is often derided as a silly, whimsical, or smutty form of discourse, but, as a cultural theorist, I choose to view it as cultural artifact, deeply imbued with meaning and a locus of social identity formation. Gossip is a particular potent form of discourse, and as Foucault has demonstrated, discourse shapes and shifts ideology, setting boundaries of what it means to be a child, an adult, a citizen, a man, a woman, a member of society. Gossip thus works through and sets limits on acceptable practices, beliefs, and behavior. Anthropologists and sociologists have performed studies on the function of gossip in social groups, from remote tribal communities to secretary pools.[35] Gossip is everywhere, and we all do it. Whether its subject is the new child in school, a

major star, the president, the quarterback, the Queen, or the hotshot at work, its function is almost always a variation on the theme of social policing.

Put differently, we talk about people who are different – who challenge with the status quo, whether by being exceptionally beautiful or ugly, remarkably awkward, or intelligent. We gossip about the person who dresses differently, does not display his/her gender appropriately, flirts with too many co-workers, or espouses radical political beliefs. A threat to the status quo is tantamount to a threat to the conception of self and society, and gossip is often the first defense against such change. As Joke Hermes points out, "gossip brings people together by creating an intimate common world in which private standards of morality apply to what is and what is not acceptable behavior."[36] While a study of the ways in which gossip affects social norms is outside the scope of this project, its societal power underlines the importance of studying how, and under what economic imperatives, it is produced and distributed.

Speculative gossip, and the supposedly smutty content it often contains, also provides pleasure. Readers are allowed to enjoy vicariously the glamorous world of the stars, relish their knowledge of secret or restricted information, or gain satisfaction from deducing the subjects of gossip "blind items."[37] The consumption of gossip is likewise a community-building activity, providing a point of reference and shared topic of conversation. Often, a sensitive, personal topic may be displaced and worked through by gossiping about a star or celebrity in a similar situation.

This understanding of stars and gossip as ideologically potent and culturally significant — an understanding rooted in cultural studies — led me to my own research question. With that said, this dissertation does not interrogate or address the political or ideological implications of

the discourse produced by the gossip industry at large. Rather, I consider my project as a foundation on which future cultural studies projects may build.

As suggested above, entertainment news is an industrial, historical, and aesthetic product. As such, it is a prime candidate for the synthetic methodological approach recently forwarded by Jennifer Holt and Alisa Perren in their collection *Media Industries*.[38] For Holt and Perren, the complicated and convergent landscape of contemporary media demands a multi-pronged approach that considers cultural studies, film and television history, political economy, and reception studies, amongst others. Holt and Perren aim to establish "media industries" as a new sub-discipline, an umbrella description under which this dissertation, in its demand for full consideration of the gossip industry, fits perfectly.

Yet the decision to employ what may appear as a hodgepodge of methodologies has been made, at least in part, out of necessity. The trade papers, popular press, academic institutions, and gossip outlets documented the gossip industry sporadically and haphazardly, with little thought to the future, in part because the material produced was long considered to be of low cultural value. Archives documenting the production of star images do exist (The David O. Selznick Collection at the Harry Ransom Center; the Louella Parsons and Hedda Hopper papers at the Herrick Library) but these collections are mostly limited to the studio system and the period immediately thereafter, and as the film, television, and music industries have grown increasingly conglomerated, they have become less willing to open their internal archives to the outside world.

At the same time, the archives of *Photoplay*, *Modern Screen, Motion Picture* and the other classic fan magazines have been destroyed, misplaced, closed to the public, or never existed in the first place. Even actual gossip artifacts — recordings of gossip broadcasts and television

programs, copies of fan and scandal magazines — are notoriously difficult to come by. Only *Photoplay* and *People* were collected with any regularity, and several key texts to this dissertation, including *Confidential*, *The National Enquirer*, and even *Us Weekly* were either not collected or are now unavailable for circulation.

Which is all to say that there is little documentation of the industry at large, particularly in the period between the transformation of the studios (and their publicity departments) and the late 1970s, when mainstream publishing and syndicating outlets (Time Inc., Paramount) began producing their own gossip outlets and attracting the attention of the trades. This scarcity has forced me to use the materials and techniques available — from chance issues of magazines available for purchase on eBay to interviews with editors in obscure publications — to reconstruct complex and multi-faceted modes of production. I thus employ three interconnected modes of analysis — *industrial, discursive,* and *formal* — to excavate and examine the history of the gossip industry.

Industrial Analysis

As highlighted above, entertainment news is a commodity, produced and disseminated via a complex matrix of individuals, organizations, and financial interests I refer to as the gossip industry. Along with the production entities behind other forms of entertainment media, it makes up what Adorno and Horkheimer famously termed "the culture industries," responsible for the production of cultural items such as films, television and radio broadcast, popular music, books, and magazines. Adorno and Horkheimer held a particularly jaundiced view of the culture industries, criticizing their "assembly-line character" and "synthetic, planned method of turning out its products" which sedate, rather than challenge, the masses.[39]

Over the last forty years, scholars in various disciplines have challenged Adorno and Horkheimer's conception of the culture industries as a monolithic or unified whole, using case studies and interviews to illuminate the cooperative practices, "micro relations," fissures, discrete "cultural worlds," and instabilities that characterize the "production of culture."[40] As Keith Negus makes clear, "production does not take place within a completely separate sphere but in relation to broader social contexts of consumption."[41] Throughout the dissertation, I use the term "production culture" to describe the distinct yet interdependent entities, such as studio publicity departments, the staff of a fan magazine, the classic gossip columnists, the magazine staff at Time Inc., or the bloggers at *Gawker* that compose the gossip industry at a given point in time. With each section, I attempt to illuminate the specifics environment, relationships, and processes that contributed to the outlet's production of gossip as well as the way that an outlet and its production culture interacted with, clashed with, and depended on adjacent outlets and their respective production cultures.

I likewise employ what Paul DiMaggio and Paul Hirsch deem a "total systems approach," looking to the "relations among parts of industries that interact intensely and pervasively in ways that determine the nature of the art and communications media."[42] In simpler terms, I focus on how changes in the relations between various *components of* and *influences on* the gossip industry (stars, their handlers, gossip outlets, studios, conglomerates, deregulation, technological innovation) result in changes in the way that gossip news is produced, disseminated, and consumed. A total systems approach is particularly well-suited for analysis of the gossip industry, given its symbiotic relationship with the entertainment industry at large. With each chapter, I consider how changes in the entertainment landscape, including the reorganization of the studio system, the rise of agents, the arrival of television, deregulatory legislation, conglomeration, and

the spread of new media technologies affect the industrial value of stars and celebrities and, by extension, the way the gossip industry packages and sells discourse about them.

Discourse Analysis

Since I myself am not privy to industrial interactions, my analysis depends heavily on discourse, or what has been said, written, recorded, and circulated about the industry on both the micro- and macro- level. Trade publications, including *Variety*, *The Hollywood Reporter*, *Advertising Age*, *Ad Week*, *MediaWeek*, *Broadcasting and Cable*, *Broadcast Engineering*, and *Folio* provide essential details of the technological, aesthetic, and organizational components of entertainment news production. Large newspapers and national magazines, such as *The New York Times*, *The Los Angeles Times*, *Time*, *Newsweek*, *The New Yorker*, and *The Atlantic* offer secondary sources of industrial information and background, as do histories of Hollywood performed by academics, journalists, novices, and all points in between.

Information gleaned from these sources form the backbone of this dissertation, providing essential details related to circulation, ad rates, television ratings, salaries, image price tags, and official cooperation among entities. Of course, not all quotes, interviews, and sound bites are taken as fact. While these sources are, in some cases, the only evidence of an outlet and its operations over a given period of time, I have attempted to interrogate the ways in which authors, editors, and publications frame the industry, its outlets, its profits, and its utility. While I do not challenge the methods of obtaining and reporting official figures (such as Nielsen ratings) that structure the industry, I do weigh and contextualize such information within the various interlocking entertainment industries of which the gossip industry is a part.

Formal Analysis

On its own, discourse analysis is an imperfect and incomplete way of approaching an industry, as all those who participate in the production and mediation of discourse, whether stars, bloggers, CEOs, interviewers, or editors, have some stake in how its subject is portrayed. I have thus combined it with analysis of the formal and aesthetic components of the products themselves, which, whether in print, broadcast, or online, rely heavily on presentation, color, text, visual manipulation, and specialized rhetoric. I perform close readings of multiple forms of entertainment news, including issues of *Confidential, People,* and *US Weekly* and web archives of *PerezHilton.com* and *TMZ.com.* While I shy from Marshall McLuhan's famous assertion concerning the medium and its inherent message, I do contend that entertainment news' various means of transmission – broadcast radio, television, print, in syndication, on the newsstand, through the mail, through blogs, even via Twitter – profoundly influences its production and consumption. Put differently, stars are "spoken" and "read" differently depending on their form of mediation.

I thus examine how the texts present star discourse visually and aurally, with particular attention to the particular strategies for aesthetic and tonal differentiation, sensationalism, and emotional appeal. As Desjardins has documented in the case of *Confidential*, entertainment news outlets of all types have "systematized" techniques of collage and repurposing, effectively ensuring an infinite stream of content and copy. My analysis pays close attention to such practices, looking to how production differs among media and has been refined with the introduction of digital technologies. I consider the ways in which sites of presentation and purchase – whether the supermarket aisle, the mailbox, or the computer browser – influence the

way that entertainment news and speculative gossip in particular have figured as part of everyday life and culture.

Together, industrial, discursive, and formal analysis illuminate the connections, joints, and structural dependency amongst stars, their handlers, and the outlets and corporate interests that exploit discourse about them. As a result, I am able to offer a expansive yet nuanced portrait of an otherwise diffuse and mostly undocumented industry.

CHAPTER BREAKDOWN

The dissertation is organized in three parts, each covering a major historical period of the gossip industry. Part One, *Foundations* (1911 - 1958) includes two chapters, the first of which, simply titled *The Gossip Industry*, establishes the genesis of the industry in early Hollywood, examining the transition between "pictures personalities" to "stars" in the early 1910s, the coalescence of the studio publicity departments in the '20s, '30s, and '40s, and the concomitant rise of the fan magazines and gossip columnists, with specific attention to Parsons, Hopper, and Winchell and their cultivation of cross-media brands.

The second chapter, *Industries in Transition and the Re-Emergence of Scandal*, looks to changes in the production of stars and gossip amidst the dissolution of the centralized studio system and the rise of television before scrutinizing the star images of four iconic performers — Robert Mitchum, Ingrid Bergman, Marlon Brando, and Marilyn Monroe — all of whom became embroiled in some form of scandal during the late '40s and '50s, and, to varying extents, challenged the way the gossip industry had traditionally packaged and propagated discourse. The chapter concludes with an examination of *Confidential*, which particularly exploited the stars' newfound lack of studio oversight, broadcasting scandal on its front page to an audience that quickly grew to the millions and providing a compelling counter-narrative to the fan magazines.

By looking closely at the various ways the fan magazines, gossip columnists, and studios attempted to neutralize, work around, or ignore the re-emergence of scandal, I shed crucial light on an industry in the throes of transition.

Part Two, *Expansion, Retraction, Regrouping (1958 - 1980)*, grapples with the industry's growing pains as various outlets began to focus on personalities other than Hollywood stars. Chapter Three, *Industry Break-Ups,* analyzes the gradual disaffiliation of the studios from the fan magazines in the late '50s, and the simultaneous expansion in coverage to teen stars, pop idols, and television personalities. The chapter also employs the scandal surrounding Reynolds, Eddie Fisher, and Taylor as a lens through which to witness the industry's struggle to mediate information about stars who increasingly refused to cooperate with traditional gossip outlets, thereby forcing editors to rely on "write-arounds" and other tactics otherwise at home in the scandal magazine.

Chapter Four, *Backlash*, examines the umbrage on the part of the studios, stars, and even the office of the President as the magazines became increasingly bold in their scandal-themed coverage. Sales were on the rise, but in their efforts to provide more scintillating coverage, the magazines alienated the studios and stars that had once provided the steadiest stream of information and advertising dollars. The chapter also details the wave of conglomeration within the entertainment industry in the 1960s and '70s and subsequent fate of the traditional fan magazines (which gradually withered on the vine) and new start-ups (Chuck Laufner and Rona Barrett). Chapter Five looks to the rise in *Personality Journalism* in the 1970s, with specific attention to *People Magazine, The National Enquirer* and the means by which each defined itself *against* the traditional fan and scandal magazine, focusing on stories about "people" of all types, from film stars to football players, presidents to hometown heroes. Both publications dominated the field

throughout the '70s, and as the decade drew to a close and the fan magazines faded into obscurity, their approach, tone, and breadth came to define the future of the industry.

Part Three, *Consolidation and Conglomeration (1980 - 2010)*, addresses the continued expansion of the gossip industry into personality journalism and entertainment news against the backdrop of steady conglomeration. Chapter Six examines *The People Effect* in publishing and broadcasting, studying the dozens of magazines, newspapers, and network and syndicated television programs that attempted to emulate the success of *People* over the course of the '80s. I posit that the publications and programs that adopted and elaborated upon the *ethos* of *People*, such as *Entertainment Tonight*, found success, while those that simply copied it, including *Us Magazine* and *People on TV,* seemed stale, derivative, or superfluous. Chapter Seven, *The Search for Synergy*, looks to the expansion of entertainment news that both provided information on celebrities and promoted various entertainment products in which they appeared, forming the perfect vehicle for conglomerates in search of lucrative synergy. The chapter focuses on the case of Time Warner, whose struggles to exploit its entertainment news properties were symptomatic of the conglomerate's overarching difficulties following the merger between Time Inc. and Warner Communications in 1989.

Chapter Eight, *Celebrity Deathmatch: Us Weekly vs. People* traces the resurgence of *Us Weekly* in the 2000s, when owner Jann Wenner partnered with Disney and hired an innovative and cutthroat editor, Bonnie Fuller, to renovate the magazine. With an infusion of capital, conglomerate connections, and a new editorial ethos, *Us* began to pose the first significant challenge to *People* since its inception in 1974. The resultant competition for exclusives and images (especially those depicting stars acting "Just Like Us") coincided with the spread of digital technologies; together, they created an unprecedented demand for paparazzi photographs. The

chapter thus traces the perceived "paparazzi frenzy" that characterized the industry in the mid-2000s to specific innovations on the part of *Us*.

The ninth and final chapter, *Gossip Goes Online*, covers the rise of the gossip blog in the 2000s, with specific attention to *Gawker*, *Perez Hilton*, and *TMZ*, all of which refined new means of reporting and disseminating gossip via digital technologies. While *Gawker, Perez*, and dozens of other blogs still operate "outside" of the conglomerate universe, the chapter points to the ways in which *TMZ*, with its conglomerate backing and cross-platform expansion, has proven to be the model to which other entertainment news outlets aspire. While much of the gossip industry has migrated online, the traditional industrial spectrum persists: some components reproduce publicist-proffered images and narratives of stars and celebrities while others, using a combination of paparazzi images, snark, and investigative reporting, counter that narrative, working to tarnish celebrity images.

These nine chapters simultaneously emphasize the importance of the changes in the way the gossip industry has functioned over the last century, even as they underscore the enduring value, both culturally and industrially, of discourse about stars and celebrities. In the process, I reveal the gossip industry as a complex and crucial component to the way that various entertainment media are pitched, produced, sold, and consumed.

Entertainment news is not novel, but that is not to say that the story behind its production is not just as compelling, juicy, and illuminating as one of the gossip items for which the industry is responsible. In illuminating the complex industry behind it, I hope to at least partially recuperate the term from its pejorative connotations. For celebrity gossip may not always be in good taste; it may be crass, provocative, or shocking; it may be cheesy or simpering or banal. But it is, and always has been, important and worthy of extended analysis and attention.

[1] R.E. McDonald, "It Was the Hottest Show in Town when Maureen O'Hara Cuddled in Row 35" *Confidential*, March 1957, 11. See also Mary Desjardins, "Systematizing Scandal: *Confidential Magazine,* Stardom, and the State of California," in *Headline Hollywood,* eds. David A. Cook and Adrienne McLean (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2001), 206-231 for an excellent overview of the story and its ramifications.

[2] "EXCLUSIVE: Mel Gibson Busted for DUI," *TMZ.com*, July 26, 2006, http://www.tmz.com/2006/07/28/exclusive-mel-gibson-busted-for-dui/. "Gibson's Anti-Semitic Tirade: Alleged Cover-Up," *TMZ.com*, July 26, 2006, http://www.tmz.com/2006/07/28/gibsons-anti-semitic-tirade-alleged-cover-up/.

[3] Oxford American Dictionary Online.

[4] While this dissertation primarily focuses on the distribution of such narratives, my hope is that future scholars will investigate and theorize the specific means of their creation and production.

[5] Richard Dyer, *Stars*, 2nd ed. (London: BFI, 1998), 35.

[6] Dyer, *Stars*, 60.

[7] Dyer, *Stars*, 60.

[8] Dyer, *Stars*, 61; emphasis in text.

[9] Dyer, *Stars*, 61.

[10] David Cook and Adrienne McLean, eds., *Headline Hollywood* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2001), 5.

[11] See Susan McLeland, "Fallen Stars: Femininity, Celebrity and Scandal in Post-Studio Hollywood," (PhD dissertation, University of Texas, 1996).

[12] For an overview of Greer Garson's star persona, see Thomas Schatz, *Boom and Bust: American Cinema in the 1940s* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 209-210.

[13] *Jacobellis v. Ohio*, 378 U.S. 184, 197 (1964).

[14] Chris Rojek, *Celebrity* (London: Reaktion Books, 2001), 9

[15] Rojek, *Celebrity*, 10.

[16] See Su Holmes, ""Starring...Dyer?: Re-visiting star studies and contemporary celebrity culture." *Westminster Papers in Communication and Culture* 2.2 (2005): 6-21.

[17] For more on the specific attributes that contribute to the star image, see Dyer, *Stars,* 60-63 and Janet Staiger, *Media Reception Studies* (New York: New York University Press, 2005), 116.

[18] Richard Dyer, *Heavenly Bodies* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1986), 19.

[19] Charles Eckert, "Shirley Temple and the House of Rockefeller," in *Stardom: Industry of Desire*, ed. Christine Gledhill, (New York: Routledge, 1991), 60-73; Robert Allen, "The Role of the Star in Film History [Joan Crawford]," in *Film Theory and Criticism,* eds. Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen, Sixth Edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 606-619; Cathy Klaprat, "The Star as Market Strategy: Bette Davis in Another Light," in *The American Film Industry*, ed. Tino Balio (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), 351-376.

[20] Marsha Orgeron, "Making *It* in Hollywood: Clara Bow, Fandom, and Consumer Culture," *Cinema Journal* 42.4 (Summer 2003), 76-97; Alexander Doty, "The Cabinet of Lucy Ricardo: Lucille Ball's Star Image," *Cinema Journal*, 29.4 (1990), 3-22; Adrienne McLean, *Being Rita Hayworth* (New Brunswick, N.J. : Rutgers University Press, 2004).

[21] See Paul McDonald, *The Star System* (London: Wallflower, 2000); Paul McDonald, "Stars in the Online Universe: Promotion, Nudity, Reverence," in *Contemporary Hollywood Stardom*, eds. Thomas Austin and Martin Baker (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 29-44.

[22] Paul McDonald, "The Star System: The Production of Hollywood Stardom in the Post-Studio Era," in *The Contemporary Hollywood Film Industry*, eds. Paul McDonald and Janet Wasko (Oxford: Blackwell, 2008), 167-181.

[23] McDonald limits his discussion to fan sites and bulletin boards, but Erin Meyers has taken up the study of the gossip blog and digital star formation in her dissertation, *Gossip Talk and Online Community*. See Erin Meyers, "Gossip Talk and Online Community: Celebrity Gossip Blogs and Their Audiences," (PhD Dissertation, University of Massachusetts, 2010).

[24] Leo Braudy, *The Frenzy of Renown: Fame and Its History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986); Charles L. Ponce de Leon, *Self-Exposure: Human-Interest Journalism and the Emergence of Celebrity in America, 1890-1940 (*Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002); Tom Payne, *Fame: What the Classics Tell Us About Our Cult of Celebrity* (New York: Picador, 2010).

[25] P. David Marshall, *Celebrity and Power: Fame in Contemporary Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997); Graeme Turner, *Understanding Celebrity* (London: Sage, 2004); Rojek; Elizabeth Currid-Halkett, *Starstruck: The Business of Celebrity* (New York: Faber and Faber, 2010).

[26] See Desjardins, "Systematizing Scandal."

[27] Desjardins, "Systematizing Scandal," 220.

[28] Neal Gabler, *Winchell: Gossip, Power, and the Culture of Celebrity* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1995); Samantha Barbas, *The First Lady of Hollywood: A Biography of Louella Parsons* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2005); Jennifer Frost, *Hedda Hopper's Hollywood: Celebrity Gossip and American Conservatism* (New York: New York University Press, 2010).

[29] Anthony Slide, *Inside the Hollywood Fan Magazine: A History of Star Makers, Fabricators, and Gossip Mongers* (Jackson, MI: University Press of Mississippi, 2010); Ronald L. Davis, *The Glamour Factory,* (Dallas, TX: Southern Methodist University Press, 1993); Kathryn Fuller-Seeley, *At the Picture Show: Small-Town Audiences and the Creation of Movie Fan Culture*, Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institute Press, 1996); Samantha Barbas, *Movie Crazy: Fans, Stars, and the Cult of Celebrity* (New York: Palgrave, 2001).

[30] Gaylyn Studlar, "The Perils of Pleasure? Fan Magazine Discourse as Women's Commodified Culture in the 1920s." *Wide Angle* 13 (1991): 6-33; Jane Gaines, "War, Women and Lipstick: Fan Mags in the Forties," *Heresies*, 18 (1986): 42–47.

[31] Rebecca Feasey, "Reading *Heat*: The Meanings and Pleasures of Star Fashions and Celebrity Gossip," *Continuum: Journal of Media and Cultural Studies* 22.5 (2008): 687-699; Kirsty Fairclough, "Fame is a Losing Game: Celebrity Gossip Blogging, Bitch Culture and Postfeminism," *Genders* 48 (2008), http://www.genders.org/g48/g48_fairclough.html

[32] Jackie Stacey, *Star-Gazing: Hollywood Cinema and Female Spectatorship* (New York: Routledge, 1994).

[33] Hermes, *Reading Women's Magazines*, 128.

[34] Gamson, *Claims to Fame,* 142-171.

[35] See, for example, Ralph L Rosnow and Gary Alan Fine, *Rumor and Gossip: The Social Psychology of Hearsay* (New York: Elsevier, 1976); Pamela J Stewart and Andrew Strathern, *Witchcraft, Sorcery, Rumors, and Gossip* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004); John Beard Haviland, *Gossip, Reputation, and Knowledge in Zinacantan* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977); Jerome R. Mintz, *Carnival Song and Society: Gossip, Sexuality, and Creativity in Andalusia* (New York: Berg, 1997).

[36] Joke Hermes, *Reading Women's Magazines* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1995), 132.

[37] Hermes, *Reading Women's Magazines*, 128; see also Joshua Gamson, *Claims to Fame: Celebrity in Contemporary America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994).

[38] Jennifer Holt and Alisa Perren, eds. *Media Industries: History, Theory and Method* (New York: Blackwell, 2009).

[39] Cited in Keith Negus, "The Production of Culture," in *Production of Culture/Cultures of Production,* ed. Paul du Gay (London: Sage, 1997): 71.

[40] Negus, "The Production of Culture," 102.

[41] *Ibid.*

[42] Paul Dimaggio and Paul Hirsch, "Production Organization in the Arts," *American Behavior Scientist* 19.6 (1976): 745.

PART ONE

FOUNDATIONS
1910 - 1958

CHAPTER ONE
THE GOSSIP INDUSTRY
(1910 - 1948)

Entertainment news and stars are codependent commodities: one cannot thrive without the existence of the other. The histories of stardom and entertainment news are thus thoroughly intertwined, as each shift in the *meaning* of "star" entailed a change in the way that the gossip industry *mediates* the star. Chapter One presents these histories, beginning with the birth of Hollywood stardom and extending through the fully integrated studio era to 1948. While the overarching concern of this project is the history of the gossip industry post-1948, the foundation and machinery of this industry was laid, tested, and elaborated upon during the period of full integration. To neglect the specifics of such developments would be tantamount to teaching the history of cinema without acknowledging the existence of silent cinema or black and white cinematography.

Two practices unite the gossip industry's most successful entities during the classic studio era: the cultivation of connections with Hollywood corporations and studios and the development of a unique "brand" that may be exploited cross-media. In slightly different iterations, both practices have continued to characterize the most successful programs and personalities in the gossip industry following the transformation of the studio system between 1948 and 1960 into its present day mode of production. To understand how the gossip industry continued to thrive, even amidst enormous industrial structural change, I will explore the history of how such practices were first developed and codified. After a brief survey of the beginnings stardom and "fan news," I focus on how the studios attempted to create favorable images of stars. I then discuss the development of the adjacent gossip industry with specific focus on the fan magazines and gossip columnists.

Apocryphal myth places the beginning of Hollywood stardom with the 1910 story of 'The Biograph Girl,' in which Carl Laemmle planted a fake story concerning the death of 'The Biograph Girl' that effectively turned the girl, Florence Lawrence, into a household name. However, as both Janet Staiger and Richard deCordova have convincingly argued, star names were certainly known before that time; indeed, a star system already functioned within the theater and variety circuit well before its development in film.[1] Laemmle did not create stars. Rather, stars were the cumulative result of a gradual yet steady release of information concerning those who appeared on the screen. To illuminate this process, DeCordova divides early cinema into four periods during which "layers" of information were gradually revealed: the discourse on acting; the picture personality; the star; and the star with scandal. DeCordova views the quest for information concerning the star as a search for authenticity: a drive to know the "real," "true" self that appeared on the screen. As such, each additional layer of information constitutes a new site of truth and authentication. Similar to the peeling of an onion, working through each layer presumably brought the fan closer to the core of the star.

During the first period, discourse concerning those appearing onscreen generally focused on their acting ability. Stars' names were inconsequential. As audiences began to construct their own makeshift continuity between an actor's appearance in one film and his/her appearance in another, fans began to request the name of the actor as a means to ascribe formal continuity and coherence. At this point, circa 1911, the actor's identity hinged entirely on his/her acting and character personality as portrayed within the context of the film.

The first fan magazines appeared at this point, starting with *Motion Picture Story* in 1911. Their primary purpose was providing supplementary information for those invested in motion pictures. Proffered extra-textual information always confirmed the actor's onscreen image – his/

her *picture personality*. *Motion Picture Story* specialized in fictionalizations of current films as well as shortened "photoplays" or story treatments, galleries of players, puzzles, fan contests, "chats with the players," and inquiries to "The Answer Man" concerning the details of Hollywood and filmmaking. Coupled with the early newspaper columns focusing on the movie business, the magazines formed "the considerable public relations apparatus that developed to allow audiences to interrogate and 'interact' with the performers on the screen."[2] *Motion Picture Story* was a runaway success. Its circulation rose from 50,000 in 1911 to 250,000 by 1914, sparking a slew of similar publications, including *Photoplay* in 1912.[3]

These magazines borrowed their graphic and tonal style from the popular general magazines, such as *Munsey's*, *McClure's*, *Cosmopolitan*, *Saturday Evening Post*, and *Ladies Home Journal*, that had grown in prominence around the turn of the century.[4] Unlike high-minded publications like *Harper's* or *The Atlantic*, popular magazines were intended for mass consumption, appealing to the middle- and working- class reader. As part of what came to be known as "the new journalism," these magazines "fixated on entertainment values" through illustrated gossip columns and lengthy profiles of compelling personages — features the fan magazines would quickly apply to moving pictures.[5] Of course, the fan magazines were not created as a simple kindness to curious readers; then, as now, they were envisioned as a convenient means of plugging studio products. J. Stuart Blackton, owner of Vitagraph pictures, co-founded *Motion Picture Story*, while *Photoplay* received initial backing from the independent producers competing against Vitagraph and the Motion Picture Patents group of which Vitagraph was a part.[6] While none of the major studios would maintain official financial ties to the magazines, the foundation for the magazines as unofficial extensions of the studios was laid early on.

Around 1913, extra-textual information — that is, information about the player's life *outside* of his/her performance on screen — emerged as a new site of authenticity.[7] Put differently, information about a star's personal life became the privileged avenue to arriving at the "true" or "real" person beneath. Fan magazines served as both a catalyst and perpetuator of this trend. By 1914, the *Motion Picture Story Magazine* began to focus far more on star profiles, relegating the fiction stories to short "capsules" and eventually dropping "Story" from its title.[8] At this point, the fan magazine began to resemble its contemporary iteration, filled with information and speculation on the stars and their lives.

While stars' actions may not have coincided exactly with their roles onscreen, they nevertheless formed a coherent and harmonious image, readily consumable and morally appropriate. Importantly, extra-textual information functioned to establish the stars as what Leo Lowenthal terms "idols of consumption," demonstrating the type of conspicuous consumption that inspired emulation and formed the foundation for the leisure industry that persists today.[9] Fans could now consume gossip about stars' *textual* lives — that is, their onscreen roles — and their *extra-textual*, or off-screen, lives as well. As interest in the stars expanded, so too did the infrastructure that trucked in said information, e.g. the gossip industry.

Yet the most important shift in film star discourse was still to come. As DeCordova points out, with the dramatic rise of stars in the years after 1913, the "cracks" in the carefully constructed star images were already beginning to show, particularly in the case of the female star. Studio publicity during this time constructed female stars' off-screen lives as upholding Victorian standards of normalcy and morality, attending to the domestic and matronly duties associated with the cult of ideal Victorian womanhood. Yet the female star's very presence on the screen clearly dictated otherwise. Put differently, a female star's appearance in films proved

that she was working outside of the home, unable to completely fulfill the role of the Victorian ideal woman. Regardless, "as long as morality was defined purely in terms of sexual conduct and pleasure purely in terms of consumption, this contradiction could be maintained."[10] Nevertheless, the potential of a deeper, hidden immorality simmered just below the surface of the star's shiny image. "It was this deeper truth (more hidden, more private, more sexual)," according to DeCordova, that would be "exposed and exploited during the twenties."[11]

In other words, cracks in the star images allowed a dim, shadowy peephole onto a fourth and final layer of the star: the scandalous, unspeakable, and immoral core. The visibility of the scandalous layer of stardom in the early 1920s sparked a brief era of explosive, scandalous gossip. While the potentially destructive public divorces of Douglas Fairbanks and Mary Pickford were quickly neutralized and folded into the moral discourse of love and true companionship, a trio of scandals — Fatty Arbuckle's alleged murder of Virginia Rappe, the mysterious death of William Desmond Taylor, and Wallace Reid's heroin overdose – provoked a rupture in the otherwise harmonious system of moral star production.

The Arbuckle scandal is the most remembered of the three, perhaps because Arbuckle and his studio failed to contain or reframe the discourse that swirled around the event.[12] Indeed, many clues point towards Arbuckle's innocence – at least of the crime for which he was accused – and he was, after three trials, ultimately acquitted of all charges.[13] But as DeCordova makes clear, "the scandal that erupted had less to do with Arbuckle's guilt or innocence than with the picture of Hollywood life that emerged during the investigation and trial," which included "shocking" details of the "gin jollification" party, hosted by Arbuckle, that precipitated Rappe's death.[14]

The scandal revealed the unseemly underbelly of Hollywood – a vision many loved to think existed but never wished confirmed. Arbuckle's scandal not only "ruined" him – his films were yanked from screens; his contract with Paramount was cancelled – but compromised the popularly circulated notion of a moral, upstanding Hollywood.[15] As a result, stars could "no longer function as a guarantor of the cinema's morality."[16] The scandals likewise highlighted a failure on the part of the studios to regulate the type of information available about their stars, revealing a "real world of moral turpitude" behind the promotion and publicity forwarded by the studios and their press agents.[17]

The trio of scandals served as a rallying cry in the protests against Hollywood and its apparent immorality, which was thought to seep readily on to the screen. Under renewed threats of censorship at local, state, and federal level, the studios formed the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America (MPPDA) in 1922, tasked, amongst other things, with "reigning in" the stars. The MPPDA and its head, former postmaster general Will Hays, would attempt to deflect moral indignation against the stars, Hollywood, and the ugly sites of truth they wished covered up. Working with the producer and distributor of Arbuckle's films, Hays removed all Arbuckle product from circulation, effectively "blacklisting" the star, despite Arbuckle's acquittal. Hays would rescind the ban a year later, but "Arbuckle's ruin was already complete."[18]

In blacklisting Arbuckle, Hays was performing damage control. In the future, Hays, in collaboration with the studios, would nip any potential scandal in the bud, obviating the need for such damage control altogether. With Hays' encouragement, the studios labored to cover up the scandalous layer, employing in-house "fixers," forging cooperative relationships with the gossip columnists, and instituting strict contractual morality clauses.[19] In so doing, the studios reasserted the conspicuous consumption of the stars as a sort of "false bottom": the end-all-be-all of a star's

authentic self. The studios' effort to contain the layers of truth and authenticity endured until the transformation of the studio and labor systems following World War II, when the scandalous layer resurfaced, this time excavated by red-mongers and so-called "smut" magazines.

THE GOSSIP PLAYERS: THE STUDIOS

In the meantime, publicity about stars was a tightly controlled, studio-run affair. The production of Hollywood gossip, which began during the silent era and gradually became standardized under the studio system, involved three steps: first, the studio "discovered" and "created" the star; second, the studio publicity department produced discourse about the star in the form of biographies, backstories, and romances; third, that discourse was distributed via newspapers, magazines, radio broadcasts, and gossip columns and made available for public consumption. Once in circulation, such discourse helped create, support, or complicate the star's image. The more the studio controlled the type and tone of discourse in circulation, the more secure the star's image and enduring value to the studio. In this way, control of the publicity apparatus was one way that the studios worked to ensure the quality and consistency of their product.

To begin the process, the studios needed raw "star" material, which scouts found on the vaudeville circuits, on the stage, or in the chance beautiful face on the street. A potential star was brought to the studio, where he/she underwent photographic and sound tests. If the studio approved of the test, it would sign the performer to a seven-year contract "with options," which meant the studio had the option to drop the player every six months.[20] Once an individual was contracted, the entire studio functioned as what Ronald L. Davis terms a "glamour factory," transforming the raw goods into glamourous stars.[21] Players attended elocution, swimming, etiquette, singing, dancing, and dozens of other classes; teeth were straightened, hairlines

corrected, hair color altered.[22] The star would be tested in a number of roles, working to find a romantic pairing or genre that fit his/her look and skills. Once a particular persona was decided, various studio departments labored to create an extra-textual image to fit it. Publicists settled on a name and background, costumers determined an appropriate wardrobe, vocal coaches refined an accent, hair stylists designed a hairdo. Studios expected stars to adhere to their images both on-camera and off. Barbara Rush, for example, "must always look like a lady," while Anita Ekberg "should look sexy, although her blouse musn't be cut too low."[23]

The studio had to introduce the star to the public, keep him/her in the fans' minds between pictures, yet avoid overexposure. This fine balancing act was entrusted to the studio publicity department. Publicists oversaw the star's image and paired stars and features with unit reporters and photographers, who produced biographies, press kits, and on-set snapshots. An additional bull pen of writers picked up slack, while planters ensured a piece of publicity made its way to publication.[24] MGM, home to "more stars than the heavens," boasted a massive publicity department that served as the model for the rest of the industry. Headed by Howard Strickling, "the dean of studio publicists," it included over sixty publicists, while Warner Bros. had between twenty-five and thirty, and Paramount had twenty.[25]

According to oral histories provided by former Hollywood workers, publicists would spend the day visiting the set, taking notes on potential stories, and working with stars to create elaborate backstories, filled with "puffery."[26] The process resembled that of a newspaper office: a copy editor examined and corrected publicist copy, which was then passed on to the planters, who "took the stories written by reporters and placed them wherever they thought they could get the best coverage," whether into the trades papers, a gossip column, or a national newspaper.[27] Some planters and publicists were dedicated exclusively to fan magazines, a handful focused on

national magazines (such as *Look* or *Life*), and others cultivated relationships with Louella Parsons and other gossip columnists. These "plants" could manifest in the form of mentions in the columns, a profile of a star to accompany a new release or review, a news bit on a new romance, or a longer biographical piece to heighten interest in the star and his/her extra-textual life. As Davis explains, "A major goal was to have a story in the *New York Times* with the publicist's byline, but material was also constantly being fed to the smaller newspapers across the country."[28]

All interviews with the stars were conducted under the supervision of publicists, who would ensure that the stars would remain "on point" in their answers. Whether the stories profiled the stars at home, at work, or at play, they were always "beautifully photographed, and all were reported to lead storybook lives, even in the face of tragedy."[29] But publicity could also be used to discipline an unruly star: "a recalcitrant actor would read in the gossip columns that he was misbehaving, or that his fans were becoming annoyed, perhaps even that his wife was thinking of a divorce. If the pressure was great enough, the actor usually capitulated."[30] In this way, control of the publicity apparatus meant that the studio not only controlled the public perception of the star but kept the star, and his potential power, in check. The studios may not have profited directly from the production and distribution of gossip as contemporary conglomerates do, but the system ensured the type of control necessary for the studios to maintain their power.

THE GOSSIP PLAYERS:* PHOTOPLAY *and THE FAN MAGAZINES

An article in the *New York Times* may have been a personal coup, but the studios and publicists recognized the fan magazines as "the greatest star builders that ever existed."[31] A magazine cover or feature could introduce an actor to millions of devoted readers overnight, and few magazines worked harder to promote performer images than *Photoplay*, the most successful of the magazines and the paragon of the genre. Under the guidance of James Quirk, named editor

in 1917, the magazine worked to alter the public conception of the fan, exchanging an image of "a mass of gum-chewing, giggling schoolgirls" for "knowledgable, middle-class film consumers."[32] The financial benefits of such a shift were clear: while schoolgirls bought magazines, they were limited in both number and finances. A mixed-sex, middle-class readership, however, would attract a steady stream of advertisers, and Quirk, "an enthusiastic proselytizer for the future of consumer culture," figured *Photoplay*'s audience as "perfect consumers."[33] Under Quirk's leadership, *Photoplay* would model a new attitude towards promoting consumer products, "embrac[ing] them as an opportunity for influence and profit."[34]

In this way, *Photoplay* established the standard by which all other fan magazines would be measured, set apart by its distinguished writers, exclusive interviews, detailed film reviews, didactic editorials, and beautifully drawn covers. In individuating the magazine, Quirk was establishing a quality brand, with specific class connotations and a dedication to upstanding morals. Quirk's editorials set the tone for the magazine. Throughout the 1920s, they filled a page of each issue, rallying readers to support the newly established Hays Office and the "cleaning up" of Hollywood in general.[35]

Like others in the gossip industry, Quirk and *Photoplay* maintained close, if unofficial, ties with the source of its content. Quirk was known to reprimand stars on behalf of the studios. According to Louise Brooks, Quirk lambasted Lillian Gish due to her overly extravagant contract with MGM, supposedly out of loyalty to MGM head Louis B. Mayer. While no hard evidence of collusion between Quirk and Mayer exists, Quirk and *Photoplay* clearly possessed the rhetorical power to influence the popularity of the star and support or contradict the actions of the studios. As the studios consolidated their power at the beginning of the 1930s, the collusion and

cooperation between the two industries would grow more complete; in the '20s, however, the ties were still tenuous and unofficial.

In 1920, *Photoplay* bestowed its first "Medal of Honor," to be presented to the producer of the year's best picture, as voted by *Photoplay*'s readers. Later dubbed "The *Photoplay* Gold Medal," it was announced at a lavish ceremony that would attract a who's-who of Hollywood. The award — and the process by which was awarded — exemplified both the magazine's dedication to "quality" *and* its model of reader interactivity. Marsha Orgeron argues that interactivity was crucial to *Photoplay* and other fan magazines' cultivation of a broad and loyal audience,"endowing fans with a sense that what they said and did mattered."[36] To this end, *Photoplay* encouraged fans to write to their favorite stars, providing the addresses of the studios and assuring readers that the studios gauged a star's popularity (and placement in future pictures) through the number of fan letters he/she received. Within this paradigm, a fan letter was tantamount to a vote of approval.

Photoplay encouraged myriad streams of reader feedback to the magazine itself, including general letters to the editor, "suggestions for casting," opinions on quandaries facing the industry, and "answer-man/woman" columns. The editors endowed readers with star-making power, soliciting votes on the "new crop" of potential stars. Every month, *Photoplay* included a mailable coupon requesting feedback on that month's issue, querying, "What was your favorite article? Who is your favorite star? Who would you like to see featured in a future issue?" In this way, the editors were able to gauge reader opinion *and* encourage reader loyalty. If a fan took the time to fill out the request for a future profile of Carole Lombard, that fan would likely buy future issues of the magazine in hopes of discovering the request fulfilled. Of course, reader interactivity was not exclusive to *Photoplay*. *Motion Picture Story* and similar magazines provided a much broader forum for the publication of fan screenplays, poems, and drawings. But *Photoplay* rooted its

specific brand of interactivity in industrial concerns, furnishing space for readers to suggest casting in future films, ostensibly reflecting a more elevated investment in Hollywood and its stars.

By the late 1920s, the general format of the fan magazine had been standardized. Each magazine featured slight variations on the same format: gossip columns offered short snippets on the latest star appearances at nightclubs, premieres, and other Hollywood soirees; longer profiles, often penned by respected authors, offered biographical sketches, insight into a star's family life, or profiled recent romantic developments.[37] Short, photo-heavy segments offered readers a look at films in production, while reviews of films currently in theaters helped guide reader opinion. Several of the magazines devoted several pages, usually in the back, to fashion, co-mingling photos of stars and models in their address to the aspirational reader. The form, tone, and content of each of these sections served different functions. The gossip columns left more room for reader interpretation, while long-form profiles often mapped a very specific ideological slant onto a star and his/her past and "private" life. While not all of the fan magazine might be considered "gossip" in the strictest sense of the word, each promoted and publicized the performer and his/her image.

As described above, the studios had organized the MPPDA and hired Hays with the purpose of "cleaning up" Hollywood and its image. As part of this process, on March 31, 1930, the studios pledged to adhere to the rules set forth by the "Production Code," also known as the "Hays Code," governing acceptable content onscreen and intended to obviate censorship campaigns on the state and local level. But the agreement was informal and non-binding, and the MPPDA had no means of formally enforcing it. Thus commenced a period in film history, commonly referred to as "Pre-Code," that spanned the four years between the introduction of the code and its enforcement in 1934. As Richard Maltby points out, the vast majority of films

produced during this period adhered to the spirit of the Code, but a few dozen highly visible (and popular) films, featuring the Marx Brothers, Mae West, gangsters and "kept women," flaunted the dictums of the code, depicting and/or strongly suggesting sex out of wedlock, prostitution, gang activity, violence, and drug use.[38] Even as certain stars portrayed characters challenging the boundaries of "appropriate" behavior, the studios persisted in maintaining several their images, especially those of women, as moral exemplars.[39]

While the majority of fan magazine articles toed the studio line, a growing number either countered or satirized efforts on the part of the studio to project wholesome star images. *Motion Picture* and *Modern Screen* "began revealing more personal and potentially scandalous information about the stars" while *Photoplay* exclaimed "Lupe [Velez] and Johnny [Weismuller] were Lovers" and "I Had to Leave John Gilbert."[40] As Janet Staiger highlights, various *Photoplay* articles and cartoons over the course of 1931-1932 lampooned the "mythical star image of [Marlene] Dietrich as devoted mother,"[41] and the August 1934 issue of *Modern Screen* included an article, "How Long Will Hollywood Protect Harlow?" suggesting the star had engaged in an affair with another actress's husband.[42] With these stories, the magazines were not only providing counter-narratives to those of the studio but ridiculing the studio publicity apparatus in general.

On July 2, 1934, however, under tremendous pressure from the Catholic Legion of Decency, the MPPDA created the Production Code Administration (PCA) and empowered it with the ability to enforce the code. In practice, "enforcement" meant that exhibitors could cancel any film against which there was "a genuine protest on moral grounds."[43] A month later, Hays, afraid that censorship efforts would still use "racy" fan magazine content as "ammunition," commanded that all future fan magazine articles be supervised and censored by the studios.[44] A

decree, issued by "Studio Publicity Executive Committee" of the MPPDA on August 10, 1934, declared

> Whereas the undersigned members of this Committee seek to curb the inaccuracies, misrepresentations and exaggeration of facts by certain fan magazine writers, which tend to create false impressions in the mind of the public in regard to motion picture personalties, the Committee herewith adopts the following resolutions, effective immediately: That, in the future, all fan magazines interviews, stories or symposiums which involve studio contract payers, whenever and wherever obtained by fan magazine representatives or free-lance writers, shall be submitted to the studio publicity director, or his properly designated representative, for approval before publication. That each writer shall first obtain approval of the studio publicity director or his representative, of any idea upon which an interview is to be based before such an interview is granted; That insofar as practicable, a third party, representing the studio, shall be present during all interviews between players and writers; That any writing violating these definite rulings of the studios shall be denied admission to the studios thereafter, and all further cooperation.[45]

The studios backed the decree by promising to rescind their advertising, which had theretofore served as one of the magazines' major source of capital. Editors and writers were predictably furious and refused to submit to demands. Hays understand how valuable the writers were to the publicity process and, by extension, the health of the industry and rescinded the decree. Meanwhile, editors and studio publicists agreed to meet and work out a compromise. On August 15, the editors of *Photoplay, Motion Picture, Screenland, Modern Screen, Movieland, Silver Screen, Picture Play, The New Movie Magazine, Movie Mirror*, and several additional magazines met with studio publicity heads where they "signed a pledge to purge their publications of false and salacious material."[46]

Editors and publicists also drafted a "White List" of "approved" writers who could be trusted to toe the studio line, dropping the number of working writers from 300 to thirty.[47] Each writer was given a "Hays Card," issued for three-month periods, that could be revoked without notice.[48] Publicity departments would provide writers with a list of approved and innocuous titles, and all interviews with stars required the supervision of a studio publicist. As Slide relates,

writers would hang around "publicity departments of the studios all day, in the hope of hearing a piece of gossip that was not too scandalous to incur the wrath of the producers but juicy enough to interest the editors back East."[49] The writers were stuck: the official studio line was banal and boring, yet any unsanctioned reportage would not only curtail their access but most likely get them fired.

When writers attempted to go around the studio publicity apparatus and interview an actor off the lot, studio executives threatened to institute the morality clauses in star contracts, which prevented stars from participating in interviews that studio publicity departments had not approved. Slide notes that "[this] aspect of the morality clause was more ruthlessly applied than in other areas dealing with more outrageous behavior" such as drinking, "fornicating," and drug use.[50] Put differently, drunk driving or a wild night on the town could easily be covered up and neutralized – MGM in particular was known for its "fixers" and security personnel, who "were not above using bribery to keep an indiscretion secret."[51] Yet unsanctioned gossip was outside of studio control and, as such, exponentially more dangerous. Once released, it could circulate and profoundly alter the meaning and, consequently, the value of the star.

However, by ensuring that writers would never have unmediated access to the stars, the studios were effectively regaining their mastery over the flow of information, and, by extension, the "meaning" of their stars. With time, the strictures gradually loosened. In January 1939, *Photoplay* published "Hollywood's Unmarried Husbands and Wives," which broadcast that several upstanding star couples – including Clark Gable and Carole Lombard, Robert Taylor and Barbara Stanwyck – were living "in sin." The issue sold out immediately and naturally infuriated the studios. The studios forced the stars to marry and demanded an apology from the magazine, which they received in the next month's issue.[52] In the aftermath, "the film industry policed the

magazines so carefully that they almost never contradicted the studios again," at least not until the transformation of the studio system in the 1950s.[53]

The fan magazines and the studio publicity departments represented dependent yet distinct production cultures oriented towards somewhat different goals. For the studios, the primary goal was ticket sales and studio based publicity departments cultivated and promoted star images in order with that specific goal in mind. By contrast, the fan magazines certainly hoped that audiences continued to go the theater, but their primary goal was sales. Authors and editors encouraged audiences to seek stars out on the screen, but they crafted narratives with the specific goal of encouraging readers to seek future issues of the magazine. Each production culture helped sustain the other even as they evidenced their willingness to use the dependence of the other to bolster their own interests.

THE GOSSIP PLAYERS: THE COLUMNISTS

The gossip columnists formed a third, equally interdependent production culture. The "holy triumvirate" of columnists included Louella Parsons, Hedda Hopper, and Walter Winchell, all of whom wielded tremendous power. Each gathered and disseminated gossip in slightly different ways, and each was variously dependent on both the studios and the fan magazine culture. But they also had their own end goals in mind. Hopper, for example, was always mindful of how her product would effect arch rival Parsons while Parsons remained vigilant in how her columns could the interests of her employer and protectorate, William Randolph Hearst. All three had to consider how to manifest their distinctive brands onto new mediums while encouraging serial consumption of their print columns.

Because of their vast readerships, the studios and stars freely cooperated with the columnists. The fan magazines regularly courted them, covetous of their recognizable bylines.

But the relationship between the columnists and the studios was one of begrudging dependency. The studios needed the columnists to promote their stars but begrudged their demands, unpredictability, and tendency to openly criticize a star or studio that failed to defer to their power or fulfill their requests. As elaborated below, one studio so resented Parsons's power over the industry that it enabled another with the specific purpose of splitting her power. At the same time, the columnists would be nothing without their inside access to the stars, facilitated by the studios. In the end, the gossip columnists offered studio publicity departments an alternative to the magazines — they could publish every day, they were more focused on pure gossip and less on narrative, their readership was larger. But as evidenced below, each columnist had a unique agenda and production culture with which publicity departments and stars would have to contend.

Winchell's column began running in the *New York Evening Graphic* in 1923; his move to the Hearst-owned *New York Daily Mirror* in 1929 marked the beginning of its national syndication and rise to prominence. While Winchell's provenance was New York "cafe society" and Broadway in particular, he would periodically report on the comings and goings of Hollywood stars. As part of the Hearst syndicate, his column would, at its height, be printed in more than 2000 papers, reaching a daily circulation of nearly nine million and Sunday readership just under 6.5 million in 1939 — "the largest continuous audience ever possessed by a man who was neither a politician nor divine."[54]

The structure of the New York theater world in the 1920s-1940s differed from that of the movie colony. Whereas Hollywood had become a highly-regulated "closed" system, Broadway relied on a far more "open" system of freelance labor. With no long-term contracts and little oversight akin to the MPPDA, Broadway performers employed their own press agents and

operated with far greater liberty than their Hollywood counterparts. As a result, the cover-up of misbehavior was less complete, and Winchell's ubiquitous informants were keen to bring any slips to his attention.

Winchell relied on this network of informants and press agents to craft "The Column," as it became known, which appeared six times a week. Even as Winchell expanded his brand into radio broadcasts, public appearances, and film roles, he maintained the illusion of collecting and penning the column himself despite tremendous labor on the part of his long-time secretary, Rose Bingman, and a handful of acquaintances who received under-the-table pay-outs for each item Winchell put to use.[55] But the vast majority of the thousands of informants who supplied Winchell with information never received a penny. For them, the prospect of a mention was "compensation enough."[56] Winchell propagated gossip concerning Broadway and cafe society but also peppered his column with jokes and providing general promotion for upcoming events, products, and personages. As a result, the press agents who sent him tips were a collection of humorists and "pun writers," "news gatherers," and "ballyhoo artists."[57]

Every day, Winchell would receive "hundreds of packets" filled with tidbits, tip-offs, and anecdotes. Bingman would cull the best items from the packets, sort them into piles according to their potential placement in the column ("Notes from a Girl Friday," "Man About Town," etc.), and envoy them to Winchell's apartment.[58] Winchell sifted through these selections yet again, seeking the best bits through which to filter his trademark journalistic style and wit, and returned a draft to the office. Bingman would retype the column and pass it to the "composing room" and a Hearst lawyer tasked with making sure the column could not be cause for a libel suit.[59]

The Column first would appear in the "green edition" of the *Mirror* that hit newsstands at eight o'clock in the evening. According to Neal Gabler, press agents would gather at the stands in

anticipation, enduring the "7 o'clock stomach" as they waited to see whether a plant had made the final cut.[60] A mention could bring a product, event, or personage tremendous attention. Press agents were compensated for placing an item in Winchell's column: an "Orchid" (Winchell's means of giving praise) meant a $150 bonus.[61] In contrast, if a press agent passed along a falsified or exaggerated information – something that could embarrass Winchell – he would end up on the columnist's "Drop Dead List," which could potentially "cost the transgressor clients and money and possibly a job."[62]

With a clipped, ruthless style, Winchell attracted a broad readership that extended far past the traditional (female) Hollywood fan. He wrote in incomplete sentences, dividing bits with an ellipsis that mirrored the way that people exchanged information. Rhymes, puns, and the use of incorrect syntax characterized his "vigorous, personal, and pungent" prose. He coined dozens of "Winchellisms" which usually involved some sort of compound word (garbo-ing, Reno-vated, cinemaddicts) or phrase (Adam-and-Eveing it, trouser-creaser-eraser), leading H.L. Mencken to credit him with significantly expanding the American vernacular.[63] Winchell was not only a "gossip" but a hybrid brand of journalist whose popularity would influence the future of the industry. Starting in the late '30s, Winchell devoted less and less space to celebrities, instead directing his attention to editorials and, eventually, coverage of the war. In 1937, Winchell was featured on the cover of *Time*; the accompanying article proclaimed 1937 as Winchell's best. Never before "had he been so fully seen, heard, read, or paid."[64]

Gabler attributes Winchell with single-handedly "expand[ing] the purview of American journalism forever" through his reportage of rumors and "secret peccadilloes and imbroglios that had previously been concealed from public view."[65] Winchell certainly did more than any other twentieth-century columnist to alter the delineation between public and private, and audience

members consider their right to know about public figures. His influence, however, was most acutely felt along the Eastern seaboard — centered, as he was, in New York and Washington.

In contrast, Parsons, the so-called "Winchell of the West," ruled Hollywood. Parsons started in Hollywood, writing scenarios for Essaney, one of the earliest studios, and penning a how-to book for hopeful screenwriters. Established as an expert, she began writing a daily film column for the *Chicago Record-Herald* in 1915 as the film and gossip industries were beginning to gain steam. These early columns centered on industry developments and only the most innocuous details of the stars' private lives. Winchell and the tabloid journalism that would proliferate during the 1920s had yet to erode the conception of the sanctity of private lives, and most newspapers columnists, even those whose primary concern was gossip, dared not trespass, lest they become the target of a libel suit.[66]

When the *Record-Herald* became part of the Hearst Newspaper Empire in 1918, Parsons was squeezed out. She quickly moved to *The New York Morning Telegraph* where she began to cultivate her connections to producers, fan magazine editors, publicity departments, and studio heads who functioned as the gatekeepers to the stars. Her cultivation of relationships — not only with those in power, but informants and gossips as well — would eventually catapult her into the position of prominence she maintained for the next two decades. Keeping with currents in the industry at large, she began to pay more attention to the stars' personal lives, going so far as to report (but never speculate) on Hollywood divorces.

During the early '20s, Parsons steered clear of explicit coverage of the scandals. According to historian Katherine Feeley, she instead "focused on what she considered wrong-headed in censorship efforts…to indicate in a coded manner her support of industry figures under assault in the headlines."[67] This would prove a signature Parsons move. Rather than feed an abject

appetite for smut, she attacked what she viewed as the root of the problem. In the 1920s, it was censorship efforts; in the late '40s and '50s, it would be the studios' inability to control their stars, the general presses' misguided obsession with scandal, and the stars themselves neglecting their "duties" to both studio and fan.

In 1923, Parsons was made motion picture editor of Hearst's *New York American,* the respectable broadsheet cousin to the *New York Daily Mirror*. Rumors that she had been appointed due to favorable publicity for William Randolph Hearst's mistress, Marion Davies, would haunt Parsons for the duration of her career. Regardless, Hearst's favor would ultimately outweigh whatever whispers were directed her way.[68] Relocation to the *Los Angeles Examiner* in 1926 not only moved Parsons closer to the middle of the action but heralded the national syndication of her column in over twenty Hearst papers and a handful of non-Hearst publications, including *The Denver Post* and *Indianapolis Star*.[69] The effect of Parsons's national syndication should not be underestimated: it made her a household name, and, for many Americans, the authority on developments in Hollywood. The studios could not afford to offend or exclude her.

In short order, Parsons became a must-invite to all parties, premieres, marriages, and baptisms. In stark opposition to Winchell, who would remain antagonistic to it for the duration of his career, Parsons gloried in Hollywood's "social order"; she commonly spent between twelve and sixteen hours a day talking with stars, researching, and writing her column.[70] While she often printed bits relayed via studio planters, Parsons also relied on a network of insiders for information and was not above using pay-offs to garner the latest gossip. As Davis describes,

> At the Hollywood Hotel, a popular celebrity hangout, she paid bellboys and chambermaids for news. At the Montmartre Cafe, she eavesdropped on lunching celebrities, and at Jim's Beauty Shop on Highland Avenue, she pressured manicurists and hairdressers for the latest 'dirt' on their high-profile clientele.[71]

When Parsons married Hollywood urologist Harry Martin in 1926, she gained access to medical laboratories and nurses around town. As a result, she "often knew that an actress was pregnant before the woman herself knew."[72] Importantly, Parsons did not print all that she knew. Like other savvy columnists, she understood that she could leverage an unprintable piece of information – an unwanted pregnancy, marital turmoil – for a juicy yet printable piece of news. Studio press agents often employed a tactic, dubbed the "trade technique," in which they would allow Parsons exclusive access to a piece of news in exchange for favorable coverage either of a star, a forthcoming film, or another studio product.

Throughout her columns, Parsons employed a mode of address that suggested that she and Hollywood royalty moved in the same circles and used her as their confessor and confidant. Her columns functioned as chatty letters to far-away friends. A typical column would include details of her "dropping by" a star's home, what they ate for luncheon, a description of the decorating scheme, and effusive admiration for the star's fashion sense and friendliness. Parsons's descriptions were almost entirely fabricated and most interviews were not only scheduled far in advance but took place at a hotel or restaurant. Yet they conveyed a sense of intimacy and domesticity that not only helped to "defuse long-standing associations of actresses with loose sexuality" but also elevated Parsons, painting her as a "amiable yet respectable middle-class mother with good sense and impeccable virtue."[73]

While Winchell's "command over the socialites and celebrities was also an expression of his contempt for them," Parsons's investment and power over Hollywood seemed to stem from a legitimate investment in the industry and its future.[74] As evidenced by Parsons's continual call for the "cleaning up" of Hollywood, this investment extended to the "moral health" of the movie

colony. But Parsons was also acting at the behest of her employer. In March 1931, Hearst wrote to Parsons, decrying the studios refusal to adhere to the Code:

> [. . .] Soon we will have a revolt against indecency on the screen. There will be an increase of censorship[,] and probably many states which do not now have censorship will have it, with all that this means in the way of difficulties for the producer. A little wisdom preached in the motion picture columns might avoid these complications.[75]

Parsons thus used her column to encourage producers to adhere to the Code, simultaneously "assur[ing] her readers that, contrary to rumors, Hollywood was not being overtaken by 'fast-living Broadway types.'"[76]

Parsons's move to Hollywood heralded a new standard in gossip. As Feeley points out, she was not only able to offer intimate details of social gatherings, but with a daily column, she could literally report such details overnight, beating out the fan magazines and their weekly or monthly publication schedules.[77] The benefits of a daily byline became clear in March 1933, when Joan Crawford divulged her marital problems with Douglas Fairbanks Jr. to Parsons. After spilling the news, Crawford admitted that she had already told another columnist — former MGM publicist and *Modern Screen* freelancer Katherine Albert. Parsons was able to beat Albert and *Modern Screen* to the punch, running the story just two days later, while the monthly *Modern Screen* would not hit the stands until the end of the week. The scoop — and glory — were Parsons's. Immediacy, even in print form, would prove an essential component of the gossip columnist's power, just as it provides today's gossip bloggers the advantage over their print counterparts.

Winchell and Parsons developed what we would today call multi-platform or synergistic brands, exploiting their names in magazines, radio, and even film appearances. Winchell's radio show, *The Walter Winchell Hour*, ran from 1932-1948, employing a telegraph ticker soundtrack and staccato delivery that perfectly capitalized on Winchell's clipped writing style. As the threat of war grew in the late '30s, Winchell's increasingly punctuated his broadcast with news reports

from across the globe, often ending with an incisive editorial on a social issue or debate. A broadcast from 1946, for example, ended with a pontification on whether Abraham Lincoln would be considered a good American. This mix of "real" news, commentary, and Winchell's steady and direct style further contributed to Winchell's authority and reputation for precision. At its height, the Sunday evening program reached an estimated audience of nearly twenty-five million.[78]

Parsons followed Winchell's success with *Hollywood Hotel* (1934-1938), broadcast from seventy-two CBS stations, using "her considerable influence to persuade big-name stars to appear for free."[79] A combination variety show/guest-star drama, *Hotel* would regularly include twenty-minute enactment of a scene from a forthcoming film, which provided the studio's with coveted (and free) publicity.[80] Many stars appeared voluntarily, while others were "strongly encouraged" by their studios. As Myrna Loy reported, "We didn't want to do it….but the studio made you do it to keep in Louella's good graces. Talk about blackmail!"[81] Failure to cooperate had immediate ramifications. When Jeanette McDonald demanded payment to sing on-air, Parsons responded by banning McDonald's name from her column for the foreseeable future.[82]

In addition to "exclusives," star interviews, and "impromptu" gossip, Parsons would include a "blind item" in every broadcast, tantalizing listeners with a juicy rumor, an unnamed star at its center.[83] In contrast with Winchell's sharp, staccato delivery, Parsons's matronly tone was soft and inviting, focused on weddings, pregnancies, and romances with little if any attention to current events. As in her column, she regularly invoked her close friendships with various stars, referring to them by their first names, harkening back to previous visits to their homes, and beginning a new gossip item from "I just received a phone call from. . ." Parsons also periodically stumbled over words, and the register of her voices went slightly shrill. But such

foibles made the program seem more like a conversation between friends, as opposed to a highly orchestrated news broadcast. In this way, Parsons's radio appearances help to flesh out the author behind the pen, contributing to an overarching sense of intimacy between reader and host.[84]

The intimate mode of address, so far from that of Winchell, would prove a blueprint for the future of broadcasting gossip. While *Photoplay* and the fan magazines had long cultivated such intimacy in print, its use over the airwaves would be essential to the success of future televised gossip programs.[85] Parsons also understood that *Hollywood Hotel* could not be a simple rehashing of her column. To cultivate loyalty to her brand, each product with its name would need to provide new, exciting information, even as it complimented and encouraged fans to consume other Louella-branded products. In 1938,Warner Bros. released a film interpretation of the program, *Hollywood Hotel* (Berkeley 1938) with Parsons as narrator, most likely in an attempt to recreate the success of Winchell's 1937 film debut, *Wake Up and Live* (Lanfield 1937).

It was no coincidence that Warner Bros. produced *Hollywood Hotel* as Hearst had moved his own production company there in 1934 from its previous home at MGM. The story of Hearst's exit from MGM was as juicy as any of Parsons's columns and highlights her willingness to trade publicity for personal advancement. In 1933, Hearst bought the script for *The Barretts of Wimpole Street* with the intent of casting Davies as its star. Irving Thalberg, convinced that the role would be perfect for his wife, MGM star Norma Shearer, forced MGM head Louis B. Mayer to retrieve the script from Hearst with the threat that MGM would field none of the cost if it was produced with Davies. When the film, starring Shearer, became a hit, it "only added insult to injury," and Hearst called upon Parsons to shun Shearer in her column.[86]

Up to this point, Hearst had showered MGM and its products with favor; accordingly, Parsons had been "almost slavishly devoted" to the studio.[87] When Mayer denied Davies another role, this time in *Marie Antoinette*, Hearst moved both her and his production company to Warner Bros. From that point on, Parsons and the rest of the Hearst Empire were to provide Warners with "the same kind of attention…that we used to give to MGM."[88] Parsons responded by lavishing Warners stars Bette Davis, James Cagney, and Edward G. Robinson with mentions and praise.[89] The production of the *Hollywood Hotel* film was thus "a gesture of reciprocity" on the part of Warners. The film performed modestly, and Parsons was long ridiculed for her wooden acting. Nevertheless, it broadened her exposure. In 1939, Parsons would continue to capitalize on the program with a national theatrical tour featuring her and a handful of Warner Bros. players. Such entrepreneurism illuminates the ways in which Parsons's placement within a media empire was crucial to both her power and the expansion of her brand — lessons that hold true in the gossip industry today.

Between 1937 and 1939, however, Parsons's power was challenged on three fronts. First, the Screen Actors Guild (SAG) successfully contested the studio practice of forcing public appearances without compensation. The outcome crippled Parsons's radio program since stars had been "paid" for their appearances with cases of Campbell's soup, the sponsor of the program. When the studios cowed to the demands of SAG, the would-be cost of Parsons's program became untenable. Refusing to alter the format of the program, Parsons was replaced. Second, the Hearst Empire was in crisis, already in receivership and soon to be in bankruptcy. With her protectorate compromised, Parsons was exposed to intense public scrutiny and criticism for the first time in her career. Third, the Esquire Syndicate hired one of Parsons's long-time informants in 1937; the *Los Angeles Times* picked up the column, "Hedda Hopper's Hollywood,"

in February 1938. The next year, Parsons was the focus of a scathing *Saturday Evening Post* profile that ridiculed her style, her prose, her weight, her sentimentality, and the gossip industry at large.[90]

Hopper split Parsons's power but ironically enhanced her visibility and celebrity. A longtime contract actress with MGM, Hopper was purportedly hired as a means of keeping Parson's power in check, and the two would famously battle through the end of the '50s.[91] During her tenure at MGM, Hopper was routinely typecast as a "classy, flamboyant, and bitchy older woman" — a persona that would extend to her gossip columnist image.[92] Where Parsons was sentimental, Hopper was venomous. When Merle Oberon asked why she wrote "such nasty things" in her column, Hopper famously replied "Bitchery, dear. Sheer bitchery."[93] Let loose from MGM, Hopper, a staunch conservative, campaigned for a position on the Republican County Central Committee. She lost the election, but the connections she forged in the process would prove beneficial in her attempt to launch her gossip career. She relied heavily on support from the Hollywood conservative political circle, including that of Ida Koverman, Mayer's secretary and most trusted advisor. Indeed, "Koverman's support of Hopper was tantamount to a seal of approval from Mayer" who was eager to have a columnist to "curb Louella's power" and retaliate against Hearst following his desertion.[94] Just as Parsons had relied on Hearst and his connections to reach her place of prominence, Hopper never would have gained a foothold in the business without the help of MGM.

Hopper celebrated her first big scoop in October 1939, interviewing James Roosevelt, son of President Roosevelt and executive vice-president of Samuel Goldwyn Studios, on the subject of his troubled marriage. The story, with Hopper's byline beside it, spread across the nation, putting her name on the lips of more than just the inner circle of Hollywood insiders. According

to historian Jennifer Frost, the scoop "not only proved Hopper an aggressive player" but additionally "demonstrated [her] dual interest in entertainment and politics."[95] From the start, this duel interest was inflected with rigid moral and political conservatism. As Hopper's influence grew, so too did her brazen partisanship, as exemplified by her virulent red-mongering in the 1950s and decade-long persecution of accused Communist Charlie Chaplin. Throughout Hopper's career, her racism, anti-Semitism, and nativism manifested themselves in both explicit and implicit form, becoming even more pronounced with the transformation of the studio system when the ebb in studio-provided material opened up space for Hopper's anti-Communist campaigns and commentary.[96]

Of course, Hopper was not the only gossipist infusing her columns with political and ideological vigor. Winchell was a lifelong Democrat and supporter of Roosevelt; his politics were increasingly visible through the course of the '30s, despite the protests of Hearst, who was anti-New Deal, firmly isolationist, and referred to Winchell as a "pinko." As politicians began to recognize the public power of Winchell's column, he became privy to Washington secrets and was a regular correspondent with J. Edgar Hoover. Leading up to and during World War II, his column consistently morphed into a political mouthpiece. In contrast with Hopper and Winchell, Parsons's politics were rather restrained. Like Winchell, she too was a Democrat and Roosevelt supporter but always tiptoed around the forceful politics of Hearst, supporting his most ardent beliefs when necessary.

The ideological compunctions of Hopper and Parsons were most similar and potent in their policing of moral behavior. They were aging, traditional women in a young town; Gabler (perhaps unfairly) describes them as "conservative, prudish, narrow-minded…and they used their gossip as a club to keep celebrities in line."[97] While neither columnist had spotless moral

pasts – Parsons had been married three times; Hopper had run away from home and became the fifth wife of a much older man – both forwarded a rigid recipe for upright moral behavior, bluntly scolding those who dared step outside the lines. If a star did misbehave, his or her sin could only be absolved through an exclusive tell-all in which Parsons or Hopper would explain, justify, and excuse the star's behavior. Winchell performed a similar task, only his gossip functioned much more "like a needle to make celebrities scream," using pointed, if veiled, criticism to disparage if they crossed or displeased him.[98] Which is all to say that these columnists, ostensibly charged with reporting the trifling comings-and-goings of the stars, were, in reality, forwarding heavily ideological agendas, buttressing and conserving the *status quo*, fighting "to conserve the old order until the world passed them by."[99]

In 1941, Hopper scooped Parsons again, this time on the production of *Citizen Kane,* which viciously lampooned Parsons's highly defensive employer. Parsons should have ascertained the topic of the film well in advance, especially since she had spent months flattering its director and star, Orson Welles. If she had, Hearst would, in all likelihood, have been able to stall, if not stop, its release. But it was Hopper, not Parsons, who attended the first press screening of the film, a mere six weeks before its release. When Hopper reported that the film was a thinly veiled rendering of Hearst's own life, it was too late for the magnate to take action. "Parsons's humiliation — public and private — was complete," and the feud between the two columnists began in earnest.[100]

Hopper had already switched from the Esquire Syndicate to the Des Moines Register-Tribune Syndicate in 1941, whose owners were also behind the popular photojournalism magazine *Look*. As with Parsons, corporate cushioning assisted Hopper, and *Look* ran a flattering profile of Hopper in 1940.[101] Following the *Kane* scoop, Hopper moved again, this time to the

Chicago Tribune-New York News Syndicate. The move increased her readership trifold and prompted *Variety* to declare "The Queen is Dead, Long Live the Queen!"[102] While Parsons still enjoyed a far larger audience — 17 million readers to Hopper's 5.75 million/7.5 million on Sunday — Parsons's supremacy was compromised. By 1947, "Hedda Hopper's Hollywood" would reach an audience of 22.8 million.[103]

Hopper, like Parsons and Winchell, understood herself as a brand and expanded into film and broadcast radio. She began her own radio broadcast in 1937, appeared as a gossip columnist in *The Women* (1939) and, as a former star familiar with the machinations of star production, was keen to manufacture her own star persona. In addition to extending her bitchy MGM picture personality, she developed a signature look, characterized towering, egregiously gaudy hats she donned at every public appearance. Hopper realized the preposterousness of her head-ware but also understood that a woman of 50-plus in Hollywood would need to draw attention to something other than her aging beauty. The hats became Hopper's trademark, individuating her from that other middle-aged gossip columnist. The hats likewise provided profilers with a nifty lead and reservoir of ready puns, taken up by Hopper herself in her best-selling 1952 memoir *From Under My Hat.*[104] MGM's favor, her political connections, and Parsons's decline certainly contributed greatly to Hopper's ascent, but she was also a canny businesswoman, savvy in the ways of public relations as she launched her competing column.

The feud between Hopper and Parsons also helped to expand their respective brands. In addition to their daily columns, both began penning extended pieces for various fan and popular magazines, including *Cosmopolitan*, *Photoplay,* and *Modern Screen*, usually focusing on a specific star or phenomenon (The "Rebel Craze" of the '50s, etc.). Parsons published her memoirs in 1944,

and both columnists became veritable celebrities themselves. *Time* featured Hopper on its cover in July 1947, declaring that "gossip, as practiced by Hedda and Louella, is big business."[105]

Of course, gossip news was by no means limited to the highly visible three discussed above. Other authors, including Cal York, Sidney Skolsky, Elsa Maxwell, and dozens more trolled the Hollywood beat. But none were as ubiquitous — and, by extension, as seemingly powerful — as Parsons and Hopper. Coupled with the thinly-veiled passive-aggression that characterized both of their columns, the apparent feud made them all the more alluring. Even with implicit connections to MGM and Warners, they relied on all of the studios, imbricating themselves in industry politics and protecting or censuring a star as a favor or a matter of loyalty.

The seemingly secure symbiosis between the gossip industry and Hollywood began to change with the end of the integrated studio system. The shift in the way that Hollywood acquired, trained, and used its stars also had distinct ripples in the gossip industry. Stars, theretofore neatly packaged by the studios for the simple exploitation by the columnists and magazines, were shedding their studio packaging. Instead of attending etiquette training and submitting to pre-packaged biographies, they were self-incorporating and refusing to deal with the press. And as the studios ceased to control and protect stars through morality clauses in long-term contracts and protective publicity arms, the stars' images became dynamic, uncontrollable, and all the more fascinating. The gossip floodgates were essentially opened, making way for increased speculation over stars' sexual preferences, illicit sexual dalliances, and illegal activities. It was not necessarily that stars were behaving more scandalously. Rather, the cover-up was simply far less effective. If the police caught a star, the studio's vaunted "fixers" were no longer available to close off all avenues of public exposure. Without studio mediation, a star's actions became increasingly transparent.

Not all of the gossip industry was interested in charting such developments. While the rapid rise of *Confidential Magazine*, replete with exposes and innuendo, alarmed Hollywood and the nation at large, traditional publications and columnists remained invested in preserving the illusion of the stars as paragons of morality, gentility, and sophistication. Yet as the 1940s drew to a close, it was increasingly apparent that such preservation was a lost cause. Hollywood was changing, and its promotion of stars along with it. Chapter Two thus examines attempts on the part of various gossip publications to deal with an industry — and conception of stars — very much in the throes of transition.

[1] See Richard DeCordova, "The Emergence of the Star System," and Janet Staiger, "Seeing Stars," in *Stardom: Industry of Desire*, ed. Christine Gledhill (New York: Routledge, 1991), 3-16; 17-29.

[2] Kathleen A. Feeley, "Louella Parsons and Hedda Hopper's Hollywood: The Rise of the Celebrity Gossip Industry in Twentieth-Century America, 1910–1950" (PhD dissertation, City University of New York, 2004), 30.

[3] Anthony Slide, *Inside the Hollywood Fan Magazine: A History of Star Makers, Fabricators, and Gossip Mongers* (Jackson, MI: University Press of Mississippi, 2010), 21.

[4] Slide, *Inside the Hollywood Fan Magazine*, 11.

[5] Charles L. Ponce de Leon, *Self-Exposure: Human-Interest Journalism and the Emergence of Celebrity in America, 1890–1940* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 77, 44, 52.

[6] Slide, *Inside the Hollywood Fan Magazine*, 77.

[7] Richard DeCordova, *Picture Personalities:The Emergence of the Star System in America* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1990), 98.

[8] Adrienne McLean, "'New Films in Story Form': Movie Story Magazines and Spectatorship," *Cinema Journal* 42.3 (2003): 3.

[9] See Leo Lowenthal, *Literature, Popular Culture, and Society* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, Inc, 1961), 109-140.

[10] DeCordova, *Picture Personalities*, 113.

[11] DeCordova, *Picture Personalities*, 119.

[12] For an insightful analysis of the MPPDA's neutralization of the Wallace Reid scandal, see Mark Lynn Anderson, "Shooting Star: Understanding Wallace Reid and His Public," in *Headline Hollywood*, eds. David A. Cook and Adrienne McLean (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2001), 83-106.

[13] For more on the trials and evidence, see Sam Stoloff, "Fatty Arbuckle and the Black Sox: The Paranoid Style of American Popular Culture, 1919-1922," in *Headline Hollywood*, eds. David A. Cook and Adrienne McLean (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2001), 56-58.

[14] DeCordova, *Picture Personalities*, 126-127.

[15] Slide, *Inside the Hollywood Fan Magazine*, 154; Stoloff, "Fatty Arbuckle and the Black Sox," 58.

[16] DeCordova, *Picture Personalities*, 129.

[17] DeCordova, *Picture Personalities*, 131.

[18] Stoloff 58. *Photoplay* did not publish any immediate response to the Arbuckle case; for DeCordova, this omission speaks to the fact that "the Arbuckle scandal fell radically outside the bounds of what had previously been permissible in star discourse" (128). Yet as Slide notes, in the years to come, *Photoplay* editor James R. Quirk published several editorials in defense of Arbuckle between 1923 and the star's death in 1931 (156-157). *Motion Picture, Modern Screen,* and *Screenland* also published recuperative features before and after Arbuckle's death, including six pages of fan letters asking for Arbuckle's return in the November 1931 issue of *Modern Screen.* In hindsight, it is difficult to gauge the actual fan response to Arbuckle's scandal, especially following his acquittal and the dissemination of exculpatory evidence. It seems plausible that the collected efforts of Paramount, the fan magazines, and Arbuckle himself could have rehabilitated his image had Hays not removed his films from circulation. For examples of fan magazine articles in defense of Arbuckle, see Tom Ellis, "Just Let Me Work," *Photoplay*, March 1931, 65, 127-128; Ruth Biery, "Plugging for Fatty," *Motion Picture*, March 1929, 42, 90, 93; Jack Grant, "Doesn't Fatty Arbuckle Get a Break?" *Motion Picture,* Sep 1931, 40-41, 90; "The Fans Want Fatty Arbuckle Back on the Screen," *Motion Picture*, November 1931, 16, 95, 99, 102, 104-105; Edward J. Doherty, "Are You Going to Give Fatty a Break," *Modern Screen,* October 1932, 28-29; Edward R. Sammis, "The Tragic Comedian Passes," *Screen Book,* September 1933, 27, 47,55, 58.

[19] For anecdotal, unsubstantiated, yet smut-filled evidence, see E.J. Fleming, *The Fixers: Eddie Mannix, Howard Strickling, and the MGM Publicity Machine* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2001).

[20] Paul McDonald, *The Star System* (New York: Wallflower, 2000), 43.

[21] Ronald L. Davis, *The Glamour Factory* (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1993)

[22] Davis, *The Glamour Factory*, 88.

[23] Davis, *The Glamour Factory*, 147.

[24] "Unit work involved covering the set, profiling the players for a press book, making sure publicity and group stills were taken for the press kit, and seeing that magazines and newspapers received sufficient information Howard Strickling required a certain number of stories every week from his unit people at Metro. Announcements of new cast members, reports of an accident or any interesting development on the set, and descriptions of parties at the end of production and special plans for the premiere were all sent to likely sources. Reporters were brought to the set almost daily, sometimes from around the world, and stars might be interviewed two or three times a day between takes. A still photographer took pictures of every scene, many of which appeared in fan magazines, sometimes even before the film was finished." Davis, *The Glamour Factory*, 150.

[25] Davis 141-144. At MGM, each publicist covered three or four stars; at Warner Bros., all publicists were dedicated to general promotion for "all the talent on the lot." See Davis, *The Glamour Factory*, 142.

[26] As one former contract player explains, "if you had a had a farm, it was an estate. If you had a field, it had to be full of horses." Davis, *The Glamour Factory,* 144.

[27] Davis, *The Glamour Factory*, 140.

[28] Davis, *The Glamour Factory,* 139

[29] Davis, *The Glamour Factory*, 140.

[30] Davis, *The Glamour Factory*, 156.

[31] Davis, *The Glamour Factory*, 143

[32] Kathryn Fuller-Seeley, *At the Picture Show: Small-Town Audiences and the Creation of Movie Fan Culture*, Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institute Press, 1996), 150.

[33] Fuller-Seeley, *At the Picture Show*, 151.

[34] Fuller-Seeley, *At the Pictures Show*, 156. The shift coincided with growing willingness on the part of stars to affix their images to consumer products, as exemplified by the use of Mary Pickford's likeness in a campaign for Pompeian Skin Cream from 1916-1921. Both stars and advertisers remained cautious, however. Stars were never used to promote "high class items." following the scandals of the 1920s, advertisers were wary of a contracted star's potential run-in with scandal blemishing their own brand by extension.

[35] Quirk and Hays were not always in total agreement. In March 1923, Quirk penned an editorial criticizing Hays's ban of Arbuckle's films. See Slide, *Inside the Hollywood Fan Magazine,* 155.

[36] Marsha Orgeron. "'You Are Invited to Participate': Interactive Fandom in the Age of the Movie Magazine." *Journal of Film and Video* 61.3 (2009): 3-23.

[37] For more on the established authors who periodically wrote for the fan magazines, see Slide, *Inside the Hollywood Fan Magazine*, 93-102.

[38] Richard Maltby, "The Production Code and the Hays Office," in *Grand Design: Hollywood as Modern Business Enterprise, 1930-1939,* ed. Tino Balio (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1995), 40. For specifics on Pre-Code cinema, see Janet Staiger, *Bad Women*: *Regulating Sexuality in Early American Cinema* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995); Thomas Doherty, *Pre-Code Hollywood* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999); Lea Jacobs, *The Wages of Sin: Censorship and the Fallen Woman Film, 1928-1942* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991).

[39] Mae West's extra-textual activities made it difficult for the studio to even attempt to frame her as a moral exemplar. For an excellent and thorough examination of the West star text, see Ramona Curry, *Too Much of a Good Thing: Mae West as Cultural Icon* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1996).

[40] Samantha Barbas, *Movie Crazy: Fans, Stars, and the Cult of Celebrity* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 98.

[41] Janet Staiger, *Perverse Spectators* (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 84.

[42] Slide, *Inside the Hollywood Fan Magazine,* 87

[43] Maltby 61. Maltby convincingly argues that implementation and acceptance of the code was much more nuanced and gradual than most histories acknowledge; the stark division between Pre- and Post- Code was, at least in part, manufactured by the studios and the MPPDA/PCA as a means of amplifying their "success" in cleaning up cinema (and thus assuaging protesting groups).

[44] Barbas 98; "Tradeviews," *Hollywood Reporter*, Jun 20, 1934, 1; "Publicity Heads United to Curb Fan Magazines," *Hollywood Reporter,* Aug 16 1934, 1, 4.

[45] Slide, *Inside the Hollywood Fan Magazine,* 87.

[46] Samantha Barbas, *Movie Crazy*, 99; Slide, *Inside the Hollywood Fan Magazine,* 88.

[47] Slide, *Inside the Hollywood Fan Magazine,* 88. The list of approved writers later rose to 50.

[48] *Ibid.*

[49] Slide, *Inside the Hollywood Fan Magazine,* 88.

[50] Slide, *Inside the Hollywood Fan Magazine,* 90.

[51] Davis, *The Glamour Factory*, 155; See also Fleming, *The Fixers*.

[52] Carl F. Cotter, "The Forty Hacks of the Fan Mags," *The Coast,* February 1939, 20; Barbas, *Movie Crazy,* 99.

[53] Barbas, *Movie Crazy,* 99.

[54] Neal Gabler, *Winchell: Gossip, Power, and the Culture of Celebrity* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1995), xi, 258.

[55] "For Walter it had always been part of the Winchell myth as well as a point of honor that he composed the column virtually by himself and that he never paid for items. But both claims were fallacies. In the early thirties he asked his old roommate Curley Harris to collect items for him at $50 a week.....Others worked on the same basis – author Jim Bishop, then a copyboy, made $5 for each "Oddity in the News" Walter used – but always secretly, lest anyone discover that Walter was not the one-man band he made himself out to be." Gabler, *Winchell,* 238.

[56] Gabler, *Winchell,* 236.

[57] Gabler, *Winchell*, 243.

[58] Gabler, *Winchell*, 236-237. Gabler cites the Rose Bigman Papers (a private collection) and interviews with Bigman extensively throughout his biography.

[59] Winchell entrusted Bingham to "fight like mad" against any edits that would infringe upon his original vision of the column. See Gabler, *Winchell*, 238.

[60] Gabler, *Winchell,* 233.

[61] Gabler, *Winchell,* 243

[62] Gabler, *Winchell,* 245.

[63] Gabler, *Winchell,* xii.

[64] Gabler, *Winchell,* 257.

[65] Gabler, *Winchell,* xii.

[66] Feeley, "Louella Parsons and Hedda Hopper's Hollywood," 34.

[67] Feeley, "Louella Parsons and Hedda Hopper's Hollywood," 51.

[68] As Feeley makes clear, Hearst never *needed* Parsons to promote Davies as he used his formidable resources to do so elsewhere; nevertheless, Parsons trumpeted Davies's achievements and certainly realized how such promotion could serve her own interests.

[69] George Eells, *Hedda and Louella* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1972), 115-116.

[70] Gabler, *Winchell*, 254. Samantha Barbas, *The First Lady of Hollywood: A Biography of Louella Parsons* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2005), 115

[71] Barbas, *The First Lady of Hollywood,* 114; Davis, *The Glamour Factory*, 148.

[72] Davis, *The Glamour Factory*, 148.

[73] Barbas, *The First Lady of Hollywood,* 48. Barbas explains that Parsons frequently harkened back to her rural roots and maternal status to further establish her credibility and trustworthiness to readers across the nation.

[74] Gabler, *Winchell*, 267.

[75] Letter from William Randolph Hearst to Louella Parsons dated Mar 24 1931; cited in Barbas, *The First Lady of Hollywood*, 128.

[76] Barbas, *The First Lady of Hollywood,* 128.

[77] Feeley, "Louella Parsons and Hedda Hopper's Hollywood," 77.

[78] Gabler, *Winchell*, 268.

[79] Michele Hilmes, *Hollywood and Broadcasting: From Radio to Cable* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1990), 67; Barbas, *The First Lady of Hollywood*, 167.

[80] Hilmes, *Hollywood and Broadcasting*, 67; The tremendously successful (and lucrative) format became a template for future Hollywood programs, most famously *Lux Radio Theatre*, featuring director Cecil B. DeMille.

[81] Barbas, *The First Lady of Hollywood*, 169.

[82] Barbas, *The First Lady of Hollywood*, 168.

[83] Feeley, "Louella Parsons and Hedda Hopper's Hollywood," 95.

[84] Feeley, "Louella Parsons and Hedda Hopper's Hollywood," 95; Barbas, *The First Lady of Hollywood*, 164.

[85] See Mary Desjardins, "'Marion never looked lovelier,' *Hedda Hopper's Hollywood* and the negotiation of glamour in post-war Hollywood," *Quarterly Review of Film and Video*, 16.3-4 (1997): 421-437 for an at length exploration of televised gossip. Rona Barrett also employed intimate address in her gossip broadcasts and interviews in the 1970s and '80s; see Chapter Six for further discussion.

[86] Barbas, *The First Lady of Hollywood*, 172.

[87] *Ibid.*

[88] Barbas, *The First Lady of Hollywood*, 174

[89] Barbas, *The First Lady of Hollywood*, 174.

[90] Thomas Wood, "The First Lady of Hollywood," *Saturday Evening Post*, July 15, 1939, 10.

[91] Gabler, *Winchell*, 256.

[92] Jennifer Frost, *Hedda Hopper's Hollywood* (New York: New York University Press, 2011), 12

[93] "Jimmy Gets It," *Time*, November 6, 1949, 47-48.

[94] Feeley, "Louella Parsons and Hedda Hopper's Hollywood," 124; Frost 13.

[95] Frost 17.

[96] For an extensive look at Hopper's politics and conservatism, see Frost, *Hedda Hopper's Hollywood* in its entirety.

[97] Gabler, *Winchell*, 256. Gabler may be a bit harsh (if not sexist) in his take on Parsons and Hopper; throughout his biography of Winchell, he elevates Winchell over his West-coast counterparts. Whereas Winchell's gossip was sophisticated, witty, and journalistic, he portrays Hopper and Parsons as clucking hens.

[98] Gabler, *Winchell*, 256.

[99] *Ibid.*

[100] Feeley, "Louella Parsons and Hedda Hopper's Hollywood," 144.

[101] "Hopping Around Hollywood with Hedda Hopper," *Look Magazine*, September 10, 1940, No page number available.

[102] Frost 18.

[103] See Frost Chapter 18; Collie Small, "Gossip is Her Business," *Saturday Evening Post*, January 11, 1947, 14; "The Gossipist," *Time*, July 28, 1947, 60.

[104] Hedda Hopper, *From Under My Hat* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1952).

[105] "The Gossipist," *Time*, 60.

CHAPTER TWO
INDUSTRIES IN TRANSITION and THE REEMERGENCE OF SCANDAL (1948-1958)

In the gossip industry, an industry-wide interrogation of stardom characterized the ten years between 1948 and 1958 as publications, columnists, and readers attempted to answer the question of what a star looked like, how he/she behaved, and whether he/she cooperated with the publicity apparatus. This chapter first looks to the industrial and cultural currents around this interrogation, addressing two major, interconnected shifts that altered the value of stars in post-classical Hollywood: the transformation of the studio/star system with the rise of agents and independent production and the spread of television. The second half of the chapter turns to case studies of four stars and one publication, *Confidential Magazine,* that challenged the way the studio publicity departments, fan magazines, and gossip columnists had produced and disseminated star images. This chapter offers a fuller portrait of how the film and gossip industries transitioned through the end of the integrated studio system, weathered the reemergence of scandal, and began to reconfigure around new modes of film and star production.

INDUSTRIAL SHIFTS

By 1940, tensions between the stars and studios were running high. James Cagney, Carole Lombard, Katharine Hepburn, and Margaret Sullavan were all feuding with their respective studios while Eddie Cantor warred with independent producer Samuel Goldwyn concerning his contract.[1] Olivia De Havilland, angry with the "mediocre scripts" offered by Warner Bros. following her Oscar-winning role in *Gone with the Wind*, was repeatedly placed on suspension. Acting on advice from MCA agent Lew Wasserman, De Havilland filed suit against Warners in California Superior Court, citing anti-peonage laws that prevented contracts enduring over seven

years. In 1944, the court found in De Havilland's favor, effectively terminating the practice of placing stars on suspension in order to extend their contracts indefinitely. While her courtroom victory did not end studio control over the star, it marked the first in a series of shifts that would transfer power formerly vested in the studios into the hands of the stars and those who they chose to manage them. Stars began to go freelance, relying on their powerful agents to leverage power over the studios. With the Paramount Decree of 1948, the big five studios were transformed, forced to divest themselves of their exhibition arms.[2]

But change had been in the air well before the Decree. Even though 1946 proved to be Hollywood's most successful year to date, the two top grossing films – *The Best Years of Our Lives* (1946) and *Duel in the Sun* (1946) – were both independent productions, the former picked up for distribution by RKO, while David O. Selznick distributed the latter. Ultimately, this shift – away from the studio system and towards independent production, staffed by freelance labor and distributed by the major studios – defined the post-classical period of Hollywood film. The ramifications of these changes were not limited to Hollywood proper, as the shift to independent production would affect major, if indirect, changes in the gossip industry as well. Before turning our attention, however, we must look more closely at what it meant to be a star in 1950s Hollywood.

While the Paramount Decree was not handed down until 1948, the studios were already preparing for its ramifications. With audience numbers already dropping in 1947, the big five studios realized that their massive studio lots, weighed down by hundreds of salaried below-the-line talent and expensive stables of stars, were no longer cost effective. Some studios sold off props, others slashed the workforce. Nearly all severely cut down the number of actors, both stars and supporting, on contract. Only MGM sustained a star stable on pre-war levels, with 80

stars still on contract in 1949.[3] When the studios released their stars, the newly vital and vigorous talent agencies were there to court them.

While agents had long existed in Hollywood, most studios forbade their presence on the lot, fearing their intervention with studio activity. But many stars, increasingly frustrated with recalcitrant studio policy, employed agents. In the early '40s, MCA and William Morris, already the biggest names in band and Broadway management, finally managed to secure a foothold in Hollywood, joining inveterate agents Johnny Hyde and Myron Selznick.[4] They helped stars who did remain on contract to renegotiate for greater autonomy. Bette Davis, at constant war with Warner Bros., was able to rewrite her contract in 1940 while dozens of stars, including Myrna Loy, Judy Garland, Gregory Peck, Jimmy Stewart, Henry Fonda, Fred Astaire, and Joan Crawford, came to rely on the expertise of MCA and Wasserman.[5]

As more stars began to acquire the service of agents, they also turned to press agents. Unlike the publicist — a designation reserved for those within the studio publicity departments — press agents worked outside of the official boundaries of the studios and devoted themselves to promoting the star who hired them.[6] During the '30s, the studios discouraged or banned stars from contracting personal press agents as means of both "controlling the shape of the star image in public" and "protecting the [studios's] exclusivity" over that image.[7] When Davis renegotiated her contract with Warners in 1943, it stipulated that she could hire a press agent to "help with fan mail" but not "for the purpose of arranging for interviews or giving statements to the press."[8] Crawford had a similar clause in her 1944 contract with Warner Bros. but violated it, hiring a press agent to promote her appearance in her first three films in the studios. As Jane Gaines explains, when *Mildred Pierce* (1945) proved a hit — in large part due to the publicity campaign, "Crawford was able to negotiate the right to keep a personal agent as long as the extra publicity

he generated for her contained only a "minimum reference" to her motion picture work with Warner Bros."[9] Warners would later move to curb Crawford's press agent, fearing over-exposure. The symbolism, however, remained. The stars were gradually taking their publicity and management of their career into their "own hands," hiring independent contractors to perform functions previously fulfilled by the studios.

In 1947, two deals signaled even larger shifts in power from the studios to major stars. First, Johnny Hyde renegotiated Rita Hayworth's contract with Columbia, winning her a weekly salary, 25% of the net on all films, and script approval. Following Hayworth's success in *Gilda*, Columbia was desperate for certain hits and ceded its power, at least in part, in order to maintain her contracted services. Second, Wasserman arranged a deal between Universal and Stewart for Stewart to appear in the screen adaptation of *Harvey* (Koster 1950), the Broadway play in which Stewart had been starring and garnering lavish praise, and the genre western *Winchester '73* (Mann 1950), promising Stewart a paltry $250,000 paycheck in exchange for a percentage of the profits. When *Harvey* bombed and *Winchester '73* proved a surprise hit, Stewart become a very wealthy man.[10]

The lessons of the story are manifold. Not only did the studio cede its financial power to the star, but it was taught the lesson of the fickle market. Few predicted that *Winchester* would beat *Harvey*; indeed, at the time, Universal's deal seemed almost exploitative. Yet in future years, this inability to predict the market would prove a bonanza for stars many times over.[11] With the studios in financial flux, the promise of an established star was one of the few ways to anchor a picture.[12] As Tino Balio explains, "in this era of spiraling production costs, shrinking audiences, and industry fragmentation, financing a picture of any consequence without a name of proven box office worth would have been unthinkable."[13] And with the help of a crafty agent, that star

could extract promises of profit participation, co-producer credits, and enormous salaries from the studio.

Under this new mode of production, everything was up for negotiation — from star to script, from budget to a film's ending. This was a stark contrast to the pre-war studio system, where decisions always lay in the hands of the studio. As a result, "the power dynamics binding the studios and talent were reversed: the studios, rather than dictating all the terms, were forced to cater to the whims of a numerically limited yet culturally potent talent pool in order to obtain product."[14] This "entrepreneurial model of filmmaking" changed not only the *way* that movies were made, but the *types* of movies that made it to the theaters. While it soon become apparent that stars did not necessarily bring in large grosses, little else could guarantee financing. Thus stars became the *de facto* anchor on which the industry centered itself in the storm of postwar industrial upheaval. Agents only encouraged this trend, as the more agents demanded for the use of a star, the more the studios thought the stars were worth.

Renegotiated contracts, increasing control, escalating worth — all speak to a shift in the conception of the star. As Gaines points out, the star has historically oscillated between a status as *labor* and that of *capital*. During the silent era, Mary Pickford, Douglas Fairbanks, and Charlie Chaplin leveraged their power to form United Artists, which wrested control of their films – and, by extension, their labor – away from the studios. But "those conditions changed in the financially rough thirties, when government-mandated industry cuts were threatened, and screen actors began to see themselves increasingly as labor."[15] Actors (including stars) unionized under the Screen Actors Guild in 1933, and as Danae Clark demonstrates, the studios considered them "workers," especially when they opposed the power structure.[16] As the studios lost their ability to sustain long-term contracts, stars were increasingly figured as *commodities* with intrinsic and

inelastic value. This distinction would prove crucial to the gossip industry as stars no longer considered it part of their contracted labor to provide interviews and other forms of promotion to columnists and outlets. As independent commodities, stars (and their teams) began to control the flow of information, providing labor on their terms.[17]

THE RISE OF TELEVISION

The transition of the studio and star systems coincided with the rise of television. Contrary to popular myth, the studios did not *hate* television. Indeed, most of the studios attempted, in various ways, to enter into the television business themselves in order to co-opt what would have become their primary competition. The major studios' monopolistic pasts contributed to the FCC's decision to block nearly every studio attempt to enter into broadcasting, while the studios' attempts at co-opting television technology (Theatre TV, Pay TV) proved abysmal failures.

Through trial-and-error, the studios eventually discovered three means of capitalizing on the new medium. By the end of the 1950s, they were filming their own programming and selling it to the networks, exploiting their back libraries of film at enormous profits, and using television as a promotional tool for new products and stars. Coupled with the shift from studio to independent production, the rise of television spelled enormous changes for the star. Not only was the Hollywood star now available on the small screen, but television began to cultivate its own crop of "organic" stars, undermining the hierarchy of stardom, demanding the attention of the gossip industry, and changing the definition of what a star looked and acted like.

Importantly, early television was not considered suitable for Hollywood stars. Instead, transplants from radio and vaudeville filled the early airwaves. The performance styles of these "vaudeo" stars were well-suited to the technological limitations of early broadcast. The vaudeo star came to embody what the industry had isolated as its key characteristics and aesthetic

properties — immediacy, intimacy, and spontaneity — the antithesis of the cultivated Hollywood star. As vaudeo stars' popularity grew, so too did their salaries, attracting the attention of the film stars, many newly emancipated from studio constrictions and hungry for work. For various reasons — the shift to the end of a licensing freeze (which allowed television to penetrate past urban areas); the incremental shift in control of programming from sponsors to the networks; Hollywood's increasing stake in filmed programming; the success of filmed sitcom *I Love Lucy* — live vaudeo programming began to fade away. In its place were filmed programming and, increasingly, programming featuring Hollywood stars.

The '53-'54 season marked the first steady wave of Hollywood star appearances on the small screen.[18] They appeared as anthology hosts, guest stars, or in promotional visits to talk shows. MCA regularly cajoled clients into appearing in various shows produced by its own production arm while the studios slowly began to realize the promotional value of the medium, just as they had years ago with radio. The Academy Awards were visually broadcast for the first time in 1953, highlighting the utility of television to promote star images. The studios also released the medium's potential for promotion. Starting in 1954, Paramount's *Colgate Comedy Hour* featured Dean Martin and Jerry Lewis and a long list of star talent as a means of promoting upcoming films while Fox and MGM aped Paramount's success with *The 20th Century Fox Hour* and *MGM Parade*.

Hollywood also began to capitalize on the lucrative sale of their film libraries — a financial gesture with tremendous symbolic ramifications. At first, only B-pictures were circulated, yet in 1951, Selznick broke the "A-Picture Barrier," releasing twelve Selznick productions into syndication in exchange for $12 million. The floodgates would not completely open until 1955, when Paramount sold thirty films to an independent syndicator for $1.15 million. The

symbolism, however, remained. The larger-than-life stars were now available for consumption, small, in poor quality, and right in the living room.[19] In this way, Hollywood stars were quite literally given the same stature as television personalities.

Hollywood stars also began to be featured as the stars of their own programming, which most often used the star's name as its primary attraction. The exploitation of the star's name underlines the paradoxical nature of stardom in the post-war period: a Hollywood star's name was still very much a valuable commodity, but his/her recurrent presence on television was often read as a "step down," highlighting the finite space for stars in Hollywood following the reorganization of the studios. As Murray and Christine Becker point out, these performers had often failed on the big screen. The studios had tinkered with their images but never found one that resonated, as exemplified by the cases of Lucille Ball and Faye Emerson.[20] Denise Mann referred to such stars as "recycled" as their former careers and star images were reused and reactivated on the small screen.[21]

Mann's thesis only goes so far in explaining the growing presence of Hollywood stars on television. As Becker elaborates, Mann's argument has often been misinterpreted to mean that the *only* stars that moved to television were the washed-up ones, creating an impression of the early television landscape as a sort of retirement home for former stars. Oft-repeated narratives of Ball's unsuccessful film career and Errol Flynn's half-drunk appearances for hire only served to reinforce this thesis. Yet such examples elide the tremendous variety of appearances by Hollywood stars on the small screen. Becker instead argues that a new awareness and "interrogation" of stardom marked early television. Television programs exploited this curiosity, heightening and lampooning the studio-generated star image and contrasting it with that of the

television star. In this way, television attempted to elevate itself by denigrating its main competition.

Photoplay seldom mentioned the appearance of film stars on the new medium — in part because, at least until 1953, they rarely appeared but also because television personalities were the provenance of its sister publication, *TV Radio Mirror*, regularly touted in the margins of *Photoplay*'s pages. This began to change in the mid- and late-'50s, especially as television personalities' romances with film stars, such as that between Eddie Fischer and Debbie Reynolds, demanded coverage. But *Photoplay* was also attempting to reify its image as the keeper of the *film* stars, along with their attendant glamour. Letters to the editor point to this desire. In 1952, a reader pleaded for "just a little less of the hum-drum family life of the stars plastered over your magazine?…After all, movies still mean glamour and romance to young and old . . . "[22] Another reader begged, "Please, let's have more Lana Turner, Liz Taylor, Ava Gardner and Rita Hayworth. These gals have real glamour and they do something exciting once in a while. Anybody can sit home at night and rock a baby, as you read about some stars doing."[23]

A new gossip columnist, Sheilah Graham, seemed to embody both the glamorous and the domestic, the modern and the moralizing and, in short order, she would overtake even Louella Parsons and Hedda Hopper in popularity and national exposure. Graham was British; she was beautiful; she had been engaged to a Marquess. Most importantly, she was the former (and final) lover of F. Scott Fitzgerald, an experience she later detailed in her best-selling 1958 memoir, *Beloved Infidel: The Education of a Woman*.[24] Even though Fitzgerald had essentially flunked out of Hollywood, his name — and Graham's association with it — connoted the glamour and sophistication of the 1920s. A resurgence in interest in Fitzgerald in the late '40s only heightened interest in Graham. That Graham had been his *lover,* as opposed to his wife, added a titillating

aura to her image. But Graham was also a doting and diligent mother, and she regularly used her column to chide negligent parents and errant stars. Her image thus managed to encapsulate the domestic and the glamorous, the scandalous and the moralizing — contradictions that formed the crux of dominant '50s ideologies.

Graham began her writing career with the New York tabloids in the early '30s.[25] In 1935, she moved to Hollywood to pen the syndicated entertainment column for the North American Newspaper Alliance. In short order, she divorced her husband and became engaged to the Marquess of Donegall. She first met Fitzgerald at her engagement party, and, according to Graham, it was love at first sight. Graham was the model for the heroine in Fitzgerald's final unfinished book, *The Last Tycoon,* and his constant companion until December 1940 when he "died in her arms."[26] Already, a thread of glamour and melodrama seemed to embroider the columnist's life.

After a stint as a war correspondent during World War II, Graham returned to Hollywood, and her readership continued to grow. By the mid-'50s, her syndicated column reached 20 million readers.[27] Following the business model of her peers, Graham broadened her vision beyond her newspaper column. By the peak of her popularity and influence in the mid-'50s, Graham had a regular column for *Photoplay*, wrote twice-monthly for *TV Guide*, and penned occasional articles in other fan magazines such as *Silver Screen*. She also started editing her own one-off "specials" — *Sheilah Graham's Hollywood Yearbook*, *Sheilah Graham's Hollywood Romances* — for Dell Publishing, using her brand to encourage fan magazine readers to purchase material that had clearly simply been repackaged in "special" form. Starting in 1949, she appeared regularly on television and radio. In 1955, Graham was paid $2000 a week for her television services — as much or more than actual film and television stars during the period.[28]

Graham was more beautiful and less dowdy than her old school compatriots, but she was still a Hollywood columnist in the traditional style, cultivating relationships with stars and regularly moralizing on the pages of the fan magazine. Despite the longevity of her appeal — her column ran until 1971 — she is less remembered than Hopper or Parsons, in part because she lacked a clear adversary. Nevertheless, Graham's popularity was an expression of the character of the gossip industry in the mid-'50s. With the steady incursion of television, she recognized that she needed to alter both her content and where she published if she wished to remain truly relevant in the field.[29] In this way, writing for *TV Guide* and appearing on her own show were not simply a way of exploiting her brand cross-media but recognizing that the landscape of stardom and gossip had and would continue to change.

CASE STUDIES: MITCHUM, BERGMAN, BRANDO, MONROE

During this period of transition, the gossip industry attempted to expand its existing tactics and rhetorical style to fit the awkward corners and voluptuous curves of the new set of stars. Although the fan magazine profile was meant to smooth out the rough stars' edges, it oftentimes merely illuminated how ineffectual such rhetorical sandpaper could be. Four star images — those of Robert Mitchum, Ingrid Bergman, Marlon Brando, and Marilyn Monroe — represent the distinct challenges to prewar practices of star production. These stars engaged in scandalous behavior and tested accepted societal mores, attracting tremendous media attention, public scorn, and tremendous cults of fandom. While other stars, such as James Dean, performed similar functions, the images, scandals, and treatment of the above stars, considered together, most effectively illuminate the gradual and specific challenges faced by the gossip industry at large.

Like all stars, Mitchum, Bergman, Brando and Monroe acted out what mattered to a broad swath of people, and in 1950s America, one of the things that mattered most was the simultaneous fascination with and disapproval of sex and scandal. Of course, the actions of these stars were not inherently scandalous, as an action is never *a priori* scandalous. Rather, it is *labeled* as scandalous when it transgresses social norms. The actions of all four stars flirted with 1950s' understandings of acceptable sexual and social behavior. From today's perspective, the offenses themselves were not all that grave, but the contemporaneous social tissue was far more sensitive and inclined towards irritation and inflammation.[30]

Scandal opens up pre-existing rifts and broadens holes in the ideological fabric, creating crises of identity, both individual and cultural, that require reckoning. Each of the four star images required reckonings, which the gossip industry attempted but only partially succeeded in offering. In the end, the relative success on the part of the gossip industry to process new star images and actions illuminates not only which methods are most successful, but also which actions *refuse* reckoning. In other words, which rules are still important and whose breaking remains unforgivable.

The scandals (and attempts at their redressment) on the part of Mitchum and Bergman highlight the growing pains of Hollywood post-divestment. Mitchum's scandal was contained much in the way that the classic system would have handled star misbehavior; as a result, his career was salvaged. For various reasons, Bergman's offense was viewed as far more grave — in part because she was a woman, in part because her offense was sexual in nature, in part because of timing — and thus, to some, indefensible.[31] The varying ability of each studio and star to neutralize their respective scandals highlights the difficulties of dealing with new problems with old methodologies. While it worked for a time, it would not work for long — a point driven

home by Bergman's denunciation on the floor of the United States senate and the boycott organized against her.

The lessons of these early scandals were substantial. The stars themselves would unshackle themselves from the studios, the gossip columnists' power was ratified, and the fan magazines scrambled to craft rhetoric that would simultaneously feed readers' appetite for information in a way that could still uphold their dedication to moral behavior. Brando and Monroe would come to exemplify a new breed of Hollywood star that was unfazed by scandal, focused on acting, and modeled a new mode of independent stardom, free from studio regulation and the necessity to submit to their promotional demands.

"DO I GET ANOTHER CHANCE?"

In 1948, Robert Mitchum had completed a string of successful films in which his trademark "droopy eyes" endeared him to millions. But on September 1, 1948, Mitchum and B-list starlet Lila Leeds were arrested for possession of marijuana. The arrest was part of a larger sting operation intended to tackle widespread drug-use in Hollywood and made front-page news across the country. Mitchum, well aware of the public perception of illegal drug use, declared his career over, and stars and their studios were put on guard. As the detective in charge of the case informed the papers,

> We're going to clean the dope and narcotics users out of Hollywood. We don't care who we have to arrest. There's a lot of 'stuff' being used in Hollywood. We have a number of important and prominent Hollywood screen personalities under surveillance. Many of the big shots, stars and other top names, do not patronize corner peddlers for fear of a shakedown. However, we have reason to believe there is an 'inside ring,' right inside the film industry, supplying a larger number of narcotics users.[32]

To compound the gravity of his offense, Mitchum's forty-three day prison stay was heavily documented, with *Life* publishing a photo of the star sweeping out his cell. It was a public relations nightmare.

Mitchum's arrest was the first scandal to emerge from Hollywood post-World War II. The revelation was viewed as so huge — and feared by many as the first in the series of scandalous revelations – that the press, RKO, and Mitchum himself went into overdrive to neutralize the offense. Unlike the scandals that followed, the police discovered Mitchum's offense, not a scandal-mongering reporter. Ultimately, Mitchum was reincorporated into the traditional star fold and the production of star images re-stabilized, if only for a time.

Three variables worked in Mitchum's favor. First, he had played several roles in recent *film noirs* that established a picture personality not at odds with "smoking the reefers." In other words, his arrest fit his star image and, thus, was not the sort of surprise it would have been if, for example, Shirley Temple was caught with an illegal substance.[33] Second, he had the support of his studio. RKO and David O. Selznick co-owned Mitchum's contract and assured the press that he would go right back to work on *The Big Steal* (1949) following his release.[34] Like the majority of star contracts of the period, Mitchum's included a purity clause that stipulated contract nullification if the star behaved improperly or immorally. Yet the clause was worded "in a nebulous fashion," and RKO and Selznick never considered taking action against Mitchum.[35]

Such clauses were mainly for show — a means of assuring conservatives that the studios were committed to ensuring the moral righteousness of their stars. Of course, standard studio practice was to cover up any "purity violation." The problem with this violation, however, was that the police, not a "Fixer," had discovered it. The ease with which RKO and Selznick excused Mitchum from the purity clauses would prove a blueprint for future scandals. The Legion of Decency — the engine powering most film protests — remained mum, claiming interest only in the moral content of the films in which Mitchum appeared. As will become clear in the case of

Bergman, scandal around a film itself can make it far more difficult for the star to emerge from the cloud scandal creates.

Finally, Mitchum gave himself and his family over to the cause of image rehabilitation. Estranged from his wife and two young boys at the time of the arrest, he was now "happily reunited" with them upon release from prison. In the months to follow, he appeared in a slew of *Photoplay* profiles, starting with his own plea for forgiveness, "Do I Get Another Chance?", published in May 1949. The May 1949 *Photoplay* would have been drafted in March, when Mitchum was still in jail, and on newsstands for all of April, when Mitchum's first film appearance since the arrest, *The Red Pony*, would be in initial release.

A press agent certainly penned the article, but it held the Mitchum byline and, like many features of the time, employed the first person confessional style throughout:

> A motion picture actor lives in a world of lights and shadows. Folks on the outside looking in see us not as we really are but as they believe, or want to believe, we are. In the last few months I've been surrounded by shadows [. . .] Here I am at the bottom of the ladder again, with a great big strike on my future. Whether I'm to have a chance to try the climb back up depends on you, the public [. . .] But the bitter pills I have swallowed have made me a better man. I have attained a peace of mind which I did not think possible. My troubled moments have been illuminated by the shining faith for my wife, Dorothy, with whom for the first time since we were married, I have an understanding and companionship which I had almost abandoned hope of finding. If I can live through this ordeal and grow in stature, because of it, nothing the future can dish up will get me down. I'm not looking for pity. It's a good thing that I'm doing time in jail. It's not in the cards that anyone can escape paying for the wrong things they do. No matter how the cards are shuffled, you pay, in one way or another. That's the law of life.[36]

The powers behind this letter — Mitchum, his press agent, a studio publicity head, Selznick himself, *Photoplay* — emphasize Mitchum's honesty, repentance, willingness to reform, and his supplication to his public, acknowledging their power over his fate. As he continues, "Now I am facing life with a new sense of responsibility to the world, to myself, and above all to my wife and our two sons [. . .] I know that my moral fiber has toughened. I know that I will make my boys

proud to call me their father. Could a man have a greater incentive? I said it before, and I say it again. You're the jury. What will the verdict be?"[37]

The recuperation of Mitchum's star became an extended campaign. In the months to come, *Photoplay* ran a spread of Mitchum frolicking with his boys, exclaiming "Wild animals at a birthday party! A fishing trip on a desert sea! But then, as Josh and Chris Mitchum can tell you, wonderful things have been happening since Dad came home [. . .] Bob always had a great fondness for his sons. But in the past, his attitude with them was pretty casual. Now he gives them most of his leisure time."[38] Here, Mitchum appears reformed, domesticated, and deserving of forgiveness. The same month, *Photoplay* published "What Now for Mitchum?" in an attempt to rationalize Mitchum's behavior. The rhetorical recuperation was crucial. Mitchum had to be constructed as fundamentally and naturally inclined towards goodness, his sin a temporary (and coerced) deviation. If a star was actually "bad," no number of fishing trip photo spreads could repair the damage. "What Now for Mitchum" thus blames "Hollywood hangers-on" and "evil characters" who prey upon stars who, like Mitchum, are just too nice to realize that they were being taken for a ride.[39]

If one cause of Mitchum's behavior was bad company, the second cause was Hollywood itself, which should have provided better guidance for the young star. "If Bob's career and life are wrecked," the author asserts, "then Hollywood must assume a great share of the responsibility."[40] Or, as longtime *Photoplay* columnist and moralist Elsa Maxwell bluntly put it a year later, "To smoke marijuana is stupid. But if Bob Mitchum had some uncontrollable compulsion to smoke it, and I don't believe he did, he did not have to smoke it where he did or the way he did, and he never would have if he had been conditioned by his studio to his responsibilities as a star."[41]

Despite Maxwell's chastisement, Mitchum's career was salvaged. Indeed, he would soon become an even bigger star with the success of *Night of the Hunter* (1955). But Mitchum cooperated fully with efforts to clear his name. Because he was repentant, he was able to use the fan magazines as a mouthpiece and engender forgiveness. He behaved as a contracted star from the 1930s would have been forced to, acknowledging a wrong, attempting a redress, and working under the assumption that the public would only accept him if he performed the necessary absolution.[42] In contrast, Ingrid Bergman refused to acknowledge her actions as scandalous, let alone apologize for them. She acted as stars often react today, claiming her decisions as private and personal. But Bergman paid the price for this anachronistic attitude, and the backlash against her and her films was swift and unforgiving.

"DO YOU WANT INGRID BERGMAN BACK?"

It is difficult for contemporary audiences to understand the intensity of the backlash that affected Ingrid Bergman following her affair with Italian director Roberto Rossellini. The difficulty stems from the absence of contemporary star images as uniformly good, likable, and constant as Bergman's — and whose choice to pursue her true passion would come as such a shattering surprise. Bergman's image was so coherent, so univocal, that it simply could not expand to include any actions that were slightly discordant with that image, let alone an affair and an illegitimate child.[43]

Bergman was a Hollywood star in the classic manner, with Selznick scouted her in Sweden in the early '40s before bringing her stateside. Bergman was married to an older doctor, Peter Lindstrom, by whom she had a child, Pia, but the husband and daughter had stayed in Sweden, expecting Bergman's time in Hollywood to be brief. Selznick signed her to a contract and put his team to work constructing an appropriate image. Bergman, however, refused to

subject herself to the Hollywood treatment. According to reports, she did not want to pluck her bushy eyebrows, straighten her hair, or wear the standard pancake make-up applied to the stars. Selznick conceded, understanding that her natural, unvarnished beauty would shine through, and constructed her image as that of a fresh-faced, wholesome Nordic woman. The press propagated this narrative, establishing Bergman as natural, authentic, and resistant to the codes of Hollywood glamour.

During this period, Bergman starred in a string of films that would reify her image as an earnest, tremendously likable, and talented star: *Casablanca* (1942), *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (1943, nominated for Best Actress), *Gaslight* (1944, winner for Best Actress), *Bells of St. Mary* (1945), *Spellbound* (1945), and *Joan of Arc* (1948, nominated again for Best Actress). The simplicity of the Bergman image — that she seemed to stand for one thing — was, of course, part of the reason for her popularity. But it was also the source of her downfall. As would become clear, the Bergman image was too perfect, with no seams to expand and bear the stress of an extra-marital romance.

In 1950, Bergman wrote a letter to Italian Neorealist director Rossellini, voicing her love for his films and desire to collaborate. Rossellini agreed to put her in *Stromboli*, and over the course of production, the two fell quietly in love and were photographed holding hands, setting off a maelstrom of speculation.[44] All over America, editorials voiced their indignation and Bergman was even denounced on the floor of the United States senate as an "instrument of evil." As McLean outlines, most historians have dismissed Bergman's scandal as a simple case of her actions not fitting with her established image. This was, to some extent, the case. Even Bergman herself understood that "People saw me in *Joan of Arc* and declared me a saint. I'm not. I'm just a woman, another human being."[45]

But as McLean points out, the real source of Bergman's problems was not that she had played saintly characters and left her husband and child for an Italian artist. Indeed, while pre-scandal publicity had emphasized Bergman's "unselfish wholesomeness and domesticity, her professionalism and devotion to her work, and her quiet family life," her picture personality had conflicted with that very image.[46] She had played saintly figures in *The Bells of St. Mary's* and *Joan of Arc*, but she had also portrayed sexually "loose" women in several films, including *Casablanca*, *Notorious* (1946) and *Arch of Triumph* (1948), which would have been in the minds of fans leading up to the revelation of her affair.

Why, then, did RKO or its publicity department not attempt to incorporate the affair into her star text, using her recent roles for contextualization? They did attempt to do so, but Bergman refused to participate, apologize, explain, or exonerate herself. Bergman's previous three films had flopped, and her husband refused to grant her a divorce in time to make her forthcoming child with Rossellini "legitimate." Perhaps even more importantly, Bergman committed the cardinal sin of lying to Hopper about her pregnancy. When the pregnancy was later "scooped" by Parsons, "Hopper's enmity knew no bounds."[47]

In the end, Bergman's response to the press, along with her inability to force a divorce from her husband, amplified the effects of the affair and pregnancy. Importantly, both components would most likely have been handled with aplomb had the incident taken place during the height of the star system. Savvy publicists and press agents would have cushioned the impact of the scandal, contextualizing it in terms of true love, as would be the case with Rita Hayworth's affair with Prince Aly Kahn, or symptomatic of devotion to work, as with the multiple marriages of Bette Davis.[48] Refusing to go along with the proposed studio

manipulation, Bergman's actions were interpreted as the result of female sexuality unleashed. In this way, she became the scapegoat on whom anxiety over such sexuality could be centered.

Other differences in the handling and reception of Mitchum's scandal and Bergman's should be clear. Mitchum was a man; his transgressions were not sexual. But he also handed himself over to the publicity powers-that-be, knowing they could manufacture a convincing story (and apology) to facilitate his re-integration. Bergman, however, did not want to conjure a melodramatic excuse. Even without her cooperation, the magazines fashioned stories and excuses, lest fans believe that they had been entirely deceived. Although Bergman never authenticated or authorized such stories, they nevertheless functioned as cultural salves.

Photoplay offered little immediate coverage of the scandal, in part because the magazine went to press weeks before it would hit newsstands, thereby preventing any sort of breaking-news reporting. But it was also part of *Photoplay*'s tradition, dating back to the '20s, to refuse to publicize or profit off of scandal, at least explicitly. Instead, *Photoplay* let the gossip columns and radio broadcasts focus on the day-to-day while it crafted longer think-pieces contemplating the roots and meaning of the scandal. In this way, *Photoplay* shielded itself from criticism as a scandal-mongerer. It neither glorified nor whipped up frenzy over these scandals. Rather, it explained them, weaving cautionary tales.

For the Bergman story, *Photoplay* relied on its time-tested tactics of narrativization and moralization. The first and longest example appeared in December 1949, promising "The Bergman Love Story: the only story personally approved by Ingrid Bergman."[49] The article, penned by Bergman's longtime press agent, Joe Steele, spread eight pages and labored to correct the public's perception of Bergman's marriage to Lindstrom. She married too young to a man who did not show her affection; her marriage was a passion-less one; she had never known true

love until she met Rossellini; she *did* miss her daughter; she was not forsaking domestic bliss, but a frustrated, fractured home. The portrait proffered was one of woman misguided but still fundamentally good, and whose motivation was understandable. The crucial subtext was that Bergman did not leave her husband and child for *sex*, but for *love*.

Explanations in this vein did defuse some of the initial shock surrounding the affair. However, the birth of the Bergman-Rossellini child out of wedlock reinvigorated critiques. *Stromboli*, the very "site of the crime," proved a financial failure despite attempts by RKO and Howard Hughes to lure viewers with a suggestive ad campaign.[50] If *Stromboli* was the litmus test of whether or not the public would still go see a Bergman film post-affair, the answer seemed to be no. Yet as McLean counters, the Neorealist film was quite unlike anything Bergman had appeared in before and therefore difficult for her core audience to "read."[51] Hughes's sensational ad style also made it seem as if Bergman and Rossellini were attempting to *profit from*, rather than *repent for*, their sins. Under this understanding, buying a ticket to *Stomboli* was tantamount to validating the actions of its star.

In the aftermath of the scandal, some fan magazines continued to blame Bergman's mistakes on Hollywood's lack of training. Just as Hollywood was responsible for Mitchum's "stupidity," so too was it responsible for Bergman's negligence. According to Maxwell,

> It is – I insist – unfair to cast young men and women out on the golden tide of fame without first preparing them for all that is involved….Had Ingrid Bergman been trained in the extracurricular requirements of a star, had she been given a proper sense of her responsibility towards the public, she never would have perpetrated this recent scandal.[52]

Here, Maxwell's words betray frustration. Bergman's behavior neither scandalizes nor offends her. Rather, she yearns for the time when stars (and their studio handlers) ran the system seamlessly. Like the other entities within the gossip industry, Maxwell understood that Bergman's

refusal to play by the rules foretold greater changes, including the gossip columnist's potential obsolescence.

But the scandal, coupled with Mitchum's recent arrest and Hayworth's romance with Aly Kahn, had already put the gossip industry on the defensive. In August 1950, Parsons adamantly declared, "Hollywood Divorces Aren't My Fault," attempting to exonerate the gossip industry of any role in the instigation of scandal. Gossip does not *cause* scandal; it simply reports it. "No marriage ever breaks up because of gossip," according to Parsons, "irrespective of how thick and fast rumors fly."[53] Parsons explained that she, along with other "reputable reporters" in the industry, were simply *reporting*, never speculating. If they published without a "firm foundation," they would be charged with libel. Furthermore, columnists did often know of scandalous gossip. Yet out of good judgment and honor, they refused to publish it, hoping for it to be sorted out in private. In short, the gossip industry had scruples.

Photoplay complimented Parsons's claims with an editorial promising "the other side of the Hollywood story," offering "a sharp contrast to impressions of the film colony fostered by recent scandals and headlines."[54] This "other side of the story" was substantiated by a four-page chart detailing the positive actions of dozens of Hollywood stars. Joan Bennett, for example, was "Active in Episcopal Church. Sponsors domestic arts courses in girls' schools. Works for expansion of adult education. Member '49 committee National Safety Council" while Humphrey Bogart "Sponsors Animal Care. Gives annual award for children's boat races. Helps combat juvenile delinquency." The editorial also claimed that the chart "answers the critics who, by inference, have questioned your intelligence quotient in liking Hollywood," underlining the notion that the actions of the stars directly affected their fans.

The next month, *Modern Screen* crafted a defense of Hollywood through extensive contextualization. For example, only ten out of 15,000 actors in Hollywood had been embroiled in major scandal; thus, Hollywood's crime rate was sixty times less than that of Kansas City.[55] Hollywood's sinful past was to blame for its current image even though "compared to the screen colony of the 1920s, Hollywood today is as pure as Eden before the snake walked in, its actors and actresses unfairly libeled by the immoral behavior of their predecessors."[56] Finally, rumors of Hollywood's "orgiastic parties" were completely unfounded. Since the stars were wealthy, "there is probably less sexual activity," for as "the Kinsey Report revealed, there is infinitely more promiscuous sex activity among the unskilled, lower occupational groups."[57] With this in mind, the educated *Modern Screen* reader understood that the behavior of a select few did not mar the reputation of the otherwise moral, law-respecting, upper-class, un-orgiastic stars.

As evidenced by the rhetorical maneuvers described above, when star actions did turn scandalous, fans required some means of explanation, achieved through context, explanatory narratives, apologies, or counter-examples. In 1950, the fan magazines and gossip columnists understood the need to address the perceived rise of scandal head-on and reassure its fans. When scandal reappeared in the pages of *Confidential*, the gossip industry would be forced to reckon with it yet again. Only then, with *Confidential* releasing a new issue filled with new scandals every month, it would be far more difficult to mount a defensive.

In the meantime, Bergman retreated to Europe. She received her divorce, married Rossellini, made films with him, and gave birth to twins. In August 1952, *Photoplay* decided to revisit the scandal, querying readers "Do You Want Ingrid Bergman Back?' As outlined in Chapter One, *Photoplay* cultivated readers' belief in their ability to influence Hollywood and the stars. *Photoplay* now relayed that "for several months there have been indications — obvious to

anyone familiar with Hollywood' wheels within wheels — that the producers would like to star Bergman in an American movie — but only if they could be sure the public would support her."[58] All that remained was reader ratification, as "Ingrid Bergman and the Hollywood producers await your answer." The article appeals to reader affection for the original Bergman star image, claiming that the "damage" of the scandal "would have undoubtedly been less had she been less honest. But I find it difficult to damn anyone for honesty."[59] In other words, Bergman — natural, authentic, unwilling to become something she was not when she first arrived in Hollywood — was also incapable of covering up her true feelings, or even of hiding the fruits of her love, i.e. her pregnancy.

In December 1952, *Photoplay* printed the verdict: "as far as you readers are concerned, Ingrid Bergman can come back home any time she wants to."[60] Over 10,000 readers sent in their votes, four-fifths of whom were in favor of the actress returning to Hollywood. *Photoplay* emphasized the reasoning behind reader votes: those who refused her return were still angered by the "abandonment" of her daughter while those who endorsed her return "felt that her private life was entirely her own affair" and "expressed sincere sympathy for her, and despair that her love should have brought her so much unhappiness."[61] The article concludes by noting that "voters who are under thirty-five were far more willing to forgive [. . .] The more mature readers possibly read into their opinions their own feelings as parents, and their judgment of themselves in the event of similar life circumstances."[62]

The *Photoplay* editors were careful to articulate the difference in reader opinion in terms of life experience. They could have readily pitted one generation against another, but the magazine's success was rooted in its cultivation of a broad, cross-generational audience. To clearly single out an age group and its opinion as the minority could read as offensive and

purposely alienating. *Photoplay* thus turned to tactics typically employed with star profiles, rationalizing and pseudo-psychologizing the divide by conjuring specific reasons why older readers would be more likely to vote against Bergman's return. Through this lens, the older readers emerge as loving parents rather than musty moralists.

Finally, *Photoplay* emphasizes that the readers' opinion — their *verdict* — mattered. The call for submissions made this clear, but the publication of results further endorsed it. In framing the results in terms of a court case, *Photoplay* rendered all of its readers as jury members, entrusting with deciding the fate of the star "on trial" for her transgressions. Each reader, and each vote, would be given to *Ingrid Bergman herself*. The framing device bolsters the perceived power of both reader and the magazine that "hosted" the trial. What's more, the "trial" allowed the magazine to collect valuable information concerning reader opinion of scandal and its successful redressment, which would provide a template for the handling of scandal in the future.

Regardless of reader "verdict," Bergman did not come back, at least not then. Instead, she remained in Europe until the end of her relationship with Rossellini in the mid-'50s. In the end, just as Bergman's star image was at its core rooted in simplicity, so too was the scandal that afflicted her. She may have fallen for an untraditional man, but she still wanted to marry him and have his children. The attempts to explain and narrativize her actions were, as a result, quite simple as well. Her image was, at bottom, borne of the integrated studio era, when images were more simple. Even in the case of a resistant star like Bergman, a single entity still controlled the discourse. Which is all to say that magazines could "handle" Bergman, could even handle the scandal. It was the new generation of stars — and Brando and Monroe in particular — who would prove far more difficult for the gossip industry to process.

"THAT MAD MAN MARLON"

After receiving tremendous critical acclaim in Tennessee Williams's play *A Streetcar Named Desire*, Brando moved to Hollywood to appear in *The Men* (1950). The roles that followed — in the film version of *Streetcar* (1951), *Viva Zapata!* (1952), *Julius Caesar* (1953), *The Wild One* (1953), and *On the Waterfront* (1954) — garnered Brando four Oscar nominations in as many years and established him as Hollywood's foremost talent. Trained in the Method and intensely emotive, few actors have so thoroughly affected the American understanding of acting and masculinity.[63] But Brando was no star, at least not in the traditional Hollywood sense of the word. He refused to enter into a studio contract; as such, he was free to cultivate his own image which quickly became known as that of "rebel," grouping him with the likes of James Dean and Montgomery Clift.[64]

Unlike Mitchum and Bergman, Brando never weathered any revelation of scandal. Rather, "Brando" *writ large* — his entire image — was scandalous. He flaunted his ungroomed appearance; he slighted Parsons and Hopper; he refused to sit for interviews with fan magazines altogether. Brando was the first amongst a new brand of stars, and his success would encourage others, such as Mitchum, to take their careers and publicity into their own hands or at least out of the hands a studio and into that of an agent, subject to their personal choices.

The fan magazines and other publicity outlets struggled to process Brando. His behavior — drumming at jazz clubs late into the night, reveling in his refusal to live like a star — was so consistently off-beat that authors could not even write it off as a publicity stunt. Of course, Brando, for all of his iconoclasm, understood that shunning publicity was publicity in and of itself. In the early 1950s, he was just as savvy in his manipulation of the press as any studio star. He simply played the game by entirely different rules, with no coach, personal trainer, or real

teammates to assist him. As uncooperative as Brando was, he had captured the attention of the nation, and the gossip outlets simply could not afford to ignore him. The industry's attempts to process Brando highlight the changes in what stars should look like, how they should behave, and the extent to which they could be compelled to cooperate with the production of their own images.

Photoplay first covered Brando following the release of *The Men* in 1950. Maxwell introduced Brando in "That Mad Man Marlon," illuminating the themes of his "anti-image" that would remain constant through the course of the '50s. He heeded none of the codes of acceptable star behavior; he cared little for others' opinion of him; he disliked money and had small regard for possessions; he had no affection for traditionally attractive girls; he followed his desire for pleasure wherever it led him. According to Maxwell, Brando's "apartments change but never vary; one room with a bed that is rarely made up, a chest of drawers about as empty as his closet […] Not long ago, Marlon ran an advertisement in the *Saturday Review of Literature* — 'Apartment Wanted - Any Old Thing.'"[65] His taste in women is untraditional: he "drives the glamour species slightly crazy because he ignores them," preferring "girls he meets at drama classes and in offices."[66]

While Maxwell clearly possesses a wealth of inside information concerning Brando, it is equally clear that he did not participate in the profile, forcing the author to rely on second-hand information and setting a precedent for future Brando *Photoplay* articles. The article also signals the growing ubiquity of references to Brando's "dirty dungarees" — a clothing choice that would define him and his attitude towards Hollywood. Jeans, at the time, were for the working class or teenagers — certainly not for a professional, especially not a Hollywood star. His refusal to don appropriate Hollywood attire symbolized a general disrespect for the institution and its accepted

way of doing things, and mentioning the dungarees quickly became shorthand for highlighting the star's uncooperativeness.

By the summer of 1952, Brando had become, according to Hopper, "Hollywood's New Sex Boat."[67] Hopper opens her article by citing the conflicting yet fervent opinions concerning the star. When she mentioned his name over coffee, it "instantly spread over my living room like a flash fire. 'Marlon Brando? He's exciting! Marlon Brando! He's coarse, he's vulgar! Marlon Brando, *he's male!*'"[68] Hopper also rehearses Brando's infractions, evoking his taste in clothing ("a habitual costume of Levis, a t-shirt, moccasins without socks"), his taste in women ("the girls he met at the studio offices or the girls who served him in shops"), and his indifference to public opinion ("When asked to pose for a cover for *Life* he laughed, 'Why would I want to do that?'"). Hopper does confess that he has "a rugged individuality" and is "always intensely male and vital, quite a contrast to some of the young men - 'cold rice pudding youths' I call them — who have sought to establish themselves as the screen's lovers."[69]

Throughout the article, Hopper implicitly aligns Brando's renegade actions with sex appeal. While part of Brando's image as a "rugged individual" and "pure man" was rooted in his picture personality — and that of Stanley Kowalski in particular — it was also linked to his refusal to cow to the demands of the business. In an era with growing anxiety over conformity and the numbing side effects of mass suburbanization, Brando's ability to break free from consumerism, manipulation, and middle-class concerns signified something vital, pure, "exciting" and "male."[70] It is possible to understand that desire in hindsight, but at the time, Hopper only knew that Brando had touched a nerve, exciting the nation.

In 1954, gossip outlets began to spread word of Brando's so-called "reform." Even the *New York Times* reported that, "thanks to the vigilance" of hounding gossip columnists, "an

exemplary new domesticated Marlon Brando has replaced the surly old savage one."[71] But as Brando announced his engagement to Josiane Berenger following a whirlwind romance and donned a tuxedo to accept his Oscar for *On the Waterfront*, he hardened his resolve against the fan magazines. His reticence forced *Photoplay* to rely on the testimonies of friends and co-stars, such as Ernst Jacobi, Harry Belafonte, and Karl Madden, in order to offer new coverage of Brando.[72] This early version of the write-around — in which an author elided his/her lack of access to the star by relating a story through the words of friends, family, and other intimates — was, at the time, relatively rare. But as more and more stars followed Brando's lead over the course of the 1960s, the practice would become commonplace.

In 1955, Brando's antipathy towards the industry intensified, culminating in self-proclaimed ban on "fan magazine stories and pictures."[73] While filming *Guys and Dolls* (1955), he informed the film's producers that he would "pose for pictures only under the stipulation that they cannot be used for fan magazines."[74] *Photoplay* protested, arguing that when Brando had first come to town, he was desperate for publicity, hiring a "top-notch publicity man who taught him how to make colorful copy." "In those days," *Photoplay* claims, "he was not at all averse to accepting the honors bestowed upon by fans," but now "he is too great to believe in the magazines through which you honor him."[75] *Photoplay* thus rallies its readers against Brando, commanding "we think it's about time that you, the fans, know this about Brando and that you did something about it. After all, Marlon's too big to be invisible — and too big a star to be ignored. So if you don't like his new role of invisible man, either, send in the attached coupon."[76]

Photoplay had trained its audience to think that their opinion mattered and attempted to wield that belief against the obstinate Brando. I do not, however, think that the editors actually believed that reader opinion would sway the star. He was already too obdurate and, even more

importantly, too powerful to need the assistance of the magazines who, as the article admits, could not simply ignore him. The article thus functions as a passive-aggressive jab. By requesting reader feedback, it lays Brando's attempts at star-production bare. While previous articles in the magazine had emphasized that Brando's antics were *not* for publicity, this one destabilizes those claims. In essence, the article elucidates Brando's attempts at star production, even as it highlights *Photoplay*'s participation in that production. At the same time, the article allows *Photoplay* to scold Brando, empower its readers, and paint itself the victim. In months to come, *Photoplay*'s indignation dispersed and it resumed its coverage of Brando, yet it was increasingly forced to resort to gimmicks. In early 1956, for example, the magazine ran an astrologer's reading of Brando's career and future.[77]

By 1957, Brando's appeal began to fade: "he isn't on the popularity polls anymore," one *Photoplay* article reported, "and the magazines don't write about him anywhere near as often as they used to."[78] His reputation for difficulty on set was beginning to grow; he had endured a set of unremarkable films [*Desiree* (1954); *Teahouse of the August Moon* (1956)] and he was blamed for expensive delays in the production of *Sayonara* (1957). *Photoplay* attributed his decline to an inability to find "any real joy or happiness" and interpreted his turn to Eastern culture and increasingly bizarre public statements concerning "the brotherhood of man" as a "search for faith."[79] In Truman Capote's biting *New Yorker* profile of the same period, however, the actor emerged as capricious, indulgent, and thoroughly unbalanced, revealing the troubled underside to the alluring masculine image.[80] "That Mad Man Marlon" seemed an increasingly appropriate label.

Brando exemplified Hollywood's conflicted attitude to stars in the 1950s. Stars were problematic and uncooperative, driving up production times and budgets with ever-escalating

salaries and demands for script and story approval. Yet they still retained essential, albeit problematics, assets. Even as studios began to rely more heavily on pre-sold products, such as biblical epics and popular book adaptations, stars were the most intensely pre-sold properties, with the potential to draw in a massive audience on the promise of his/her name alone. Yet for every massive hit, the star could leverage his/her newfound power for a bloated failure. For every *On the Waterfront*, a *Sayonara* might milk the studio dry.

Brando's ability to maintain a high level of visibility without cooperating with the fan magazines was a testament to the power of his performances and the willingness of the *New York Times, Washington Post, Time Magazine* and other outlets to review, critique, and otherwise publicize him. These publications had a different production culture from the fan magazines. Instead of relying on "plants" and stories penned by press agents, they relied upon their writers and investigative efforts to write on stars and entertainers. While they often published interviews and profiles produced with the participation of their subjects, they were also well-practiced in the reporting on events, phenomenons, and national crazes, including those sparked by film stars, without cooperation from the stars themselves.

To cover Brando and other uncooperative stars, the fan magazines thus adopted components of this other, less dependent mode of production. They interviewed more willing co-stars, speculated about his love life, consulted "experts" to interpret decisions, and wrote in the second-hand, write-around style more at home in outlets offering criticism and commentary. In this way, the difficulties in processing Brando's star image illuminated the weaknesses in the fan magazine *modus operandi*, yet encouraged editors to adopt new, flexible, and innovative journalistic tactics to deal with the reality of stars liberated from promotional obligations.

"HOLLYWOOD VS. MARILYN MONROE"

According to Billy Wilder, Marilyn Monroe had "flesh impact" — a rare quality, shared, in Wilder's opinion, only with the likes of Clara Bow, Jean Harlow, and Rita Hayworth. "Flesh impact" meant having "flesh which photographs like flesh. You feel you can reach out and touch it."[81] Whether "flesh impact" or primal sex appeal, Monroe possessed something indelible. But she also had business acumen, personal volition, and a startling awareness of her own image. She also made her studio, 20th Century-Fox, a tremendous amount of money when predictable hits were few and far between. As classic stars failed to draw audiences, she seemed to promise that new ones could still be cultivated.

But Monroe was no meek studio star. She tested the weakened boundaries that governed star contracts in the early '50s and fled the studios, formed her own production company, and chose her own projects. Monroe also acted out what mattered to people in the 1950s — which is to say, she acted out sex — and did so in a manner that seemed to both heighten and soothe anxieties about sexuality during the era. As a result, she also proved a singular challenge to gossip outlets with little experience in processing an image of which sexuality was so forthrightly a part.

Monroe's image was designed for fan magazine exploitation. Under contract to 20th Century-Fox during her rise to stardom, she participated in myriad interviews, confessionals, and domestic "exposes" between 1952 and 1955. But the current of sexuality that ran through the Monroe image stymied attempts to fit her within the dominant paradigm of female stardom of the time, exemplified by domesticated mothers Janet Leigh and Esther Williams. When Monroe declared her desire to be a normal housewife, these words still emanated from her perpetually

half-open mouth, with her trademark breathy voice, and from her body, all of which were laden with the signification of sex.

For stars such as Bergman, the sudden visibility of sexuality created scandal. For Monroe, sexuality was the very foundation of her star image, and her studio, her agent, and Monroe herself had few qualms in forwarding it. Of course, Monroe's image was not without precedent. Bow, Hayworth, Dorothy Lamour, Veronica Lake and Betty Grable all had sex or "It" as the crux of their images. But as Richard Dyer has convincingly argued, Monroe's image reconciled innocence and sexuality — the amalgamation of the virgin *and* the whore — in a manner that seemed to arouse and appease sexual appetites without guilt or shame.[82] How, then, could the historically conservative fan magazines profile her? How could they alter their attitudes towards explicit sexual desire? Clearly they could not decry and condemn the most popular star in the nation. Instead, they employed three rhetorical tactics: 1) pseudo-psychologizing Monroe's behavior, using details of her past to explain her current actions; 2) framing her as an object to be pitied — the lonely flip side of life as a sex object; 3) explicitly dividing Monroe into parts, one sexual, the other innocent.

Monroe spent most of her life traded amongst foster homes and extended family, dropping out of school to marry the son of a next-door-neighbor, posing for cheesecake photos, and divorcing before eventually scrapping her way to stardom. In 1949-1950, with the help of boyfriend/William Morris agent Johnny Hyde, Monroe landed a string of bit parts. These roles culminated in a small but significant turn in *All About Eve* (1950) in which she played "a breathless if somewhat dim-witted" actress, willing to "make herself available to nice men if it might advance her career."[83] The part established the ground note of Monroe's image and picture personality, with roles over the next five years providing variations on the selfsame theme.

Hyde was dying, but he set the table for the feast that would be Monroe's future. He arranged private acting lessons and fostered connections between the star and the gossip industry, leading to a *Photoplay* profile in September 1950. In December, Hyde secured Monroe a seven-year contract with Fox. He would pass away before the end of the month, but Monroe's future was secure. Her film roles remained, for a time, unremarkable, yet her exposure was growing. *Stars and Stripes*, the magazine for soldiers in Korea, "featured a Monroe on its front page every day"; she appeared on the covers of *Look* and *Life*; she was declared "the Nation's number one sex thrill" and "the hottest topic of conversation in Hollywood."[84] Various "Monroe-isms" — "I never suntan because I love feeling blonde all over" — were in wide circulation. A high-profile romance with Joe DiMaggio made her a fixture in the gossip columns, theater owners billed her over classic stars Ginger Rogers and Cary Grant, and Fox raised her loan-out rate to $100,000 a picture.[85] Wherever the Monroe name and image appeared — on the screen, in the pages — profits followed.

Conflicted reactions to Monroe's explicit sexuality immediately began to circulate. A *Photoplay* reader complained that Monroe "seems to think that the only way she can get noticed is to shed her clothes," yet conceded "I don't mean that she should hide those gorgeous curves [. . .] but she doesn't have to disrobe to appeal to us men. I enjoy looking at her, who wouldn't?"[86] Like many other fans, this reader was drawn to Monroe yet uncertain about her overt violation of social mores. His internal struggle mirrors that of the fan magazines, whose editors found themselves attracted to the readership and profits that Monroe copy would offer even as the star's image tested standards theretofore set for their publications and their subjects.

Photoplay addressed the conflict head-on with a November 1952 article ostensibly penned by Monroe herself. While *Photoplay* had published treatments of the star in the past, this article

would form the foundation of its future treatment, attempting to establish the star as vulnerable, lonely, and afflicted by a troubled past. "I Want Women to Like Me" addressed animosity towards Monroe on the part of female fans — presumably because they disliked the way that the star affected the men in their lives.[87] Monroe confesses, "I have never, in my whole life, had but two women who were outright kind to me. I had no family life in my childhood [. . .] I was separated from my mother not long afterward."[88] She proceeds to play to female readers' concerns about her actions, admitting,

> Up until now, I've felt that as long as I harmed no other person and lived within the bounds of good taste, I could do pretty much as I pleased. But I find that isn't really true. There's a thing called society that you have to enter into, and society is run by women. Until now, I've never known one thing about typical 'feminine activities.' … All I know about cooking is how to broil a fine steak and make a good salad. That, you see, is all any man wants for dinner [. . .] I don't sew. I don't garden. But now [. . .] I'm beginning to realize that I'm missing something.[89]

That missing something: female friendship.[90] Through its use of biographical tragedy and lack, "I Want Women To Like Me" invites readers to think of Monroe as a human, not simply the object of their husbands' attraction. *Photoplay* and Fox understood that Monroe's appeal was lopsided. For her to become a star (and not just a sex object), Monroe's intrinsic sexuality needed to be complimented with an authentic sense of humanity, supported by a plea for protection and affection. This strategy would structure Monroe's sustained success.

1953-1954 marked the height of Monroe fever — a symptom of America's fascination with sexuality, but also a catalyst for that fascination. Monroe appeared in a quick succession of films [*Niagara* (1953), *Gentleman Prefer Blondes* (1953), and *How to Marry a Millionaire* (1953)] that refined her unique brand of innocent sex appeal. She was the American Film Distributors' Top Star, *Photoplay*'s Most Popular Female Star, and, in January 1954, the wife of DiMaggio.[91] 1953 was also "a year of extraordinarily compelling significance in the history of sexuality." Kinsey

released his report on women, inciting "the most massive press reception ever accorded a scientific treatise," and *Playboy* published its first issue, with Monroe on the cover.[92]

The cover featured a picture of Monroe as Grand Marshall of the 1952 Miss America Parade, wearing a dress with a plunging neckline that sparked intense debate at the time and, as Dyer points out, evoked a brazen, guilt-less sexuality that *Playboy* wished to associate with its fledgling brand. But the money shot was the magazine's very first centerfold, with a reprint of Monroe, posing nude, from the "Golden Dreams" calendar. Monroe had posed for art photographer Tom Kelley in 1948 and the photos were subsequently reprinted in numerous calendars, of which "Golden Dreams" was the most famous.

When Monroe's star rose in the early '50s, she was identified as the model in the photos. Unlike Hayworth, Bow, or Grable, whose pasts had been scrubbed clean via studio and fan magazine discourse, Monroe's stint as a "cheesecake" and nude model proved that she had been involved with the more tawdry manufacture of sex appeal. But Monroe's response to the revelation became as fundamental to her image as the photos themselves. Instead of attempting to avoid or deny the rumors, Monroe answered them head-on. She had been "hungry," was "three weeks behind with [her] rent," and had insisted that Kelley's wife be present. "I'm not ashamed of it," she averred. "I've done nothing wrong." Hopper would deem this forthright defense "The Monroe Doctrine."[93]

Once the potential for scandal had dissipated, Monroe declared "I'm saving a copy of that calendar for my grand-children," admitting "I've only autographed a few copies of it, mostly for sick people. On one I wrote 'This may not be my best angle.'"[94] As Dyer explains, the crux of Monroe's image in the wake of the photos — the notion that sex was "guiltless, natural, not prurient" — was the exact philosophy proselytized by *Playboy*.[95] Moreover, by confronting the

rumors, Monroe had transformed a potentially scandalous story into one that further bolstered her image. The salience and generalized acceptance of Monroe's defense forced the gossip industry to cultivate and further this very narrative of innocence, muting objections to such behavior on the part of its subjects.

Several months later, *Photoplay* was at the center of another brewing scandal. Monroe had made an ostentatious entrance at the magazine's Gold Medal Awards Dinner, attended by the who's-who of Hollywood. According to Graham, Monroe "wriggled in, wearing the tightest of tight gold dresses. While everyone watched, the blonde swayed sinuously down the long room to her place on the dais. She had stopped the show cold."[96] Joan Crawford denounced Monroe's "burlesque show," claiming "Kids don't like Marilyn…because they don't like to see sex exploited."[97] Gossip outlets exploited the battle between two very different types of stars. Parsons called Monroe, promising to tell "her side of the story," cultivating sympathy for the star by relating the details of her difficult childhood and emphasizing her hurt feelings.[98]

Photoplay capitalized on its role as "host" of the feud, sensationalizing the story under the title "Hollywood vs. Marilyn Monroe."[99] In what had become standard '50s *Photoplay* style, the article offers a tantalizing hook of scandal but then proceeds to contextualize the offense in terms of Hollywood history, woven with distinct threads of nostalgia and moralism. The author allegorizes the confrontation as an "offensive" against Monroe, with Crawford as its "general." [100] In a cunning twist, the author compares Monroe's behavior to Crawford's during her "hey-hey girl" days in the late 1920s. In this light, Monroe's "offenses" are not all that offensive while Crawford was hypocritical and out of line.[101] The resultant portrait was of an old fashioned and embittered star criticizing the newcomer who had stolen the limelight, with the gossip industry firmly on the side of the new star. *Photoplay* thus managed both to exploit the controversy and

ingratiate itself to Monroe. The cover of the following issue heralded its "SCOOP!" of intimate details of the DiMaggio/Monroe romance. It would prove a harbinger of things — and strategies on the industry's part — to come.

In 1954, Monroe and *Photoplay* attempted to domesticate the star's image, framing her romance and eventual marriage to the conservative DiMaggio as evidence of a profound personality change.[102] At home, where their lives were "as ordinary as a couple's in Oklahoma City," Monroe "slips into an apron and begins opening cans and getting things ready for the big fellow's dinner, which she cooks with her own hands."[103] Another article proclaims Monroe's marriage philosophy which called for "candlelight on bridge tables, budgets and dreaming of babies" — simple, plain, domesticity.[104] "'Joe doesn't have to move a muscle,'" Monroe boasted, "'Treat a husband this way and he'll enjoy you twice as much.'"[105] This "New Monroe Doctrine" was in stark contrast to the "Monroe Doctrine" of old.

But the rhetorical masonry of the fan magazines buckled under the weight of Monroe's preexisting image. Even as Monroe proclaimed her newfound domesticity, during their honeymoon to Japan, she detoured to Korea to appear in ten shows for 100,000 eager servicemen. As she and DiMaggio played house for *Photoplay*, Monroe privately complained that "'Joe's idea of a good time is to stay home night after night looking at the television.'"[106] A few months later, Wilder invited the press to observe the filming of the now-famous "air vent" scene for *The Seven Year Itch* (1955). Hundreds of spectators surrounded the shoot as Monroe's dress flew high, infuriating DiMaggio and incited a yelling match between him and Monroe. The two would divorce soon thereafter, confirming the unspoken speculation that sexuality and domesticity could not coexist. Such incompatibility recalled Monroe's 1951 *Modern Screen* confessional, "Who'd Marry Me?", in which the star admitted that any man "would have to hold

me awfully tight to keep me home. Because I'm a girl who wants to go places." Monroe concluded that "right now, I have a one-track mind — screen work."[107] That "one-track mind" had stymied the most sincere attempts, including those of the gossip industry, to domesticate her image.

Monroe extended this new-found independence to her career, leaving Hollywood and Fox in early 1955. It was not the first time that Monroe had rebelled against her studio. In late 1953, she had balked when Fox cast her in yet another derivative song-and-dance film, *The Girl with the Pink Tights*. Eager to appear in more serious roles, a furious Monroe refused to report to the set. Fox put her on suspension but soon negotiated a deal: Monroe would appear in the mediocre *There's No Business Like Show Business* (1954) in exchange for the coveted lead in *The Seven Year Itch*. After *Itch* wrapped production, Fox persisted in type-casting her. Acting on the advice of photographer and confidant Milton Greene, Monroe retreated to New York, and "The New Marilyn" was born.

"The New Marilyn" attempted to shed her one-note image and cultivate her acting skill, sitting in on classes at the Actor's Studio. With Greene's assistance, she self-incorporated, forming Marilyn Monroe Productions. When *The Seven Year Itch* was released to massive box office success, Monroe had the upper hand against her former studio. She renegotiated her contract, leveraging profit participation for her production company and the authority to reject any script or director, accentuating the shift in the power from studio to star. Many doubted the sincerity of Monroe's ambitions, but her performance in *Bus Stop* (1956), the first film under her new contract, received the best notices of her career. During this period, Monroe began her relationship with playwright Arthur Miller, eleven years her senior. Never before had a major star attempted to renovate her image so radically on her own accord.

The gossip industry struggled to reconcile this "New Marilyn" with the Monroe of old. The incongruities were immediately apparent. To announce her production company and new direction, she called a press conference in New York wearing a full-length white ermine coat, evoking the sumptuousness that had structured the "Old" Monroe image.[108] When asked for names of potential projects she would like to pursue, Monroe replied "'*The Brothers Karamozov.*'" She meant, of course, that she would like to play the lead *female* role of Grushenka, for which Monroe would be an appropriate fit. Her response, however, was (perhaps maliciously) misinterpreted, and word spread that she wished to play one of the brothers. A Monroe-ism also began to circulate concerning her production company: "'I feel so good,'" Monroe purportedly told a wardrobe assistant, "'I'm incorporated, you know.'"[109] The press persisted in reading Monroe's old image into her new one, effectively suggesting the "New Marilyn" as little more than publicity stunt.[110]

The other press tactic was to explain Monroe in terms of dueling images. The *Saturday Evening Post* divided Monroe into three: "the sex pot Monroe" of the early 1950s, "the frightened Marilyn Monroe" from the tales of her childhood, and "the New Marilyn Monroe," a "composed and studied performer."[111] *Photoplay* distinguished between Monroe "The Legend" and Monroe "The Woman." The Legend was draped in furs and jewels, responsible for "Monroe-isms," and "robbed The Woman of friends, love, and peace of mind" while The Woman was "shy, hesitant, removed, and terribly lonely."[112] Monroe's marriage to Miller offered The Woman a third chance at happiness, but only if she can put the "frankenstein-like Legend" to rest and "The Woman also becomes a mother." Both magazines were performing a form of star analysis, underlining her image's polysemy and availability for widely varied interpretations and exploitations. *Photoplay*'s description of the warring sides of Monroe's personality proved

prophetic as Monroe continued to struggle against the images created for her, growing increasingly difficult to work with and separating from Miller before succumbing to a drug overdose in 1962.

The bifurcation of Monroe's image served a distinct ideological purpose. Neither magazine — or the gossip industry at large — could render sexuality and intelligence, or sexuality and happiness, in conjunction. If both needed to separate out Monroe's explicit sexuality in order to approach her as a human, it follows that overt sexuality is not human, or at least not part of the human *woman*. Despite Monroe's popularity, gossip outlets struggled to mediate Monroe's image under traditional terms, let alone endorse it, without siphoning off and condemning the sexual component. The resultant image was that of an aspiring domestic who was lonely and desperate to shed her sexuality, yet completely at odds with the behavior and demeanor that characterized Monroe in action.

Monroe challenged the status quo for appropriate female behavior, but she also confronted, even flaunted, the rules that had theretofore governed acceptable behavior for a star contracted by a studio. At the same time, she proved an immensely lucrative asset to a struggling studio and leveraged her resultant power to her artistic and financial advantage. Coupled with a handful of similar deals negotiated during this period, Monroe's negotiations helped further tip the balance of power from the studios to the stars.

Considered together, the cases of Mitchum, Bergman, Brando, and Monroe illuminate the changing means of handling star transgressions, as well as the increasing value and power of the star as the studios shifted their mode of production. Yet all four stars had uncommon relationships to the studios. An independent producer (Selznick) and RKO, which was undergoing a shift of ownership to Howard Hughes, shared Mitchum's contract; Selznick also

held Bergman's contract and "loaned" her services to several studios over the course of her career; Brando was never bound to a single studio. Monroe was under contract to Fox, yet it was for a relatively short period of time, and as demonstrated above, she leveraged her box office draw against the studio's attempts to control her and her roles.

Which is all to say that these stars, and their relation to the studios, were atypical during this era. Unlike Williams, Debbie Reynolds, Rock Hudson, or dozens of other stars of the period, none of the four had a long term relationship with a single studio. If Mitchum or Bergman were MGM properties, for example, the handling of their actions would have been different. When Brando refused to do fan magazine interviews for *Guys and Dolls*, he was not angering the studio brass but the film's independent producer Samuel Goldwyn, with whom he had no long-term relation or responsibility. These four stars had, for various reasons, eluded complete control by the studios. As a result, their various transgressions and rebellions were able to rise through the growing cracks in the system. At the time, these stars were the exception. Yet as subsequent chapters make clear, over the next decade, their strategies would become the rule.

"TELLS THE FACTS AND NAMES THE NAMES"

The gossip industry's fumbling attempts to mediate Monroe's image illuminated its inability to represent or confront sexuality. Another magazine, much more savvy and willing to *exploit*, rather than *sunder*, the expression of sexuality would capitalize on this inability throughout Monroe's career. This magazine, cleverly named *Confidential*, rose to prominence the month it placed Monroe and the promise of revelation of scandal, on its cover. Up to that point, no mainstream magazine dared publicize, let alone speculate, on the truly scandalous actions of public figures. Yet *Confidential* did not even consider itself a fan magazine, and refused to play by the unspoken rules of American journalism.[113] By exploiting that which *Photoplay* and the rest of

the fan publications were too shy, or too cowed, to cover, it heralded a new mode of reportage and production culture within the gossip industry — *scandal mongering* — that would soon infiltrate even the most historically conservative of gossip publications.

Garish, brassy, and brimming with punning innuendo, *Confidential Magazine* pledged to "tell the facts and name the names" — who was having sex with whom, who was covering up hidden pasts, who was secretly flaunting societal rules.[114] *Confidential* suggested, to an audience that quickly reached over four million an issue, that sexual and moral deviance ran rampant in Hollywood. In this way, it not only countered the wholesome narratives of the traditional gossip outlets but rendered them absurd. The mercurial rise of the magazine bespoke a hunger for this type of coverage. However, in 1957, "The Trial of the 100 Stars" forced *Confidential* publisher Robert Harrison to sell off the magazine, effectively neutering it in the process. Yet its success forced mainstream publications to alter their tone, style, and subject matter to fit readers' taste for smut and scandal and precipitated the expansion of weekly tabloids in the 1960s.

In just four years, *Confidential*'s mode of production established a new norms for the collection, mediation, and consumption of gossip. By extension, it altered the way that Americans consumed stars, along with attitudes towards and expectations of them. In 1958, the gossip and film industries were still dependent upon one another. But the relationship demanded reconfiguration: as the fan magazines broadened their focus to singers, television personalities, and president's wives, the studios were using television and other media to sell their product and continued to decrease their investment in fan magazine advertisements. Ultimately, *Confidential* marked the end of close cooperation between the two industries and signaled the beginning of the slow demise of the classic fan magazine.

The narrative of *Confidential* has been well-rehearsed.[115] Harrison started as a newsboy at the *New York Graphic,* a tabloid where he ran errands for Walter Winchell. Trained in the trade, he began publishing various "cheesecake" magazines when paper rations lifted following World War II. But the profits were negligible, and Harrison was under pressure from the postal service, which threatened to revoke his mailing permit for mailing obscene material. Harrison had watched his staff mesmerized by the Kefauver Hearings, which put members of the organized crime syndicate, including Frank Costello, on the stand for the nation to see. The public's unabashed fascination prompted Harrison to start a magazine based entirely on finding such inside stories, exposing that which would otherwise be "confidential." The magazine that followed traded on the unsettled moral milieu of the '50s, specializing in stories that insinuated homosexuality, miscegenation, and aggressive female sexuality. No public figure, in or outside of Hollywood, was immune. As Harrison proclaimed, "once a person becomes a public character, he belongs to his public insofar as what he does. They've made him. Hence, in my opinion, he's fair game, because his income is coming from the very fact that he's a public property."[116]

With an initial run of 150,000, *Confidential* peppered its coverage of public figures with stories of "racketeering, consumer scams, and political peccadilloes."[117] But it was not until the third issue, dated August 1953, that *Confidential* would begin focus on the movie business, placing Monroe on the cover. The headline promised to reveal "Why Joe DiMaggio is Striking Out with Marilyn Monroe!" and circulation jumped to 800,000.[118] Importantly, the story named DiMaggio's rival for Monroe's affections as 20th Century-Fox co-founder Joe Schenck, whom Monroe supposedly referred to as "daddy." The attack underlined *Confidential*'s willingness to alienate anyone in Hollywood, no matter their stature. As Henry E. Scott concludes, the Monroe

story "was a clear sign that *Confidential* wasn't going to play by the unwritten rules" that had theretofore governed the gossip industry.[119]

Harrison was savvy to the power dynamics at play in the gossip industry and immediately attempted to curry favor with Winchell. In April 1953, *Confidential* featured a condemnation of Josephine Baker, who had recently bad-mouthed the columnist. Winchell was delighted and, as a result, "plugged the magazine so hard that, for a time, it was rumored he had money it."[120] Harrison also recognized *Confidential*'s role as an alternative to the sappy, moralizing fan magazines and fluffy profiles in popular magazines. In the January 1955 issue, for example, *Confidential* queried "Does Desi Really Love Lucy?" The accompanying article detailed a tryst between Arnaz and a well-known Hollywood call-girl in 1944 when the two were separated. The issue hit newsstands the very same month that the cover of *Look* featured "Lucy and Desi, TV's Favorite Family!"[121]

With Winchell's endorsement and established role as fan magazine "antidote," sales boomed. The July 1955 issue sold 3.7 million copies, setting the record for single-issue sales and outpacing both *Reader's Digest* and *Ladies Home Journal* in newsstand purchases.[122] *Confidential*'s production culture was rooted in Harrison's keen understanding of both the art of titillation and of the specifics of libel law. Harrison knew that the magazine had to deliver on its promise of scandalous revelation not available through agents or studio publicity departments. Instead of cultivating a relationship with the studios, Harrison gleaned content through a network of informants, ranging from bell-check boys to call-girls who provided the foundational truths for stories that he and his staff would then flesh out with the trademark *Confidential* style.[123] In this way, Harrison supplanted the need for studio cooperation — and the resultant obligation to toe the publicist line — with his own stream of information and content.

The *Confidential* house style was laden with elaborate, pun-inflected alliteration and allowed stories to *suggest*, rather than *state,* the existence of scandal.[124] Headlines such as "Orson Welles, His Chocolate Bon Bon and the Whoopsy Waiter" provided the push-off for what Harrison termed "the toboggan ride" of each article.[125] The result was also consistently amusing, and if content was *funny*, it did not, strictly speaking, "appeal to prurient interests" — a basic qualification for a product to be labeled obscene and one that help protect the magazine in court. While not all *Confidential* stories were strictly true, they were rooted in fact. Frank Sinatra did not eat Wheaties to maintain his stature as "Tarzan of the Boudoir," as *Confidential* alleged in 1956, but he did sleep with a call girl who related her experience, breakfast and all, to one of the magazine's reporters.[126] The Wheaties added a humorous touch and provided the most opaque of covers for the real scandal, namely, the presence of a young woman, not his wife, at the breakfast table.

The *Confidential* mode of production depended heavily on documentation. If Harrison could prove that an event, however scandalous, had occurred, the magazine would be immune from libel. He thus pursued the "state-of-the-art" in audio and visual surveillance technology.[127] He hired private investigators across the globe who both unearthed dirt themselves and confirmed stories brought in by paid tipsters, requiring informants to sign affidavits attesting to the veracity of their claims.[128] Harrison's lawyer also advised Harrison to "print slightly less than [he] knew," thus maintaining leverage over stars, studios, and agents who might sue. According to Frank Otash, one of Harrison's long-time investigators, "what *Confidential* actually published was 'pretty thin stuff' compared to what he and others had turned up."[129] Most famously, Harrison forged a deal with agent Henry Willson, trading proof of Rock Hudson's homosexuality for an expose of Rory Calhoun's convict past.[130]

As documented by Mary Desjardins, *Confidential*'s aesthetics and narrative methodology relied heavily on "practices of recycling, combining, [and] recombining."[131] Authors employed established fact, such as Fatty Arbuckle's murder trial, to infuse speculative stories with smutty undertones. These "recycled" narratives "contained important omissions, combined several events that had no causal relationship," and employed aesthetic flair, including inflated font size, loud color, and exclamation marks to add further suggestiveness.[132] *Confidential*'s trademark blue, red, and yellow color scheme was paired with black and white photos, cropped to fit the narrative's need, to form a sort of smut decoupage.

Confidential also perfected the now-common practice of recaptioning an unflattering or unkempt photo of a celebrity to substantiate the innuendo of the article.[133] As Desjardins notes, these "composite truth stories" possessed enormous "truth value," presenting "plausible chronologies for events that had a ring of truth about them because readers had probably encountered some aspect of them before in newspaper gossip columns, traditional fan magazines," etc.[134] The gossip industry had historically depended on the studios to provide photos of the stars, whether on set or at leisure. With no studio ties or obligations, *Confidential* was forced to rely on haphazard, unauthorized photographs. It just so happened that most were unflattering and easily manipulated to serve the magazine's narrative purpose, with a certain aesthetic quality infinitely more suggestive of a dirty secret revealed. The demand for this type of unauthorized photos — the more suggestive the better — would soon transform into paparazzi culture as we know it.[135]

Proof of *Confidential*'s salience was in its imitators. Dozens of publications and hundreds of "one-shots" soon promised disclosure in the *Confidential* vein, variously named *Uncensored, Inside Story, On the QT, Behind the Scene, Hush-Hush,* and *Exposed.*[136] From 1955-1956, several mainstream

newspapers and magazines profiled the magazine, with Harrison boasting that *Confidential* would fight, and win, any suit against it. It also sparked virulent condemnation. A lawyer representing several targets of the magazine proclaimed, "These magazines are a major threat to the movie industry [. . .] We'll hound them through every court in the country [. . .] We'll sue the publishers, the writers, the printers, the distributors. We'll even sue the vendors. This smut is going to stop."[137]

Harrison, however, simply ignored such threats. Lacking immediate recourse, the studios, stars, and fan magazines attacked *Confidential* in other ways. In July 1955, *Photoplay* responded to the incursion of *Confidential* and the scandal magazines. Carefully avoiding the mention of names, *Photoplay* suggested that the scandal magazines' tactics were unethical and manipulative; their readers, naive and impressionable. To this end, the editor related the story of a reader whose daughter "had read your excellent article telling about Burt Lancaster's wonderful home life." But "now she brings into our house an article that makes Mr. Lancaster appear to be a man of little principle." The daughter did not know what to think. "'I've told her not to believe the article,'" the mother relates, "'but the disillusionment still stands.'"[138] The daughter was responding to a discourse that undercut that proffered by *Photoplay*, and the resultant disappointment and confusion typified the reaction to *Confidential* and its ilk.

Photoplay reassured readers that "We must all admit the existence of good and bad persons, even the coexistence of good and bad in individuals. Motion picture stars are no exception." With that said, "much has been written that is pure speculation [. . .] Even more has been written revealing scandal, dug from the archives of the past, which has no bearing on the person the star has become." *Photoplay* concludes by advising the mother that "if you seek to believe the worst in human beings, motion-picture stars *not* excluded, you can find something bad

in everyone. But there is more good than bad in most everyone, and on this truth *Photoplay* stands."[139] In other words, the fan who seeks such information — who purchases *Confidential* — will be disillusioned. But the fan who wants to know "the good"— the "truth" of the star's soul — will stick with *Photoplay*.[140]

Photoplay also offered counter-arguments for specific narratives propagated by *Confidential*. In 1955, Mitchum sued *Confidential* for $1 million over his depiction in the story "The Nude Who Comes to Dinner."[141] In "Robert Mitchum, The Man Who Dared To Sue," *Photoplay* affirmed the star's gumption and motivation: "The stake, Bob says, is not money — it's the honor and good name of his family."[142] Like several other stories of the period, the *Photoplay* article emphasizes the lack of collective action on the part of Hollywood. Most stars hesitated to even issue formal denials of stories lest they "dignify" the claims in the process. In reality, the stars had little recourse. Some were scared of what other rumors *Confidential* might spread while others understood that a suit would only further propagate the scandal. Most suits were also likely to fail. As Desjardins explains, "if the celebrity had not suffered pecuniary loss, the libelous material had to be defamatory on its face. In other words, it must be defamatory without the need of innuendo or inducement" which, in the case of *Confidential*, would be extraordinarily difficult to prove.[143]

Other stars simply used *Photoplay* to generate counter-discourse. In "Kim Novak: Stabbed By Scandal," the star "personally asked *Photoplay*" to tell the "true story" of her discovery.[144] Novak had been "scandalously painted as an ambition-driven girl who let nothing stand in the way of a film career," e.g. *Confidential* suggested that she had slept her way to the top. The *Photoplay* article countered the *Confidential* narrative with Novak's version of the "hard work" that led to her career, straining to frame scandal-mongers as "envious, grasping men" who "cowardly

hide behind an anonymous name."[145] For *Photoplay*, the true scandal was not Novak's behavior but the nefarious men who conjured such material and spread their lies to the reading public.

When *Confidential* exposed Calhoun's past as a juvenile delinquent, the star used *Photoplay* to proclaim his reformation, employing a narrative of growth and moral maturation with which *Photoplay* was well-versed. The article, published under Calhoun's name, advised young delinquents to steer clear of trouble. "I have since had to pay the price for every mistake I ever made," Calhoun admits. "I had to bring shame and suffering to the people who were close to me when I admitted to the world that I had a prison record."[146] Calhoun then psychologized his behavior, explaining that a single mother raised him and, as such, he lacked guidance. However, at nineteen, he found God, made friends with a chaplain, paid off his debt to society, and was baptized in a train station bathroom. Calhoun emerged thoroughly reformed as affirmed by the close of the article, which encouraged readers to "BE SURE TO SEE: RORY CALHOUN IN COLUMBIA'S UTAH BLAINE!" *Photoplay*'s counter-*Confidential* methodology was straightforward: never dignify the magazine with a mention but provide a space in which the stars could apply *Photoplay*'s trademark victim psychology and moralizing to form a defense *and* encourage readers to patronize the star's films. While some readers certainly bought such defenses, *Confidential*'s numbers continued to surge. Scandal sold, but moralizing defenses also sold — just not nearly as well.

Harrison continued to gain gumption, braving to proclaim "Why Liberace's Theme Song Should Be Mad About the Boy" on the cover of its July 1957 issue.[147] In response, the studios purportedly began to plot a counter-attack, funneling money into a secret fund to be directed towards the California Attorney General with the explicit purpose of "getting [*Confidential*] at all costs."[148] Yet it was a war without visible armies. The stars could not see the enemy, and never

knew when, or how, it would strike. Many decried it, but it was impossible to ignore. As Humphrey Bogart famously quipped, "Everyone in Hollywood reads *Confidential*, but they say the maid brought it in the house."[149]

This frustration came to a head in May 1957 when a California Grand Jury indicted *Confidential* and its subsidiaries with conspiracy to commit libel and publish obscene material.[150] Harrison had long been anticipating this trial and fired back with gusto. The defense subpoenaed hundreds of stars — many fled the state, but others were forced to take the stand and officially associate themselves with the magazine and scandal.[151] *Confidential* stories were read aloud in court to uproarious effect and the jury took a field trip to Graumann's Theater to watch a re-enactment of the "alleged love scene" between Maureen O'Hara and a "Latin Lothario." The trial was front page news in Los Angeles and reported across the nation. Ironically, the "serious" press was now propagating these stories, camouflaged as "legal reporting."[152] In other words, the trial became a media spectacle, putting *Confidential*'s name was on everyone's lips. The plan to silence the magazine and mute its allure had not only failed but backfired.

Highlighting the magazine's investigative and surveillance tactics, the prosecution charged that *Confidential* not only dug up old scandals but set the stage to create new ones. In other words, *Confidential* was a "smut factory," generating scandal so that it could then cover it.[153] *Confidential's* defense team crafted a cunning response, claiming that *Confidential*'s material was far less "morally contaminating" than other publications, including the bestselling novel *Peyton Place*. Indeed, the magazine was actually performing a public service, broadcasting the "truth" about stars, whereas the studios had long inveigled the public with falsified fairy tales, inspiring millions to worship "false idols." In essence, *Confidential* was charging that the studios had long

"systematized" their own star discourse. Now that they were no longer able to do so, they attacked the publication that had stolen and improved upon their tactics.[154]

The jury hung after fifteen days of deliberation and the judge declared a mistrial. A retrial was scheduled, but both sides decided to instead strike a deal, with studios and stars agreeing to drop charges if *Confidential* ceased covering them. In May 1958, Harrison sold the magazine to other interests. The magazine still looked the same, but the stripping of its investigative arm compromised the production culture that had generated wit, bite, and actual exposes. The success of *Confidential* was just one of several cultural and industrial events (the Kinsey Reports, the launch of *Playboy*, and the "Miracle Case") that made sex and sexual transgressions visible in the 1950s, proving that they could be mediated for mass consumption. In the years to follow, the traditional fan magazines would gradually incorporate elements of *Confidential*'s style and content in an effort to capitalize on the increasingly mainstream market for scandal coverage.

CONCLUSION

The *Confidential* trial capped a ten-year period in which several stars became progressively resistant to the traditional mode of production within the gossip industry. As the decade drew to a close, it was increasingly clear that the old ways of mediating stars were no longer cost effective. The stars refused to offer their services and interviews for free and, apart for a handful of stars still under long-term contract, the studios no longer forced them to do so. What *Confidential* offered, then, was a new mode and culture of production. The mainstream publications may have decried the expose magazines, calling their tactics unethical and their content salacious. Yet *Confidential* showed that the fan magazines need not be dependent upon the struggling film industry, and the fate of the studios need not be the fate of the magazines. Instead of bemoaning

the reality of the stars' private lives, they could profit from it; instead of ignoring bad behavior, they could put it on the cover. They could also learn from *Confidential* in terms of potential content, expanding coverage to an endless supply of television, music, and political celebrities.

This style fit the new generation of fan magazines readers, who apparently cared less for moral tales and more for photos of young singing sensation Pat Boone. *Photoplay* would term its new approach a "broader look" to the future of stardom. As the next chapter shows, this "broader look" — specifically, the type and tenor of stories mainstream magazines were willing to publish — would guide the gossip outlets through the 1960s and '70s amidst their increasing de-articulation from the film industry. In this way, *Confidential* built on the wreckage of star scandals and scandalous star images following the war, establishing a foundation on which future publications, whether *The Enquirer* or *TMZ*, could flourish.

[1] Ronald L. Davis, *The Glamour Factory* (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1993), 112. For more on Cagney's legal battles with Warner Bros., see Paul McDonald,*The Star System* (New York: Wallflower, 2000), 62-66

[2] As Thomas Schatz and several other scholars have pointed out, the divestment of the studios' exhibition arms, meant to curb the studio's monopoly over the production, distribution, and exhibition of films, ultimately reaffirmed their hegemony over the industry as the independent exhibitors intended to benefit from divestment became even more beholden to studio product. See Thomas Schatz, *Boom and Bust: The American Cinema in the 1940s* (Scribner: New York, 1997), 232-239.

[3] Schatz, *Boom and Bust*, 335.

[4] For an excellent and thorough history of Hollywood agenting during the classic era, see Tom Kemper, *Hidden Talent: The Emergence of Hollywood Agents* (University of California Press: Berkeley, 2010).

[5] See Frank Rose, *The Agency: The William Morris Agency and the Hidden History of Show Business* (Harper Collins: New York, 1995); Connie Bruck, *When Hollywood Had a King: The Reign of Lew Wasserman, Who Leveraged Talent Into Power and Influence* (New York: Random House, 2003).

[6] Jane Wilkie, *Confessions of an Ex-Fan Magazine Writer* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1981), 75.

[7] Jane Gaines, *Contested Culture: The Image, The Voice, and the Law* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 163.

[8] Cited in Gaines, *Contested Culture*, 163.

[9] Gaines, *Contested Culture,* 164.

[10] Kemper notes that Stewart's deal was not the first of its kind, or even that anomalous. Several similar profit sharing deals had been negotiated for actors up to that point. See Kemper, *Hidden Talent*, 235.

[11] Of course, "creative" Hollywood bookkeeeping practices often ensured that an otherwise successful film would be listed as unprofitable; if the star had arranged for a small salary plus a percentage of the film's net, he/she would be left with little.

[12] As Schatz points out, the studios increasingly relied on tested (and aging) stars in the postwar period rather than cultivate new talent that had not been tested with audiences. See Schatz, *Boom and Bust*, 353-368.

[13] Tino Balio, *United Artists: The Company Built By the Stars* (University of Wisconsin Press: Madison, 1976), 74.

[14] Denise Mann, *Hollywood Independents: The Postwar Talent Takeover* (University of Minnesota Press: Minneapolis, 2008), 4.

[15] Gaines, *Contested Culture*, 150.

[16] Danae Clark, "Actors' Labor and the Politics of Subjectivity: Hollywood in the 1930s," (PhD dissertation, University of Iowa, 1989), 219.

[17] Gaines, *Contested Culture*, 150

[18] See Christine Becker, *It's the Pictures That Got Small* (Middleton: Wesleyan University Press, 2008).

[19] Michele Hilmes, *Hollywood and Broadcasting: From Radio to Cable* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1999), 111.

[20] Susan Murray, *Hitch Your Antenna to the Stars: Early Television and Broadcast Stardom* (New York: Routledge, 2005).

[21] Mann looks to the case of Martha Raye, whose "step down" facilitated guest appearances by true stars, as she took on the role of the "fan," providing a point of identification for audience members. See Dennis Mann, "The Spectacularization of Everyday Life: Recycling Hollywood Stars and Fans in Early Television Variety Shows," in *Star Texts*, ed. Jeremy G. Butler (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1991), 333-360.

[22] "Readers Inc.," *Photoplay*, September 1952, 4.

[23] "Readers Inc.," *Photoplay*, July 1952, 4.

[24] A film version of *Beloved Infidel* was released in 1959 starring Gregory Peck and Deborah Kerr.

[25] In the tabloids, Graham cultivated what she referred to as a "salable mediocrity." See Albin Krebs, "Sheilah Graham is Dead at 84; Wrote Hollywood Gossip Column," *The New York Times*, Nov 19, 1988, 10.

[26] *Ibid.*.

[27] Sam Kashner, *The Bad and the Beautiful: Hollywood in the Fifties* (W.W. Norton: New York, 2002), 295.

[28] *Ibid.*

[29] *Ibid.*.

[30]As Adrienne McLean has theorized, scandal does not simply "upset the status quo temporarily." It may function as "a wedge-driver" that "reveals the vulnerability of the main 'primary social frameworks' that together make up what we so often refer to as dominant ideology." David A. Cook and Adrienne McLean, eds, *Headline Hollywood* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2001), 5.

[31] See Adrienne McLean, "The Cinderella Princess and the Instrument of Evil: Revisiting Two Postwar Hollywood Star Scandals," in *Headline Hollywood*, eds. David A. Cook and Adrienne McLean (New Brunswick: Rutgers Press, 2001), 163-189.

[32] "Film Arrests Spark Drive on Narcotics," *Washington Post*, September 3, 1948, 4.

[33] For discussion of Mitchum's star image, see Terry Teachout, "The Star Who Didn't Care: The Paradox of Robert Mitchum," *Commentary Magazine*, May 2010, 59-62; Peter Babiak, "A Few Short Notes on Robert Mitchum," *Cineaction* (1997), 40-45; Alvin Marill, *Robert Mitchum on the Screen* (South Brunswick, New Jersey: A.S. Barnes, 1978).

[34] "Mitchum's Career Safe Despite Jail," *Los Angeles Times*, February 10, 1949, A2.

[35] *Ibid.*

[36] Robert Mitchum, "Do I Get Another Chance?", *Photoplay*, May 1949, 42.

[37] *Ibid.*

[38] "Mitchum Reunites with Family," *Photoplay*, August 1949, 46.

[39] Florabel Muir, "What Now for Mitchum?" *Photoplay*, August 1949, 98.

[40] *Ibid.*

[41] Elsa Maxwell, "I Call It Scandalous," *Photoplay*, June 1950, 33.

[42] Mitchum's actions once released from his contract emphasize the extent to which his repentance was engineered by the studios — as *Photoplay* complained in 1954, "Why Can't Mitchum Behave?" See James Hunt, "Why Can't Mitchum Behave?" *Photoplay*, March 1954, 50.

[43] For a detailed analysis of Bergman's star image before the scandal, see McLean, "The Cinderella Princess"; David W. Smit, "Marketing Ingrid Bergman," *Quarterly Review of Film & Video*, 22.3 (2005): 237-255; Ora Gelley, "Ingrid Bergman's Star Persona and the Alien Space of *Stomboli*," *Cinema Journal* 47.2 (2008): 26-51; Edward Buscombe, "Ingrid Bergman: The Face of Authenticity in the Land of Illusion," in *What Dreams Were Made Of: Movies Stars of the 1940s*, ed. Sean Griffin (New York: Routledge, Forthcoming 2011).

[44] See McLean, "The Cinderella Princess,"172.

[45] See Donald Spoto, *Notorious: The Life of Ingrid Bergman* (New York: Citadel Press, 1970).

[46] McLean, "The Cinderella Princess," 173.

[47] *Ibid.*

[48] See Adrienne McLean, *Being Rita Hayworth* (New Brunswick, N.J. : Rutgers University Press, 2004).

[49] Joseph Steele, "The Ingrid Bergman Love Story," *Photoplay*, December 1949, 36-39; 94-95.

[50] Hughes understood it would be a tough sell and tried to use salacious advertising to attract curious viewers. Posters read "This is IT!" to evoke the star and director's illicit association. Despite boycotts, RKO was able to book all 300 prints of the film; after three weeks, however, it became increasingly difficult for those prints to find a home.

[51] McLean, "The Cinderella Princess," 177.

[52] Maxwell, "I Call It Scandalous," 33.

[53] Louella Parsons, "Hollywood Divorces Aren't My Fault," *Photoplay*, August 1950, 52.

[54] "The Other Side of the Hollywood Story," *Photoplay*, August 1950, 31.

[55] Charles Saxon, "How About Hollywood Morals?" *Modern Screen*, September 1950, 25; 54-60.

[56] *Ibid.*

[57] *Ibid.*

[58] Elsa Maxwell, "Do You Want Ingrid Bergman Back?" *Photoplay*, August 1952, 39.

[59] *Ibid.*

[60] "The Verdict on Ingrid Bergman: 4 to 1 in Her Favor," *Photoplay*, December 1952, 56.

[61] *Ibid.*

[62] *Ibid.*.

[63] See Christina Prendowska, "Marlon Brando as the Auteur," *Literature Film Quarterly* 7.1 (1979): 120-126; Richard Schickel, "Hostage of His Own Genius," *Time*, July 12, 2004, 73-74; A.O. Scott, "Marshaling His Talent To Battle His Fame," *New York Times*, July 3, 2004, B7-B9.

[64] Brando's star image is surprisingly undertheorized. See Prendowska, "Marlon Brando as the Auteur"; Susan White, "Marlon Brandon: Actor, Star, Liar," in *Larger than Life: Movie Stars of the 1950s*, ed. R. Barton Palmer (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2011), 165-193; James Naremore, *Acting in the Cinema* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1988), 193-210.

[65] Elsa Maxwell, "That Mad Man Marlon," *Photoplay*, December 1950, 40.

[66] *Ibid.*

[67] Hedda Hopper, "Hollywood's New Sex Boat," *Photoplay*, July 1952, 62.

[68] *Ibid.*.

[69] *Ibid.*.

[70] These anxieties were soon articulated in film (*The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit,* 1956) and print (*Revolutionary Road,* 1962),

[71] Cecilia Ager, "Brando in Search of Himself," *New York Times*, July 25 1954, SM24.

[72] See Karl Madden, "My Friend Brando," *Photoplay,* September 1954, 61; "Pursuit of Happiness," *Photoplay,* March 1955, 39; Ernst Jacobi, "A Character - But Still Brando," *Photoplay*, June 1955, 62. Through these testimonies, the magazine attempted to infuse his portrait with a potential to enter the domestic sphere: he loves to horse around with kids; he will settle down when he finds the right woman

[73] "The Visible Invisible," *Photoplay,* September 1955, 54.

[74] *Ibid.*.

[75] *Ibid.*.

[76] *Ibid.*.

[77] Charles Knefler, "Luck Is A Lady for Brando," *Photoplay*, February 1956, 41.

[78] Nicholas Gray, "Search for Faith," *Photoplay*, June 1957, 60.

[79] *Ibid.*

[80] Truman Capote, "The Duke in His Domain," *The New Yorker*, November 9, 1957, http://www.newyorker.com/archive/1957/11/09/1957_11_09_053_TNY_CARDS_000252812.

[81] P. Martin, "New Marilyn Monroe," *The Saturday Evening Post*, May 5 1956, 25-7.

[82] Richard Dyer, *Heavenly Bodies* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1986), 19-67.

[83] Frank Rose, *The Agency: The William Morris Agency and the Hidden History of Show Business* (Harper Collins: New York, 1995), 148.

[84] Hedda Hopper, "Marilyn Soared to Stardom on Torrid Monroe Doctrine," *Los Angeles Times*, May 4, 1952, D1; John Crosby, "Anyway, the Men Like Her Fine," *Washington Post,* November 4, 1952, 31.

[85] Florabel Muir, "What Hollywood's Whispering About," *Photoplay*, December 1952, 14.

[86] "Readers Inc.," *Photoplay*, June 1952, 8.

[87] According to Monroe, women regularly charged her with "'putting the country in a worse state than it's in,'" accusing her "'of startling all the rapes.'" Crosby, "Anyway, the Men Like Her Fine," 31.

[88] Marilyn Monroe, "I Want Women to Like Me," *Photoplay* November 1952, 58.

[89] *Ibid.*

[90] *Photoplay* aimed to make it clear that Monroe's plea had the desired effect, publishing a letter from one reader who proclaimed "I hope…this opens the eyes of some of those jealous women gossipers who do nothing but criticize her…Marilyn, this is one gal who loves you." "Readers Inc.," *Photoplay* January 1953, 18.

[91] Dyer, *Heavenly Bodies*, 27.

[92] *Ibid.*.

[93] Hopper, "Marilyn Soared to Stardom," D1; Dyer, *Heavenly Bodies*, 31. *Photoplay* emphasized that Monroe did not have to come forward and address the rumors; "libel laws being what they are…so long as Marilyn didn't admit she had posed for the photo, reporters would have thought twice before identifying her." But Monroe, unashamed, "just had to tell the truth." Sheilah Graham, "Why Gentleman Prefer Blondes," *Photoplay*, June 1953, 52.

[94] P. Martin, "New Marilyn Monroe: Here She Talks About Herself," *Saturday Evening Post*, May 12 ,1956, 26-8.

[95] Dyer, *Heavenly Bodies*, 31.

[96]Graham, "Why Gentleman," 52.

[97] Samantha Barbas, *The First Lady of Hollywood: A Biography of Louella Parsons* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2005), 316.

[98] Monroe would show her gratitude to Parsons for the rest of her career, favoring the her over Hopper and granting her the exclusive on the Monroe/DiMaggio marriage the following year.

[99] Hildegarde Johnson, "Hollywood vs. Marilyn Monroe," *Photoplay*, July 1953, 42.

[100] *Ibid.*

[101] The author does caution Monroe that "it's foolish to try founding either a marriage or a movie career on sex attraction alone."

[102] DiMaggio was notoriously private, making *Photoplay*'s exclusive access to their home all the more sensational. See George Armstrong, "The Private Life of Joe and Marilyn (Are Joe and Marilyn Married?)," *Photoplay*, December 1953, 40.

[103] Armstrong, "The Private Life of Joe and Marilyn," 40.

[104] Sidney Skolsky, "260,000 Minutes of Marriage," *Photoplay*, August 1954, 52.

[105] *Ibid.*

[106] Lesley Anne Dick, "I Just Want to Be Wonderful: The Cultural Legacy of Marilyn Monroe," (PhD dissertation, University of Iowa, 1985), 104.

[107] Marilyn Monroe, "Who'd Marry Me?," in *The Best of Modern Screen* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1986), 208.

[108] "Studio Claims Marilyn Is Still Under Contract," *Los Angeles Times*, January 9, 1955, A1.

[109] Liz Wilson, "Marilyn's Glamorous Good-By," *Washington Post*, Apr 3 1955, K22.

[110] Other sources chose to authenticate the "New Marilyn," most forthrightly through description of her new self. This new Monroe was "liberated, happy, cooperative, friendly, and relaxed"; her "shy, tense, little-girl voice" was gone, replaced with a woman who radiated "confidence and aplomb." A copy of *Ulysses* on Monroe's coffee table, marked with dialogue notes for future rehearsals, provided further proof of the shift.[26] The "Monroe Doctrine" was repurposed to describe Monroe's new attitude towards movie-making: "'I don't want to be the highest paid movie star in the world,'" she proclaimed. "'I want memories of having been a real actress.'" See Dorothy Manning, "The Woman and the Legend," *Photoplay*, October 1956, 58; Martin "New Marilyn Monroe," 26; Cecil Smith, "Has Marilyn Monroe Really Changed?" *Los Angeles Times*, April 8, 1956, D1.

[111] Martin, "New Marilyn Monroe," 25.

[112] Manning, "The Woman and the Legend," 58.

[113] The shift towards scandal reportage was not limited to the United States. The 1950s also marked the expansion of a British market "for confessional features in which celebrities would discuss their sexual exploits"; the British popular press began to demand information concerning the private lives of the monarchy, "challenging the culture of secrecy surrounding the monarchy." See Adrian Bingham, *Family Newspapers? Sex, Private Lives, and the British Popular Press, 1918-1978* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), Chapter 7.

[114] The phrase "Tells the facts and names the names" served as *Confidential*'s subtitle and appeared on the cover of each issue published under Harrison's tenure.

[115] See Mary Desjardins, "Systematizing Scandal: *Confidential Magazine,* Stardom, and the State of California," in *Headline Hollywood*, eds. David A. Cook and Adrienne McLean (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2001), 206-231; Samuel Bernstein, *Mr. Confidential: The Man, His Magazine & The Movieland Massacre that Changed Hollywood Forever* (New York: Walford Press, 2006); Henry E. Scott, *Shocking True Story: The Rise and Fall of Confidential* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2010).

[116] "Fair Game: Interview with Robert Harrison," *Writer's Yearbook*, 1956, 20.

[117] Desjardins, "Systematizing Scandal," 208.

[118] Scott, *Shocking True Story*, 6.

[119] *Ibid.*

[120] Scott, *Shocking True Story*, 23; Richard Gehman, "Confidential File on *Confidential*," *Esquire*, November 1956, 145.

[121] Scott, *Shocking True Story*, 55.

[122] J. Howard Rutledge, "Gossipy Private Peeks at Celebrities' Lives Start Magazine Bonanza" *Wall Street Journal*, July 5, 1955, 1.

[123] Harrison would pay $4500 for a big article, $1000 for an outline, and $500 for a picture.

[124] The fan magazines did this as well, especially before Hays instituted the White List. See Janet Staiger, "The Romances of Blonde Venus: Movie Censors versus Movie Fans" in *Perverse Spectators: The Practices of Film Reception* (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 77-92 for more on how *Photoplay* used innuendo in its coverage of Marlene Dietrich's private life in the early '30s.

[125] "We went someone to get interested right away," Harrison revealed, "and not get off that toboggan until they are through." See "Fair Game" 23.

[126]Bernstein, *Mr. Confidential*, 88-90.

[127] Desjardins, "Systematizing Scandal," 206-231.

[128] Scott, *Shocking True Story,* 38; Desjardins, "Systematizing Scandal," 210.

[129] Scott, *Shocking True Story,*" 40.

[130] See Robert Hofler, *The Man Who Invented Rock Hudson: The Pretty Boys and Dirty Deals of Henry Willson* (New York: Caroll & Graff, 2005).

[131] Desjardins, "Systematizing Scandal," 211.

[132] *Ibid.*

[133] *Ibid.*.

[134] Desjardins, "Systematizing Scandal," 212.

[135] As elaborated in Chapter Five, paparazzi culture first rose to prominence in Italy during the postwar period.

[136] Records of scandal and smut publications are notoriously poor, and I have been unable to locate specific publication dates. All began publishing at some point around the launch of *Confidential*. Harrison was familiar with the desire for "second-tier," even pulpier knock-offs, and promoted his own iteration, *Whisper*, to attract an additional 700,000 in sales. See Desjardins, "Systematizing Scandal," 208; J. Howard Rutledge, "Sin & Sex: Gossipy Private Peek At Celebrities' Lives Start Magazine Bonanza," *Wall Street Journal*, July 5, 1955.

[137] Jack Olson, "Smeared Stars Fight Back," *Chicago Sun-Times*, October 22, 1955, 6.

[138] Ann Higgenbothom, "Scandal in Hollywood," *Photoplay*, July 1955, 29.

[139] *Ibid.*

[140] This moral is reproduced in MGM's 1956 film *Slander*, whose narrative rotates around a scandal magazine obviously modeled after *Confidential* and the effects of an expose on a young Hollywood star. The film labors to frame the scandal magazine, its tactics, and its morals as unaccountably evil. To ensure the viewer understands the evil at work, the publisher's mother kills him at film's end, and the star takes to television to proselytize against the purchase of similar magazines. The film clearly blamed the public for the continued propagation of scandal; the impetus was upon the reader to stop supplying the demand to which publishers catered. By asking readers to judge *themselves* instead of judging the stars, both *Photoplay* and *Slander* were attempting to distract from the actual revelations. See Anthony Slide, *Inside the Hollywood Fan Magazine: A History of Star Makers, Fabricators, and Gossip Mongers*. (Jackson, MI: University Press of Mississippi, 2010), 181.

[141] The story describes Mitchum stripping naked at a party, "dressing himself" with ketchup, and declaring himself a hamburger.

[142] David Albright, "Robert Mitchum: The Man Who Dared to Sue," *Photoplay*, January 1956, 36.

[143] "Under a special civil code in California law, which exemplified the degree to which the first amendment concept was held sacred, if the judge or jury believed that the article was susceptible to an innocent as well as defamatory interpretation, it was highly likely that the ruling would be in favor of the defendant." Desjardins, "Systematizing Scandal," 208-209.

[144] Tex Maddox, "Kim Novak: Stabbed by Scandal," *Photoplay*, February 1956, 54.

[145] *Ibid.*

[146] Rory Calhoun, "Look, Kid, How Stupid Can You Be?" *Photoplay*, February 1957, 48.

[147] Liberace would successfully sue *Confidential* for libel.

[148] "Laxity of Studios Charged in Trial," *New York Times*, August 27, 1957, 43.

[149] "Scandal Sheet in Court," *New York Times*, August 18, 1957, E2.

[150] Coupling the two charges was no mistake. As Desjardins explains, "Yoking the charge to conspiracy to publish obscene material worked as contaminating factor in two ways. It put the case into a social arena in which the magazine might be judged as a moral contaminant in society (as moral crusade discourses usually described obscenity) and it 'contaminated' the libel charge, potentially predisposing jurors to find the magazine's whole operation sleazy and therefore to fine its stories malicious in intent and its reporting of private acts outrageous and of no social value." Desjardins, "Systematizing Scandal," 220.

[151] The stars were subpoenaed to testify as to their whereabouts and veracity of the stories printed in *Confidential*, not because they had leaked stories to the magazine itself.

[152] Jack Smith, "'Love Scene Re-Enacted," *Los Angeles Times*, August 17, 1957, 1.

[153] Desjardins, "Systematizing Scandal," 221.

[154] *Ibid.*

PART TWO

EXPANSION, RETRACTION, REGROUPING
1958 - 1980

CHAPTER THREE
INDUSTRY BREAK-UPS
1958 - 1961

In early September 1958 the "Widow Todd," also known as Elizabeth Taylor, was photographed spending late evenings in New York night clubs with Eddie Fisher. Fisher was not only the best friend of Taylor's late husband but also half of the "cutest couple in Hollywood" — the other half being the perennially pig-tailed Debbie Reynolds. Over the course of the next few weeks, Taylor, Fisher, and Reynolds became players in a melodrama fit for the screen, slotted into the roles of dark temptress, weak protege, and cherubic mother. Fisher and Reynolds divorced in May 1959, allowing Taylor and Fisher to marry soon thereafter. But the months between were filled with speculation: was Taylor blaspheming the memory of her dead husband? Would Debbie grant Eddie the divorce? Could Debbie love again? As both the popular and fan press were eager to proclaim, not since the early 1920s, when Mary Pickford and Douglas Fairbanks divorced their respective spouses in order to wed each other, had such a scandal rocked Hollywood.

At first, Taylor, Fisher, and Reynolds offered sporadic cooperation with the fan magazines, relying on them to tell each star's "side of the story" and cultivate support. Yet the three could or would not provide enough copy to satiate what quickly became a voracious demand for scoops, exclusives, and everlasting streams of content. To feed this demand, fan magazine editors and authors increasingly relied upon the "write-around" tactics reserved for Marlon Brando and other uncooperative stars, conjuring stories, positing hypotheticals, and extrapolating from interviews with other, more mainstream publications. As the magazines altered their mode of production and ceased to rely on the stars and their press agents as a source of material, covers and headlines became increasingly bombastic.

The subjects of this coverage took expected umbrage, and in short order, Taylor, Fisher, and Reynolds all ceased to grant the fan magazines access. The result was a downward spiral. The less stars cooperated, the more the fan magazines had to create material; the more the magazines created, the less willing stars were to cooperate. By 1961, the only figures granting access to the fan magazines were young Hollywood hopefuls and a handful of television and music sensations. The cooperation between the two production cultures, in which the studios and the stars' agents would exchange photos, interviews, and exclusives for free publicity, was effectively over.

In this way, the Taylor/Fisher/Reynolds triangle and its coverage precipitated profound changes in the way that the fan magazine procured and published information concerning the stars. The magazines had long alluded to titillation and scandal but almost always in a genteel, sublimated, and/or scolding manner. In the late '50s, the stars were increasingly brazen in their public activities, and cultural mores — what was and was not acceptable to do and talk about — were in flux. Appetites for scandal had been thoroughly whetted by the success of *Confidential* which, in summer of 1958, was enjoying front-page publicity across the nation as the defendant in the "Trial of 100 Stars." Over the course of the three years between the Taylor/Fisher/Reynolds scandal and the inauguration of John F. Kennedy in January of 1961, it became not only acceptable to air scandal on the cover of the fan magazine, but expected, even necessary. In this way, the production culture of the fan magazines came to resemble that of the scandal and celebrity publications, affecting a profound shift in the dynamics of the gossip industry at large.

To effect this shift, the magazines relied on several tactics refined by *Confidential*. Most importantly, they expanded their net of coverage: music stars, television personalities, and political figures all began to make regular appearances. The magazines changed their aesthetics

and form, as long-form profiles were traded in for short, image-heavy features, and impromptu and unauthorized photos took the place of posed publicity shots. Finally, the magazines' general tone became increasingly bombastic, especially in the flagrant headlines that began to dominate the covers of each publication. Instead of protecting and defending the stars, effectively creating an intimacy between them and movie audiences, the magazines accused and decried the stars, employing a style characterized by florid rhetoric and ample use of exclamation points.

Whether the studios and stars cut the fan magazines loose or the fan magazines freed themselves of studio dependency, the salient fact remains: the relationship between the two production cultures changed dramatically. Stars publicly decried the magazine's tactics while cultural critics framed the magazines as bastions of all that was wrong with modern society. As the magazines continued to shift their focus to "stars" un-affiliated with the film, the studios began to doubt the magazines' efficacy in promoting film viewership, culminating in continued cuts in the number of advertising dollars directed towards the magazines. The very understanding that had bound the fan magazines to the studios — that those who read the magazines were those who attended films — was undermined. The ascendant paradigm: those who read fan magazines read more fan magazines. By hooking readers in scandalous melodrama, fan magazines assured repeat readership in the same manner as serial narratives and soap operas.

Operating within this melodramatic mode, the magazines thrived throughout the 1960s and early 1970s. As Chapter Four suggests, their success throughout this period was rooted in diversification: in the topics they covered (and devotion to Jacqueline Kennedy in particular) but also in the way the parent companies of the magazines followed overarching industry trends towards merging and diversifying holdings. By the early 1970s, however, competition from *The*

National Enquirer and *People*, coupled with increasing postage rates and the fragmenting of the mass magazine audience, dragged the fan magazines to their eventual demise. Chapter Five thus explains how the editors of the next generation of gossip publications, typified by *The National Enquirer* and *People,* defined their publications *against* the scandalous, garish image of the '60s and '70s fan magazines, propagating and popularizing a form of "personality journalism" that would spread far beyond the traditional boundaries of the gossip industry. In other words, the move on the part of the fan magazines to the fringes of respectability allowed other forms of gossip — blanched and framed as stories about *personalities*, rather than stars — to infuse mainstream news and media. Ultimately, the magazines' strategy for mediating stars and celebrities flamed bright, burned out, and in so doing fertilized the ground for the new "crop" of gossip germinating below.

To reach this conclusion, this chapter looks to two interconnected components that contributed to the shifts in the gossip industry between 1958 -1961: the changing value of stars within Hollywood and the re-codification of form, tone, and aesthetics in the major fan magazines sparked by the treatment and ramifications of the Taylor/Fisher/Reynolds scandal.

THE INDUSTRIAL VALUE OF STARS

As established in previous chapters, the gossip industry does not operate in a vacuum; rather, it is always imbricated within the shifting value and definition of "star" within both Hollywood and American culture. During the late '50s and early '60s, the industry refined several practices that not only illuminated the changing value of stars within the system but predicated the transformation of the late '60s, when the studios underwent a massive wave of conglomeration and endured an industry-wide recession. These practices — full investment in telefilm production, the cultivation of "cadillac" pictures, and the exploitation of film libraries — helped the studios counter ever-dropping audience numbers.

By 1955, studio attempts to co-opt television were at an impasse. The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) had denied a petition for a special "theater band" that would have provided a frequency for Theater TV and permitted audiences to view theater content from home for a fee. Paramount soldiered on with its fight for Pay TV through the early 1960s yet was blocked at every turn. The main objection to studio investment in television technology was that the studios would take over and monopolize broadcasting the same way they had the film industry. In hindsight, reactionary measures to keep the studios out of television infrastructure backfired as the studios simply moved their attention to telefilm production. Within a few short years, the studios dominated the industry, marginalizing the very entities the FCC had labored to protect.[1]

Hollywood approached television production from several angles. In 1952, the Screen Actor's Guild (SAG) granted MCA, the most powerful talent agency in Hollywood, a special blanket waiver. The waiver, negotiated by SAG president and MCA-client Ronald Reagan, exempted MCA from prohibitions against agents entering into production. For MCA, the waiver was a tantamount to a license to print money. The agency had long encouraged its clients to incorporate themselves for tax purposes, thus becoming co-producers (and profit participants) in their own work. Now MCA's production arm, Revue, could partner with their clients' production companies and stack shows with MCA talent. As a result, stars affiliated with MCA — including Reagan — benefited handsomely.[2] At the same time, Hollywood production entities negotiated long-term deals with the networks. In 1954, Disney partnered with ABC in a deal that traded investment in Disneyland for a stream of programming that would include *The Mickey Mouse Club*, *Zorro,* and *Disneyland.*

By the end of 1956, Hollywood supplied 70% of primetime programming. The percentage would only continue to grow, especially as a struggling NBC forged an agreement with MCA/Revue in 1957. According to apocryphal legend, NBC allowed Revue complete control over its schedule and new programming — a tale that not only emphasized the power of MCA in the late '50s but the extent to which the networks had come to depend on Hollywood-based telefilm production.

But the telefilm producers lacked a clear vision of how to exploit their products — especially stars — over the long term. Here, the case of Warner Bros. is instructive. In 1956, Jack Warner appointed Christopher Orr as head of Warners' main TV unit and allocated $1 million for a new TV building.[3] By investing in telefilm at a large scale, Warners hoped to garner enough profit to float the studio's film production arm. Orr immediately instituted several policies straight from the studio era. He refused profit participation for any talent; he assigned producers to various shows rather than allowing them to produce shows on their own. As Christopher Anderson explains, Orr's strategy was a creative catastrophe. Designed to cut costs and increase standardization, what it actually cut was innovation and artistry.[4] Nevertheless, Warners received an order for eight primetime shows in 1958, making the studio the top producer of television programming.[5]

Yet the Orr mode of production proved unsustainable — in large part due to the refusal to accept the new paradigm of star autonomy.[6] Frustrated with the power-hungry stars of both film and television, Warners had reactivated its studio-system reputation as the least star-friendly of the studios.[7] Standard practice was to sign hungry, low-level talent at bargain basement prices. Once signed, the stars could not renegotiate their contracts, even when their careers and value took off. These "all-encompassing contracts" allowed the studio to exploit a star across both

television and film as it saw fit. If a star refused, he or she was simply cut loose. When Clint Walker, star of the hit Western *Cheyenne*, attempted to rewrite the terms of his contract, Warner Bros. replaced him, confident that any male actor of a certain ilk could replace him.[8] In Walker's case, Warners was right.

Yet when James Garner, star of *Maverick*, found himself in a similar situation, the studio was not as lucky. Garner was tremendously popular, had gained increased visibility in a handful of films, and soon demanded profit participation on top of his measly $250 weekly salary. Warners balked and fired Garner, but Garner called the studio's bluff and left television for good. Unlike Walker, Garner proved fundamental to the success of *Maverick*. Following his departure, ratings plummeted. Orr's strategy was too dependent on a single product (the hour-long drama) in a single market (ABC) with a single mode of production, and, in the end, it backfired. The strategy likewise neglected the new paradigm of stardom. Once a star was made, he or she could demand, and receive, profit participation and/or salaries commensurate with his or her growing worth. The lesson of Warner Bros. under Orr was that studios certainly could make money in telefilm production, but they would need to figure out how to balance creativity, control of the stars, and studio oversight.

United Artists (UA) was the only studio to harmonize all three of these components. While UA was focused on producing movies, their template for producer-partnership and distribution would be emulated by those in film and telefilm production. Unlike Warners's attempt at complete control and oversight, UA encouraged creative partnerships with various independent producers, most notably Burt Lancaster's production company, Hecht-Lancaster (later Hecht-Hill-Lancaster). In addition to granting talent complete creative control over their product, UA also promised generous profit participation.[9] Such incentive encouraged talent to

stake a claim in the success of their product – a "partial-ownership" strategy that motivated actors, directors, and screenwriters to work hard and with efficiency. Over the years, other studios would gravitate towards the United Artists model, turning more and more into *financiers* and *distributors* of film, as opposed to *producers*. In this way, distribution rights slowly became the fulcrum on which the success of a studio rested, while stars became less associated with the studio and more dependent on agents who could "package" them with a director/producer and negotiate partial ownership in the products in which they appeared.

Over the course of the '50s and early '60s, the studios refined a new approach to production and distribution: make 'em big, show 'em big, and sell 'em big.[10] With fewer films in production, the business risks of these high budget films, the so-called "Cadillacs" of the production line, increased exponentially. Producers attempted to insure their films' success by packing them with effects and gimmicks — CinemaScope, Cinerama, 70 mm, surround sound, 3-D, smell-o-vision — to differentiate the cinematic experience from the televisual, "emphasiz [ing] the motion picture's capacity for spectacle."[11] Whereas much of classic Hollywood narrative had focused on character and plot, the so-called "Cadillac" pictures centered on the manufacture of *sensation*. The rise of "runaway production" (shooting overseas) added extra exoticism, decreased the studios' bottom lines through tax incentives, and circumvented the demands of the Hollywood guilds.

The success of *This is Cinerama* (1952), *The Robe* (1953), *How to Marry a Millionaire* (1953), *There's No Business Like Show Business* (1954), *White Christmas* (1954), and *Oklahoma!* (1955), all of which relied on some type of spectacle, demonstrated that audiences would still come to the theater for the right kind of attraction. As historian Peter Lev explains, this so-called "CinemaScope rebound" of 1953-1955 not only "demonstrated a basis for continuing to make

movies for theaters" but proved that "the Hollywood film industry would not become a mere adjunct to television."[12] But the uptick in attendance would last only two years. Between 1956 and 1960, weekly theater attendance fell from 46 million to 40 million.[13] The studios would continue to rely on widescreen processes through the early '60s, but as film budgets continued to soar — in part due to bankrolling these expensive processes but also because of escalating salaries for stars, directors, and screenwriters — they required an additional means of profiting off the individual movie-goer.[14]

One solution was for studios to exploit the most lavish and extravagant of these pictures through roadshowing. "Roadshow" pictures were screened for a limited set of dates in large, urban venues, with tickets sold ahead of time at elevated prices. The practice rendered movie-going a special event, attracting audiences who had ceased to frequent the cinema.[15] Between 1956 and 1961, *Around the World in 80 Days* (1956), *The Ten Commandments* (1956), *The Bridge on the River Kwai* (1957), *South Pacific* (1958), *Sleeping Beauty* (1958), *Porgy and Bess* (1959), *Ben Hur* (1959), *The Alamo* (1960), *El Cid* (1961), and *King of Kings* (1961) all received road-show releases. Several of these films featured stars: *Bridge* starred William Holden; John Wayne directed and starred in *Alamo*; *Commandments*, *Ben Hur*, and *El Cid* established Charlton Heston as a star. But for most of these Cadillac pictures, the stars were secondary (albeit crucial) components to a film's high concept and attendant spectacle.

Finally, the studios began to sell off the rights to their back libraries of films. In the '50s, film libraries were divided into two categories: those produced before the divestment decrees in 1948, whose rights the studios were free to sell, and those produced after 1948, which were bound up in negotiations between producers and the trade unions.[16] The studios had hesitated to sell rights for a number of reasons. The networks' offers were too small, and, as highlighted

above, many studios spent the first part of the '50s attempting to work out alternate means, such as Theater and Pay TV, to exploit their libraries via television.[17] In 1955, Paramount opened the floodgates on the sale of pre-1948 films, selling the television rights to thirty of its films to an independent producer.[18] That July, RKO sold the television rights to its entire pre-1948 library, and the other studio vaults opened wide. Some studios sold their television rights outright while long-sighted studios retained their ownership and sold short-term rights or distributed films themselves. In 1960, the Screen Actor's Guild reached an agreement with the studios for the release of post-1948 films, leading to second flurry of sales.[19]

The importance of the availability of films — classic and contemporary — was dual-fold. First, stars, even the most glamorous, became a regular fixture in the home. The integrity of the star aura had already begun to deteriorate, accelerated, as discussed in Chapter Two, by the growing appearance of film stars on television programs in the mid-'50s. Second, library sales provided studios with an additional influx of cash, enabling the continued production of lavish films featuring well-compensated stars. In this way, investment in television facilitated the continued production of big Hollywood films and sustained the few major Hollywood stars who remained.

As one of the few semi-reliable ways to lure the elusive audience, stars with recognizable names were essential, if problematic, assets for the studios. But under the new logic and mode of production, every time a star had a hit, he/she could leverage his/her newfound power for bloated failure. Yet as the big stars got bigger, the number of films, potential star vehicles, and mid-level stars decreased. By the end of the 1950s, Cary Grant, Jimmy Stewart, Clark Gable, Bette Davis, Joan Crawford, and Lana Turner were in the twilights of their careers, while the number of cooperative stars from the mid-'50s, including Debbie Reynolds, Elizabeth Taylor,

Janet Leigh, Tony Curtis, Natalie Wood, Rock Hudson, Doris Day, and Kim Novak, were either receding in popularity or about to finish their studio contracts. The crop of new, compelling actors — Marlon Brando, Joanne Woodward, Paul Newman, along with international imports Bridgette Bardot and Sophia Loren — were not only elusive but proved un-malleable to traditional fan magazine tactics of domestication. There simply was not enough sell-able star product, resulting in an economic situation in which stars with demonstrated audience appeal could leverage their scarcity as they saw fit.

Such leverage had direct effect on the gossip industry. Unless a star was under long-term contract, as few were in 1958, the studio could not compel the star to cooperate with the fan magazines. Editors were forced to follow one of two tacks: construct stories without the star's participation or turn to the seemingly everlasting fount of material from television and the music industry. Some readers predictably bemoaned the fading glamour, echoing cries from the early '50s following the transformation of the studio system and rise of television.[20] Yet many, especially younger readers, praised the reorientation towards media products in which they were actually invested both emotionally and financially. The fan magazines' decision to incorporate non-film stars and scandal reporting was, at least in part, a move of necessity. Yet it also served to sustain and eventually *increase* readership numbers.[21] It meant new life for the fan magazines, even as it entailed a dramatic reconceptualization of tone and content.

EXPANDING COVERAGE

In 1958, fan magazines readership numbers were steady. *Photoplay*'s average total paid circulation hovered around 1.3 million (an increase of around 100,000 from 1946) with 40% of sales coming from subscriptions.[22] Yet *Confidential* had proven that covering non-film celebrities, cultivating scandal, and neglecting studio and press agent demands could double or triple that

number, even with virtually no subscription base. While the magazines did not adopt all of *Confidential*'s tactics immediately, by 1961, they were liberally employing all three.

The magazines' first move was to broaden the scope of their content beyond film stars. Before 1958, singers Elvis Presley and Eddie Fisher were regular fixtures, but both had ties to film (Presley began starring in films in 1956 and Fisher appeared in conjunction with wife Debbie Reynolds). Starting in 1958, however, gossip coverage of music and television began in earnest. The influx of musician-related stories can at least partially be traced to the rise of teen culture in the late 1940s and 1950s. Following the phenomenal cross-media success of Presley, dozens of rock 'n' roll stars flooded the market just as the first products of the baby boom were entering their teens. During this period, teen-targeted films, including B-grade exploitation, Corman horror films, teen melodramas (*Rebel without a Cause*, 1955) and music films (*Rock Around the Clock*, 1956*)* proved some of the most reliable box office draws.

The fan magazines, eager to attract a new generation of film fans, had begun covering filmic teen idols, including Brando, Pier Angeli, and Piper Laurie, throughout the '50s. While James Dean's early death immortalized him, it also foreclosed the possibility of extended fan magazine coverage; beyond eulogies, there was little else to print. In contrast, Dean's co-star in *Rebel*, Natalie Wood, possessed an image primed for fan magazine exploitation. Wood had grown up in the studio system, and *Rebel* marked her transition to teen stardom at age sixteen. Warner Bros., to whom she was contracted, had failed to capitalize on her popularity, and she languished in mediocre films for most of the late '50s before a career revival in *West Side Story* (Wise 1961) and *Splendor in the Grass* (Kazan 1961).

Despite an inability to attract audiences at the box office, Wood became a fixture of the fan magazines. Discourse focused on her fairytale romance with Robert Wagner, with whom

Warner Bros. had arranged a date to commemorate her eighteenth birthday. Following a highly publicized year of courtship, they married in December 1957. As both were under contract to studios — Wood to Warners, Wagner to Fox — the fan magazines received a tremendous amount of information concerning their relationship, including wedding and Honeymoon photos and the couple's "private love diaries."[23] Wood was a fan magazine's dream: young enough to attract teens, yet involved in an idealized romance that appealed to all ages.

Wood was not the only teen film star of the time, but she was unique in having no background in either music or television. The majority of late '50s teen idols rose through their success in music, on television, or in productions that incorporated both, such as *American Bandstand* (1952-1989), hosted by the young and charismatic Dick Clark.[24] ABC began broadcasting *Bandstand* nationwide in August 1957; with an audience of 40 million, *Bandstand* served as the launching pad for several teen idols.[25] Apart from *Bandstand*, young, handsome, and beautiful singers used television to generate broad fan bases that would then follow them to the theaters and record stores. In April 1957, seventeen-year-old Ricky Nelson launched his career by appearing "as himself" on his parents' show, *The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet* (1952-1966). Over the next two years, he would regularly close the show with a musical numbers leading to thirty Top 40 hits between 1957-1962 and film roles in *Rio Bravo* (1959) and *The Wackiest Ship in the Army* (1960).[26]

The magazines were eager to exploit affection for these teen idols. Not only were most idols under contract (and thus compelled to cooperate), but they also appealed to the highly desirable teenage market. *Modern Screen* offered a "Special Youth Issue!" in August 1958, promising "12 Stories of Tenderness and Torment." The cover, featuring an enraptured Wood and Wagner, declares "Natalie kisses her teens goodbye!" In March 1958, *Photoplay* began

running an "On the Record" column, along with profiles of singer Perry Cuomo and Clark.[27] When Pat Boone appeared on the cover of the April 1958 magazine, he was the first non-film star to do so in *Photoplay*'s forty-seven year history.[28]

Over the next year, *Photoplay* continued to bolster its music coverage, running features on "Who'll Be the New Singin' Idol?" and "What You Don't Know About the Lennon Sisters"[29] in addition to a regular column "penned" by Clark.[30] *Motion Picture* promised a "Giant Pat Boone Pin-Up - Twice as Big as This Magazine" and "A Confidential Report on Ricky Nelson!" while *Modern Screen* offered details on "Ricky Nelson's Secret Engagement" and the cover story, "Mariane Gaba Confesses: WHY I WALKED OUT ON RICKY NELSON!"[31] Meanwhile, fan magazines with smaller circulations changed their names to reflect an increased dedication to TV and recording stars: *Movieland* became *Movieland and TV Time* in 1958 while *Screen Stories* merged with *TV & Record Stars* to become *Screen TV & Record Stars*.

The major fan magazines still hesitated to feature television stars who had not also gained famed as teen or singing idols. *Motion Picture* published articles on Garner, the stars of *Peyton Place* (1964-1969), and "TV's Top Guns: All Your Favorite Western Stars!" but *Photoplay* and *Modern Screen* both maintained focus on film and singing idols.[32] Economics most likely motivated this hesitancy as several publications were already devoted to television stars, from the mainstream *TV Guide* to fan magazines *TV-Radio Mirror*, *TV and Movie Screen*, *TV and Screen Life*, *TV and Screenworld*, and *TV and Movie Fan*. *TV-Radio Mirror* was also *Photoplay*'s sister publication (Macfadden owned both publications), and ads in *Photoplay* regularly invited readers to refer to *TV-Radio Mirror* for exclusives on television personalities. As television personalities became more compelling than their filmic counterparts in the mid-'60s, the discreet "realms" of the magazines

would blur significantly. In the late '50s, however, coverage of film and television remained relatively distinct.

In hindsight, these changes seem slight. But the *movie* fan magazines coverage of *rock 'n' roll singers* offered tangible proof that Hollywood film stars were decreasing in number and receding in prominence. Which is not to say that the biggest stars of the period did not receive attention. They did, in equal if not greater proportion to the new generation of idols. Yet the need to embed these stars in narratives of domestic bliss and moral rectitude was in decline. In its place: inflecting a story with scandal and salaciousness, no matter the subject matter. By 1958, this tonal shift had already been set in motion, yet the maelstrom of the Taylor-Fisher-Reynolds scandal worked as a catalyst, helping to codify a new industry-wide shift in production culture, manifested in aesthetics, form, and tone.

THE LOVE TRIANGLE

The details of the "love triangle" between Taylor, Fisher, and Reynolds have been rehashed in innumerable biographies and memoirs, but for the sake of clarity, they deserve repeating.[33] In March 1958, Taylor's third husband, flamboyant producer Mike Todd, was killed in an airplane crash. The fan magazines profiled Taylor's grief for the next six months, framing the 'Widow Todd' in highly sympathetic terms while highlighting her emotional reliance on Todd's protege and "best friend" Fisher. In early September, rumors began to circulate that Fisher and Taylor had become romantically involved. Both Fisher and Taylor initially denied the rumors, and Hedda Hopper ratified Taylor's denials several times in her column in the week leading up to the break out of the scandal.[34]

The affair became public on September 10, 1958, and Taylor issued a statement declaring "Eddie is not in love with Debbie and never has been [. . .] You can't break up a happy

marriage. Debbie and Eddie's never has been."[35] Hopper, angry that Taylor had deceived her, penned a blistering critique of Taylor for her September 11 column, including a misquote of Taylor that would be reprinted hundreds of times over the next decade: "Mike is dead, and I am alive." As Susan McLeland explains, Hopper's column set the tone of "moral outrage" that would define the reception of the scandal and re-cast Taylor's star image as the "sexually available" or "slutty woman."[36]

Reporters swarmed Reynolds at home, leading to an iconic photograph of Reynolds, diaper pins clipped to her blouse.[37] The photo made the front page of the *Los Angeles Times* on September 12, coupled with the caption: "Still Smiling — Tears in her eyes, Debbie Reynolds, who told reporters she hopes she and Eddie can iron out their difficulties and 'be happy,' manages a smile as she makes a hurried trip home."[38] Yet Fisher had already moved out, and the next day, the front page announced that "Debbie Will Seek Divorce from Eddie."[39] Soon after, Fisher made an official statement declaring that his marriage "was headed for break-up long before he even knew [. . .] Taylor."[40] Reynolds's carefully-worded response, released September 14, declared, "it seems unbelievable [. . .] to say that you can live happily with a man and not know that he doesn't love you. That, as God is my witness, is the truth [. . .] I now realize when you are deeply in love how blind you can be. Obviously I was. I will endeavor to use all my strength to survive and understand for the benefit of my two children."[41]

With these statements as support, the press framed Reynolds as victim and Taylor and Fisher as self-centered home-wreckers. The two women were placed in opposition, with Taylor, "the black widow," against the sprightly, "pig-tailed" Reynolds.[42] Of course, these roles were rooted in the foundation of all three stars' well-established star images. As a child, Taylor had been the star of numerous MGM productions, including *National Velvet* (1944), a string of *Lassie*

pictures, and *Father of the Bride* (1950). *Bride*, whose release coincided with Taylor's own marriage to hotel heir Nicky Hilton, marked her transition into adult roles. The marriage was heavily publicized but quickly went sour as a drunken Hilton purportedly refused to consummate the union.

Taylor's divorce from Hilton in 1951 coincided with a starring role in the adult melodrama *A Place in the Sun* (1951) in which she played a wealthy socialite who so enthralls Montgomery Clift that he plots to kill his pregnant girlfriend. *Sun* also marked the cultivation of Taylor's image as a lusty, actively desiring subject as opposed to the passive sex "object."[43] In February 1952, Taylor married a second time, this time to volatile British screen actor Michael Wilding and gave birth to two children over the next five years. In January 1957, Taylor divorced Wilding and married Todd a week later, ratifying her image as a "consumer" of men.

Taylor's film roles during the period only reinforced this image. She portrayed a socialite turned ranch-wife in *Giant* (1956), this time attracting the affection of both Rock Hudson and James Dean; in *Raintree County* (1957), she played a wealthy, tempestuous Southern belle who tricks an impressionable young man (Clift again) into leaving his high school sweetheart (Eva Marie Saint). News of the Fisher scandal coincided with the release of *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (1958) in which Taylor, clad in a form-fitting white slip for much of the film, embodies the role of Maggie "The Cat" — a woman willing to go to whatever means necessary to obtain what she wants, whether it be the affections of her husband or her father-in-law's fortune. With such a sultry, sexual, and self-serving image, the affair with Fisher seemed a straightforward extension.

Reynolds's star image was the inverse of Taylor's. She shot into the public eye with her role in *Singin' in the Rain* (1952), released when she was just twenty years old. As McLeland explains, the role "contains all the elements of the desire-free Reynolds star persona" as the

"spunky, talented, cute and funny Reynolds rebuffs Gene Kelly's sexual advances but wins his heart."[44] MGM was keen to cultivate this "girl next door" image; its publicity department circulated an anecdote detailing how Reynolds's mother would embroider the star's high school sweaters with "N.N." to proclaim her "non-necker" policy.[45]

When Fisher and Reynolds began dating, their interactions, at least in public, were chaste and traditional, in part because their dates were effectively "chaperoned" by reporters from both the fan and popular magazines who documented everything from the couple's "first public kiss" to their fairytale wedding at an "enchanted castle" in the Catskills.[46] Fisher and Reynolds were regular cover subjects, especially following the birth of their two children, whose presence helped affirm the couple's image as the embodiment of the domestic idyll. When Taylor "stole" Fisher, it was that idyll — and the potential for readers to aspire to it — that she smashed in the process.

Coverage of the scandal and its aftermath would provide an endless stream of content for the fan magazines. We should recall, however, that Taylor and Fisher's actions were not *de facto* scandalous. An action is judged scandalous when it transgresses social norms or, as Adrienne McLean points out, functions as a "wedge-driver," "reveal[ing] the vulnerability of the many 'primary social frameworks' that together make up what we so often refer to as dominant ideology."[47] Put differently, scandal opens up pre-existing rifts and rents in the ideological fabric, creating crises of identity, both individual and cultural. By the late 1950s, the ideologies that had undergirded the status quo governing domesticity, sexuality, and gender roles were changing, assisted by the Kinsey Report, *Playboy*, Marilyn Monroe, and *Confidential*, amongst others.

Taylor and Fisher's affair — and their refusal to apologize for it — not only flaunted the rules of the status quo, but showed how easily, and flagrantly, they could be broken. For McLeland, the coverage of the scandal illuminated a "moment of social categories in crisis,"

revealing the "precarious state of marriage and family, especially in terms of women's roles."[48] Even as coverage focused on "the destructive potential of excessive female desire," highlighting the way in which Taylor had wrecked the lives of all around her, she nonetheless enthralled the public.[49] Taylor and the transgression she represented was irresistible, despite her disruption of and disregard for earlier norms of female behavior.

All scandals demand reckoning — some satisfactory explanation of what happened, of providing redress, of stitching over the hole in the ideological fabric. In late 1958 and the decade to follow, fan magazine discourse attempted to reckon with the scandal by framing Taylor as the villainess, Reynolds as the traditional female ideal, and Fisher as the man blinded by Taylor's allure. But the ideological wound enacted by the scandal refused to heal. Magazines continued to print stories, and audiences continued to read them well after all three parties had moved on. Indeed, reader attraction was not to the actual people involved but to the conflicts they embodied. More than any other public figure or fictional character of the time, the discourse around Taylor, Fisher, and Reynolds spoke to anxieties concerning the role of women and sex in American society. It follows, then, that the sources that provided that discourse with regularity and flair, e.g. the gossip magazines, would generate tremendous profits.

The initial aftermath, however, played out entirely in the newspapers, radio broadcasts, and gossip columns. Because fan magazines had to submit copy to printers weeks in advance, the scandal received no magazine coverage until the December issues, on newsstands and in mailboxes in early November. But the magazines made up for lost time with extensive and detailed treatment: *Photoplay*'s cover promised a "SPECIAL SIX PAGE SECTION," including three separate stories, each focused on one of the involved parties. The cover featured a large shot of Reynolds, captioned with "Smiling through her tears, Debbie Says: "I'M <u>STILL</u> VERY

MUCH IN LOVE WITH EDDIE." *Modern Screen* countered with a photo of all three stars chatting on a couch, presumably taken months before, with the caption "Heartbroken but still in love, Debbie pleads: 'Don't hurt Eddie . . . don't hurt my husband." These covers marked a new chapter in the coverage of scandal, in which the magazines refined aesthetic and formal tactics to infuse narratives with melodrama and scandal.

Scarcity helped enact these changes. While Reynolds provided a modicum of access, both Fisher and Taylor refused to sit for interviews. As a result, the magazines employed a profusion of rhetorical flourish to cover up the lack of "inside" material. For *Photoplay*'s "Tragic Triangle," the author relies on an interview with Fisher from before the break-up, employing Fisher's statements to construct a divide between the fame-hungry singer and his domestic wife. While Debbie "prefers her own home, two infant babies, her garden and her constant reading of novels and scripts nightly in front of the fire," Eddie "loves all this dearly but must also get out with people, travel, shake hands, listen, talk, and *make friends*."[50] In this way, Fisher's philandering became an expression of rebellion against domesticity and, as an extension, Reynolds. His actions likewise evoked a desperate need for approval: "If Eddie and Debbie *were* having trouble," the author wondered, "could [Fisher's] desire, or better still [his] *craving* to be liked — have anything to do with it?"[51] In this way, *Photoplay* framed Fisher not only as the architect of the separation, but the victim of crippling neuroses.

In "We'd Never Been Happier Than We Were Last Year," *Photoplay* affirmed this reading and accumulated sympathy for Reynolds, who invited an author from the magazine into her home. The article's structuring metaphor is an image of Reynolds, alone in a massive chair the estranged couple bought in order to allow the entire family to sit together. "A few months ago, she had sat there with Eddie and both their babies," yet "now, on this cold night, she was

learning another way to sit in the chair — alone."[52] The article evoked a previous visit by Taylor and Todd, imagining a conversation between Taylor and Reynolds: "So cheerful, Debbie — it's such a happy room. It looks like you!"[53] Taylor thus became the literal interloper in the Reynolds/Fisher relationship, while the mention of her previous visits amplified her malice in "stealing" a man whose wife she had befriended.

None of the magazines explicitly sided with any of the stars, yet early rhetoric clearly cultivated reader solicitude with Reynolds. In its attempt to reckon with Taylor's transgression, *Photoplay* framed the star as a woman living in her own private world, oblivious to the ramifications of her actions on others. "Did Liz Taylor know when the headlines were naming her as the immediate cause of trouble in the Eddie Fisher household?" Of course not, as Taylor "had spent most of her life in a sheltered, unreal world all her own — a soft, comfortable, pretty world, with her beautiful self at the center." Within this world, "there was only a hazy dividing line between her own life and the make-believe life she lived on the screen, where everything always turned out happily."[54] The overarching message: the self-centered, self-serving Taylor deserves little sympathy.

Following the first flurry of coverage, the industry continued to exploit fascination and anxiety percolating around the scandal. Reynolds, still under the control of MGM, provided rotating "exclusive" access to *Photoplay* and *Modern Screen*. Through these exclusives, both magazines pursued a strategy of reckoning in which Reynolds became proof positive that traditional ideologies of femininity and sexuality, threatened by Taylor's transgressions, remained in tact. To perform this feat, *Photoplay* focused on the details of Reynolds's life as a single mother and her unflappable, endlessly giving spirit. The January 1959 issue, for example, depicted

Reynolds kneeling beside her children, captioned with "Carrie Fisher's question to Santa: 'Is Daddy going to be with us all the time?'"[55]

The deification of Reynolds persisted through the end of the decade, assisted by sympathetic headlines, including "I Never Knew Eddie Didn't Love Me," "Debbie Rebuilds Her Shattered Life: a story of courage that every woman should read!" and "I Wish Eddie and Liz Happiness."[56] Editors also began to pair Reynolds with new potential loves, a strategy that not only rendered tragedy into romance but re-situated her within a heterosexual pairing. *Modern Screen* asked "Rock! Are You Going to Marry Debbie?" and *Motion Picture* proclaimed "Debbie Marrying Glenn Ford!"[57] Even after Reynolds's MGM contract ended and she began to shun the press, criticizing their proclivity to misquote and misrepresent her, the majority of fan magazine features remained sympathetic.[58]

At the same time, coverage of Taylor and Fisher oscillated between accusations and attempts to fit their romance into the traditional fan magazine paradigm. For every "Will Liz Break Eddie's Heart?" were stories of "Liz and Eddie's Marriage," paired with an image of the couple holding hands with Taylor's two young boys.[59] Here, the tension between vilifying Taylor/Fisher and attempting to bring them back into the status quo is clear. Yet it was this tension — and the inability of Taylor to fit within the paradigms in which the magazines attempted to place her — that would continue to animate gossip through the hundreds of stories to come.

This tension helped structure a narrative anchored in the melodramatic mode. Once established in this mode, the narrative could be extended *ad infinitum,* rotating its "characters" in the roles of villain and victim. In classic melodrama, characters embody social types — the charitable man, the fallen woman, the tragic hero — each of which is ascribed with good, evil,

or redemptive qualities. Gossip narratives often endow stars with similar qualities. As evidenced above, Reynolds becomes the victim and girl-next-door while Fisher plays the role of spotlight-hungry dupe. Historically, social melodramas provided a means of making the secular world "morally legible"; the narrative served as a sort of moral compass whose directions could be transferred to a bewilderingly complex world.[60] In the same way, reading and talking about stars, the types they embody, and one's feelings concerning those types help consumers negotiate their own social and moral environs. Stars' personal melodramas become equally, if not more, important than the melodramatic roles they play on screen.

Rendering stars within the melodramatic mode serves a second, more industrial purpose. Many melodramas, including the silent film shorts *Perils of Pauline* and radio/television soap operas, rely heavily on serialization. Through cliff hangers, convoluted character involvement, and dangling story lines, the narrative compels the reader to return to the text for as long as it takes for the conflict to reach resolution and, as a result, the universe to "right" itself. In transforming the incidents among Taylor, Fisher, and Reynolds into a "love triangle," replete with melodramatic types, characterizations, and seriality, the magazines effectively ensured repeat business for their content. Readers would buy magazines not to find out what had happened "in real life" but to discover the next chapter in an ever-winding saga, whose conclusion promised to reveal truths about what type of moral behavior was acceptable and what must be decried.

"Real life" events helped to sustain the melodrama for the next several years — Taylor nearly died from pneumonia and accepted an Oscar with her tracheotomy scar still visible, Reynolds married multi-millionaire Harry Karl, and Taylor left Fisher for Richard Burton, starting the melodramatic cycle anew. Editors also experimented with switching "social types" in accordance with popular sympathy. When Taylor took ill, for example, she became the tragic

victim, with Fisher re-cast as a devoted husband.[61] But just as music, wardrobe, and mise-en-scène heighten melodrama on screen, so too did formal and aesthetic choices within the magazine, specifically the use of headlines and the manipulation of photographs.

From 1958 - 1961, fan magazines headlines became increasingly declarative and provocative. The scandal-tipped headline was one of the fan magazine's first overt attempts to conform to the *Confidential* mode of production. Editors saw the need to incorporate scandal but in a manner that managed to both uphold the magazines' dedication to conservative values *and* provide the titillation that made *Confidential* so successful. To achieve this effect, headlines began to feature one or more of the following: a question mark, an exclamation mark, a dramatic quote, the promise of a "scoop" or "exclusive," alliteration, accusation, and/or allusion to scandal. For example: "The Real Reason Lana's Daughter Had to Kill!" "Film Star Vanishes! Where is Monty Clift?" "The Man Bill Holden is Trying to Kill!" "Pat Boone's Forbidden Love: How It Hurt Him! How It Saved Him!" "Hollywood's Most Shameful Story - The Truth Behind the Debbie and Eddie Rumors" "Is Natalie Wood fit for marriage?" and "Is Lana Turner GUILTY?"[62] The magazines also resorted to deliberately misleading puns and turns of phrases to catch a reader's eye. The cover headline "Tony Shoots Janet in the Bathtub!" was not a murder story, but a photo spread of Tony Curtis taking chaste photos of Janet Leigh in the couple's bathtub.

The magazines also undertook the most significant aesthetic change since switching their covers from painted likenesses to color photographs in the early '40s. Starting in 1958, each publication began to rely heavily on candid photos for both covers and stories.[63] The transition was, again, a move of necessity: "whereas before, appeasing 'scandalmongering photographers' could be considered quite literally part of the job (as specified in the star's contract)," after the

dissolution of long-term contract system, stars were no longer obligated to pose or even smile for photographers greeting them on the street.[64] While posed/sanctioned stories did still periodically appear, the majority of covers from 1959 onward feature decoupage, collaging, and caption reinterpretation of stock, "scandalmongering," and candid photographs.[65]

The first set of love triangle covers exemplify what would soon become common aesthetic practice when attempting to generate a scandalous aura around a picture. *Modern Screen*'s cover photo of the three stars chatting, for example, seems to be a photo from a previous event, chosen to highlight the friendship that had previously united them. *Motion Picture* was more blatant in its manipulation. In one corner, a decoupaged picture of a happy Fisher and Reynolds; in the other, Taylor, positioned to evoke the wall-slinking pose from the poster for *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, eyes them, ready to pounce. The caption promised to provide "THE TRUTH ABOUT LIZ TAYLOR AND EDDIE FISHER," with a predatory Taylor plotting to destroy the intimate couple in the corner.

These cover tableaux not only titillated but obviated the need for star cooperation. Why would editors grovel for a star to pose when they could simply pay a freelance photographer or cut and paste old photos to serve their purpose? Only *Photoplay*'s cover adhered to aesthetic tradition, presumably because Reynolds and her studio were cooperating with the magazine to protect her image and ensure sympathy during the time of scandal. Yet *Photoplay* soon embraced the tactics of its competitors. For its July 1959 cover, the magazine featured a press photo of the pair at a formal event in which Taylor smiles absent-mindedly as Fisher appears caught in conversation. Neither look at the camera. With the question "Will Liz Break Eddie's Heart?" the photo was deracinated from its original context and morphed into evidence of fomenting

marital distress. With this new editorial stance towards covers, the magazines could effectively suggest whatever they chose and reinforce those suggestions through pictorial "evidence."[66]

Of course, the fan magazines did not invent this tactic. As outlined in Chapter Two, aesthetic and rhetorical manipulation has a long journalistic lineage, extending before *Confidential* to the tabloids and yellow journalism of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. The difference, then, was that magazines whose editorials had decried the "low," manipulative journalistic tactics that had characterized *Confidential*'s production culture were now embracing them whole-heartedly. From this point forward, success began to hinge on each magazine's skill at employing these tactics.[67] The headlines and cover manipulations were the product of economic necessity: in an industry in which the majority of sales came from the newsstand, an eye-catching cover and "blurb" were essential.[68]

Aesthetics and form inside the magazine helped reinforce the reorientation towards headlines and scandal, and the most obvious transformation manifested in the form of an increase in photos and graphics and a corresponding decrease in text. During the studio era and into the early '50s, feature articles would generally run at least four pages in the front of the magazines, continuing for two to six additional pages in the back. Photos and headlines always accompanied these lengthy narratives, but they took up equal or less space than the text itself.

Starting in the late '50s, however, *Photoplay* stories regularly began with two pages of headline, extensive photo collages, and enlarged, sensational pull quotes. Following the visual barrage, the reader was invited to turn to the back pages of the magazine to read the actual text of the article, which rarely topped four pages. The headline and its accompanying imagery, not the story itself, were intended to entice the reader. For example, an April 1960 feature on Taylor led with a two-page close-up of a seemingly despondent star. Large text to to the left of her face

read "The question was asked in a whisper, yet the words seemed to grow louder and louder and more insistent . . . " segueing into the dramatic headline, "Does God Always Punish?"[69] The answer can be found twenty pages later, in a brief story that contemplates whether or not Taylor considered her frequent illnesses as God's way of punishing her for attempting to find love and happiness.

"Does God Always Punish?" also employed write-around tactics that allowed the fan magazines to recycle old gossip and frame it as their own. Culling interviews and features from other publications, broadcasts, and public statements, authors accumulated grist for new gossip. Necessity again motivated the move. With most stars refusing to offer content directly to the fan magazines, "editors and writers were on their own in unearthing stories and unchecked as to the content of such stories."[70] The author of the above article, for example, relied heavily on quotes from un-cited interviews and statements from "many people close to Liz since childhood," all of whom remained unnamed. The magazines could frame quotes to be as suggestive as they wished, so long as it was not libelous. In this way, authors began to rely on a melange of recycled quotes, spinning reinterpreted, reframed discourse as novel revelations.

Recreated dialogue had long been a fan magazine mainstay. Historically, however, such dialogue had been stamped with the stars' approval — an article was "written by" Janet Leigh or "as told to the author by Marilyn Monroe" even when magazine authors, publicists, or press agents had penned the story. Yet the magazines could not fake authorship or interviews in the same way when it came to uncooperative stars. One solution, as evidenced in Chapter Two, was to take a creative roundabout to the star: when Brando shunned the fan magazines, *Photoplay* generated content by interviewing his co-stars and penning his "love horoscope."[71] By the late '50s, however, nearly all of the major movie stars had adopted Brando's attitude, and such

strategies, once the exception, became the rule. The solution: imagine "hypothetical" dialogue or posit "possible" interior monologues. Even if the statements were fabricated, they were not defamatory, and a libel case would be near impossible to prove and futile to pursue. The resultant copy was just as juicy and did not even require the star or press agent to sign off. Together, these tactics helped transform the relationship between the dominant production cultures within the gossip industry from cooperative détente to antagonistic conflict.

CONCLUSION

In the wake of the scandal, both Taylor's and Reynolds's values as star commodities literally doubled. Reynolds's $125,000 per-picture salary rose to $250,000 while Taylor's rose from $500,000, then to $750,000, and finally to $1 million for *Cleopatra* (1963). In contrast, Fisher's career dwindled to nearly nothing: his television show was cancelled as his singing style became outmoded and his performance in *Butterfield 8* (1960), offered to him as a favor to Taylor, was widely ridiculed. In truth, Fisher had never been the attraction. Even if he was the man in the middle, the magazines never featured him alone. The women were the points of attention; their images, actions, and relationships with men — not those of the man himself — were what drew readers back to the melodrama month after month.

Gossip did not ruin the careers of Taylor and Reynolds. Rather, from 1958 through 1961, it made their images, and their presence in a film, all the more valuable.[72] Taylor was the second highest paid actor in 1958, and Reynolds was fifth in 1959; in 1960, Taylor placed fourth and Reynolds fifth.[73] When the studios continued to cut their advertising in the fan magazines, editors would engage this argument in their defense: scandal not only sold magazines but helped sell movie tickets as well. While this algebra would soon prove flawed, it was, at least for the time, a testament to the power of gossip, no matter its tone, to add value to a star commodity.

But how much Taylor and Reynolds, however titillating, did a reader want? Television still had popular personalities, but most lacked the distinct glamour necessary for conflict and drama, and by the time the Kennedys moved into the White House in January 1961, the teen singing idol craze was in decline. Given the sparsity of available content, the magazines turned to a woman who had recently attracted every eye in the nation — a woman as glamourous and refined as a classic Hollywood film star, as domestic as Reynolds, yet bestowed with far greater importance than any film idol. She was Jacqueline Kennedy, America's First Lady. Once "discovered" as a source of content, Kennedy would become an even more lucrative gossip commodity than Taylor or Reynolds. Kennedy was, as *Photoplay* proclaimed in October 1961, "America's Newest Star," despite never appearing in a film or even setting foot in Hollywood.

Thus began the fan magazine's second wave of diversification, both in terms of content and ownership. If a figure such as Kennedy was glamorous or scandalous, he/she could provide content and potential gossip to sell magazines. The fixation on Kennedy proved a publishing boon. But criticism and anxiety over the magazines spiked as well, as cultural critics decried the Kennedy obsession while the studios used the coverage as justification to disaffiliate themselves financially from publications that no longer regularly featured their product. At the same time, the fan magazines succumbed to nationwide trends towards diversification and conglomeration, with individual publications folded into larger entertainment empires and upstart gossip providers moving to provide content cross-media. As Chapter Four makes clear, the focus on Kennedy foretold overall shifts in the gossip industry: from stand-alone publications to gossip conglomerates, from print to multi-media synergy, from film stars to personalities.

[1] Michele Hilmes, *Hollywood and Broadcasting* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1990), 137

[2] In 1959, MCA arranged a deal for Reagan to star in *General Electric Theater with Ronald Reagan*, allowing him to reap millions through his production company's co-ownership of the show.

[3] See Christopher Anderson, *Hollywood TV* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1994).

[4] See Anderson, *Hollywood TV*, Chapters Seven, Eight, and Nine on Warner Bros.' television production.

[5] Anderson, *Hollywood TV,* 246.

[6] For additional ways in which the production was unsustainable, see Anderson, *Hollywood TV,* 216-255.

[7] See Ronald L. Davis, *The Glamour Factory* (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1993) for more on Warners' reputation amongst stars.

[8] Anderson, *Hollywood TV*, 274-275.

[9] See Tino Balio, *United Artists: The Company that Changed the Film Industry* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1987).

[10] Balio, *United Artists*, 125.

[11] Peter Lev, *Transforming the Screen: 1950-1959* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 2003), 108.

[12] Lev, *Transforming the Screen*, 125.

[13] Paul Monaco, *The Sixties: 1960-1969* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 2001), 40.

[14] In 1960, the studios were responsible for 53 widescreen releases; in 1961, they released 47; in 1962, they released 51. In 1963, the number of releases dropped to 38. See Monaco, *The Sixties*, 272.

[15] Balio, *United Artists*, 215.

[16] In 1951, SAG signed a contract with the studios that relinquished all rights to films produced before 1948; "In return for that concession, the Guild indicated that it expected to negotiate royalty and residual system for post-1948 products. Each producer who wished to distribute post-1948 fils to television was required to negotiate additional payments to the actors involved; failure to do so meant that the studio would run the risk of losing its contract with the Guild altogether, and with it further use of Guild actors" Hilmes, *Hollywood and Broadcasting*, 159; see also Janet Wasko, "Hollywood and Television in the 1950s: The Roots of Diversification," in Peter Lev, *The Fifties* (University of California Press, 2006), 138.

[17] Wasko, "Hollywood and Television," 138; Hilmes, *Hollywood and Broadcasting*, 157.

[18] Paramount sold thirty films to an independent studio for $1.15 million. See Hilmes 159.

[19] By 1961, films began to show on network television "relatively soon" after their theater releases; *How to Marry a Millionaire* premiered in full color in NBC in September. See Hilmes, *Hollywood and Broadcasting*, 166.

[20] For example: "Please let's have more on Lana Turner, Liz Taylor, Ava Gardner, and Rita Hayworth. These gals have real glamour and they do something exciting once in a while. Anybody can sit home at night and rock a baby, as you read about some stars doing" "Readers Inc.," *Photoplay*, July 1952, 4; "Couldn't we have just a little less of the hum-drum family life of the stars plastered over your magazine? We're awfully fed up looking at pictures of Gordon MacRae's wife and children, of Alan Ladd and his wife and children, Gregory Peck's family, etc. After all, movies still mean glamour and romance to young and old — and that's what put them where they are, or were. Anyway, this is the opinion of an 18-year-old, a 40-year-old, and a 5-year-old and I'm sure many others. Won't you give it a thought? Yours for more glamour and less domesticity." "Readers Inc.," *Photoplay*, September 1952, 4. Even Lana Turner decries the lack of glamour in Hollywood's new crop — see Don Alpert, "Lana: No Dash to New Gals," *Los Angeles Times*, June 11, 1961, B5.

[21] In 1950, *Photoplay*'s average total paid circulation was 1,211,644; in 1959, it has risen to 1,295,723, by 1965, 1,328,771. *Modern Screen*'s average total paid circulation rose from 1,168,445 in 1950 to 1,267,420 in 1959, while *Motion Picture*'s climbed from 795,173 (1950) to 986,896 (1959). Further figures unavailable. See Anthony Slide, *Inside the Hollywood Fan Magazine* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2010), 171; 182; see also Association of National Advertisers, *Magazine Circulation and Rate Trends 1946-1976* (New York: The Association, 1978).

[22] In 1946, *Photoplay's* average total paid circulation was 1,253,095; in 1955, *Photoplay*'s average total paid circulation was 1,379,627.

[23] "Nat and Bob Honeymooner's Own Album," *Photoplay*, April 1958; "Natalie and Bob's Diary: 12 Months of Love!" *Modern Screen,* March 1958; "Natalie's Honeymoon!: Exclusive by Louella Parsons," *Modern Screen*, April1958; "Love Secrets of Nat and Bob," *Photoplay,* June 1958.

[24] Clark served as host from 1957 to 1989.

[25] By March 1958, *American Bandstand* aired on Saturday evenings and Monday through Friday from 3-3:30 and 4-5 p.m. — exactly when teens had monopoly over the television set. See John P. Shanley, "Dick Clark - New Rage of the Teenagers," *New York Times*, March 16, 1958, X13; Leslie Lieber, "Why Everybody Likes Dick Clark," *Los Angeles Times*, November 16, 1958, TW8.

[26]At Disney, the mini-major was already refining its skills as a star-germinator: Frankie Avalon and Annette Funicello both parlayed their Mousketeer stardom into film careers, appearing in several Disney films Other examples of teen idoldom: First-season Mousketeer Johnny Crawford found fame as the fresh-faced co-star of television Western *The Rifleman*, while Tommy Sands, signed at age 15 to RCA by Presley's manager, found success *playing* a teen idol on *Kraft Television Theatre* and went on to a starring role in *Sing, Boy, Sing* (1958).

[27] Music-centered features in March 1958 *Photoplay* include: "On the Record" (Disc Jockey Tommy Reynolds asks 'What is jazz?"), 26; Profiles of singers - "Easy Does It" (profile of Perry Cuomo), 45; "Round the Clock with Dick Clark," 54.

[28] Eddie Fisher had appeared, but only when coupled with Debbie Reynolds.

[29] "Who'll Be the New Singin' Idol?," *Photoplay*, April 1958, 54; "What You Don't Know About the Lennon Sisters," August 1958.

[30] 'Dick Clark's Special 6-Page Dance Book" — "Top of the Hops"/"Get Hep with These Real-Gone Steps", *Photoplay,* October 1958, 60-64. DICK CLARK CHEERS "Teams! Teams! Teams! (The top musical teams that you asked for: The Everly Brothers, The Four Lads, The Diamonds, Donny and the Juniors, Dion and the Belmonts), *Photoplay,* November 1958, no page; "Dick Clark's Scrapbook for 1958," *Photoplay*, Jan. 1959, 46.

[31] "Giant Pat Boone Pin-Up - Twice as Big as This Magazine," *Motion Picture,* July 1958; "A Confidential Report on Ricky Nelson!" *Motion Picture,* October 1958; "Ricky Nelson's Secret Engagement," *Modern Screen,* August 1958; "Mariane Gaba Confesses: WHY I WALKED OUT ON RICKY NELSON!," *Modern Screen*, November 1958.

[32] "James Arness - Gunsmoke's Giant!," *Motion Picture,* May 1958; "Peyton Place Powerhouses," *Motion Picture,* April 1958; "TV's Top Guns: All Your Favorite Western Stars!," *Motion Picture*, March 1958; "Dinah Shore: She's Got a Secret!," *Photoplay,* March 1958.

[33] See Debbie Reynolds, *If I Knew Then* (New York: Random House, 1962); Elizabeth Taylor, *Elizabeth Taylor: An Informal Memoir* (New York: Harper & Row, 1965); Dick Sheppard, *Elizabeth: The Life and Career of Elizabeth Taylor* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1974); Kitty Kelly, *Elizabeth Taylor: The Last Star* (New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1982); Eddie Fisher, *Eddie: My Life, My Loves* (New York: Harper Collins, 1984).

[34] "Eddie Fisher Romance With Liz Taylor Denied," *Los Angeles Times*, September 9, 1958, 2.

[35] See "Tale of Eddie, Debbie, and the Widow Todd," *Life Magazine*, September 22, 1958, 39.

[36] Susan McLeland, "Fallen Stars: Femininity, Celebrity and Scandal in Post-Studio Hollywood," (PhD dissertation, University of Texas, 1996), 104.

[37] "Reynolds described the photo and its aftermath in detail in an interview with the *Saturday Evening Post* years later: 'I know the picture you mean...I remember it very well. It was taken after I had my children out for an airing, and when I came home there were a lot of strangers in my house — reporters and photographers. I didn't even know what had happened. Then they told me that my marriage seemed to be definitely on the rocks, but I still didn't get it. I remember saying 'It's unbelievable that you can live happily with a man and not know that he doesn't love you . When they took that photo, I had just finished changing my babies. I wasn't thinking about how I looked. My mind was completely on another subject. When I saw that picture, I was surprised to see a couple of diaper pins still attached to my blouse.'" See Pete Martin, "I Call on Debbie Reynolds," *Saturday Evening Post*, March 26, 1960, 29.

[38] Walter Ames, "Eddie Fisher Talks; Says He's a Sick Man," *Los Angeles Times*, September 12, 1958, A1.

[39] Walter Ames, "Debbie Will Seek Divorce from Eddie," *Los Angeles Times*, September 13, 1958, A1.

[40] *Ibid.*

[41] "Debbie and Eddie Cancel Charity Show Appearance," *Los Angeles Times*, September 14, 1958, A1.

[42] See McLeland, "Fall Stars," 108.

[43] *Ibid.*

[44] McLeland, "Fallen Stars," 127.

[45] "Show Business: Just Friends," *Time*, September 22, 1958, http://bit.ly/9GyjJ2.

[46] *Ibid.*

[47] Adrienne McLean, "Introduction," in *Headline Hollywood,* eds. David Cook and Adrienne McLean, eds., (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2001), 5. .

[48] McLeland, "Fallen Stars," 101.

[49] *Ibid.*

[50] *Ibid.*

[51] L. Pollock, "Tragic Triangle," *Photoplay*, December 1958, 34.

[52] Irene Reich, "We'd Never Been Happier Than We Were Last Year," *Photoplay*, December 1958, 32.

[53] *Ibid.*

[54] Janet Graves, "Why Liz Turned to Eddie," *Photoplay,* December 1958, 30.

[55] Charlotte Dinter, "Carrie Fisher's question to Santa: 'Is Daddy going to be with us all the time?" *Photoplay*, January 1959, 50. *Photoplay* also presented Reynolds on three additional covers over the course of 1959, two of them with her children in her arms.

[56] "I Never Knew Eddie Didn't Love Me," *Motion Picture*, January 1959; "Debbie Rebuilds Her Shattered Life: a story of courage that every woman should read!" "I Wish Eddie and Liz Happiness," *Photoplay,* August 1959; "Debbie Talks About: Marriage! Men! Morals!" *Motion Picture,* May 1959.

[57] "My Heart is Filled with a New Love!," *Modern Screen*, April 1959; "Rock! Are You Going to Marry Debbie?," *Modern Screen,* June 1959, "Debbie Marrying Glenn Ford! The Facts Behind Hollywood's Hottest Rumor" *Motion Picture*, November 1959.

[58] Don Alpert, "Debbie's Angry," *Los Angeles Times*, December 25, 1960, B4.

[59] "Will Liz Break Eddie's Heart?" *Photoplay* July 1959; "Liz and Eddie's Marriage," *Modern Screen,* May 1959.

[60] See Peter Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama, and the Mode of Excess* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976); Linda Williams, "Melodrama Revised" in *Refiguring Film Genres: History and Theory,* ed. Nick Browne (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1998), 42-70; Thomas Elsaesser, "Tales of Sound and Fury: Observations on the Family Melodrama," in *Home is Where the Heart Is: Studies in Melodrama and the Woman's Film,* ed. Christine Gledhill (London: British Film Institute, 1987), 43-69.

[61] See "Tribute to Our Bravest Star," *Modern Screen*, May 1961; "The Last Person Liz Called For When She Was Dying," *Photoplay*, June 1961; "Liz' Fight for Life!," *Motion Picture,* May 1961; "How Hollywood Took Liz Back To Its Heart!," *Screen Stories,* July 1961.

[62] Title attribution from first mentioned: *Motion Picture,* July 1958, *Motion Picture*, June 1958, *Motion Picture*, March 1958, *Motion Picture* May 1958, *Modern Screen*, May 1958, *Modern Screen,* March 1958, *Modern Screen,* February 1958, *Photoplay* July 1958.

[63] According to Liz Smith, "fat shots" of Elizabeth Taylor garnered high prices for paparazzi as early as 1957. See Liz Smith, "Public Fantasies, Private Lives," in *American Photo* 4.3 (1992): 46.

[64] McLeland, "Fallen Stars," 91.

[65] According to McLeland, "what characterizes what we now call paparazzi photography — and what distinguishes it from earlier 'scandalmongering' photography or general celebrity photography — is not so much a transformation of actual photographic practice or subject matter, but a change in the structure of feeling between the photographers and their subjects — from respect or reverence on the side of photographers to contempt, and from tolerance or appreciation on the side of the stars to annoyance." See McLeland, "Fallen Stars," 90.

[66] The headline strategies were by no means limited to coverage of the Taylor/Fisher/Reynolds. The October issue of *Modern Screen* blasted "WHY I HAD TO END MY LOVE-AFFAIR WITH EDD BYRNES - A Tragic Confession by Asa Maynor," paired with a portrait of a distraught Mynor fleeing the embrace of Brynes.

[67] Lawrence J. Quirk, "Fan Mags: The Pros and Cons," *Variety,* January 9, 1963, 36.

[68] Slide, *Inside the Hollywood Fan Magazine*, 194.

[69] Charlotte Dinter, "Does God Always Punish?" *Photoplay*, April 1960, 34.

[70] Slide, *Inside the Hollywood Fan Magazine*, 184.

[71] Charles Knefler, "Luck *Is* a Lady for Brando," *Photoplay*, February 1956, 41.

[72] Elizabeth Taylor placed second on the "Top Ten Moneymakers Poll" (Actors and Actresses) in 1958; Reynolds was 5th in 1959; Taylor placed 4th and Reynolds 5th in 1960. See Lev, *Transforming the Screen*, 306.

[73] Lev, *Transforming the Screen*, 306.

CHAPTER FOUR
BACKLASH
1961 - 1980

In 1969, screenwriter, Hollywood insider, and ersatz sociologist Irving Schulman surveyed the moral and cultural landscape and found it in crisis. The cause, according to Shulman, were fan magazines. More specifically, the exploitation of the former first lady, Jacqueline Kennedy, soon to be Onassis, at the hands of these magazines. To articulate this argument, Shulman surveyed hundred of fan magazines, culled quotes, interviewed past and present authors in the industry, and conducted an extensive (if flawed) ethnographic survey of fan magazine readers. His conclusions was nearly as bombastic as the magazines headlines he decried. To his mind, the fan magazines were

> considerably more than a trifling symptom of American malaise, and this symptom could explain the American public's conditioned acceptance of such obscenities as genocide, favorable kill ratio, nuclear fallout, murder, a geometric increase of violent felonies, starvation, slums, denigration of the human condition, fine print in consumer contracts, demagoguery, venality and stupidity in public office, and a spate of social violences which imprison juveniles in a delinquent society of adults.[1]

For Shulman, all that was wrong with the world could be traced back to the fan magazines and the attitudes and ethics they represented.

Shulman was not a hack yelling on the figurative street corner. His book, *Jackie: The Exploitation of a First Lady*, was reviewed in the *New York Times* and *Variety* and remains widely available today. The book's thesis, however jaundiced, articulated a generalized frustration with the fan and celebrity culture which, over the course of the '60s, had reached a fever pitch, with "Jackie," Elizabeth Taylor, and Richard Burton at its center. Paparazzi stalked celebrities' every move and magazines had never been more suggestive or declamatory. Taylor and Burton gallivanted around the world, milking studios dry with their excess. These events took place against the backdrop of seismic cultural change, both in America and abroad. The enduring

interest of the fan magazines in Jackie's love life, compared with the Prague Spring or May 1968, seemed, to many cultural critics, an indication of how trivial and unengaged the majority of Americans remained.

For decades, the fan magazines and the cult of fandom they promoted seemed relatively harmless, toeing the same line of respectability and morality as the movie industry at large. But by the late '60s, the trajectory set in motion in the late '50s, when the magazines expanded their coverage beyond Hollywood stars, had reached its inevitable end point. The magazines now focused on a combination of celebrities, stars with no studio affiliation, and personalities from the world of television and music. As neither Kennedy nor Taylor would willingly provide material, editors relied wholly on the tactics first refined in the late '50s and described at length in Chapter Three: photo decoupage, suggestive and scandalous headlines, paparazzi photography, fabricated "theoretical" dialogue, and borrowed quotes from interviews with other sources. The innocuous fan magazines had adopted the production culture of the scandal rags, and sales had never been better.[2]

As Hollywood prepared to undergo a wave of consolidation and diversification in the '60s, the gossip industry followed suit. Some experiments in consolidation and diversification, however, fared better than others. Once under the massive umbrella of a non-media corporate, *Photoplay*, *Motion Picture*, *Screenland, Silver Screen,* and *TV-Radio Mirror* all withered and, by the end of the 1970s, ceased publication. In contrast, Chuck Laufer built a publishing empire around teen magazines, diversifying into adult gossip, fan clubs, and star management. Ultimately, nesting gossip within large, diversified media conglomerates would prove the template for the future, as outlined at length in Chapters Six through Nine.

This chapter thus focuses on three overarching themes that structured the gossip industry between John F. Kennedy's inauguration and the decline of the traditional fan magazines in the 1970s: 1) the full shift to celebrity coverage and emphasis on scandal; 2) the resultant backlash, both from the entertainment industry and actors; and 3) the move towards consolidation and diversification within the gossip industry. Combined, these movements coalesced to form an industrial and cultural environment characterized by scandal fatigue and an increasingly fragmented mass audience. The major fan magazines and their respective began to fade, overtaken by *People Magazine* and *The National Enquirer*, whose novel production cultures generated human interest stories and "positive" coverage. In this way, the 1960s marked the height of the fan magazines' hold on the nation even as they telegraphed their demise.

JACKIE FEVER

In September 1961, *Photoplay*'s cover proclaimed Jacqueline Kennedy as "America's Newest Star." The declaration was the culmination of months of coverage, both on the part of the fan magazines and popular journalistic outlets. The young, handsome President and his young, glamorous wife were a perfect antidote to the dowdy Eisenhowers. Over the course of the President Kennedy's first year in office, *Cosmopolitan, Ladies' Home Journal, Life, Look, Mademoiselle, McCall's, Nation, Newsweek, Reader's Digest, Time, Saturday Evening Post, Vogue*, and dozens of other publications published profiles of the first couple.[3] At once glamorous, domestic, and political, the Kennedys were equally at "home" in news, fashion, women's, general interest, and fan magazines.

Almost immediately, the White House moved to curb gossip about the First Family. In July 1961, the Associated Press (AP) released a bulletin declaring Kennedy "the nation's top feminine star." The "chic First lady," according to the AP, "has supplanted Elizabeth Taylor,

Marilyn Monroe, and other movie queens as the idol of young girls."[4] Soon thereafter, *The Washington Post* reported the President's "horror" at the "growing number of tasteless fan magazine articles." Robert Kennedy, then Attorney General, notified the magazines of the President's "displeasure" but to no avail. As one unnamed editor proclaimed, "we plan to go on writing about stars, not only of the screen but of life itself."[5]

Photoplay understood the gravity of declaring Kennedy a star and anticipated reader critique with an explanatory editorial. "We fully expect there will be those who, on seeing Jacqueline Kennedy on the cover of PHOTOPLAY, will shake their heads in righteous shock," the editors admitted. "We can just hear the members of Hollywood's grown-and-gripe brigade popping off with, 'Isn't it just terrible to what lengths some editors will go?'" Yet *Photoplay* did not view its decision as a publicity stunt. Rather, "PHOTOPLAY has always, in its fifty years of publishing, been proud of its reputation for tastefulness and beauty. For our part, we cannot understand how we could have ignored Jackie Kennedy, a woman who is, today, the symbol or tastefulness and beauty."[6]

As for the contention that a star must hail from Hollywood, *Photoplay*'s defense is a rhetorical marvel. The "star system is dead," the editors admit, but "stardom *is not*" — it "transcends professions, countries, races, and creeds." Stardom is not simply a matter of being an entertainer; rather, it has "a light of its own." Further, stardom is "the light of individuals who — in their very bodies and souls — have the radiance of everybody else's dreams." To prove this point, the editors offer a comparative list: "Franklin Delano Roosevelt was a star; Harry Truman was not [. . .] Grace Kelly and Greta Garbo, both retired, are *still* stars; Jo Van Fleet and Julie Harris, who are *not* retired and who are brilliant actresses, will never be movie stars." Under this

rubric, Kennedy is "the complete star." She does not merely "exude beauty, glamor, and excitement," but *embodies* it.[7]

The cover article "America's Newest Star!" further elaborates this argument. The author cites an "unofficial definition" of star as "a person whose private life is always public, whose every word and action may be publicized and criticized."[8] According to *Photoplay*, Kennedy yet again fits the description perfectly: "like a star, whatever she wears is copied. Like a star, whatever she says — on child upbringing or politics — is discussed and analyzed. And like a star, she lives in a goldfish bowl."[9] Kennedy's status as a star thus stems from two qualities: an inherent, intangible star-like light and the non-stop fascination with and scrutiny of her life. A social theorist would call the first quality charisma and is, as the *Photoplay* editors point out, a quality shared by select politicians, military leaders, public speakers, and entertainers.

The second quality, however, is somewhat more circular. To wit, Kennedy is star because people demand and consume discourse about her. However, a significant catalyst for that demand is the initial existence of coverage. One taste, and the appetite is whetted. The argument might be reworded to claim "a person is a star because we say she is star." Which, recall, is exactly what *Photoplay* had just done, just as they had made stars of hundreds of young men and women before, regardless of the presence of actual charisma, skill, or pre-existing demand for information about them. The fan magazine editors had, in collaboration with the studios, helped make stars of Clara Bow, Joan Crawford, Kim Novak, and dozens of others. So too could they make Kennedy a star — simply by putting her in their pages. In 1961, as throughout the history of Hollywood, an actor became a star because he or she was *sold* as one, both in the filmed and gossip products in which she appeared.

The decision to declare Kennedy a star, therefore, was predicated on economics. The fan magazines had increasingly turned to teen idols, rock 'n' roll singers, and television stars in the late '50s not only because such figures were more cooperative but also out of necessity. There simply were not enough major film stars remaining, and Debbie Reynolds, Liz Taylor, Rock Hudson, Doris Day, Janet Leigh, and Tony Curtis could fill only a modicum of pages. By turning to Kennedy, the magazines opened up an entirely new source of content, especially given that information about her was seemingly endless. While Kennedy never sat for an interview with any of the fan magazines, she was, as the result of her position as wife to the President of the United States, constantly on display. The editors' decision to cover Kennedy was certainly inspired. Yet followed to its logical conclusion, the decision also altered the industry to such an extent that the traditional fan magazine was rendered obsolete.

When *Photoplay* put Kennedy on its cover, the other gossip magazines followed suit. In addition to four additional appearances on the cover of *Photoplay*, the first lady appeared on multiple covers of *Modern Screen* and *Motion Picture* over the course of 1962. At first, stories focused on documenting her family, her romance with John, and their cosmopolitan lifestyle: "Jacqueline Kennedy's Christmas Plans," "Jacqueline Kennedy's Complete Life Story," "From Shirley Temple to Caroline Kennedy: America Falls in Love Again!" and "Happy Anniversary: A Diary of 9 Years of Love and Marriage."[10] During this period, Kennedy's general visibility increased as well. The First Lady led a tour, broadcast in primetime, of the White House in February 1962. The next month, a good will trip to India and Pakistan was heavily documented in photos and print.

To provide product differentiation, fan magazine editors began to tint their coverage with hint of scandal or mild titillation, employing the selfsame tactics with which they mediated

Taylor, Reynolds, and other stars. By the end of 1962, headlines exclaimed, "Minister Attacks Jackie! Has she gone too far — or has he?" "Exposed! The Threat to Jacqueline Kennedy and Her Family," and "Jackie's Daring Photos That Started Talk."[11] Just as most of the promised revelations concerning Hollywood stars turned out to be highly innocuous, so too with even the most scandalous Kennedy-related headlines. A *Motion Picture* cover story asking "How Long Can They Hide the Truth From Caroline Kennedy?" for example, wondered how long Caroline's parents could "hide the truth" that she was a celebrity.

Kennedy's assassination in November 1963 did not mark the end of Jackie Kennedy's celebrity. Instead, it extended it, even to the point of her death in 1994. In the immediate aftermath of the assassination, the magazines were sympathetic, cultivating a mournful tone in their description of how the former First Lady and her children would cope with their loss. By the end of 1964, Kennedy's actions became fodder for negative gossip where anxiety concerning appropriate behavior as a widow and mother could be hashed out. Authors attacked Kennedy's parenting, her choice of companions, and moving on too quickly. Even articles in ostensible defense of Kennedy critiqued her. A 1965 *Photoplay* feature, "We Say: End the Indecent Attacks on Jackie," bemoans others' critiques as "etched in acid and venom, framed in envy and spite."[12] Yet the article then charges Kennedy with a litany of offenses: she "took a two-week vacation from her children — and away from the U.S."; she "allegedly wanted 'privacy' but exposed herself to publicity by involving her brother-in-law Bobby's campaign"; she "pledged to spend a year in mourning [but] began dating again before the first anniversary of her husband's death, and even plans to marry again."[13]

Stories oscillated between affection and disgust, but all expressed extreme investment in the First Lady's everyday actions, regularly inviting readers to express their opinion concerning

Kennedy's behavior, potential suitors, and even the design of her wedding dress. Her presence on the cover could mean the difference between profitability and loss. As one magazine editor explained, "I try to have Jackie on the cover every month [. . .] if you take Jackie off your cover and put someone else on, sales go down."[14] The magazines generated material much in the same way they did for other stars: "an assembly line of writers, editors and researchers" would borrow from other stories, read recent biographies, and seek out sources, such as former dressmakers and butlers, with some "Jackie morsel" to convey.[15] These "Jackie Factories," as the *Los Angeles Times* termed them, were almost entirely self-sufficient and could conceivably continue to produce material for years, even without new grist in the form of public appearances or interviews.[16]

Kennedy's coverage "competition" was Taylor — another woman whose life had become a rhetorical grounds on which cultural anxieties and judgments could be levied. As Kennedy became a gossip fixture in the early '60s, Taylor's life continued to fit the narrative of a real-life melodrama. In March 1961, Taylor fell ill with pneumonia. Her grave condition made front-page news, and Eddie Fisher dramatically informed the *Los Angeles Times* that he had been informed "she had only one hour to live."[17] Yet Taylor recovered, amassing tremendous fan sympathy in the process, as exemplified in cover stories "Tribute to Our Bravest Star," "How Hollywood Took Liz Taylor Back to Its Heart!" and "Liz's Fight for Life!"[18]

Fox moved production of *Cleopatra* from England to Rome, hoping the Mediterranean climate would facilitate her recovery. The film's budget was already spiraling out of control, compounding Taylor's existing image as a paragon of conspicuous consumption. A characteristic newspaper profile, "Liz Bathes in Milk, Millions," reported that in addition to the $1 million in salary for *Cleopatra,* Taylor would be paid $53,000 a week in overtime, $3000 a week in living expenses, and receive a $500,000 bonus when the picture wrapped plus a

percentage of the film's profits.[19] Her total salary was forecasted to top out at nearly $3 million — over 21 million in today's dollars.[20] Taylor also began a romance with Richard Burton, a well-known Lothario who had been brought in to replace Stephen Boyd as Marc Antony. Rumors of the romance hit papers in February 1962. Soon thereafter, Sybil Burton threatened divorce, and Burton broke off the affair, denying any romance with Taylor to the press.[21] On February 17, a heartbroken Taylor was hospitalized for food poisoning — later revealed as a suicide attempt — and Burton returned to her side.[22] Three weeks later, Hedda Hopper reported Fisher and Taylor's forthcoming separation, and Taylor and Burton began to appear openly in public with the voracious Roman paparazzi, made notorious by *La Dolce Vita* (1960), tracking their every move.[23]

By the time *Cleopatra* wrapped, the saga of "Dick and Liz" had become the next chapter in the melodrama of Taylor's star text. Unlike the Taylor's previous affairs, however, there was no quick marriage. Due to difficulties on the part of both parties in obtaining divorces from their respective spouses, Burton and Taylor could not be married until 1965. The couple nevertheless flaunted their relationship in public, and photos of the pair in horizontal embrace, clad only in swimsuits, soon made the cover of *Photoplay*, tagged with the headline "LIZ & BURTON - SHAMELESS LOVERS."[24] The editors were ostensibly decrying their behavior, framing the pair as "a sad testimony to what can happen when passion mocks morality."[25] Nevertheless, a magazine that, just ten years earlier, would never have deigned explicitly *discuss*, let alone *depict,* a woman gallivanting with a man to whom she was not married, now rotated features of Taylor and Burton with those focused on the First Lady.

BACKLASH

Cleopatra was a box office disappointment. Even a gross of $26 million — the largest of 1963 — could not compensate for over $44 million in production costs. Many questioned the role of Taylor and Burton's highly publicized affair in predisposing audiences against the film before it had even hit theaters.[26] Whether or not Taylor and Burton were at fault, it was clear that publicity for the film — its mammoth budget, its halting progress, it overages, all augmented by the swirl of publicity surrounding its two stars — created expectations that would be difficult to fulfill. Yet speculation about Taylor's influence on the performance of the film illuminated a greater thesis, ratified through numerous "star-less" box office hits in the mid- and late-'60s. In short, the stars were not worth the trouble, let alone the skyrocketing salary. Following *Cleopatra*, Burton and Taylor would go on to star together in a string of successful films, including *The V.I.P.s* (1963), *The Sandpiper* (1965), and *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* (1966), but their reputation for volatility and squandering budgets only increased.[27] At the same time, the breakthrough hit of 1965 — *The Sound of Music* — featured neither special effects nor an established star but a singing nun and a pack of kids outwitting the Nazis in the alps of Austria.[28] The box office seemed utterly unpredictable.

The major studios were clearly in transition. The long-standing studio heads were slowly dying off, leaving a vacuum of power in their wake. Oversight, chain-of-command, and overall vision were poor, as each studio looked for one blockbuster hit to pull it through the year, relying on standardization and established formulas.[29] Who could the studios blame, and where could they cut corners? One of the most obvious answers was the fan magazines. Once bastions of studio support, the magazines had seemingly turned their backs on the very production centers

that had fueled them. They were no longer uniquely devoted to film stars, and when they did feature a movie star on its cover, it had little do with a forthcoming film.[30]

As outlined in Chapter Three, the magazines had taken this tact out of necessity in response to the scarcity of contracted and/or cooperative stars. Nevertheless, in the late '50s, the studios began to substantially cut advertising within the fan magazines.[31] For decades, the page directly opposite *Photoplay*'s table of contents had been reserved for an advertisement for a forthcoming film. Starting in 1959, that advertising periodically disappeared, replaced by ads for domestic products. The gossip industry at large attempted to counter the trend, sponsoring an ad in *Variety* outlining the advantages of advertising in one of the six major fan magazines:

> Impartial surveys show that National FAN MAGAZINES are the strongest influence in getting others — particularly the 'infrequents' — to get up and get out to a movie. FAN MAGAZINE readers see movie . . . talk movies . . . practically live and breathe movies. They are literally 'box office barkers' for the industry. Doesn't it make sense to give them first-hand material on this pre-sold enthusiasm — advertise your next picture in the National FAN MAGAZINES! You'll never get more resultful publicity at such reasonable cost.[32]

The claims of the ad were not false. Even David Lipton, vice-president of Universal, admitted to one of the industry trade publications that the magazines were the most direct conduit to opinion leaders within the movie-going public.[33] Yet despite the magazines' continued efforts to encourage studio advertising in their pages, by the late '60s, studio advertisement was almost entirely gone with fewer that eight ads a year in major fan magazines by 1968.[34]

In a 1967 interview with *The Film Daily*, Columbia Vice President Robert S. Ferguson defended the decline in advertising, citing "the actual effectiveness of such advertising" and the "deteriorated moral tone of some of the magazines."[35] Speaking to the *Wall Street Journal*, Ferguson also blamed the magazines for "encourag[ing] censorship, condemnation of the industry by outside groups, and restrictive legislation."[36] Ferguson did recognize the potential

power of the magazines, acknowledging that they had, in the past, helped sell tickets and buttress the industry. Now, however, "they've hurt the industry as a whole," "cater[ing] to the cheapest elements in society."[37] Another unnamed executive echoed this claim: "fan magazines have only a fraction of the impact they used to have" due to "the kind of stories they print."[38] These interviews, published on the front page of a Hollywood trade publication and in the pages of the nation's leading financial newspaper, sent a unequivocal message to the fan magazine editors. At the same time, the studio heads publicly distanced their industry from the publications that had once served as its primary means of promotional support.

Richard Lederer, vice-president of ads and publicity at Warner Bros., justified his studio's decision as a question of numbers. "We haven't advertised in these or any other magazines, except occasionally, because of the economics," he explained. "More and more, we are going toward cooperative advertising and other media [. . .] we try to concentrate in areas where we think the money is going to do us the most good, at the point of sale, such as TV, radio, and newspapers."[39] Unlike television, the magazines also lacked the ability to pair ads with actual release dates, thus diminishing their effectiveness. Lederer underlined that the studios did still provide free publicity stills and miscellaneous production information to help the magazines craft stories around new films. Paying for advertising in a magazine that was already running a story on a star or film, however, was "just gilding the lilly."[40]

According to this testimony, the studios ceased advertising within the fan magazines for two reasons: their moral tone and their ineffectiveness at selling tickets. Ferguson clearly viewed the two in conjunction — for him, the decline in the industry at large was directly tied to the magazines' shift in content and tone. Yet the magazine editors objected to this characterization. Despite covering stars and personalities outside of the traditional boundaries of Hollywood, their

readers still bought movie tickets, and the studios would be smart to target them in the pages of their magazines. One study, published alongside Ferguson's comments in *The Film Daily*, found that *Modern Screen* and *Photoplay* "accounted for the sale of slightly more than one out of every two tickets to motion picture theaters."[41] The article's title, however, illuminated the studios' dubiousness, admitting "Fan Mags May Raise Attendance, But — ."

With articles in the *Wall Street Journal* and a major Hollywood trade paper doubting their efficacy, fan magazine editors were on the defensive. After steady circulation gains for most of the '50s and '60s, *Photoplay*'s average total paid circulation dropped from 1.41 million in 1965 to 1.109 in 1967. In December 1967, Aljean Hermetz penned a three-part series on the state of the magazines for the *Los Angeles Times.* The kick-off article, aptly entitled "Fan Magazines Yearn for Star-Spangled Banter of Yore," voiced the common complaint within the gossip industry that the fan magazines' halcyon days — when stars were glamorous, abundant, and sold magazines — were a thing of the past. The reason Kennedy, Lord Harlech, Lynda and Lady Bird Johnson had replaced the stars was simple. According to Helen Weller, editor of *Modern Screen*, "finding a movie star to put on your cover every month is a hard sweat. After Liz, there's nobody."[42]

For Pat Campbell, president of the Hollywood Women's Press Club, "it's almost as bad inside the magazine. You get so desperate for someone to put on your 82 pages each month that you could scream."[43] To obtain an exclusive photo of a major star, the magazines increasingly adopted an aspect of the tabloid and scandal magazine production culture, paying large sums for exclusive photo rights. *Modern Screen* had paid $25,000 for a set of photos of Taylor and Burton while Sterling, publisher of *Movie Mirror,* traded $3000 for four shots of Kennedy. For Campbell, star scarcity was directly linked to the studios who "haven't built a star in years. I don't think talent coordinators at the studios know talent even when they fall over it." The rise of

roadshowing also makes it impossible for the few new stars to gain national exposure as roadshow pictures "never get into small towns and are too expensive for the young marrieds to see anyway."[44] For this group of weary editors, the *studios* were responsible not only for falling ticket sales but for the fan magazines' newly-oriented mode of production.

Of course, the "blame" could not be wholly placed on either side. Following divestment, the way that stars were created, their subsequent value, and the level of their necessity had all changed, forcing the gossip industry to change as well. According to *Variety* editor-in-chief Thomas Pryor, the symbiosis between the film and gossip industries forced the latter to adapt to changes in the former: "the neo-realism era of the motion picture," coupled with studio loss of control and cutbacks, caused the fan magazines' reliance on "sensation and personal revelation."[45] Hal Wallis, inveterate independent producer, blamed the magazines' turn to scandal on the stars themselves, claiming that "as long as individual personalities [air] their emotional delinquencies, running the confessional gamut from childhood to marital problems, nothing can be done about the situation."[46]

Ultimately, by the end of the '60s, the mode of star production had shifted, and fundamental insecurities accompanying the business of producing and selling stars were fatiguing representatives of both industries. The problem, then, was that neither the gossip nor the film industry had figured a surefire way to ensure profit from this new mode. Weariness and frustration manifested in blame. The magazines blamed the studios and the elusive stars; the studios blamed the magazines and the overly-confessional stars; and the stars blamed the voracious magazines who intruded upon their private space, spread lies, and conjured fairytales.

To protest their treatment at the hands of the fan magazines, stars pursued a number of strategies. The first and most straightforward was simply to deny access. Most major stars

followed this strategy, turning to mainstream popular magazines such as *Life*, *Saturday Evening Post*, or *Time* as their main publicity conduits. The second was to sue. In 1960, Taylor and Fisher filed libel suits against six fan magazines based on the use of "lurid front cover 'teaser' headlines" that hinted at scandal.[47] The case was settled out of court for an unnamed figure, but the magazines were warned. In 1969, Julie Andrews filed suit against two magazines for $6 million.[48] The suit was again settled out of court, and the magazines paid Andrews an undisclosed amount and printed retractions. Despite the Supreme Court's 1964 ruling in *New York Times v. Sullivan*, which made it more difficult for public figures to sue for libel or slander, many stars refused to ignore unfounded, potentially character-damaging gossip.

The third, most rarified approach was to tackle the magazines head-on, as James Garner did in a lengthy *Los Angeles Times* editorial in late 1967.[49] Addressing the refusal of stars to cooperate with the magazines, he avers,

> I'm sure that if the fan magazines would take their feet out of the mud and write on a higher level [. . .] instead of inventing scandal and rumors, they would be read just as thoroughly and perhaps have many more satisfied readers. Actors would become cooperative again providing the reader with a fresh and more interesting look at their favorite personalities."[50]

Garner concludes that today's magazines are "little better in principle" than *Confidential*, filled with "innuendo and suggestion of sex."[51]

Garner's editorial sparked a firestorm of feedback. Television star Christopher Connolly wrote a letter to the editor explaining his own maltreatment at the hands of the magazines. For Connolly, "there is a place for fan magazines. I know that we actors would love to resume a regular flow of information in them [. . .] It is [the magazines] who could easily change their policies and upgrade their image in the trade. I hope they do."[52] Nancy Anderson, editor of *Photoplay*, underlined the stars' need for the fan magazine platform, claiming that "most of the

actors and actresses who have become major stars have done it with the aid of fan magazines," once again emphasizing that their readers were the "ones who go to the movies on a regular basis."[53] Again, there were no conclusions as to who was at fault, yet it seemed clear that all parties — the magazines, the studios, and the stars themselves — were unhappy with the current relations between the various production cultures.

REGROUPING

The backlash against the fan magazines bespoke a generalized anxiety about the future of the film industry and the placement of stars within it. Independent film production continued to grow, relegating the studios to the role of distributor. At the same time, the title of "producer" expanded to include directors, screenwriters, agents, financiers, and stars, especially those with business acumen or the guidance of a skilled agent. As Jack Valenti, newly elected as president of the MPAA, explained in 1966, "This business has changed [. . .] Now a fellow like Kirk Douglas can find a script he likes, find his own financing up to a point, hire a big studio that will do all the planning and set up exhibition. That opens up the way for creativity right down the line . . . "[54]

Given the string of massive hits and misses that had punctuated Hollywood's business records over the course of the decade, few shared Valenti's optimism. The phenomenal success of *The Sound of Music* (1965) and *Mary Poppins* (1966) made Julie Andrews an instant star, while the success of *Funny Girl* (1968) proved Barbra Streisand a valuable, if unconventional, star commodity. Yet when the studios aimed to capitalize on both actresses' star power, funneling millions into *Star!* (1969) and *Hello Dolly!* (1969), the attempts fell flat or barely recouped production costs. At the same time, small-budget, counter-cultural films such as *Bonnie and Clyde* (1967), *The Graduate* (1967), *Easy Rider* (1969), and *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* (1969), an example of "generic revision" peppered with one tested star (Paul Newman) and one in the

making (Robert Redford), were runaway hits. As audience tastes continued to change, it became ever more difficult to predict a successful film, and by 1969, the entire industry was in recession.

The studios were able to limp through the economic downturn, however, as most had been recently acquired by diverse conglomerates looking to invest in lucrative "leisure" holdings. Gulf and Western acquired Paramount in 1966, Transamerica took over United Artists in 1967, and Kinney National Services bought Warner Bros./Seven Arts in 1969, the same year financier Kirk Kerkorian first acquired MGM. Only MCA/Universal, Disney, and Columbia remained independent of conglomerate control. These new owners hoped to buy up large swaths of the film, television, and music industries, forging a loose form of diversification. Theoretically, entertainment holdings could then be used as avenues for cross-plugging or as a means to provide tax write-offs on losses. While these partnerships would prove cumbersome, the conglomerates provided the necessary cushion and support for the studios to survive the long slog through the recession. The infusion of cash and structural support helped studios incur greater risks and production costs in hopes of reaping even greater benefits on the flip side.[55] At the same time, several untested directors, hoping to make small movies with small budgets, were okayed by studios hoping to emulate the success of *Easy Rider*, thus encouraging the short, spectacular period known as the Hollywood renaissance.

Meanwhile, the studios continued to diversify their own production. While most studios served primarily as financiers and distributors for films, they were still responsible for the majority of television programming.[56] In 1960, the MCA talent agency, home to Revue Productions, had merged with Universal, bringing together a solid production schedule and pre-existing production infrastructure.[57] Studio-based television production continued through the 1960s, with extra (albeit inadvertent) incentive through the FCC's Financial and Syndication (Fin-Syn)

rulings in 1970.[58] At the same time, the studios continued to profit from sales of films on television and other forms of cross-plugging, such as MCA/Universal's studio-lot tour, intended to ape the phenomenal success of Disneyland. The continued drive towards diversification would characterize "The New Hollywood" that would solidify in the 1970s and '80s as studios labored to synergize movies, television, soundtracks, theme parks, and merchandise.

MACFADDEN / BARTELL / DOWNE / CHARTER

The trend towards conglomeration and diversification extended to the gossip industry. In February 1961, Bartell Broadcasting, owner of four AM radio stations in top markets, acquired Macfadden Publications, whose holdings included *Photoplay*, *TV-Radio Mirror*, and the highly lucrative *True Story* franchise.[59] By 1964, Macfadden-Bartell had added holdings in merchandising, trade publications, magazine distribution, and CATV while the purchase of *True Confessions* and *Motion Picture* further rounded out its fan publication portfolio. The goal, according to CEO Lee Bartell, was "a total communications complex."[60]

The benefits of a well-diversified organization were tangible. Despite the decline in studio advertising dollars, magazine advertising sales increased ten percent to $7 million between 1962 and 1963 while broadcasting revenues rose ten percent to $2.5 million. In 1964, overall sales from all avenues topped $25 million a year.[61] A second merger in September 1961, this time with Process Lithographers (a magazine printing and distribution center), allowed Macfadden-Bartell to cut costs significantly.[62] Macfadden-Bartell was no publishing giant, yet its holdings in broadcasting enabled cross-plugging, as a Macfadden magazine could advertise for "sister" magazines and books imprints as well as radio programs aired on Bartell stations. Over the course of 1964 and 1965, Macfadden-Bartell expanded again, acquiring *Motion Picture, Silver Screen,* and *Screenland*, leaving *Modern Screen* as the only major fan publication *not* under the

Macfadden-Bartell umbrella. The same year, the corporation also declared plans to move into television and movie production, exploiting the "major assets" of its back library of articles and stories.[63] At Macfadden-Bartell's annual meeting in May 1965, the chairman announced that the corporation, now to be known as "Bartell Media Corp.," was looking at its most profitable year to date.[64]

Bartell's success attracted the attention of Downe Communications, a "mini-conglomerate" formed in 1967 by entrepreneur Edward Downe Jr. Downe's major holdings were in publishing, including *Family Weekly, Ladies Home Journal*, and *American Home*, but it also operated a mail-order book company, a magazine advertising corporation, and divisions devoted to pet products, catalog mail orders, and cosmetics. Downe was already diversified but lacked the infrastructure to render it a major media conglomerate — an infrastructure it found in the form of Bartell's distribution network, radio stations, and CATV holdings. In 1967, Downe purchased a major interest in Bartell. Two years later, Downe had acquired sufficient stock to control the board, making it the second largest publication entity in the nation, with an overall circulation topping 28.2 million.[65] In 1969, Downe began expanding further into broadcasting and production, acquiring dozens of additional CATV systems and a FM station.[66] Downe was fast becoming the media conglomerate that Macfadden-Bartell, on its own, never was.

Yet Downe's conglomerate status also made it lucrative to outside buyers, even those outside of the media business. Thus, starting in 1969, Charter Company began to acquire stock in Downe, steadily growing its share of the company until it achieved control in 1965. Charter had started out as a mortgage, banking, and land-development firm, expanding into oil and gas station ownership in 1968. It matched the profile of the large non-entertainment conglomerates, such as Transamerica and Kinney, that had purchased studios in their own attempts to diversify

holdings. The problem, as with other attempts to merge non-entertainment conglomerates with "leisure" holdings, was that synergy was neigh impossible. How could *Ladies Home Journal* promote an oil well?

When Kinney National Services acquired Warner Bros. in 1969, CEO Steve Ross understood that the company, which had already acquired Panavision, the Ashley Famous talent agency, and what would become DC comics, could not be a parking lot/funeral home and media company at once. He renamed the conglomerate Warner Communications and gradually spun off or jettisoned the company's non-media holdings, concentrating on developing a diversified *media* conglomerate. Gulf & Western, however, attempted to juggle holdings in media (Paramount, Desilu), clothing, sugar production, auto parts, finance, and zinc while Transamerica combined its insurance and airline investments with United Artists' film production. The conglomerates attempted to manage the studios in the same way one would manage any business, putting in management to control costs. But unlike most commodities, movies require a specific form of creative vision in order to succeed. As evidenced by UA's implosion following the *Heaven's Gate* fiasco in 1980, the conglomerate's failure to understand the distinct operations of a creative industry could be disastrous.

As Charter's financial interest in Downe increased, so did Downe's interest in acquiring holdings in CATV, broadcasting, and mutual funds. At the same time, publishing profits plummeted. *Photoplay*'s circulation declined steadily throughout the '70s, dropping from 1.392 million in 1970 to 1.099 million in 1974. At the same time, the circulation of *Motion Picture* and *TV Radio Mirror* both fell below 250,000 by mid-decade.[67] The magazines lacked clear utility for cross-media exploitation and, as a result, their value and importance within Downe steadily diminished. The magazines were the flotsam that results from mergers and loose diversification

— the funeral homes and parking garages that Steve Ross jettisoned in order to turn Kinney Inc. into Warner Communications. When Charter, by then boasting $1.1 billion in yearly sales, obtained controlling interest in Downe and Bartell in 1975, it announced plans for Downe and Bartell to merge into a single, unnnamed subsidiary.[68] Bartell's flailing "women's group" publications, including *Photoplay*, *TV-Radio Mirror, Motion Picture* and the *True Story* franchise, were spun off, sold to unit-president Peter J. Callahan, and renamed "The Macfadden Group." By the end of the decade, *Photoplay*, *Motion Picture*, *Silver Screen,* and *TV-Radio Mirror* would all quietly fold. The Macfadden fan magazines once amongst the most lucrative magazines in the field, had been all but ignored, left to quietly decline.

THE LAUFER EMPIRE

Despite the fate of *Photoplay* and its fan magazine siblings, conglomeration and diversification did not mean certain death. Indeed, the most successful and innovative fan magazines of the 1960s and 1970s were the brainchildren of Chuck Laufer, a man set on building a diversified publishing empire from the ground up. Instead of buying up existing magazines in tired formats, Laufer started fresh, gradually expanding his empire by recruiting television gossip personalities and dabbling in producing the very stars his magazines would exploit. Unlike Downe, who had relegated the fan magazines to the periphery of conglomerate operations, Laufer made his magazines the focal point of his empire, cultivating a tightly diversified corporation where content could migrate seamlessly from one product to another.

In 1965, Laufer launched *Tiger Beat*, a magazine entirely focused on teen idols targeted at ages 10-17. Laufer packed the pages of *Tiger Beat* with photos of boyishly handsome teens paired with brief, breathless articles detailing the idols' preferences in snacks, music, and colors. Unlike *Photoplay* or *Modern Screen*, *Tiger Beat's* content was strictly PG: never a hint of scandal or smut, just

dreams of holding hands. *Tiger Beat* also eschewed other "adult" stories about kids or domesticity, as the majority of its readers thought of marriage as an imaginary happy ending far, far away, not a tangible reality. Writers did, however, take a page from the adult fan magazine handbook when it came to phrasing. Every title, even the most banal, ended with a flourish of punctuation, such as "David ordered a steak!"[69]

Laufer based cover material and content almost entirely on reader feedback. "When we first started," he explained to the *New York Times*, "we simply ran with who was hot in *Billboard* and *Cashbox*. We found out that was a mistake. Because it didn't necessarily coincide with who these kids really like. There was a look. And at first we couldn't zero in on it."[70] When Laufer put Paul Revere and the Raiders on its cover, fan letters poured in not for Paul, but singer Mark Lindsey. Lindsey possessed "the look" — not sexually threatening, cute, and feminine. "They all look like pretty girls," Laufer explained, adding, "In fact, David Cassidy's double on *The Partridge Family* was a girl."[71]

Laufer would test the "marketability" of an unknown by placing him on the cover and gauging the response. If it was positive, as it was for Cassidy, it could mean twenty-four consecutive covers. Like *Photoplay* and other fan magazines before it, Laufer also relied on reader feedback to determine the tone of content. It was fan desire, then, that dictated *Tiger Beat's* no-scandal policy. "The kids just will not buy negative stuff," Laufer declared in the *Times*, "we know certain stars get busted on grass and stuff. But you will never read about that in our magazines. You'll never see the stars smoking a cigarette. The kids don't want to hear about it."[72] Whether or not the "kids" did or did not actually want to read negatives stories about their idols, Laufer understood the importance of maintaining a positive image for his magazines, one that

differentiated them from their "adult" counterparts and, by extension, encouraged parents to okay their purchase.

Laufer quickly expanded his empire, adding magazines devoted to *The Partridge Family* and *The Monkees,* "super-special annuals," *FaVE! (*1967), whose constant was "literally interchangeable" with *Tiger Beat*, and *Right On!* (1971), directed at a black readership and filled with Motown stars. [73] By 1971, Laufer had become one of the leading publishers in the field, with an editorial staff of thirty. Each magazine focused on nearly the same subjects, only with slightly different photos, content, and interviews. This ability to recycle material kept overhead low and profits consistent. No single publication had huge circulation numbers — around 250,000 each, according to Laufer. Laufer subsidized profits with fan club offers, advertised within the teen magazines, which sold for $2 each and proved enormously lucrative with very little overhead.[74] As Laufer proclaimed, his goal was to "make pennies, but make millions of pennies!"[75]

Given his success in the teen market, Laufer began eyeing the adult gossip market, setting his sights on Rona Barrett. Barrett was not of the traditional, Hedda and Louella school of gossip. Instead of penning a newspaper or magazine column, her gossip career started in December 1966 with appearances on the nightly news of the Los Angeles ABC affiliate, KABC. Barrett's sassy, innuendo-laden style helped double KABC's ratings, and four other major ABC stations soon picked up her musings.[76] Like Walter Winchell and *Confidential* editor Robert Harrison before her, Barrett was a stickler for facts and reliability. By 1968, she had already amassed a web of informants on Wall Street and Hollywood, along with "full-time leg men" in New York and London.[77] Seven lawyers checked her copy, and as of 1968, she had never been sued for libel. The strength of Barrett's information — that it was rooted in truth — led the *New York Times* to declare her the heir apparent to the gossip throne.[78] Yet gossip did not sit well with

ABC news executives bent on preserving journalistic integrity. After "unkind words" were exchanged with ABC news president Elmer W. Lower in early 1969, Barrett moved to Metromedia, which began syndicating her gossip spots in twenty-two news programs nation-wide.[79]

Laufer began courting Barrett during this time, telling her "You're the only person that we feel is a nation-wide columnist where the whole country sees you and knows the legitimacy of your statements. We want to put out the kind of magazine that reflects what you are doing on television."[80] Put differently, Barrett's name — and its reputation for juicy albeit reliable gossip — had become a valuable commodity, and Laufer wanted to attach it to a new, non-teen gossip magazine. Barrett signed a contract with Laufer in June 1969, and a magazine bearing her name, *Rona Barrett*'s *Hollywood*, appeared later that year, followed, in 1972, by *Rona Barrett's Gossip*.

For the Barrett magazines, Laufer applied the same tactics he had used in cultivating his teen mag empire. But he also learned from the mistakes of others, focusing on newsstand rather than subscription-based sales. In the late '60s, several major publications, including *Coronet, The Saturday Evening Post, Look,* and *Life*, had either folded or were struggling to survive. Millions still read these magazines, yet each was bearing the burden of massive subscription bases that siphoned millions off the bottom line in postage costs and slashed subscription rates.

Laufer avoided the subscription albatross with a simple policy. All subscriptions would be full-rate, with no "half-off-the-cover price" deals or two-years-at-the-price-of-one promises. As a result, the vast majority of Laufer sales were newsstand-based, maximizing profits as it reinforced the paramount nature of the magazine's most valuable attribute — the attractive faces (and/or Barrett's name) on the cover. Laufer also took the unusual policy of eschewing all ads. As he explained, "this kind of magazine [. . .] has a notoriously low ad rate" and cowing to the

demands of low-paying advertisers was not cost efficient.[81] With overhead and outside obligations low, profits were high.

For the inside of the magazine, Laufer cut costs by relying on a large staff of in-house writers tasked with writing "quirky, scatter-shot celebrity coverage" that took the place of lengthy, expensive exclusives.[82] What interviews they did obtain were stretched over several issues, allowing "old material [to be] constantly reborn, until fresher morsels can be pumped in."[83] The magazines made ample use of Question and Answer, polls, quizzes, and other "user-generated" content, such as forums in which collectors could trade photos and clippings of one star for another. The Barrett-brand magazines spread her name across features: "Rona's Hot Shots," "Rona's Would You Believe," "Rona's Short Circuit of the Month," and "Rona's 'Nothing But the Truth.'" Of course, Barrett wrote none of the columns. Instead, in-house writers proficient in Rona's trademark style penned them under her name. By 1972, the combination of Laufer's editorial acumen and Barrett's television brand had proven a success, with circulation climbing to one million readers a month.[84]

Meanwhile, Barrett continued to expand her brand. By 1972, her television spots appeared on 50-plus stations, while a radio program named after *Rona Barrett's Hollywood* was syndicated on thirty-five radio stations.[85] Her staff expanded to five full-time assistants in Los Angeles in addition to "stringers" scattered across American and Europe.[86] In addition to a best-selling memoir, *Ms. Rona* (1972), Barrett penned *The Lovo-maniacs* (1974), in which she pontificated on the inability of Hollywood stars to find love. In 1975, Barrett began a stint on *Good Morning America* and became a regular fixture in other gossip "specials" for other networks.[87] "Of the thousands who had covered Hollywood over the decades," explained industry observer David

McClintick, "none had ever garnered the fame that had come to Rona Barrett by the late seventies. Not Hedda. Not Louella. No one."[88]

As Barrett's profile and brand grew in prominence, so too did its prominence within the Laufer Empire, which expanded to include *Rona Barrett's Preview* and *Rona Barrett's Daytimers*. By 1976, *Photoplay* had ceded its circulation throne to *Rona Barrett's Hollywood* — a point that Laufer was quick to capitalize upon in a full-page *Variety* ad. The ad paired a smiling photo of Barrett with a bold proclamation of *Hollywood* and *Gossip* as "The Top Selling Newsstand Magazines in the Entertainment Field!" The ad labors to distinguish Barrett's magazines from slow-dying fan magazines "legends," emphasizing the precision of Barrett's reporting, the existence of a Los Angeles office, and the youth of its audience.

> We know legends die hard, but the FACT of the matter is that an entertainment magazine does not have to be full of half-truths, fantasized by 'creative' writers back in New York . . .
>
> We know legends die hard, but the FACT of the matter is that there are two entertainment magazines which are not only written and edited in Hollywood, but are also staffed by a professional team of reporters, interviewers, and photographers on the-spot here in Hollywood.
>
> We know legends die hard, but the FACT of the matter is that readers of our magazines are not "middle-aged housewives in beauty shops." Our reader polls have proven that the average age of our readers is in the 18-35 age range. Yes, there are millions of people "out there" who do enjoy and read ACTUAL interviews, candid photographs, and color previews of current Hollywood films.[89]

Because Laufer magazines did not seek advertising dollars, the goal of the ad seems to be general exposure and star and publicist cooperation, announcing Barrett and Laufer's "phenomenal growth" and newfound domination of the publicity field. In the end, the ad underlines the ways in which the Barrett magazines had displaced the traditional fan magazines not by adopting their old-fashioned production culture, but by fashioning their own.

Finally, Laufer began to dabble in producing stars himself. In the early years of *Tiger Beat*, it became apparent that Laufer had a "knack for picking comers," as he had both anticipated and fueled the demand for Cassidy and Donny Osmond.[90] With no explicit connection to the management of Cassidy or Osmond, however, Laufer could profit from his magazines but not the stars' themselves. The solution was to find and cultivate stars himself, culling a percentage of their profits as agent and producer. Laufer's first foray into star making started in the late '60s, when he would take teen boys with "the look," place them on the cover, and wait for reader reaction. If the reaction was positive and forceful, he would attempt to place the star with a record company or on television.

Laufer applied this strategy to the DeFranco Family. The DeFranco parents sent Laufer a picture of their photogenic sons, and Laufer flew to Ontario, signed the entire family, bank-rolled a demo tape, and partnered with Twentieth Records in a new venture devoted to developing new teen idols.[91] "Heartbeat" went on to sell 2.5 million copies, assisted, naturally, by heavy coverage in Laufer's teen magazines.[92] But Laufer's focus remained on cultivating an integrated empire. A 1974 *Billboard* ad for the DeFrancos also featured icons for five of Laufer's publication holdings, including *Rona Barrett's Gossip* and *Tiger Beat*. The caption reminded readers that the producer behind the DeFrancos's latest hit single was also responsible for the "fastest growing magazines," with a "total monthly readership of 3,530,000."[93]

In Fall 1978, Laufer sold the majority interest in the company to Canadian-based Harlequin Enterprises, best known for its eponymous brand of romance. Harlequin itself was in the process of being acquired by Toronto Star Co., a massive media conglomerate with holdings in publishing and television. In 1979, frustrated with the changing tone of magazines which bore her name, Barrett moved to disaffiliate herself from Laufer and insisted her name be taken off

several of the titles. *Rona Barrett's Gossip* switched its name to *Gossip* in 1980 and ceased publication shortly thereafter. At the same time, Laufer continued to cultivate stars, placing ads in the Hollywood trades recruiting "teenage-idol types" who would then be market tested within the Laufer teen magazines and, if approved, given music lessons and placed on the teen idol path.[94] In 1984, Laufer's four children launched *Bop*, continuing in the tradition and mode of production of their father. But the Laufer Empire itself was no more.

CONCLUSION

Nevertheless, the lessons of Laufer are clear, especially when contrasted with the fate of *Photoplay* and Macfadden. Macfadden was passed from one publishing corporation to the next before landing as one of many holdings within a large, loosely diversified conglomerate. In the 1960s, *Photoplay* and the rest of the gossip magazines refined a mode of production that continued to function, even without a steady stream of Hollywood stars. But with the decline in studio advertising, their financial foundations were unsteady. To survive the 1970s, *Photoplay* and its publishing siblings would have required radical overhauls — some means of attracting a larger subscription bases or more lucrative reader demographics which would also raise advertising rates. Alternately, the magazines needed to follow the lead of Laufer, eschewing advertising altogether in favor of more lucrative streams of secondary profit. But under Downe, they received little attention and, with revenues declining, were figuratively put out to pasture.

In contrast, Laufer sought tight diversification, developing a web of star and gossip-related holdings with content that could be exploited seamlessly across holdings. While Laufer did not expand into television or radio, he leveraged the brand of a gossipist who *had* in order to attract a readership beyond his traditional realm of teen idols. Laufer's forays into star cultivation underlined his understanding of the relationship between the entertainment and

gossip industries. Only by controlling the product *and* its exploitation could he truly move towards monopolization of his industrial niche. While Laufer eventually sold his empire, other successful gossip enterprises would emulate his innovations and attitude towards diversification, whether *The National Enquirer* and *People* in the '70s, *Entertainment Tonight* in the '80s, or Perez Hilton today.

The gossip legacy of the 1960s and '70s expands beyond the lessons of Macfadden and Laufer. As Shulman's ardent rhetoric at the beginning of this chapter suggested, when gossip stretched its traditional boundaries, covering figures outside of Hollywood in venues other than the fan magazine, it caused tremendous anxiety. Whether speculating about the First Lady or popping up on the evening news, gossip, and its attendant connotations of smut, low-class, and compromised journalistic integrity, seemed to have infiltrated all corners of American media and popular culture. This anxiety manifested in many forms: in Shulman's book length interrogation of the fan magazines's cover of Jacqueline Kennedy, in Rona Barrett's feud with the ABC news chief, and in the likes of Daniel Boorstin's *The Image* and Guy Debord's *The Society of Spectacle*.

The growing prevalence and enduring popularity of gossip sparked this anxiety. As a result, two ascendant publications, *The National Enquirer* and *People*, embraced the components of gossip that attracted readers — the light, airy subject matter, the highly readable form — while eschewing the components of the fan magazine that caused most alarm, such as bombastic headlines, suggestive photography, and garish covers. Chapter Five thus outlines the ways in which two publications developed novel production cultures explicitly oriented around "personalities" and defined against fan and scandal practices. These publications would guide the future of the gossip industry at large, redefining the way a successful gossip publication looked, vetted its sources, molded its stories, attracted readers, and maximized profits.

[1] Irving Shulman, *Jackie! The Exploitation of a First Lady* (New York: Trident Press, 1970), 8.

[2] In 1946, *Photoplay*'s circulation was 1.253 million. In 1961, the figure had risen to 1.328 million; in 1965, it reached a peak of 1.417 million. See Association of National Advertisers, *Magazine Circulation and Rate Trends 1946-1976* (New York: The Association, 1978), 110.

[3] In addition, two "one-shot" magazines were devoted exclusively to Mrs. Kennedy. Among the first was *Jacqueline Kennedy*, an offering of Wykagyl Publications, which appeared on February 7, 1961, shortly after the inauguration of John F. Kennedy. Another publication, closer in format and vein to the fan magazines, was *Jacqueline, Beauty in the White House*, which also sold for 50 cents...In that first year of 1961....they decided to peruse innocuous, inoffensive examinations of the First Family." Shulman, *Jackie!*, 38-39.

[4] Jim Hoffman, "America's Newest Star," *Photoplay*, October, 1961, 29.

[5] "JFK Horrified At Fan Stories?" *Washington Post*, September 7, 1961, C21.

[6] "From the Editor's Desk," *Photoplay*, October 1961, 4.

[7] *Ibid.*

[8] Hoffman, "America's Newest Star," 29.

[9] *Ibid.*

[10] "Jacqueline Kennedy's Christmas Plans," *Modern Screen*, January 1962; "Jacqueline Kennedy's Complete Life Story," *Modern Screen*, June 1962; "From Shirley Temple to Caroline Kennedy: America Falls in Love Again!," *Photoplay*, March 1962; "Happy Anniversary: A Diary of 9 Years of Love and Marriage," *Photoplay,* November 1962.

[11] "Minister Attacks Jackie! Has she gone too far — or has he?," *Photoplay* December 1962; "Exposed! The Threat to Jacqueline Kennedy and Her Family," *Modern Screen*, September 1962; "Jackie's Daring Photos that Started Talk!," *Modern Screen,* November1962.

[12] Jim Hoffman, "We Say: End the Indecent Attacks on Jackie," *Photoplay*, January 1965, No Page Given.

[13] *Ibid.*

[14] John J. Goldman, "Mrs. Kennedy a Star, Helps Keep Many U.S. Magazines in Profit," *Los Angeles Times*, May 15, 1966, D2.

[15] *Ibid.*

[16] *Ibid.*

[17] "Elizabeth Taylor Condition Remains Grave," *Los Angeles Times*, March 6, 1961, A1.

[18] "Tribute to Our Bravest Star," *Modern Screen*, May 1961; "How Hollywood Took Liz Taylor Back to Its Heart!," *Screen Stories,* July 1961; "Liz's Fight for Life!," *Motion Picture*, May 1961.

[19] Philip K. Scheur, "Liz Taylor Bathes in Milk, Millions," *Los Angeles Times*, December 29, 1961, 21.

[20] *Ibid.*

[21] On the 19th, Burton denounced "uncontrolled rumors" of his involvement with Taylor; on the 22nd, Hedda Hopper called Burton "a wild Welshman" and repeated the rumors, which she found "ridiculous." "Elizabeth Taylor Romance Rumor Scotched By Welsh Leading Man," *Los Angeles Times*, February 19, 1962, A1; Hedda Hopper, "Liz Taylor, Burton Rumors Amusing" *Los Angeles Times*, February 22, 1962, C20. See also Susan McLeland, "Fallen Stars: Femininity, Celebrity and Scandal in Post-Studio Hollywood," (PhD dissertation, University of Texas, 1996), 84.

[22] See McLeland, "Fallen Stars," 84-88 for the reasons why the food poisoning attempt was covered up by the Fox publicity department and gossip industry.

[23] Hedda Hopper, "Liz Taylor Separation from Fisher Reported," March 10 1962, A2.

[24] Jay Richards, "The Shameless Lovers," *Photoplay*, October 1962, 38.

[25] *Ibid.*

[26] For an excellent analysis of the function of gossip on *Cleopatra* and Fox, see McLeland, "Fallen Stars," 80 - 88; Jack Brodsky and Nathan Weiss, *The Cleopatra Papers: A Private Correspondence* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1963).

[27] See Robert Neville, "To Rome, Where Mr. Burton is 'Taming' Miss Taylor," *New York Times*, June 26, 1966, D11.

[28] My thanks to Susan McLeland for this clever phrasing.

[29] For more on the death of the studio moguls and the resultant power vacuum see Edward Jay Epstein, *The Big Picture: The New Logic of Money and Power in Hollywood* (New York: Random House, 2005). For an extensive discussion on the increased reliance on standardization and blockbusters, see Paul Monaco, *The Sixties* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 2001), 24-39.

[30] By 1966, *Photoplay*, *Modern Screen*, and *Motion Picture* all split their coverage "50-50 between the two media." For detailed report on the shift to television coverage, see "Film Fan Mags on TV Kick," *Variety*, January 26, 1966, 11.

[31] The studios had gradually decreased advertising spends following the Paramount Decrees, but the advertisements dropped notably in the late '50s and '60s as the fan magazines began to focus on non-film stars.

[32] The ad also included: FACTS ABOUT FAN MAGAZINES: $12,000 will buy you a page advertisement reaching over 20,000,000 young movie-conscious readers. That is only 1/20th of a cent per potential box office ticket!" Sponsored by: *Photoplay, Modern Screen, Screen Stories, Motion Picture, Movie Life, Movie Stars, Screenland, Silver Screen* See *Variety*, April 8, 1959, 36.

[33] Lipton is quoted in *Film Daily*, which is in turn quoted in the above ad.

[34] "Movie Magazine Controversy Continues to Fan Out," Letter from David R. Moss, *Los Angeles Times*, January 14, 1968, D9.

[35] Edward Lipton, "Fan Mags Have Hurt Industry: Ferguson," *The Film Daily*, January 3, 1967, 1.

[36] Kent MacDougall, "More Fan Magazines Battle for Readers," *The Wall Street Journal*, May 31, 1967, 26.

[37] Lipton, "Fan Mags," 1.

[38] "Fan Mags May Raise Attendance, But -" *The Film Daily*, January 4, 1967, 1.

[39] *Ibid.*

[40] *Ibid.*

[41] Lipton, "Fan Mags," 1.

[42] Aljean Harmetz, "Fan Magazines Yearn for Star-Spangled Banter of Yore," *Los Angeles Times*, December 17, 1967, D1.

[43] *Ibid.*

[44] Harmetz, "Fan Magazines," D1.

[45] Shulman, *Jackie!*, 238.

[46] Thomas M. Pryor, "Photoplay Has Glorified Many Stars, But Top Accolade Goes to Hal Wallis," *Daily Variety*, January 27, 1965, 1;4.

[47] "Elizabeth Taylor Files 6 Libel Suits," *New York Times*, December 1, 1960, 70.

[48] Anthony Slide, *Inside the Hollywood Fan Magazine* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2010), 189-190.

[49] James Garner, "A Maverick Gets the Drop on Fan Magazine Editors," *Los Angeles Times*, December 31, 1967, C7. As with fan magazine articles penned under stars' names, it is doubtful that Garner authored the editorial entirely on his own — he most likely had assistance from his press agent.

[50] *Ibid.*

[51] *Ibid.*

[52] "Fan Mags vs. Actors," *Los Angeles Times,* January 28, 1969, D5.

[53] "Movie Magazine Controversy Continues to Fan Out," *Los Angeles Times*, January 14, 1968, D9.

[54] Jack Carmody, 'The Man Who Moves Movies,' *Los Angeles Times,* November 13, 1966; Quoted in Paul Monaco, *The Sixties* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 2001), 280.

[55] See Epstein, *The Big Picture*; Monaco, *The Sixties*, 9-23.

[56] Monaco, *The Sixties*, 17.

[57] The move was not without precedence — Desilu Production had purchased the RKO lots in 1957.

[58] See Michele Hilmes, *Hollywood and Broadcasting* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1990), 188.

[59] The eponymous flagship of the *True Story* franchise boasted a monthly circulation of 2.5 million in 1960. See Alexander R. Hammer, "Bartell May Buy Macfadden Chain," *New York Times*, February 9, 1961, 43.

[60] "Today, Macfadden-Bartell is in the fields of radio, television, men's magazines, women's magazines, paperbacks, and magazine distribution. It is a well diversified organization with sales of more than $25 million a year." "The Bartells recently have also started two television operations, in the Netherland Antilles, Telecuracao, and Teleruba." See Peter Bart, "Macfadden Enters a New Field," *New York Times,* April 19, 1964, F16.

[61] *Ibid.*

[62] "Bartell, Macfadden, Lithographers Merger Set," *Variety*, September 6, 1961, 27.

[63] "Macfadden-Bartell Production Division for TV and Features," *Variety*, March 3, 1965, 46.

[64] The chairman trumpeted Macfadden-Bartell's "saturation newsstand sales" and "systematic elimination of nonprofitable subscriptions." "It's Bartell Media Corp Now," *Variety*, May 19, 1965, 91.

[65] Robert E. Bedingfield, "Downe Chief Sees Bright Publishing Future," *New York Times*, Aug 16, 1968, 43. Downe's overall circulation was ahead of Time Inc.'s 16.7 million and just behind *Reader's Digest*'s 29.6 million "Downe Still a Bit Shy Of Circulation Record," *New York Times*, October 31, 1959, 74. Downe also added Macfadden-Bartell's two CATV systems to its dozens of pre-existing holdings across the nation. See "OK Sale of Two Storer FMers to Bartell Media," *Variety*, February 17, 1971, 34.

[66] "Downe Spreading via CATV, Shows," *Variety*, July 23, 1969, 38.

[67] "Film, TV 'Fan' Mags Newsstands Sales, *Variety*, October 15 1975, 30.

[68] Herbert Koshetz, "Charter Co. Is Planning Merger For Its Bartell and Downe Units," *New York Times*, August 14, 1975, 42.

[69] David Lamb, "Big Show Biz: The Building of a Teenybop Idol," *Los Angeles Times*, December 6, 1971, A1.

[70] Jim Stingley, "Starmaker to the Bubblegum Set," *New York Times,* February 11, 1974, C1.

[71] *Ibid.* From then on, reader letters guided the way. 25,000 letters ensured a star's cover space the next month, and "when the letters subside, so subsides the star."

[72] *Ibid.*

[73] *Ibid.*

[74] *Ibid.*

[75] Quoted in Slide, *Inside the Hollywood Fan Magazine,* 212.

[76] Joan Barthel, "Rona Barrett: TV Snoop," *Life*, March 21, 1972, 41-42; Wayne Warga, "Rona Barrett Looks for New Home," *Los Angeles Times*, April 3, 1969, F20.

[77] John Hallowell, "Shhhhh! Miss Rona Might Hear," *New York Times*, September 22, 1968, 119.

[78] *Ibid.*

[79] Lawrence Laurent, "Miss Rona Barrett Survives the Knocks," *Los Angeles Times*, September 30, 1972, B7.

[80] "Inside Gossip on Rona vs. Laufer Feud," *Los Angeles Times*, March 30, 1980, L6.

[81] Jerry Stahl, "Chuck Laufer's Fan Mags are Gonna Create Stars, Baby!" *Los Angeles Magazine*, May 1979, 160.

[82] Stahl, "Chuck Laufer's," 305.

[83] Stahl, "Chuck Laufer's," 306.

[84] Gary Arnold, "Where Gossip is News," *Washington Post*, Jun 5 1972, B3.

[85] *Ibid.*

[86] *Ibid.*

[87] John J. O'Connor, "Rona Barrett Interviews Four 'Dream' Actors," *New York Times*, December 11, 1975, 91.

[88] David McClintick, *Indecent Exposure* (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1982), 137.

[89] Laufer Media Advertisement, *Variety*, May 5, 1976, 7.

[90] Stingley, "Starmaker to the Bubblegum Set," C1.

[91] "Label, Teen Mag in Tie," Billboard, May 5, 1973, 1, 10; "The Defrancos: Canadian Superstars," *Billboard*, Aug. 31, 1974, http://bit.ly/cF5mbL

[92] Stingley, "Starmaker to the Bubblegum Set," C1. Sometime in 1974, Laufer also started *Teen Star Gossip*.

[93] "The Defrancos," http://bit.ly/cF5mbL

[94] Stahl, "Starmaker to the Bubblegum Set," 160.

CHAPTER FIVE
PERSONALITY JOURNALISM
1967 - 1980

The fifth issue of *People Magazine*, published April 1, 1974 features then-president Gerald Ford on its cover. But Ford was neither hobnobbing with heads of state nor sitting dignified in the oval office — he was in a swimming pool. The close-up shot makes it appear as if he just emerged from a swimming laps, with beads of water still streaming down his face. Naked from the waist up, he grins softly at the camera. The caption refers to "Gerry" Ford as "the front-runner who refused to run" while his bare chest conveys a nakedness and willingness to reveal his informal side. The cover domesticates Ford, suggesting him as the reader's intimate. This now-familiar strategy is one that *People* has repeated time and again, discursively and visually, as it spins large and complex issues into narratives about "personalities."

In the late 1960s, Generoso Pope Jr. switched the focus of his *National Enquirer*, transforming the publication from a gore-and-guts rag into a quasi-respectable tabloid. Like *People*, *The National Enquirer* attracted its audience by cultivating narratives based on people – some bizarre, some remarkable, some famous – and coupling them with advice columns, letters from senators, investigative health pieces, and offhand bits on psychics and famous dogs. Both publications embraced the tenets and label of "personality journalism," alternately referred to as "popular journalism" and "infotainment" and typified by "a concentration on the private life of individuals, specifically in terms of scandal, sports and entertainment."[1] In so doing, *People*, *The National Enquirer*, and dozens of imitators proved the vitality of the mass-audience magazine despite the recent demise of *Collier's, Saturday Evening Post*, *Look*, and *Life*.

Together, the success of *People* and *The National Enquirer* redefined the parameters of celebrity gossip. By the end of the '70s, Rona Barrett's magazines had usurped the classic fan

publications, with combined circulation hovering between two and three million. But *People* and *The Enquirer* courted a much broader audience than the traditional fan magazines. By switching the focus of each production culture to positive coverage of personalities of all kinds, the editors of *People* and *The Enquirer* disaffiliated themselves from their respective legacies. *People* would not be a fan magazine; *The Enquirer* was no longer a scandal rag.

The shift away from these publications and their respective production cultures had a spectacular result. Stripped of their most negative connotations, both magazines were able to attract a diverse audience of readers who might have otherwise shied from a fan or scandal magazine. *The National Enquirer* and *People* took news about famous and infamous people, otherwise known as "gossip," placed it in brief, airy, photo-heavy packages, and rechristened it "personality journalism." In the process, *People* and *The National Enquirer* demonstrated that gossip was no longer a niche within the publishing industry at large. Rather, when cloaked as personality journalism, it was the *future* of the industry. In effect, gossip outlets became mainstream.

Importantly, these publications were drawing on the same swath of personalities — celebrities, politicians, and remarkable individuals — but packaging the information in distinct packages for distinct audiences. With the industry connections and journalistic connotations of Time Inc., which, in addition to publishing *Time, Fortune, Sports Illustrated, Southern Living,* had expanded in the early '60s into book, reference, and music publishing, the glossy, magazine-form *People* quickly became a mainstay of doctor's offices, waiting rooms, and other public spaces. University libraries across the nation began collecting it — a general indication of a publication's overarching societal acceptability and perceived cultural value.[2] In contrast, *The National Enquirer* jettisoned many of the negative associations of its scandal antecedents, yet was still on pulpy

paper, printed black-and-white, and in tabloid form. Millions were buying it, but for most it was not the type of reading material one would leave on the coffee table or read in public. In this way, the maxim that held true for *Confidential* — "everyone reads it, but they say that the cook brought it in the house" — extended to *The Enquirer,* no matter how arduously its editor labored to rid the publication of negative connotations.

With this chapter, I demonstrate that *People* and *The Enquirer* remained on opposite ends of spectrum of public acceptability yet employed similar modes of production to distinguish themselves from their even less acceptable antecedents. As a result, the two publications dominated the gossip industry for the duration of the decade. Ultimately, this shift to general personality reportage proved the most substantial change in how gossip was generated, disseminated, and earned a profit since the end of the studio system.

People and *The Enquirer* were not the first publications to trade on the cultivation and exploitation of personalities. In the late nineteenth century, various outlets regularly provided coverage of early celebrities, including Buffalo Bill, prizefighter John L. Sullivan, and "professional beauty" Lillie Langtry, but this coverage was generally segregated to publications aimed at the lower-middle and working class. Following the turn of the century, however, personality coverage began to expand as interest in the private, "authentic" self increased.[3] Fascination with the personal lives of public figures swelled to include everyone from philanthropists to the "picture personalities" on the film screen.[4]

During this period, "respectable" magazines, including *The Saturday Evening Post*, *McClure's*, and *Collier's,* started running profiles illuminating the personal lives of entrepreneurs, politicians, and entertainers of all types. The market for this type of human interest or "New" journalism was further established in 1922 when Charles Lindbergh's cross-Atlantic flight sparked a massive

influx of coverage. The press incited and perpetuated the obsession with Lindbergh, which quickly extended to details and speculations concerning his private life.[5] Faced with hordes of reporters interested in intimate details of his private life, Lindbergh made himself available to "a select group of aviation writers, whose access depended on their steering clear, as much as possible, from his personal life."[6]

Lindbergh's refusal to make his private life available for the personality profile proved a public relations disaster. The affronted tabloid press published a "series of sensational and largely unflattering rumors highlighting his arrogance," many of which were reiterated in a *New Yorker* profile of Lindbergh.[7] The lesson of Lindbergh was clear. If a public figure refused to proffer his personal life, the press would make up one, however unflattering, for him. The smartest course of action was to submit to inevitability, choosing a reporter and publication that could be trusted to flatter. Most editors were more than willing to sacrifice a modicum of journalistic ethics and objectivity in order to win an interview with a particularly admired, charismatic, or elusive celebrity. By the 1930s, personality-based journalism — whether related to Lindbergh, Hollywood stars, or President Roosevelt — was commonplace in nearly all mass circulation magazines.[8]

As Charles Ponce de Leon explains, profiles paired candid photos with biographical details and descriptions of visits to the subject's home, "reinforcing the notion that private life was a crucial site for self-expression and the display of a person's true self."[9] "Insiders" or self-declared "real-friends" often penned the stories as their intimacy with the subject signified a more authentic rendering. The problem with such intimacy should be apparent, as "friends" were "expected to produce articles that were sympathetic or flattering" lest they lose their 'insider" status and future access, creating a tacit agreement that blatantly undercut journalistic ethics.[10]

Before 1920, profiles largely focused on "idols of production," or men who produced, invented, or enacted social change and whose primary achievement was in the public sphere. Around 1920, the focus of attention shifted to "idols of consumption" — men and women whose fame was not rooted in their ability to produce or invent but to *consume*.[11] Consumption could be demonstrated conspicuously in the public sphere but was most lavishly manifested in the private sphere, where the celebrity's home, wardrobe, and other possessions were on full display. Profiles, biographies, and interviews thus demonstrated the extent of these idols' consumption and leisure, detailing the sports they played, the men and women they loved, and the fine food and drink they consumed. For the duration of the century, profiles bearing these characteristics would become standard throughout the publishing world, from accounts of the travails of Woolrich's heiress Barbara Hutton to Louella Parsons's and Hedda Hopper's first-person profiles of starlets. By the '70s, *The National Enquirer* and *People* manifested the apotheosis of the personality profile.

The spread of "yellow" journalism and the tabloid press facilitated the growth of human interest and personality-based journalism. Hearst and Pulitzer famously stretched truths and sensationalized stories throughout the late 1890s, using their newspapers to spread propaganda, churn xenophobic unrest, and drive circulation numbers leading up to the Spanish-American War. In the 1920s-1930s, a crop of tabloid-sized papers, including the *New York Evening Graphic*, Hearst's *New York Daily Mirror*, and the *New York Daily News* amplified several tested "yellow" tactics, making "Hearst's conventional-size papers appear tame in comparison."[12] In addition to sensational stories and pictures, the tabloids relied heavily on personality profiles and gossip columns. The *Daily Mirror*, for example, was the home of Walter Winchell's account of New York "cafe society" and reprinted Parson's report from Hollywood.

Over the course of the early twentieth century, the publishing industry gradually centralized and consolidated, and the proliferation and increasing popularity of personality-based journalism was one of the major expressions of such industrial concentration. The bulk of personality news, whether profiles, interviews, or gossip, originated in New York and Los Angeles but were by no means contained by metropolitan boundaries. By the late '20s, Hearst had amassed a publishing empire of twenty-eight papers, several magazines (including *Good Housekeeping, Harper's Bazaar*, *Cosmopolitan,* and *Town & Country*), two news services, and the King Features syndicate, allowing his publications to exchange and reprint content freely. The rise of syndicates, including those of Hearst and Scripps, permitted "newspapers in small cities to publish the same kinds of material as big-city papers," especially material related to celebrities.[13]

The rise of personality-based journalism did not go without remark. Sensational, tabloid, and personality-based journalism has long aggravated anxieties about the demise of the fourth estate. The "six-penny" press of the 1830s charged the single-penny press with sensationalism and Matthew Arnold famously condemned "The New Journalism" in 1887. In 1927, former journalist Silas Bent denounced journalistic fixation on celebrity and personality which served only to "satisfy or stimulate primitive attitudes."[14] The target of criticism oscillated between fluff and smut, both of which threatened the integrity of the "serious press," compromised journalistic ethics, distracted the public, and served as a harbinger of the end of democracy.[15] The critique of celebrity, personality, and human interest journalism proves a well-practiced song, with a refrain that simply grows louder with the success of a new publication.

The success of *Confidential* and the subsequent "scandalization" of the traditional fan magazines in the 1950s amplified the chorus of consternation. As Chapter Three describes, fan magazines began to employ scandalous and suggestive headlines and unsanctioned/paparazzi

photography even as the inside text remained relatively chaste and moralizing. When the fan magazines began mixing the aesthetics of a scandal magazine with the tone and content of a fan magazine in the 1960s, cultural critics, industry executives, and stars decried the tactics taken up to suggest, insinuate, and declare scandal.

As I have demonstrated, this anxiety did not necessarily affect readership numbers, as the fan magazines maintained and even increased their circulation following the incorporation of scandal and tabloid tactics in the late '50s and '60s. The problem, then, was reluctancy on the part of the Hollywood studios or other prestigious, big-budget advertisers to associate themselves with the tone and tenor of the material found within. By the early '70s, the connotations of the term "fan magazine" could not have been poorer. It indicated a lower-class, almost entirely female, very young or middle-aged audience. In order for *The Enquirer* and *People* to succeed in selling news about popular figures, they needed to disaffiliate themselves not only from the scandalous past of the tabloid but the pablum of the fan magazine as well.

The National Enquirer and *People*'s success hinged on both publications' ability to distance themselves from previous gossip publications. But they also crystallized the cultural and journalistic ethos of the time. When *People*'s editors claimed that the magazine "embodied an editorial idea whose moment time had come," they echoed rhetoric used by many to describe a general fatigue with traditional 1970s media.[16] The late 1960s and early 1970s had been saturated with coverage of protests, assassinations, cultural unrest, Vietnam, and Watergate. A representative *Newsweek* editorial claimed that the American public was "tired of the serious issues and events that crowded the front pages for the last decade" and was "demanding [. . .] entertainment."[17] Watergate may have been the final disillusionment for much of the American public, but it also served as a gossip catalyst. If the President could shelter such secrets, the

assumption went, then so too could any public figure. However, this cultural impulse was double edged. Americans were tired of serious issues, yet they also hungered for the authentic, perceived as accessible uniquely through the disclosure of scandal.[18]

The perceived "serious issue" fatigue of the early '70s coincided with what amounted to a judicial sanction of celebrity gossip. In 1964, the Supreme Court's ruling in *New York Times v. Sullivan* expanded the definition of who could be considered a public figure. As a result, in order to prove libel, a defendant had to prove that a publication reported information with malice or a "reckless disregard for the truth."[19] While the ruling was intended to permit risky investigative journalism and general freedom of the press, it likewise shielded gossip publications, including the traditional fan magazines, *People*, and *The National Enquirer*.[20] Publications could print rumors about any public figure and be immune to libel charges so long as they did not print information they knew to be false.

At the same time, many of the iron horses of print journalism were in decline. Weighed down by massive, unprofitable subscription bases, the *Saturday Evening Post* folded in 1969, *Look* shuttered in 1971, *Life* ceased publication in 1972, and fan magazine circulation steeply declined throughout the 1970s. While many of the mainstays of general interest print journalism were dying, the television "newsmagazine" was a hit. CBS began broadcasting *60 Minutes* in 1968; ABC followed with *20/20* in 1978. Rona Barrett's "news minutes," focused on Hollywood industry news and gossip, were syndicated across the nation, sandwiched between local and national news.[21] Against this cultural, judicial, and industrial backdrop, *The National Enquirer* and *People* developed their production cultures.

With support from Hearst, William Griffin founded *The National Enquirer*, originally *The New York Evening Enquirer,* in 1926 to serve as a vetting ground for isolationist and fascist

propaganda during the 1930s.[22] In 1952, Generoso Pope Jr. purchased and revamped the paper from a broadsheet into a tabloid. By 1957, Pope had rechristened the paper *The National Enquirer* and narrowed its focus to sensational stories of gore and guts. The tabloid garnered a regular if select readership, yet Pope quickly realized the potential for expansion was small. In 1967, he renovated the publication yet again, dropping violence in favor of celebrity and "personality" coverage. With its roots in tabloid journalism, *The National Enquirer* still skewed to the scandalous side of the gossip spectrum, yet cloaked its smuttier and salacious reportage in a veneer of respectability. By 1972, *The Enquirer* tailed only *TV Guide* in newsstand and supermarket sales, reaching its peak circulation of 5.9 million in 1978.[23]

Unlike *The National Enquirer*, *People* has more or less resembled its current form since its inception in 1974. In the early '70s, with *Life* on indefinite hiatus, Time Inc. sought a general interest weekly to take its place. While *People* editors were careful to curtail insinuations that the magazine was simply *Life* rebooted or *Time*'s "People" section expanded, the final product undoubtedly embraced crucial tenets of both, including a broad intended audience, a sanitized, optimistic approach, and a general personality focus. Time Inc. gave *People* a comprehensive launch, selling a staggering 978,000 copies of its inaugural issue.[24] By 1977, *People* had reached three million in guaranteed circulation, a figure *Time Magazine* took thirty-three years to reach.[25] In order to achieve such success, the editors of *The National Enquirer* and *People* created production cultures that reconciled strains of scandal and fan journalism in four specific areas — *form, content, mode of production,* and *distribution*. The remainder of this chapter details the development and implementation of those innovations.

FORM

To modify the famous catchphrase of media theorist Marshall McLuhan, medium *informs* message.[26] Both *People* and *The National Enquirer* are print media. As such, both communicate their messages in dramatically different fashion than, say, a radio broadcast or a television segment. With that said, there are crucial formal differences between the two publications, including size, layout, and color. Both *People* and *The Enquirer* reconciled the formal extremes of their journalistic precedents. *The Enquirer* placed aspects of the scandal magazine in newspaper form; *People* combined the fan magazine format with Time Inc. glossiness.

From 1952 through 1978, *The National Enquirer* was printed in black and white in tabloid form. In the nineteenth century, the word "tabloid" was used to describe a flat, compressed, oftentimes medicinal solid. The connotations were then transferred to a mode of journalism, oftentimes sensational, condensed and printed on pages half the size of an average broadsheet.[27] When the size of the page was reduced, so too was the breadth of reporting. The form thus predisposes *The Enquirer* towards a certain type of coverage. Instead of a dozen long articles, *The National Enquirer* features several dozen short pieces, curiosities, and brief answer columns. Unlike a magazine, the tabloid is printed on newsprint and in black and white. The resultantly low bottom line permits a correspondingly low price tag – just twenty cents for most of the 1970s – that encouraged impulse and low-income purchases and, by extension, connotations of low-class. It opens and folds easily, facilitating urban and on-the-go reading practices. The tabloid form also allows for a tremendous amount of stories and print on a single page. Issues from 1973, for example, averaged between three and four stories per page, plus three to five photos and one or two small advertisements.

During *The Enquirer*'s gore-and-guts phase it regularly featured full-page spreads of "cheesecake" models, a paparazzi photo, and at least one gory accident scene, with headlines making frantic use of exclamation points to grab the attention of the passerby. When Pope changed the focus of the magazine, he modified its look as well. The tabloid form remained the same, but the front page and interior outlay changed significantly. Throughout the 1970s, the front page would generally feature a striking (but never gory) 8x11-inch black and white photo bordered by between ten and twelve headlines and teasers. The photo would most often be un-posed, either taken by paparazzi or other photojournalists, strengthening the visual link between the tabloid and its journalistic roots. Inside the paper, the "centerfold" was gone, replaced by dozens of small photos of people and events of interest dispersed throughout the issue.

The format of *The Enquirer* clearly encouraged a reading practice similar to that of a newspaper. Yet the revamped *Enquirer* embraced the cheapness, portability, and readability of the traditional tabloid while rejecting the screaming headlines and garish photography generally associated with the form. In contrast, *People* aimed to distance itself from lingering associations with *Life*, keep overhead low, and make it clear that it was not a new fan or movie magazine. To do so, Time Inc. editors combined the format of a newsmagazine (such as *Time* or *Newsweek*), kept the interior black and white, but festooned each magazine with attractive, full-color covers featuring non-movie stars.

The *People* staff created several design iterations before settling on the format that went to press in March 1974. In the beginning stages of development, the editors decreed that *People* would not be printed in the costly oversized format used by *Life* and *Look* and the magazine would feature a "splashy cover" – printed in full color – spotlighting a *person*, never an issue.[28] Articles would be short with a total page count between 51 and 54. Yet the first mock-up of the

magazine, dubbed "the Liz and Dick dummy" in honor of cover subjects Elizabeth Taylor and Richard Burton, was judged a failure: "the consensus was powerfully negative [. . .] the words most often used were 'sleazy' and 'cheap.'"[29]

According to an authorized history of Time Inc., the problem was twofold. First, the presence of "Liz and Dick" immediately associated the magazine with fan magazines their attitude towards the stars as elevated and glamorous individuals. Indeed, *People*'s ultimate choice to focus on *celebrities* – rather than stars – underscored its approach to popular figures as fully accessible, embodied human beings, as opposed to untouchable heavenly bodies. Second, the entire layout and tone too closely resembled that of a tabloid. The writing was "too giggly," and the typewriter style typeface was "widely despised."[30] In this way, the rhetoric employed by the dummy's critics and reproduced by the publication's authorized history reinforce the negative fan magazine stereotype even as it labors to distance *People* from it.

Following the failure of the "Liz and Dick dummy," Richard Stolley, formerly with *Life*, was brought in as managing editor. Stolley would later be credited for much of *People*'s innovation and success; in 1973, however, his most significant idea was to take the movie stars off the cover. He placed Billie Jean and Lawrence King on the cover of new mock-up – a clear message that this was *not* a fan magazine, but a publication, as the title stated, about *people*. The 53 editorial pages were divided into sixteen sections, including In the Money, Jocks, Star Tracks, Up Front, Chatter, Couples, In Her Own Words, Off the Screen, Out of the Pages, Tube, amongst others. The writing, according to Time Inc. sources, was more "self-confident," and the font was replaced with the more stylized sans-serif to create a "crisper and more attractive" magazine.[31] In other words, the editors disposed of soft, pliable, and bubbly — e.g., feminized —

look and writing style. The result was, in Time Inc.'s words, a "classier" publication aimed at its existing mixed-sex, middle-class readership.

The cover was crucial to *People*'s success. Celebrities and other well-known figures would draw readers in while human interest stories would cater to the "more sophisticated part of the audience."[32] In 1974, the cover would highlight the lead story and up to ten additional stories; by 1975, that number had been reduced to three or four. Unlike *The Enquirer*, the cover shot was always posed – never paparazzi – and often taken in close-up. The cover emulated those of Time Inc. publications, but it likewise associated the magazine with the long tradition of classic fan magazines whose covers, at least during the pre-war era and its immediate aftermath, were authorized by the studios.

The philosophy for *People*'s interior was rooted in a straightforward formal concept. According to the editors, all stories would be "light and lively, easy to read and heavy on photo content."[33] The magazine began with a table of contents, a mailbag filled with brief letters, and an "Upfront" section featuring several series of picture-heavy stories. The Upfront section of the September 1, 1975 issue, for example, spotlighted the Kennedy clan on vacation in the Berkshires (four pages, seven pictures, 250 words) and an account of David Frost's bid for a series of interviews with Richard Nixon (two pages, six pictures, 500 words). *People* likewise prided itself on a tremendously high readability level. The articles were uniformly short and concise, but they were also enormously inviting. Pieces were tailored for short attention spans, specifically, for the minds of those aged 18-34 who "had been brought up on TV" and "can read and absorb things rapidly."[34] Critics writing for the trade and popular press called the style "chatty and giddy," "frothy and superficial," "Formica-slick" and "sprightly," but to *People* executives, such elitist criticism missed the mark.[35] "We're not *Harper's* or *The Atlantic*," Stolley explained, "And we

don't try to be. Outside the East Coast this is a link to the real world."[36] In other words, middle-class, Middle America – a prime demographic – would read it, even if sophisticated, upper-class Easterners did not.

Overall palatability and readability also increased the magazine's pass-along audience. *People*, like its fan magazine precedents, was often shared amongst many readers after purchase: passed along to friends or placed in doctor's offices and beauty parlors. Stewardesses declared it "the most ripped-off magazine on the airlines."[37] According to an expectedly supportive review in *Time Magazine, People*'s form of the magazine encouraged "impulse usage," as "it can be picked up for 10 minutes or an hour, thumbed through, started anywhere."[38] Time Inc. was clearly keen to publicize *People*'s ease of use, promoting its low demands, emotion- and time-wise, on the reader and the ease with which it could be parceled to fit the busy reader's schedule.

Reflecting on *People*'s ten years in circulation, an *Adweek* columnist attributed the magazine's success to "the brilliance of the original idea, which discerned a gap in popular journalism between the supermarket fanzines and the more 'serious' book."[39] That original idea was not only conceptual but formal. *People* effectively tempered any scandalous or low-class connotations by dressing its product in formal aspects of the fan magazine and a Time Inc. publication, effectively broadening the magazine's audience to include many of the respectable and, more importantly, middle-class readers of *Time*, *Life*, and *Fortune* — readers with clear value to *Adweek*'s audience of advertising agents. While the end product looked very different than *The Enquirer*, the content of both publications nevertheless intersected, most often in the form of personality-based content, as described below.

CONTENT

The Enquirer and *People* packaged their personality journalism in different formal packaging, but the body of content remained the same. The redesigned *Enquirer* was intended to be "*Reader's Digest* in tabloid form."[40] *Reader's Digest* offered short pieces spanning a broad variety of topics, and *The Enquirer* would be similarly structured, filled with entertaining bits, celebrity exclusives, rags-to-riches stories, messages from respected public figures, a weekly horoscope, health advisories, tales of triumph over cancer, and Good Samaritan awards. Pope likewise claimed that his magazine simply reproduced American popular discourse at a given moment. In the late '60s, he commissioned a team of researchers to visit dozens of cities, anonymously questioning average men and women "with the singular objective of learning what the public really talked and cared about."[41] Pope then purportedly shaped *The Enquirer* to mirror those exact issues. According to Pope, he simply extrapolated and expanded upon desires, ideas, and concerns already percolating across America. Like Stolley, Pope was heavily invested in certain image for his paper, and encouraged the circulation of anecdotes, such as the one above, that spoke to *The Enquirer*'s populist dedication to the "real" concerns of his audience.

The Enquirer would rarely net front-page exclusives or interviews with A-list movie and television stars. Instead, Pope filled the paper with stories of celebrities of all kinds in distinctly "human" situations. Katharine Hepburn explained "Why Hollywood Never Quite Got to Me," while Liz Taylor told of her "terrible" ESP experience, Sophia Loren declared "I Never Flirt!" and Zsa Zsa Gabor described "my biggest break." Of course, none of these stars related these tidbits directly to *The Enquirer*. Due to *The Enquirer*'s connotations within the industry, few publicists would allow their clients to cooperate with the paper. Rather, writers culled stories

from various interviews, profiles, and television appearances and reframed them as new revelations.

These short, oftentimes humorous anecdotes offered a distinctly non-glamorous view of a star, highlighting his/her struggle to celebrity, personal pitfalls, and general emotional baggage. Importantly, celebrity pieces were intermingled with those featuring everyday citizens, a strategy that familiarized the celebrity and celebritized the individual. For the celebrities of *The Enquirer* were portrayed as neither gods nor goddesses. They were not made to seem better than the reader; in fact, they are surprisingly *like* the reader. In this way, *The Enquirer* leveled the discursive playing field, suggesting *anyone* could have an important and compelling story. The paper thus encouraged a high level of reader involvement through myriad contests, polls, and opportunities for reader response. An issue from September 9, 1973, features ten reader solicitations, including "Did You Go to School With a Celebrity? Tell Us and Win!", "*Enquirer* Reader Poll: Should Churches Pay Real-Estate Tax?", the winner of the "Why I Love My Cat Contest," and the "$5 for Happy Thoughts" reader letter. Reader involvement not only allowed "real life" stories to be intermingled with those of celebrated figures but encouraged sustained, serial readership as well. The *Enquirer* was not the first to cultivate reader participation.[42]

Enquirer writers constructed many articles using a second-person invocation, such as "Shoddy Mechanics Can Take *Your* Money and *Your* Life" and "Smothering Sneezes Can Harm *You*, Doctor Warns."[43] Additional stories cultivated fear and anxiety over looming disaster, whether medical, natural, or financial: "The U.S. Will Almost Certainly Have a Nuclear Disaster Within 10 Years" or "Aspirin is So Dangerous It Should Only Be Sold by Prescription, Says Doctor."[44] *Enquirer* headlines also consistently evoked expert authority, as evidenced by

"Nutrition Expert Warns: Plants Won't Grow in U.S. Soil by 1985" and "Psychiatrist Explains Decrease in Radical Activity on Nation's Campuses."[45]

These headlines evidence Pope's keen understanding of the power of *affect*. *Enquirer* stories, whether rooted in scientific findings, dabblings with the occult, celebrities' mishaps, or youths rescuing their elders from dangerous situations, invoked acute feelings of contempt, sympathy, fear, heartbreak, and joy. Photos were selected with the same mindset. Pictures of wild animals "kissing" would elicit warm feelings, just as the last photo of Elvis Presley in his coffin would inspire such heightened, mixed sensations that the issue would sell over 6.5 million copies.[46] As Jostein Gripsrud points out, *The Enquirer,* like so many tabloids, was creating small melodramas in each article, compelling readership through heightened emotion.[47]

Tabloids had long traded on melodramatic narratives and overblown style, just as fan magazines long employed first person address and reader queries and contests to ingratiate the publication in the reader's everyday life. *Life* and *Look* both relied upon emotional and evocative photojournalism, *Confidential* warned of impending health crises, and *Photoplay* regularly highlighted the domestic and non-glamorous aspects of the stars. What made *The Enquirer* special, then, was its ability to combine the above strategies, plaiting them to form a particularly salient and successful brand of journalism.

People, like *The Enquirer*, interwove celebrity and human-interest narratives, dedicating 51% of its editorial content to recognizable celebrities, with the other 49% spotlighting "ordinary persons doing extraordinary things."[48] "We aim to be the indispensable guide to those millions of aware Americans who cheerfully acknowledge that what interests them most is other people," the inaugural editorial proclaimed, "especially the above average, the important, the charismatic, the singular."[49] Mia Farrow promoted *The Great Gatsby* film on the front of *People*'s inaugural issue,

yet the cover only selectively featured movie stars. In fact, Stolley's famous "cover maxim" dictated "television is better than music; music is better than movies; movies are better than sports; and anything is better than politics."[50]

The fan magazines had expanded the potential coverage "pool" to pop idols, television personalities, and Jackie Kennedy in the 1960s, but *People*, like *The National Enquirer*, widened the pool even further, featuring "extraordinary citizens," charismatic politicians, and other compelling personages unaffiliated with the entertainment industry. The result was a near-endless stream of "personality"-based fodder for the publications to exploit. As Stolley pontificated, "since the '60s, there's been more interest in individuals, a looking inward. The atmosphere is more suited for magazines to look at a person's life."[51] He himself referred to *People's* approach as "personality journalism" but insisted that the magazine was not dredging the bottom of the celebrity barrel: "We're scouring every facet of American life for stars. We haven't changed the concept of the magazine. We're just expanding the concept of 'star.'"[52]

Stolley's public expansion of "star" echoed rhetoric employed by the editors of *Photoplay* in 1961 who, in their justification for labeling Kennedy "America's Newest Star," simply redefined the word, expanding its meaning to include those with "the radiance of everybody's dreams."[53] Both justifications were, at bottom, attempts at applying "star" to the world of celebrity, which allowed the fan magazines to exploit national fascination with Kennedy and *People* to reach outside the tightly guarded sphere of Hollywood performers for regular content. Indeed, *People* would cover the full spectrum of notables, including television personalities, politicians' families, Bruce Springsteen, author Annie Dillard, Swedish royalty, playwright Tennessee Williams, Egyptian socialites, swimmer Tim Shaw, rock star Alice Cooper, and a zookeeper who lost a finger to his favorite anaconda.

People manifested the notion that any story is actually made up of *individuals* – not societal issues, legislation, or global strife. As Stolley declared in the pages of *Time*, "we're getting back to the people who are causing the news and who are caught up in it, or deserve to be. Our focus is on people, not issues."[54] If a story did take on a broad social issue, the article routinely personalized it: Vietnam became a story of returned POWs while an ambush of FBI agents on Sioux Territory morphed into a remembrance of other agents who have sacrificed their lives for their country. Here, *People*'s subtle preservation of the status quo becomes clear. In its pages, war, unrest, and misfortune are not the results of profound and systemic issues. Rather, they are the product of individual conflicts and, as such, readily reconcilable, as evidenced by the uniformly optimistic tenor of the magazine.

While *People*'s human interest narratives lacked the explicit invocation of affect at home in *The Enquirer*, it nevertheless traded on melodramatic tropes, rendering clear heroes and villains, triumphs and failures while focusing on stories of uplift with "zest, sensitivity and good humor."[55] Early features included "Denny McLain has lost his fastball, but he can still throw the bull" and "Princess Grace faces her problems with royal serenity."[56] Even the headings of sections – "Sequel," "Winners," "Happy" – encouraged an optimistic reading position. Of course, *People* did not shy entirely from negative stories, but it routinely cast them with a pale of *misfortune* rather than outright *scandal*. When Haverford College president Jack Coleman resigned after forcing the school to go co-ed, the story was filed under the innocuous "In Trouble."[57] Instead of reporting on the details of comedian Freddie Prinze's suicide, *People* printed an extensive interview between Prinze and his psychologist, "discovering the moods that finally killed him."[58]

People integrated the tone of a self-help brochure, a focus on the individual, and *Life*-inspired photo-heavy lay-out, avoiding stories that could potentially indict the reader as complicit

or at risk. Similar to a classic fan magazine, it catered to the desires of fans, profiling the continually expanding talent market via photos, profiles, interviews, and small bits of news about their love lives. Most star-based copy was obtained with the permission of the subject, thereby extending the star's proffered image and publicist line. This approach pulled *People* to the right of the gossip spectrum, but its content, especially the incorporation of everyday people and generalized celebrity, tethered it to the center and *The National Enquirer*. This middle ground, neither smutty nor salacious, neither fawning nor fantastical, defined both publications and guided the future of the gossip industry at large.

MODE OF PRODUCTION

Both *The National Enquirer* and *People* built their respective modes of production upon a layered foundation of established journalistic practice and innovation. During the 1970s, and post-1976 in particular, the production culture at *The National Enquirer* and *People* were incredibly similar. *The Enquirer* engaged in more investigative journalism, cultivating scoops, while *People* opted to approach existing stories from alternative angles, emphasizing the personalities that made up an otherwise issue-heavy story. Still, both placed a premium on accuracy, in part to save money, but also to save face. In order to distance themselves from maligned forms – scandal rags on one end, gossip magazines on the other – both publicly emphasized their commitment to rigorous fact checking and journalistic precision. The resultant connotations of reliability and respectability helped pull both *The Enquirer* and *People* and their subject matter into the mainstream where their respective production cultures, along with established form and content, would become models for success.

The National Enquirer had a tarnished journalistic history to overcome. Thus, when Pope reoriented the tabloid towards celebrity coverage, he recruited British journalists, well-practiced

in the cutthroat game of checkbook journalism, who "knew how to compete."[59] Pope commissioned his new stable of reporters with putting the sensationalist image of *The Enquirer* to rest. As a profile in the *Washington Post* explained, "perhaps more than any publication in the nation, *The Enquirer* has to be certain of its facts. That old image dies slowly."[60] Pope's mission was successful, and by 1972, even the Reverend Billy Graham praised *The Enquirer* for its "clean accurate reporting."[61]

Pope's strategy also created an imperative to produce. *Enquirer* reporters purportedly "misrepresented themselves or their publication to gain access to people or places" and regularly paid off bartenders, maitre d's, publicity agents, and others.[62] Of course, checkbook journalism was not novel, and scandal-mongering publications had long employed unorthodox methods to gain access to coveted scoops. By the mid-'70s, with its circulation increasing steadily, *The Enquirer*'s image seemed secure. Yet in 1976, Carol Burnett launched a highly publicized defamation suit against the tabloid. *The Enquirer* had printed a gossip bit insinuating that Burnett was drunk at a Los Angeles party. Because both of Burnett's parents died of causes related to alcoholism, she argued that the piece was not only false and defamatory but printed with malicious intent as well. As a result, the court granted Burnett $1.3 million in punitive damages and $300,000 in general damages.[63]

An appellant court later the figure to $150,000, but Pope and *The Enquirer* felt the blow nonetheless.[64] Pope quickly acquired the services of Ruth Annan, formerly of Time Inc., to revamp the research department. Annan instituted the rigorous fact-checking system that Henry Luce had first put in place at *Time* in the 1920s. According to *Enquirer* historian Andrew Morton, the research department "required the writers and reporters to submit their transcripts for meticulous scrutiny [. . .] Savvy reporters learned to tape the entire interview, and write the story

with quotes . . ."[65] *Enquirer* reporters could still rummage for dirt and scoops, but they had to support their claims. In other words, rigorous fact checking did not entail going soft on potential scandal. Rather, it meant that what *The Enquirer* did print would be sheltered from expensive litigation and the resultant negative publicity.

At *People,* the editors could not even risk the suggestion of libel. Nested under the Time Inc. umbrella, *People* editors had standards of journalistic integrity and, by extension, the Time Inc. corporate image to uphold. Yet Time Inc. still wanted *People* "run lean." Initially, the research staff was minuscule, with "reporters check[ing] their own facts for accuracy."[66] *People*'s subject matter inspired general consternation in the conservative Time Inc. headquarters; the running joke was that "*People* would be a magazine with one writer and ten libel lawyers."[67] To counter such rumors, *People* publicized its renewed premium on research staff and all-around accuracy. As the authorized Time Inc. history underlines, each piece, no matter how banal, went past a Time Inc. legal team.[68] The goal was not only to distance the nascent publication from tabloid journalism but from fan magazines and gossip more generally.

The editors did not want *People* to be a glossy *Enquirer*, but they also did not want the magazine to lack compelling content or to garner a reputation as being entirely toothless. Editors thus cultivated a "Chatter" column, a mainstay of the magazine throughout the 1970s. "Chatter" filled the final page of the magazine and, in the word's of one *People* editor, "ha[d] all the dirt."[69] The section was subject to the same rigorous fact checking as the rest of the magazine, but it traded on innuendo, inference, and general insider knowledge. For example, a "Chatter" bit from 1974 entitled "Not High But Dry" debunked a potential romance between Burton and Sophia Loren while shooting Carlo Ponti's *The Voyage* (1974) but added,

> It is true that Ponti and his devoted wife Loren gave Richard refuge in their Roman villa during the shooting (which coincided with Burton's last separation from Liz Taylor). But

> what producer wouldn't want to keep the high-spirited actor warm and relatively dry on vacation?[70]

In other words, Ponti kept the oft-intoxicated star sober. The bit may have been true – Burton was a notoriously hard drinker – but is nevertheless more suggestive (and far less moralizing) than would have been printed in most fan magazines. If anything, it most resembles the double speak of gossip masters Winchell and Mike Connolly.

"Chatter" pieces like this one highlight the middle ground occupied by *People*, distanced from both fan and scandal magazines. Accuracy and, by extension, immunity from libel characterized this middle ground. At the same time, it was also periodically laced with slightly titillating bits and innocent innuendo. *People* was the school librarian telling a slightly dirty joke, whereas *The Enquirer* was a former burlesque dancer gone to journalism school. With their respective modes of production in place, both *People* and *The Enquirer* balanced the fine line between boredom and sensationalism, between legal caution and kindling reader interest.

DISTRIBUTION

Distribution forms a crucial yet too often overlooked component of any publication's success. While Generoso Pope Jr. is often credited with shifting the paradigm of magazine and newspaper distribution, it is crucial to note how changes in distribution beginning with *The Enquirer* and extending to *People* altered the way that gossip made its way into the home and, as a result, gossip's overarching image and acceptability. Up until the 1960s, *The National Enquirer* and other newspapers and tabloids were generally sold at newsstands, drugstores, and street corners. Pope likewise understood that a tabloid, even the tamped-down *Enquirer*, would never be a prime candidate for subscriptions. Thus, in the late 1960s, Pope brokered a deal. Under the advisement of several public relations experts, he

> …lobbied supermarket associations, presented video programs, hosted celebrity-filled parties, and negotiated financial incentives. Pope proposed a sweet deal for supermarkets: he guaranteed the sale of half the weekly issues he placed in the store. If fewer than half sold, Pope paid the owner the difference between the anticipated and received income. He never had to pay.[71]

At the same time, Pope called for the design of unique racks, emblazoned with the *National Enquirer* logo, for placement at eye-level in the check-out lanes. In 1961, Macfadden-Bartell had significantly cut costs by merging interests with a printing and distribution center. Pope emulated this example, creating his own distribution service, DSI, to monopolize the grocery store, drug store, and newsstand market. The innovations and business strategies paid handsomely, with circulation growing from 700,000 to nearly 2 million between 1964 and 1970.[72]

But Pope's innovation did more than simply raise sales numbers. By placing the paper in the supermarket checkout lane, Pope shifted its desired means of consumption. *The Enquirer* was now an "impulse buy," almost wholly dependent on single-copy sales.[73] Indeed, by 1972, a whopping 90% of all sales were over-the-counter, and sales had out-paced those of *Reader's Digest*.[74] When postage costs began to rise in the early '70s, *The Enquirer*'s move seemed prescient, especially as the traditional fan magazines, burdened by massive subscription lists, struggled for profitability. Pope compounded profits by moving *Enquirer* headquarters to Florida in 1971. Real estate was cheaper, but Florida is also a "back-haul state," as most hauling trucks bring products *to* Florida, but have little to haul back. As a result, Pope negotiated lucratively low rates to transport the *Enquirer* to distribution points across the nation.

Still, the impact of *The Enquirer*'s shift in distribution reached beyond sales or profits. When Pope shifted the paper's focus, his explicit aim was to make housewives comfortable bringing it into the house. In short, he wanted to domesticate the tabloid. One might think that the easiest way of doing so would be to encourage regular subscriptions, but Pope opted to move

the point of sale from the urban street or drugstore counter (where it might be placed next to lad magazines and *Playboy*) to the female-oriented supermarket. Like the school or the church, the supermarket functions as a liminal space between the public and the private as items purchased in the store were for explicit use in the home. Just as women purchased the type of cereal that came into the house, so too did they purchase reading material that would end up on the family's coffee table — including *The Enquirer*. In this way, Pope helped to de-stigmatize, soften, and revitalize the *Enquirer*'s image, forging a successful campaign to diversify and broaden its potential audience.

Preparing to launch in late 1973, *People* co-opted key components of *The Enquirer*'s distribution strategy. Time Inc. properties such as *Time*, *Sports Illustrated*, *Fortune*, *Money*, and *Life* had long relied on subscriptions, which netted far less profit per issue but inflated circulation numbers and, as a result, increased ad rates. With *People*, Time Inc. would take a different approach, marketing it, like *The Enquirer*, as a single-copy magazine. The decision was attributed to the rising cost of second-rate postage, but a reliance on single-copy sales fit the form of the magazine with its alluring full-color covers. Time Inc. also made deals with major chains, just as *The Enquirer* had years before. Time would pay vendors a 20% commission on every magazine sold but also "agreed to pay $5 for each display rack if *People* went into every rack in the store, $3.25 if it only went in some of them," cultivating tremendous vendor incentive to place the magazine front and center.[75]

Time Inc. put *People* through comprehensive market testing and advertising leading up to its launch in 1974. The magazine was a pre-sold product: it boasted the Time Inc. brand; it was advertised ahead of time in sister publications; it even bore the name of an established *Time* column. With name recognition, a massive initial release, and an enormous engine of capital

powering it, the magazine was able to charge $4550 for a black and white advertising page in its initial issue – a tremendous figure for a first-run magazine.[76] While *People* eventually began offering subscriptions, in 1979, 85% of its readership was still composed of single copy sales.[77] As Chapter Six makes clear, the immediate and enduring success of *People* would provide a blueprint for future gossip publications, the most successful of which would be backed by substantial capital, expansive resources, and the negotiating heft of a major media conglomerate.

Like *The Enquirer*, *People* capitalized upon the liminal space of the supermarket but with slightly different goals. While *The Enquirer* aimed to domesticate and soften its product, *People* needed to differentiate itself from fan magazines and other overly domesticated products. Cultivating a subscription base would only further label the nascent publication as domestic, female, fannish, and outside the provenance of males and other "serious" readers. By depending on supermarkets – as well as drugstores and newsstands – as primary points of consumption, Time Inc. helped disassociate *People* from the fan magazines and their female audiences. Of course, Time also risked too closely associating its product with illicit products, such as *Confidential* or *The Enquirer*, sold in the public sphere. Yet the choice not only fit with *People*'s visual-heavy, impulse-gratifying form but also helped establish the magazine's distinct identity. *People*, much like *The National Enquirer,* was a publication whose form, content, mode of production, and distribution all contributed to an overwhelming invitation to be taken home and read.

CONCLUSION

The Enquirer and *People* found such remarkable success in the 1970s for a rather simple reason. They dealt with things the reader talked about, featured people *like* the reader, and did so in a form that was respectable, readable, and satisfied curiosities the reader did not even know he or she had. In slightly different ways, the two publications accentuated the most compelling

aspects of the tabloid, including readability, melodrama, and ease of purchase. At the same time, they cloaked the appeal to voyeurism – the very most attractive, albeit shameful, aspect of tabloid journalism – in the respectable clothes of personality journalism. It was not embarrassing to read these publications, not only because so many other people were, but also because they were both ostensibly upright, positive, and simply *catering to*, rather than *cultivating*, the curiosities of their audiences.

Both *The National Enquirer* and *People* spawned legions of imitators, further heightening the anxiety over celebrity infused coverage. Up-and-coming media mogul Rupert Murdoch launched *The Star* in 1974 to compete with *The Enquirer*, eventually reaching a domestic circulation base of three million.[78] *The New York Daily News* and *The New York Times* began running their own iterations of a "people" section and three new glossy celebrity "newsmagazines" (*Celebrity*, *In the Know*, and *Us*) cloned *People* in form, style, and tone.[79] The enervation of serious journalism with airy, soft-hitting speculation was viewed as systemic. Cultural critics bemoaned the apparent gossip renaissance, citing the front-page placement of gossip in many daily newspapers. "Not since the giddy old days of American journalism," *Business Week* lamented, "has so much space been devoted to so little."[80]

As early as 1977, critics were invoking a "celebrity industry" that "endlessly recycled" past and present stars, forced to "jerry-build new angles on old material or bestow media stardom on suspiciously ordinary folk."[81] Even President Jimmy Carter expressed his disdain, decrying *People*'s "gossipy prattle," asserting that the magazine "confirmed his sense of a nation whose familial values are in trouble and whose morals are in decline."[82] Carter and others of his mindset were reacting to the expansion of a type of coverage and curiosity heretofore reserved to Hollywood stars, pop idols, and Jackie Kennedy. While fan and gossip magazines had long found

a lucrative niche in the American publishing industry, they were ghettoized as "teen" or "women's" throwaway pleasures.

Yet the popularity of these new publications expanded that niche, infiltrating "serious" journalism with coverage of the celebrity – a term that expanded to include figures as diverse as the President, ice skaters, cancer survivors, and East Coast socialites. In truth, journalism had been turning towards celebrity and personality coverage since the late nineteenth century, and the complaints, cries, and moans were familiar, if amplified. The particular success of *The Enquirer* and *People* simply marked the completion of that turn, heralding a new era in the gossip industry in which several production cultures, characterized by positive coverage of celebrities and the cultivation of a mass audience, facilitated the spread of gossip into television and, eventually, the internet. As Chapter Seven demonstrates, the first and most successful manifestation of this era took the form of *Entertainment Tonight*. a syndicated televisual product specifically intended to function as "*People* on TV." As cable television spread through the '80s, so too did the number of time slots in need of relatively cheap, broadly accessible programming. Dressed as personality journalism and proven in its ability to attract a mass audience, gossip content was primed to fill that void.

[1] See Mark Deuze, "Popular Journalism and Professional Ideology: Tabloid Reporters and Editors Speak Out," *Media, Culture & Society,* 26.6 (2005): 861-882; Colin Sparks, "Introduction: The Panic over Tabloid News," in *Tabloid Tales*: *Global Debates over Media Standards*, eds. Colin Sparks and John Tullock (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2000), 1-40.

[2] Most large university libraries across the nation have holdings of *People* dating to the 1970s. While several university libraries collected *Photoplay* sporadically throughout its run, very few collected any other fan magazine, and none collected *The National Enquirer* (the Bowling Green Popular Culture Library now holds select runs).

[3] Charles L. Ponce de Leon, *Self-Exposure: Human-Interest Journalism and the Emergence of Celebrity in America, 1890-1940 (*Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 41.

[4] See Richard Decordova, *Picture Personalities: The Emergence of the Star System in America* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2000).

[5] See Leo Braudy, *The Frenzy of Renown: Fame and Its History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 19-28.

[6] Ponce de Leon, *Self-Exposure*, 103.

[7] *Ibid.*

[8] Ponce de Leon, *Self-Exposure,* 59.

[9] Ponce de Leon, *Self-Exposure,* 57.

[10] Ponce de Leon, *Self-Exposure*, 89.

[11] See Leo Lowenthal, *Literature, Popular Culture, and Society* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, Inc, 1961), 109-140.

[12] Ponce de Leon, *Self-Exposure*, 47. The *Evening Graphic,* widely regarded as the most salacious of the three, earned the moniker of the "pornoGraphic" for its lurid exploitation of sex scandals. See "Orgy," *Time*, February 27, 1927, http://bit.ly/a8g3w6

[13] Ponce de Leon, *Self-Exposure*, 79.

[14] See Michael Schudson, *Discovering the News: A Social History of American Newspapers* (New York: Basic Books, 1978); John Tulloch, "The Eternal Recurrence of New Journalism," in *Tabloid Tales: Global Debates Over Media Standards,* eds. Colin Sparks and John Tullock (Lantham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2000), 131-146; Ponce de Leon, *Self-Exposure*, 77.

[15] John Keane, *The Media and Democracy* (Cambridge, MA: Polity, 1991); Anthony Sampson, "The Crisis at the Heart of Our Media," *British Journalism Review* 7.3 (1996): 42-51.

[16] The Editors, "Introducing...," *People Magazine* 1.1 (1974), 2.

[17] Linda Bird Franke,"Gossip Mania," *Newsweek*, May 24, 1976, 56.

[18] See Decordova, *Picture Personalities*.

[19] *New York Times Co v. Sullivan*, 376 U.S. 254 (1964).

[20] See Anthony Lewis, *Make No Law: The Sullivan Case and the First Amendment* (New York: Random House, 1991).

[21] See Joan Barthel, "Rona Barrett: TV Snoop," *Life*, March 21, 1972, 41-42; Wayne Warga, "Rona Barrett Looks for New Home," *Los Angeles Times*, April 3, 1969, F20.

[22] See Jack Vitek, *The Godfather of Tabloid: Generoso Pope Jr. and* The National Enquirer (Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky Press, 2008).

[23] "Hollywood Goes to War' *Time*, January 21, 1981, http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article0,9171,952567,00.html.

[24] Robert Elson, *Time Inc.: The Intimate History of a Publishing Empire* (New York: Atheneum, 1986), 436.

[25] "Joining the *People* Parade," *Business Week*, May 16, 1977, 71.

[26] See Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1965).

[27] As Sparks points out, the term 'tabloid' has fluctuated in meaning over time, and tabloid journalism is by no means exclusive to newspapers in traditional 'tabloid' size. Instead, a tabloid may be distinguished by choice of topic, priorities, and taste. See Sparks, "Introduction," 10-11.

[28] Elizabeth Heilman, "What Makes *People Magazine* Such a Money Machine?" *Adweek*, January 1985, no page number.

[29] Elson, *Time Inc.*, 433.

[30] Elson, *Time Inc.*, 434.

[31] *Ibid.*

[32] Barry Siegel, "*People* - Prying into Private Lives," *Los Angeles Times*, May 6, 1976, E1.

[33] Martin Rossman, "The Nation's Favorite Gossip Turns 5," *Los Angeles Times*, February 26, 1979, D13.

[34] *Ibid.*

[35] Tom Shales, "*People* on TV: Melts in the Mind," *Washington Post*, August 28, 1976, C1; Sally Quinn, "*People Weekly*," *Washington Post*, April 2, 1977, B1; Franke, "GossipMania," 56; Betsy Carter, "The People's Choice?" *Newsweek*, August 30, 1976, 79.

[36] Quinn, *"People Weekly*," B1.

[37] *Ibid.*

[38] "Inside Look at *People Magazine*" *Time*, Nov. 8, 1974, 58.

[39] Heilman, "What Makes *People Magazine*,"no page number.

[40] Paula Morton, *Tabloid Valley: Supermarket News and American Culture* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2009), 33.

[41] David Lamb, "From Gore to Riches. *Los Angeles Times*, May 6,1972, A1.

[42] As Marsha Orgeron explains, early fan magazines encouraged reader interactivity, affirming the worth of an individual reader's opinion of Hollywood and stars. The *Enquirer* took interactivity a step further. A reader's opinion about celebrities was important, but so too were his/her pets, personal musings, and opinions on political issues. See Marsha Orgeron. ""You Are Invited to Participate": Interactive Fandom in the Age of the Movie Magazine," *Journal of Film and Video* 61.3 (2009): 3-23.

[43] "Shoddy Mechanics Can Take *Your* Money and *Your* Life," *The National Enquirer,* September 9,1973, 19; "Smothering Sneezes Can Harm *You*, Doctor Warns,"*The National Enquirer*, September 9, 1973, 4.

[44] "The U.S. Will Almost Certainly Have a Nuclear Disaster Within 10 Years," *The National Enquirer,* U.S. Senator Mike Gravel, July 16, 1972, 26; "Aspirin is So Dangerous It Should Only Be Sold by Prescription, Says Doctor" *The National Enquirer,* May 28, 1972, 29.

[45] "Nutrition Expert Warns: Plants Won't Grow in U.S. Soil by 1985," *The National Enquirer,* July 16, 1972, 14; "Psychiatrist Explains Decrease in Radical Activity on Nation's Campuses," *The National Enquirer,* April 30, 1972, 31.

[46] Morton, *Tabloid Valley*, 83.

[47] See Jostein Gripsrud, "The Aesthetics and Politics of Melodrama," in *Journalism and Popular Culture*, eds. Peter Dahlgren and Colin Sparks (London: Sage, 1992), 84-95.

[48] Rossman, "The Nation's Favorite," D13.

[49] The Editors, "Introducing....," 2.

[50] Heilman, "What Makes *People Magazine,*" no page number. The five best sellers from 1974-1979 reinforce the diversity of coverage: the covers featured Cher, Tony Orlando, *Star Wars*, Priscilla Presley, and a tie for fifth between Kris Kristofferson and Barbra Streisand and Liz Taylor and John Warner. See Tim Zito, "Lookers and Losers," *Washington Post*, March 2, 1979, E1.

[51] Siegel "*People* - Prying Into Private Lives," E1.

[52] Harry F. Waters, "The People Perplex," *Newsweek*, June 6, 1977, 89.

[53] "From the Editor's Desk," *Photoplay*, October 1961, 4.

[54] "*People*'s Premiere," *Time*, March 4, 1974, http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,944778,00.html.

[55] The Editors, "Introducing....," 2.

[56] "Sequel," *People Magazine* 4.3 (1975), 28; "Winners," *People Magazine* 4.9 (1975), 21; "Bio," *People Magazine*, 4.9 (1975). 39.

[57] G. Walter, "In Trouble," *People Magazine*, February 14, 1977, 48-49.

[58] S. Janus, "A psychologist discovered in Freddie Prinze's Boyhood the Moods that Finally Killed Him," *People Magazine*, February 14, 1977, 28.

[59] *Enquirer* reporters were some of the best paid in the business. In 1972, editors earned $66,000, staff reporters earned $35,000, while over 5,000 part time correspondents received between $500-$1000 for a cover tips. See M. Balfour, "*Enquirer*: Violence Gets the Ax," *The Washington Post*, October 15, 1972, K5.

[60] *Ibid.*

[61] "*Enquirer* Profits by in News," *New York Times*, August 13 1972, 50.

[62] "Hollywood Goes to War," *Time*, Jan. 21, 1980, http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article0,9171,952567,00.html.

[63] Robert Lindsey, "Carol Burnett and Enquirer Clash in Court," *New York Times*, March 18, 1981, A16.

[64] "Court Backs Reduction in Burnett Libel Appeal," *New York Times*, October 8, 1983, 1.34.

[65] Morton, *Tabloid Valley*, 14.

[66] Elson, *Time Inc.*, 435.

[67] *Ibid.*

[68] "Joining the *People* Parade," 71.

[69] Quinn, "*People Weekly*," B1.

[70] "Chatter," *People Magazine*, March 4, 1974, 72.

[71] Morton, *Tabloid Valley*, 38.

[72] *Ibid.*

[73] Philip H. Dougherty, "Advertising: *The National Star*," *New York Times*, February 4, 1974, 42.

[74] '*The Enquirer* Profits by Uplift in News" 50.

[75] "Joining the *People* Parade," 71.

[76] "*People*'s Premiere," Online.

[77] Rossman, "The Nation's Favorite," D13.

[78] "Hollywood Goes to War" Online.

[79] "Joining the *People* Parade" 71.

[80] *Ibid.*

[81] Waters, "The *People* Perplex," 89

[82] Peter Goldman, "To Lift a Nation's Spirit," *Newsweek*, July 23, 1979, 20.

PART THREE

CONSOLIDATION AND CONGLOMERATION
1980 - 2010

CHAPTER SIX
THE *PEOPLE* EFFECT
1974 - 1990

Starting in the early 1980s, *Entertainment Tonight* (*ET*) helped popularize a new mode of gossip in which stories on the private lives of stars and celebrities co-mingled with reportage of box office receipts and on-set exclusives. Now, some three decades later, *ET* has become one of the longest running, most consistently profitable programs on the air. In the 1980s, it readied the way for a profusion of entertainment news programs and publications that now form a major node in the media landscape, from E! to *Entertainment Weekly*. But *ET* was one program, albeit the most successful, amidst a sea of upstart publications and television pilots that emerged in the 1980s, manifestations of what one industry analyst retrospectively termed "the *People* effect."[1] *People*'s launch and subsequent success encouraged the creation of dozens of magazines, newspapers, tabloids, and syndicated and network television programs, all attempting to recreate *People*'s palatable blend of gossip and personality journalism.

Yet this "*People* effect" must be situated amidst a constellation of technological, regulatory, and journalistic changes, from the spread of cable and satellite technology to the gradual repeal of the Financial and Syndication (Fin-Syn) Rules and other anti-monopoly regulations. This chapter thus aims to position the influx of gossip, entertainment, and personality-focused publications within the greater cultural and industrial climate of the 1980s, with specific attention to *US Magazine* (now *US Weekly*) and *Entertainment Tonight*.[2] *US* struggled to find a foothold, switching ownership, format, content, and publishing schedule numerous times between its launch and 1977 and 1990. Critics found its content derivative and confused, and the frequent changes to format and style left it without a solid identity. In contrast, *Entertainment Tonight* was

hailed for its innovation and consistency, and its unmitigated success changed the landscape of first-run syndication, inspiring dozens of knock-offs and also-rans.

Why did two products, both inspired by the same magazine, fare so disparately? The answer lies in the extent to which each adopted and adapted the ethos and production culture of *People,* as opposed to simply copying them. The editorial ethos of *People* was straightforward: package cheerful, airy stories about celebrities and other notable individuals in a highly readable, image-heavy format. But *People*'s production culture was also rooted in its identity as a Time Inc. product and as an innovative publication that was the first of its kind. When producers of *Entertainment Tonight* held up copies of *People* in meetings with station owners across the nation, they were attempting to evoke the spirit and profitability of the magazine, not promising to put it, page for page, on air.[3] Instead, *ET* added coverage of entertainment news and a highly videographic style, creating a program unlike anything else on television. As one of the first programs distributed by satellite technology, *ET* provided "day and date" transmission, offering an immediacy with which no newsweekly could compete. In this way, *ET*'s initial and most enduring innovation was to create a demand for entertainment news where none had previously existed.

Like *People, Entertainment Tonight* was nested within a large conglomerate with holdings across film, television, music, and publishing. Time Inc. (now Time Warner) owns *People*; Paramount (now Viacom) is the primary producer of *ET.* In the early '80s, Paramount was still nested under the Gulf & Western umbrella, but after struggling to combine diverse holdings throughout the '70s, the conglomerate began selling its non-entertainment holdings, emulating the strategy espoused by Steve Ross at Warner Communications. As will become clear, the

investment in *Entertainment Tonight* was symptomatic of Paramount's resolve to tighten its holdings and their cross-promotional potential.

Just as Time Inc. was able to cover *People*'s start-up cost and initial launch, so too were *ET* producers able to leverage Paramount's capital base, distribution network, and connections within the industry to grant *Entertainment Tonight* extensive market penetration. Both Time Inc. and Paramount recognized the potential of these gossip entities, mobilizing them to provide free publicity and promotion for other conglomerate properties. *Entertainment Tonight* and *People* thus emerge as prototypes for successful gossip products in the '80s and '90s: nested within an media conglomerate; providing a mix of entertainment news, personality journalism, and gossip; and cultivating close, symbiotic relationship with other components of the gossip industry, including stars, publicists, and agents.

In contrast to *Entertainment Tonight*'s adaptation of the *People* ethos and production culture, the *New York Times* Co. designed *US* as an almost exact replica of *People*. Dissatisfied with its profits, the *Times* jettisoned the magazine after three years. From there, *US* travelled from one publishing entity to the next, eventually landing in the hands of Jann Wenner, whose resume as founder and editor of *Rolling Stone* seemed to promise success. But *US* could not escape its identity as a second-rate *People*, permanently lagging behind in circulation, ad rates, and access to celebrities. Wenner attempted to expand his publishing network in the early '90s but lacked the capital and connections to compete with a behemoth like Time Inc. With neither conglomerate ties nor a clear identity, the magazine floundered for the better part of two decades.

To support these conclusions, I have arranged the chapter in three sections. The first provides technological, cultural, industrial, and regulatory background on the media environment that allowed both Time Inc. and a program like *Entertainment Tonight* to thrive. The

second focuses on the "*People* effect" in publishing, underscoring how *People*'s unmitigated success inspired *USA Today*, *Vanity Fair,* and the various iterations of *US Magazine*. The third section looks to the "*People* effect" on television, examining the success of *Entertainment Tonight* and high-profile failures on the part of Time Inc. and *USA Today* to expand into televised personality journalism.

TEN YEARS THAT SHOOK HOLLYWOOD

As outlined in Chapter Four, the majority of the Hollywood studios had become parts of large, broadly diversified conglomerates by the early '70s. Over the course of the next two decades, these conglomerates would cultivate holdings related to media and entertainment while jettisoning those that did not. The apotheosis of this trend was Kinney National Services, which, in the late '60s, was a hodgepodge of funeral homes, parking lots, and dry cleaners. Under the guidance of Steve Ross, Kinney acquired Ashley-Famous Talent Agency, National Periodical Publications (now known as DC Comics), Panavision, Atlantic Records, and, most importantly, Warner Bros.-Seven Arts. By 1971, Ross had spun off Kinney's non-entertainment holdings, renamed the company Warner Communications, and continued his acquisition spree.[4] To varying degrees, Gulf + Western (owner of Paramount), MCA/Universal, Transamerica (owner of United Artists), and Disney all attempted to expand in similar fashion over the next decade. In the 1980s, several of the studios changed hands, while those that had avoided conglomerate control went up for sale: Transamerica sold UA to MGM in 1980, Coca-Cola bought Columbia in 1982, and Rupert Murdoch acquired control of Fox in 1984-1985.

These conglomerates were gradually achieving vertical integration, regaining the control of production, distribution, and exhibition that characterized studio filmmaking before the 1948 divestment decrees. At the same time, they were cultivating tight horizontal integration, expanding their media holdings as broadly as the FCC would allow. By collecting assets in

production, radio, television affiliates, book publishing, and music, a conglomerate could exploit a single product across multiple media, increasing profits exponentially. The more horizontally and vertically integrated the conglomerates become, the more likely it is that the producers of *entertainment gossip* will be housed under the same corporate umbrella as the producers of the *entertainment* itself. Conglomeration thus encourages production cultures invested in the production of cooperative and promotional content, as opposed to content that is confrontational, derogatory, or otherwise counterproductive to conglomerate goals.

As the conglomerates moved towards horizontal and vertical integration, the studios housed within them began to focus on big-budgeted blockbuster pictures. Of course, the blockbuster was not invented in the 1970s. Lavish film spectacles including *Gone with the Wind* (1939), MGM musicals, '50s bible epics, and roadshowing attractions were all produced and distributed in blockbuster fashion. But the recession of the late '60s put a cap on studio spending, and executives had begun to depend on frugal, innovative filmmaking in the mode of *Easy Rider* (1969). Yet in 1971, Congress passed a Federal Tax Relief bill, providing massive incentive for outside interests to invest in filmmaking. Even a film that lost money would serve its purpose of providing tax relief for investors.[5] While Congress closed these tax loopholes by the end of the decade, studios were nevertheless able to raise budgets across the board and signed off on personal projects for directors whose small movies had proven successful, giving Francis Ford Coppola, George Lucas, Steven Spielberg, William Friedkin, Martin Scorsese, and Michael Cimino free reign. More often than not, budgets spiraled out of control, leading to films that were by turns indulgent, bloated, and brilliant, including *New York, New York* (1977), *Apocalypse Now* (1979), and *Heaven's Gate* (1980).

Not every big budgeted film was a disaster. From 1975-1985, a decade J. Hoberman has termed "the ten years that shook the world," the studios and their conglomerate parents began to orient themselves around "high concept" filmmaking, in which a product's premise could be described in a sentence or less.[6] *Jaws* (1975), a pre-sold property with its visceral marketing campaign, was a sign of things to come as big-budget, effects-heavy films, the majority associated Spielberg and Lucas, characterized the next ten years.[7] Many of these '70s and '80s blockbusters were purposely bereft of established (and thus expensive) stars. *Star Wars* (1977) and *E.T.* (1982) were cast with relative unknowns: the star of these films was the concept. The most successful films may have privileged special effects over intricate narrative development, but they still relied on the presence of an emoting human body in the form of the actor. While some of those actors — Mark Hamill, for example — faded from stardom, others, such as Harrison Ford, leveraged one blockbuster role into another.

Ford and stars of his caliber did so with the help of agents. Indeed, the 1980s might be termed the decade of the Hollywood super-agent, ushering in a period of unprecedented star power. As Stephen Prince outlines, the emergence of agents as "industry power brokers" did not originate in the '80s, but "in that decade the results of their clout assumed stark clarity."[8] According to Prince, the results of agents' escalating power were threefold: they "fueled the inflation that gripped the industry, cartelized talent, and delimited the power of the studio executives."[9] Put differently, agents at the three major talent agencies [Creative Artists Agency (CAA), International Creative Management (ICM), and William Morris] leveraged benefits (large salaries, points off the gross, script approval, etc). for talent (stars, directors, producers, screenwriters) from the studios. As a result, the average film cost rose from $14.5 million to $20.7

million between 1984 and 1988, in large part due to escalating salaries for stars and star directors.[10]

Agents were able to exact such demands because the studios still viewed stars as "the best (and perhaps only) way to guarantee an audience."[11] The prevailing wisdom, despite evidence to the contrary, was that stars were tantamount to success, whether in the form of a star director (such as Spielberg), a star concept (such as a sequel or other pre-sold property), or an actual star actor. A star provided a selling point – a way to pitch the idea, secure investing, sell international rights, and advertise the finished product. Yet the agencies possessed what amounted to a virtual monopoly on these stars: if the studios wanted talent, they would have to go through the agencies to secure it. For example, for mini-major Carolco to make *Rambo III* (1988), it had to hire Sylvester Stallone; to hire Stallone, it had negotiate with his agent, Michael Ovitz, who extracted a $12-$16 million paycheck for the star.[12] Of course, agents had a vested interest in escalating star salaries: they gleaned 10% off of the star's final paycheck.[13] Combine studio desire for a sure-fire hit with a relative scarcity of sure-fire product, and the result is a tremendous amount of leverage for agents and the stars they represent.

Industry analysts trace the rise of this new breed of super-agent to 1975 when Ovitz and four William Morris colleagues combined to form the Creative Artists Agency (CAA). Following Michael Ovitz's lead, CAA agents dressed in Armani suits, drove matching Jaguars, traveled in packs, and practiced a Zen-influenced philosophy of teamwork and collaboration.[14] Over the course of the '80s, CAA rose to prominence and power, becoming home to the most vaunted talent brokers in the business. In the late '70s, however, Ovitz was but an upstart in this new class of super-agents whose most powerful members included Stan Kamen of William Morris and Sue Mengers at ICM. Yet Ovitz steadily built his client base and industry influence, signing Sean

Connery in 1979, followed by Paul Newman in 1980, Sydney Pollack, Robert Redford, Stallone, and an unknown named Tom Cruise in 1981.[15]

Through the '80s, Ovitz secured roles for Cruise in a string of massive hits that fine-tuned Cruise's cock-sure, all-American, and definitively masculine star image: *Risky Business* (1983), *All the Right Moves* (1983), *Top Gun* (1986), *The Color of Money* (1986), and *Cocktail* (1988). In the late '80s, Cruise proved his acting range in *Rain Man* (1988) and *Born on the Fourth of July* (1989) — prestige pictures that still managed to exploit Cruise's star power to massive profits and critical adulation. Cruise relied heavily on Ovitz and CAA during this time. They packaged him with Newman on *The Color of Money*; they found the script for *Rain Man*, put Cruise and fellow CAA client Dustin Hoffman in the lead roles, and sustained the project through four changes in director.[16] By 1990, Cruise was arguably America's biggest star, with a corresponding price tag of $9 million.[17]

Cruise was amongst a small handful of stars – including Stallone, Mel Gibson, Eddie Murphy, Bruce Willis, and Arnold Schwarzenegger – who, by the close of the decade, could demand between $5-$7 million per film. In some cases, stars' demands for points off the gross turned a small salary into a tremendous pay-day. In 1989, for example, Jack Nicholson re-negotiated his contract during the production of *Batman*, agreeing to forfeit his $3 million paycheck in exchange for a percentage of the film's gross and any ancillary product bearing the likeness of his character, The Joker. In the end, Nicholson received a breathtaking $50 million paycheck for a single film's work.[18] The balance of power had shifted, as agents had become utterly "indispensable for the operation of the business."[19] Indeed, when *Premiere Magazine* published its inaugural "Hollywood Power Rankings" in May 1990, Ovitz was on top, beating out MCA/Universal's Lew Wasserman, Disney's Michael Eisner and Jeffrey Katzenberg, and

Warner Bros.'s Ross and Bob Daly.[20] The 1980s were the Decade of the Agent, with the stars as their primary beneficiary.

While the agents leveraging salary and benefits for the stars, publicists were leveraging the extent and type of star access available to the press. Ovitz was responsible for much of Cruise's success in the 1980s, but Cruise's image could not have remained as pristine and unmarred by scandal without the assured guidance of his publicist, Pat Kingsley. As head of PMK, Kingsley was widely regarded as the most powerful publicity firm in Hollywood. Throughout the '80s and into the '90s, Kingsley ruled press access to Cruise with an iron hand.[21] As Anne Thompson describes,

> Anyone who has ever dealt with Kingsley knows that going up against her takes guts and the full backing of your organization. That's because she's willing to use her entire arsenal to protect her most powerful clients. With the bat of an eyelash, she'd withdraw the cooperation of her agency's other stars, refuse to cooperate on other stories or ban a publication from getting another star interview […] Kingsley controlled the select magazine covers Cruise would do for each picture, the friendly interviewers he was most comfortable with, the photographers who shot him to look his best. Knowing that he didn't have much to say, she controlled his image, preserving his mystique as a movie star. Her PR philosophy has always been, "Less is more." Keep the fans guessing. Hold the star in abeyance. Keep everyone lining up clamoring for more.[22]

In other words, Kingsley masterfully protected Cruise from questions and queries concerning Scientology, his sex life, and his marriage and divorce yet managed to make his brand distinctive, internationally recognizable, and unquestionably valuable. She managed the type, tone, and volume of gossip that would circulate about Cruise, bolstering the specific star image set up by his iconic roles – a service of equal and complementary importance to that of an agent in sustaining the power and profitability of a star.

For the gossip industry, the ramifications of this type of star power were multifold. First, the existence of "bonafide" stars paid large sums of money for big, blockbuster roles ensured a level of consumption absent since the halcyon days of "Dick and Liz." At the same time, stars

and their handlers could govern the placement of a photo, the choice of photographer, and interview specifics. The major gossip outlets of the '80s, outlined below, thus fought for exclusives with but five or six major stars.[23] Just as agents profited from the gap in studio demand and star availability, so too did the publicists. Kingsley could make the demands she did because the number of gossip outlets was far disproportionate to the number of stars who could be relied upon to sell an issue or attract a television audience.

The resultant leverage meant that programs and publications had to harmonize with the star's proffered image. In practice, this meant pitching soft-ball questions and painting a favorable portrait of the star, his/her personal life, and the specific product he/she was promoting. If an outlet printed or broadcast something negative or scandalous, the star's publicist and/or agent not only rescinded access to that star but to myriad others in their agency "stables." Coupled with the impetus to provide promotion for co-conglomerate products, the tone of the gossip during the 1980s was consistently flattering and dependably palliative. In this way, the relationship between stars, their representatives, and gossip outlets keenly resembled the cooperation between production cultures that existed in pre-war Hollywood.

As agents rose in prominence, the incursion of new technologies, especially cable, pay-cable, and the VCR, began to challenge studio control of how films would be exhibited in the home. Beginning in the days of early radio, the Federal Communications Committee (FCC) had blocked the Hollywood studios from entering into broadcasting, fearing the consolidation of entertainment media into the hands of few. The practice continued when broadcasting expanded from radio to television as the FCC checked studio attempts at entering into television, station ownership, cultivating "Pay-TV" options, or starting their own networks. At the same time, the FCC was wary of the existing networks, their growing power, and their apparent

negligence of the mandate to use the airwaves for the public good. In the 1960s, ABC, CBS, and NBC increasingly relied on programming in which they had invested, a practice that ensured profits but resulted in a schedule replete with game shows and derivative Westerns.[24]

The resultant crop of programming and the studios' monopolistic control over production, scheduling, and syndication encouraged FCC passage of the Financial Interest and Syndication Rules (Fin-Syn) in 1971. Fin-Syn prohibited the networks from securing financial interest in independently produced programming and syndicating off-network programming. Coupled with the Prime Time Access Rule (PTAR), Fin-Syn also limited the amount of programming that each network could produce for itself and freed a portion of prime time from network ownership. The resultant time slots, dubbed "prime access," would allow affiliates to program independently, hopefully with shows serving the local interest.

The FCC thus blocked the networks' attempt to achieve vertical integration, barring them from *producing* the content they *distributed*. With the passage of Fin-Syn and PTAR, the FCC also hoped to free broadcast hours from network-induced repeats, opening the airwaves to local interests and concerns. In several crucial ways, Fin-Syn served that purpose, but it failed to encourage local programming. When tasked with filling the hours vacated by PTAR, local stations usually opted for syndicated offerings from the studios or independent production companies, which not only cost less but brought in higher ad revenue.[25] Without Fin-Syn and PTAR, *Entertainment Tonight* — a show produced by Paramount and broadcast during prime access — would not have been feasible.

The spread of new technologies, including cable, satellites, and the VCR, also posed a threat to network control. With the help of satellite technology, Time Inc. launched HBO in 1975, sparking competition from Viacom (Showtime) and a group of studios that attempted to

circumvent HBO through their own premium movie service, tentatively named Premiere. But Premiere was blocked at every turn as the FCC and the courts still considered any move on the part of the studios to move into television exhibition as monopolistic. The networks, however, had greater worries than pay TV. While cable (CATV) had long been available in rural areas unreachable by broadcast signals, in the 1980s, it began to spread in earnest to urban and other areas already serviced by broadcast, featuring superstations (WGN, WOR, TBS), ESPN, Nickelodeon, C-Span, and several evangelical stations.[26] The studios' conglomerate owners, legally unable to purchase or launch their own cable channels, began buying cable MSOs (multiple system operators) instead — a move that would provide enormous leverage in the future when deregulation eventually allowed for the purchase of cable channels, local affiliates, and networks.

To battle the spread of cable, the networks began to lobby hard for relief from Fin-Syn. The networks argued that without the revenue from network-produced shows that could be sold into syndication, they would no longer be able to provide national broadcasting service for free. The studios lobbied back, and with the help of then-president Ronald Reagan, a long-time friend and former client of MCA/Universal head Lew Wasserman, they fended off attempts to rescind Fin-Syn until the early '90s. Yet governmental forces were amenable to deregulation in other sectors of the entertainment industry. The Paramount Decrees had forced the studios to gradually disaffiliate themselves from their exhibition arms in the late '40s and '50s, but under President Reagan, the Department of Justice had "interpreted the court's rulings leniently."[27] By 1987, MCA/Universal, Columbia, Warner, and Paramount had all invested in theater chains, effectively restoring the vertical integration of the studio era and further strengthening conglomerate control over the industry.[28]

But the studios and networks faced a second threat in the form of the VCR, whose two leading formats (VHS and Betamax) were owned by Japanese software giants JVC and Sony. Up until the early '90s, videotapes were rarely "sold-through" for ownership, but the studios and networks recognized the VCR's alternate threat. Not only did it permit viewers to rent a video and watch it at their leisure, it also allowed savvy consumers to record programs and films broadcast on television, "time-shifting" to watch whenever and however many times they wished. The studios were acutely aware of how such a device could cut profits and fought to suppress VCR technology on grounds of copyright infringement. In a congressional hearing, Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) head Jack Valenti declared that "the VCR is to the American film producer and the American public as the Boston strangler is to the woman home alone."[29] Despite such arch rhetoric, the Supreme Court ruled in favor of Sony and other VCR companies in 1984, declaring time-shifting to be a form of fair-use.[30]

One battle lost, the conglomerates opted to take a different strategy in the war between providers of *hardware* (VCRs) and providers of *software* (films and television). Studios, cable interests, and networks began to combine forces, either through joint ventures, expansion, or conglomeration. Tri-Star Studios, a joint venture of Columbia Pictures, HBO, and CBS founded in 1982, streamlined the flow of product from filming to exhibition in the theaters, on pay cable, and finally on network television.[31] Three years later, a calculated temporary blindness on the part of the FCC allowed Rupert Murdoch's News Corp. to acquire full ownership of Fox, purchase the Metromedia group of television stations, and launch the Fox broadcasting network. The move put a studio and network under the same ownership umbrella for the first time since the infamous DuMont network, a disastrous venture between DuMont Laboratories and Paramount Studios that folded in 1956. Fox only broadcast ten hours of programming in its

early years, but such synergy became the envy of the media industry, encouraging the conglomerate move towards network ownership in the mid-1990s. While the Japanese software producers continued to thrive, the American media industry kept pace, primarily via conglomeration and cooperation.

Conglomeration also promoted the expansion of the gossip industry. Not necessarily because there were more celebrities, or because existing stars were more interesting, but because gossip served an increasingly crucial purpose within the media conglomerate. In addition to providing a profitable revenue stream, gossip provided promotion and publicity for other conglomerate products. As outlined in Chapters One and Two, the fan magazines had served this function before and immediately following divestment, yet the relationship between the two production cultures had always been informal. In contrast, the direct financial line between gossip outlets and media conglomerates guaranteed that the tone of said gossip would remain soft and supportive. At the same time, it ensured that gossip outlets on the fringes of the conglomerate landscape, such as *US,* would struggle in comparison.

THE* PEOPLE *EFFECT: PUBLISHING

From 1974 through the end of the 1980s, the "*People* effect" took one of two forms in publishing: 1) established publishers launched new publications, including *US Magazine*, *USA Today*, and *Vanity Fair*, in an attempt to tap into the national appetite for celebrity news and personality journalism; 2) media companies eager to expand sought out struggling celebrity publications, such as *US,* in hopes of bolstering their existing holdings. Products that simply attempted to emulate the look and content of *People,* such as *US,* failed to find a market foothold. In contrast, *Entertainment Tonight, USA Today* and *Vanity Fair* successfully adapted crucial aspects of the *People* ethos and production culture, including the split between personality- and celebrity-

focused coverage, positive relations with studios and celebrities, and light, highly digestible content approach to fit their specific mediums and intended audience.

In the mid-'70s, the *New York Times* Company began to expand its holdings, slowly buying up local newspapers. In light of *People*'s success, the *Times* launched its own personality-based biweekly magazine, *US Magazine*, in April 1977. Dismissed as a *People* knock-off, the magazine floundered. Despite reaching a circulation of nearly 900,000, *US* had lost nearly $10 million between 1977 and 1980.[32] In March 1980, The *Times* Company unloaded *US* for $4 million to the Macfadden Group, which was still attempting to revitalize *Photoplay* and other classic fan magazines.[33] Under Macfadden, the content of *US* was to be ratcheted "a tad or two more in the direction of *People*."[34] Macfadden turned the magazine around, raising its rate base to 1.1 million by 1983 and increasing circulation by 2% when nearly all other magazines were in decline.[35] Over the course of 1984, Macfadden laid plans to infuse the magazine with a new capital investment, but Warner Communications held an option to buy 50% of the company. When Macfadden tried to buy the option, Warner "shopped it around" instead.[36] In May 1985, Warner and Macfadden sold *US* to then-independent television distributor Telepictures Inc. and Straight Arrow Press, owned by Jann Wenner, founder and editor of *Rolling Stone*.[37]

Why would a rock journalist and a distribution company desire a moderately profitable celebrity magazine? The potential of its format. In the early '80s, the success of *People* had inspired the launch of *Entertainment Tonight*, *USA Today*, and Conde Nast's revival of *Vanity Fair*, illuminating the breadth of the potential audience for celebrity-infused personality journalism. *USA Today* manifested key components of the *People* style, including brief, highly digestible news items, heavy use of graphics, and personality-oriented coverage of current events.[38] Under the control of Al Neuharth, then head of Gannett Media, *USA Today* used Gannett's network of 80+

daily newspapers and holdings in satellite technology to facilitate printing and distribution, creating a national newspaper to compete with the *Wall Street Journal* (*WSJ*).[39] Like the *WSJ*, *USA Today* was marketed towards travelers, businessman, and other members of the "mobile, upscale market."[40] The editors intended the paper to be read on the go and used micro-stories, vibrant color coding, and generous photography to appeal to the casual reader. Neharth publicized his goal to edit "not for the nation's editors, but for the nation's readers," working, like *People*, to inform without offending. In practice, this meant putting Grace Kelly's death on the front page, even when the president of Lebanon was assassinated on the same day.[41]

Soon after *USA Today* hit newsstands in September 1982, critics from older, traditional newspaper began to decry its form and content. It quickly earned the nickname of "McPaper" for its "brief treatment of major stories, emphasis on celebrities, and boosterish tone," all of which rendered it "the journalistic equivalent of junk food."[42] By April 1983, Gannett was promising an 800,000 guaranteed circulation base; by 1987, that number had climbed to 1.3 million.[43] In 1987, an authorized account of the paper and its struggles, *The Making of McPaper*, revealed that the paper had incurred nearly $500 million in losses between 1982 and 1986 before finally turning profitable in May 1987.[44] But *USA Today* had already altered newspaper journalism. Even the *New York Times* admitted that the paper had been "loudly mocked and quietly mimicked" by papers across the nation.[45] By the early '90s, Gannett had transformed from a "shitkicker outfit from Rochester to an international media company" — a reputation and reach built not by imitating *People* but by espousing crucial aspects of its tone, format, and packaging.[46]

Unlike the upstart *USA Today*, *Vanity Fair* had a storied pedigree. The original *Vanity Fair* had been one of the foundational publications of the Conde Nast publishing empire, but

dwindling circulation during the Depression forced Nast to fold *Vanity Fair* into *Vogue* in March 1936. In 1981, Nast announced plans to reintroduce the magazine, this time as a mix of high culture, poetry, book excerpts, commentary, literary criticism, and investigative journalism. The first issue hit newsstands in February 1983, but the magazine floundered. Critics called it a "typographical mess" and "pretentiously high-brow."[47] It went through three editors and three publishers in two years, sparking rumors of its pending demise.[48] But in 1984, Tina Brown took over as editor-in-chief, reinvigorating the magazine by reorienting its focus and covers towards celebrity. The effect was almost immediate. By August 1985, circulation had risen 32% to 381,000 while ad pages were up 41%.[49]

The revamped *Fair* was deemed "an upscale *People*."[50] Crucially, however, Brown did not simply repackage *People* on glossier paper. Rather, she applied the high-brow Conde Nast formula to the type of personality-focused coverage at home in *People*. Brown defended the new focus of the magazine, countering that "many of the people in *Vanity Fair* show up in *People*, but they also show up in *Time* and *60 Minutes*."[51] Indeed, the abundance of celebrity and personality-focused content in *Vanity Fair*, *Time*, *60 Minutes*, and *USA Today* was, at least in part, a manifestation of the *People* effect. Over the course of the '80s, all four products were able to parlay that effect into profitability. When Wenner and Telepictures bought *US* in 1985, they hoped to tap into the seemingly elastic market for celebrity and personality journalism, exploiting *US*'s potential to its fullest.

Under the guidance of Wenner, the partnership enacted an extensive and expensive refurbishment of *US*. Wenner aimed to make the magazine "crisper and smarter" by differentiating it from the competition in general and *People* in particular. *People*'s 60/40 ratio between "real people" and celebrity stories resulted in too many stories focused on, in his words,

"the ghetto tree doctor and the nun with herpes."[52] In interviews in both trade and popular publications leading up to *US*'s relaunch, Wenner employed slight variations on this description of *People*, working to label his competition and their particular mix of coverage as equal parts ridiculous and melodramatic. He and various reviewers also emphasized the ways in which *US* had distanced itself from the *People* brand, cutting cloying columns on "Celebrity Recipes," star horoscopes, and other human interest stories and replacing them with entertainment news and gossip.[53]

Editors at *People* claimed to be nonplussed, as *US*'s circulation of 950,000 paled in comparison to *People*'s 2.8 million reach. As a biweekly, *US* could not break new stories, and the magazine's color photography supposedly lacked the "immediacy" and "credibility" of *People*'s black-and-white formula.[54] *People* dismissed *US*'s focus on celebrities, claiming "If you stick with 100 percent celebrity stories, you run out of credibility pretty fast. You have to be careful not to become captive of press agents."[55] The *People* editors' critique of *US* illuminates their own rhetorical project, which was focused on defining their own publication as credible, reliable, devoted to "objective" reporting, and free from celebrity and press agent demands.

The critique likewise articulates differences between the two production cultures that would define the competition between the magazines for the next two decades. How much space should be devoted to celebrities? What is the value of human interest stories? How closely do editors and writers cooperate with publicists and press agents? What age group and demographic are most desirable? How do formal attributes — including color, lay-out, and glossiness — affect that demographic? And the other, unstated question — how crucial is ownership by a large media conglomerate to a publication's success? As the next three chapters

will show, these questions would not only structure the competition between *People* and *US*, but between gossip outlets of all types.

Between 1985 and 1988, Telepictures Inc. merged with Lorimar, responsible for the production and distribution of *Knots Landing* and *Dallas*, and purchased the MGM production lot from Ted Turner. Warner Communications purchased Lorimar-Telepictures in 1988, thus bringing *US* under conglomerate control. But in 1988, Warner began discussion of a potential merger with Time Inc., a move which would place *People* and *US* under the same corporate umbrella. Instead, Wenner bought the remaining interest in the magazine in April 1989.[56] Several months later, a revamped *US* hit newsstands, this time focused on gossip, fashion, and style. The new *US* promised to be "nice to celebrities" since, according to Wenner, "famous people hate being in *People*."[57] Wenner was clearly over-exaggerating, as dozens of celebrities sought the promotion allotted by *People* coverage. The subtext of Wenner's statement was that *People* did not always fully cooperate with celebrity and publicist demands, which could periodically frustrate efforts to control and refine a celebrity's image. *US*, on the other hand, was eager to provide uncritical promotion in hopes of gaining greater celebrity participation.[58]

Wenner persistence was motivated by a specific industrial goal. In a 1989 interview with the *New York Times*, Wenner confessed that "the publisher of a solo magazine," such as *Rolling Stone*, suffered a disadvantage "in an era of communications conglomerates."[59] Wenner thus planned to fashion his own publishing empire, gradually accumulating sufficient clout to compete with industry behemoths Time Warner and Conde Nast. He followed the full acquisition of *US* with introduction of *Men's Journal* in March 1992 and *Family Life* a year later. According to Wenner, "we could be launching a magazine every year to 18 months."[60]

Yet as one magazine consultant made clear, "while Jann Wenner is successful, he is outgunned."[61] With four publications to the dozens owned by Time Warner and Conde Nast, Wenner found it difficult to leverage prime placement of the magazine in the all-important supermarket check-out aisle. In 1991, Wenner modified the *US* format and editorial ethos yet again, this time challenging Time Warner's *Entertainment Weekly* and cinephile-oriented *Premiere*. The new *US* was published monthly and filled with substantive features, ranging from celebrity profiles to in-depth examination of Hollywood's anti-Latino casting bias.[62] But the move was a miscalculation. *US* still lacked a cohesive identity, stuck somewhere between frothy promotional vehicle and serious entertainment journalism.[63]

Despite Wenner's intimacy with the music world, Straight Arrow could not compete with the massive web of Time Warner content, holdings, and established relationships, which often funneled content and exclusives directly to *People* and *Entertainment Weekly*. The first half of the '90s, *US* circulation hovered around 1.2 million. Between 1995 and 2000, however, circulation fell to 1 million while *People* and *Entertainment Weekly* increased circulation to 3.5 million and 1.5 million, respectively.[64] Within Wenner Media, *US* was known as "Jann's Vietnam." Even as it bled him and the rest of the corporation dry, he refused to abandon it. Famous for his hands-on editorial style, Wenner could not settle on a format or editor that pleased him or the reading public.[65] For Wenner, *US* was an opportunity to prove that *Rolling Stone* had not been a fluke. "People wonder why Jann's doing this," said one obviously disgruntled *US* editor, "It's really quite simple. He's never been satisfied with being a great editor. Part of him resents being known as the *enfant terrible* who founded *Rolling Stone*. He wants to be Henry Luce" — the man responsible for *Time Magazine* and the Time Inc. empire.[66]

But Wenner was no Luce. Not until 2000, when Wenner turned the magazine to a weekly, changed its name, acquired co-financing from Disney, and hired renegade editor Bonnie Fuller did the magazine finally settle on a format and tone that would win it a market foothold. Like Luce, Murdoch, and even Ross, who turned his father-in-law's parking lots and funeral home holdings into Time Warner, Wenner aimed to build a publishing conglomerate. But he lacked the infrastructure, movie studio, network, or cable channels of a true media conglomerate and struggled to define his publication or forge synergy between products. As Chapter Eight explains, *US* succeeded in the 2000s in part due to partnership with Disney, which allowed the brand to spread cross-media. Even more importantly, the twenty-first century *US* changed the terms of the relationship between the celebrity and the reader — not by emulating *People*, *Vanity Fair*, or *Entertainment Weekly*. It developed its *own* ethos, one that has since been broadly copied and co-opted, even by *People*.

THE* PEOPLE *EFFECT: TELEVISION

Logic would suggest that a *People*-branded program might be the most likely to extend the *People* effect to television. Indeed, between 1976 and 1988, Time-Life Television produced four different pilots touting the *People* name.[67] In his review of Time-Life's first attempt, *People Cover Story*, veteran *New York Times* television reviewer John J. O'Connor asked the pertinent question: "if gossip works demonstrably well for a magazine or newspaper, can it succeed within the special context of a television format?"[68] Gossip and personality journalism had worked in the past, whether in the form of the Edward R. Murrow-hosted *Person-to-Person* or the slightly more high-minded *60 Minutes*. Yet for O'Connor, *People Cover Story* was little more than a "*Person-to-Person* revival" with "slicker production values."[69] In other words, *People Cover Story* lacked a hook or sense of freshness, and audiences and network executives reacted with "little enthusiasm."[70]

Thus formed the refrain that would surround all four of *People*'s television iterations. Whether thirty minutes or ninety, hosted by Lily Tomlin or a non-celebrity, television viewers remained apathetic, even as *People Magazine*'s circulation and influence continued to grow.

The failure of all four programs defied industrial logic. Time-Life Television was nested within Time Inc. and it enjoyed a healthy reputation within Hollywood.[71] Time-Life attempted partnering with each of the networks and experimented with a variety of formats and program lengths. The only way to understand such a contradiction is lack of innovation and novelty. Most industry experts believed that a solid brand, such as *People*, would attract audiences. In the case of the various *People* pilots, however, I believe the built-in audience, confident that they had been informed about the news of the week through their readership of *People*, may have chosen not to make *People* part of their television routine. The success of *Entertainment Tonight* — a program that espoused the *People* ethos, but whose formal and content-based innovations promised something novel — further substantiates this theory.

Similar to the print publications highlighted above, *Entertainment Tonight* was a manifestation of the *People* effect. Producers evoked *People*'s format and success by holding up copies during sales meetings, yet *ET* was not a simple transfer of *People* content to the airwaves. Rather, *ET* executives co-opted and elaborated upon two central concepts to the *People* formula: audiences are interested in stories about personalities, and audiences desire those stories delivered in soft, optimistic style. *ET* was also nested, at least partially, within a media conglomerate, a position that afforded the same sort of support enjoyed by *People*.

People cleared the path for *Entertainment Tonight*. Once on the air, however, *ET*'s innovations in delivery, style, and content helped transform the "*People* effect" into the "*ET* effect," sparking more than a dozen programs imitating *ET*'s format, style, content, and distribution. Until the

early '80s, "first-run" syndicated programming (programming created for initial airing in syndication, not re-runs) was limited to a "ghetto of game shows, talk shows and cartoons."[72] *Entertainment Tonight* gentrified that ghetto, changing the way that both producers and stations conceived of first-run syndication and its potential profitability.

Alfred M. Masini conceived of *Entertainment Tonight* in the 1970s. A former ad exec and the creative force behind *Solid Gold*, *Star Search*, and *Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous*, Masini came up with the idea for *ET* by studying what *was not* on the air.[73] Where others saw a full television schedule, he saw an absence – no one was providing "entertainment news" in the form of information on box office receipts, upcoming projects, Nielson ratings, gossip, and personality profiles. But the particular brand of "news" that *ET* was prepared to offer was a commodity that consumers had no idea they were supposed to desire. Indeed, before 1981, "almost no one, outside of pencil pushers in the business, had heard of television's upfront ad-selling season" let alone attendance figures, production deals, and industry machinations.[74]

But if *ET* provided that news, Masini hypothesized, audiences would watch. As longtime *ET* host Mary Hart recalled, "We were wondering, 'Do people really want to learn all these details – the weekly TV show ratings, the top-grossing movies?' If we present it concisely and regularly, the answer is yes, people do want to learn."[75] Hart's rhetoric reproduced the implicit message of the program, which suggested that entertainment news, when offered on a daily basis and concision, accrues gravity and importance. In other words, *ET* supplied entertainment news and figures with such regularity that such information no longer appeared superfluous but *necessary* to make sense of the (entertainment) world.[76]

While *Entertainment Tonight* was introducing a new genre of programming, it was also proposing a novel model of distribution. *ET*, like Maisani's other hits, was syndicated. For the

last thirty years, syndicated programs had been "bicycled" from station to station, airing in one market, then sent, via the mail, to another. As a result, the lag-time between production and airing could be weeks — an unacceptable lag time for a show promising up-to-date Hollywood news. Paramount offered a solution in the form of satellite technology. In exchange for control of the show, Paramount offered to install and lease dishes to any station willing to air the show.[77] The offer resulted in a network of 100 local stations equipped to receive the *ET* feed and a reach unthinkable without Paramount's infusion of capital.[78]

Satellite distribution also allowed *Entertainment Tonight* "day and date" transmission, meaning the show could be aired the same day it was filmed. This promise of immediacy would prove quintessential to *ET*'s image. In the early '80s, the weekend's box office figures came in at noon on Monday. *ET* would tape its segment at 1:30 pm, and the finished product would be seen across the nation within hours, beating even the afternoon papers.[79] As a result, *ET* even beat the Hollywood trade papers in announcing figures crucial to the industry. In truth, such immediacy mattered little to *ET*'s audience, the vast majority of whom had no fiscal investment in the media industry. But the distinction as the "first in entertainment news" bestowed *ET* viewers with the status of insiders and experts and, by extension, encouraged serial viewership.

ET's cost and market penetration were unprecedented. Producers estimated the annual price tag at $20 million, and three months before it aired, *ET* had already been cleared in 100+ markets, reaching 77% of the U.S. homes with all advertising sold for the year.[80] In its first week on the air, *ET* made good on its promises to affiliates, earning a 12.6 national rating for the week of September 14-18, 198, enough to make it the highest-rated national newscast.[81] But early reviews were not kind. The hosts were "dreadful"; the news was "so soft it squishes"; it was "*People Magazine* without that fine publication's depth."[82] One critic deemed it a "press agent's

dream," calling out a recent on-set visit to Paramount-produced *Grease II* as pure promotional propaganda.[83] In decrying *ET*'s intimacy with the industry, critics were in fact criticizing the cooperation between the production cultures at *ET* and the studios. In other words, *ET* was *intended* to be a press agent's dream and serve as a promotional vehicle for Paramount. These functions were not intended to be visible to the average viewer, only the savviest of whom would even realize that the show was produced by the same organization as *Grease II*.

Over the next decade, critics would continue to criticize *ET*'s relationship with Hollywood. According to one *Time* reviewer, "*ET* is a part of the phenomenon it covers, another wheel in the publicity machine it seeks to explain."[84] *ET* has built a "cozy, symbiotic relationship" with celebrities, and "[t]he show has dropped almost all pretense of being anything but an arm of the Hollywood publicity machine," filled with "fluff indistinguishable from advertising."[85] Such assessments were not inaccurate. From the start, *ET*'s tone has mirrored that of a traditional fan magazine, offering fawning, flattering portraits of the stars and Hollywood delivered by Hart and her various co-anchors in a bright, cheery fashion. While *ET* would not shy from reporting on an existing celebrity controversy or scandal, the tone was never derogatory or denigrating. Most importantly, the *ET* production culture, with its lack of an investigative reporting arm, did not break such stories itself, lest it risk alienating a celebrity or publicist. The addition of entertainment news and figures helped *ET* to gain credibility and attract a broader demographic. But it did not change the character of the relationship between the program and its subjects.

That relationship, however, was one of *ET*'s biggest assets. As *Variety* observed, the program is "a big wet kiss in terms of promotion of projects." A single appearance on *ET* could reach double, even triple the audience of one on a network morning show or an evening talk show.[86] Such reach gave *ET* tremendous leverage, especially over publicists eager to place

celebrity clients on the show. Over the course of the '80s, *ET* producers exploited this leverage to exact a host of demands, including exclusive footage, access to stars, and the right to air a trailer before any other outlet.[87] As Kingsley explained, "they're a 600-pound gorilla. The No. 1 show can command that."[88] But *ET* needed celebrities and their publicists as much as they needed *ET*. "The reality is that we're all in bed with each other," said one top talent manager, "So nobody can tell anyone off. I need them. They need me."[89]

The gossip outlets had always worked symbiotically with the studios, one depending on the other to achieve their own goals. As demonstrated over the last five chapters, the terms of that relationship have at times been more strained, and visible, than others. The trade papers tolerated and even praised *ET*'s function within the industry — it was critics outside of the industry, writing for national publications, who bemoaned the transparency of its promotional function. Yet as the ratings made clear, audiences did not object to such transparency, and *ET* used it to its own advantage and profit.

ET attempted to make up for lack of hard content with snappy editing, musical accompaniment, and fast-paced storytelling. Producers livened up its otherwise soft approach with flashy graphics, sound effects, and quick cuts that add "portent" and attract audience members who are "video fluent,"[90] manifesting a graphic mode that John T. Caldwell has termed "exhibitionism," in which stylization and activity take precedence.[91] In 1983, a typical program began with seven to eight solid minutes of industry news, delivered in the style of a nightly news program. A "Spotlight" on celebrity and an on-set exclusive (a "Never-Before-Seen glimpse behind Johnny Carson's desk!") followed industry news. The show generally closed with an "in-depth" report on style, an industry trend, or "a look backward at entertainment of the past."[92]

From time to time, a longer, more investigative piece or multi-part series would replace the final section. "Paparazzi-snapshots," in which stills of of celebrities linked each segment of the show. Because *ET* was shot on video, producers could easily and cheaply manipulate graphics and other visual framing devices (bumpers, "Next On," logos). The cluttered aesthetic compensated for the otherwise "low" production values (until digitalization, video always looked far cheaper than film) and, more importantly, guided viewer response to material and discouraged viewers from changing channels. The carefully orchestrated mix of content, oscillating amongst headlines and statistics, eye-catching imagery, and slightly longer interviews and features mirrored likewise prevented viewer fatigue with a particular segment.

Over the course of the '80s, *ET* continued to grow. By September 1983, it trailed only *Solid Gold* and *Family Feud* with a 8.9 weekly rating, while its weekend show, *Entertainment this Week*, earned a 14.4[93] By the end of the decade, *ET* had established itself, in the words of one Hollywood observer, as "such an important component in the way the industry is covered by press and television that it would be difficult to imagine it absence."[94] According to Ron Miller, a journalist for the Knight-Ridder newspaper chain, *ET*'s concept had "revolutionized the TV syndication business and proved that expensive, original non-network programming can be profitable to everyone."[95] *ET* prided itself on its success, collecting both of the above quotes for a full-page *Variety* advertisement that trumpeted the program's success. With its placement in the leading Hollywood trade, *ET* was effectively advising other Hollywood entities that the program had taken on a crucial promotional role within the industry, and could not be ignored.

With the potential and profitability of the genre firmly established, imitators followed. Between 1981 and 1990, more than a dozen shows and pilots attempted to emulate the *ET* formula, including Metromedia's *All About US* (1984); Paramount's *America* (1985); King World's

Photoplay (1986); Tribune Entertainment's *Public People, Private Lives* (1988-1989); TPE's *Preview* (1990); Twentieth's *Entertainment Daily Journal* (1990-1992); and Viacom's *TV Star* (1980) *Entertainment Coast to Coast* (1986), *Exclusive* (1988), and *America's Hit List* (1990).[96] Some shows, such as the pilot for *All About US,* were clear attempts to create cross-media promotion for print publications while others, such Twentieth's *Entertainment Daily Journal*, attempted to provide promotion for parent companies, in this case Fox/News Corps.

The most significant challenge arrived in 1988, when Gannett Media developed a half-hour strip modeled after *ET* and branded with the *USA Today* name. The prospect of such a program proved so beguiling that 156 stations signed up to air *USA Today: On TV* without seeing a pilot. Yet the show crashed and burned despite a promotional maelstrom preceding its September 1988 launch. Even an extensive revamp, new executive producer, new hosts, and "second debut" in January 1989 could not turn the show around. After little more than a year on the air, *USA Today: On TV* was unceremoniously cancelled.[97] But *USA Today: On TV* was no anomaly. Each challenger to *ET* either failed to make it out of the pilot stage, lasted but a season, or staggered through two seasons of low ratings. Here again was the exacting logic of the *People* effect in action. The product that adapted the *People* ethos to TV, innovating along the way, succeeded, while those that simply tried to duplicate *ET,* perhaps adding an additional anchor or focusing on a specific location, failed.

Imitators also struggled for a reason that had little to do with *Entertainment Tonight*. *ET* was innovative and addictive, but its initial clearances and subsequent growth took place during a period of high demand for syndicated programming. As the number of independent stations grew (from 106 to 215 between 1980 to 1985), the number of shows being sold into "off-network" syndication (e.g. reruns) decreased.[98] The networks had become increasingly quick to

cancel high-budget shows with mediocre ratings, and without at least a season or two already produced, a program could not be profitably sold into syndication. In this way, the networks inadvertently bolstered the first-run syndication market, which included shows like *ET*, *Solid Gold*, and a raft of game shows such as *Family Feud* and *Wheel of Fortune*.[99] *ET* and the game shows were joined in the mid-'80s by televised tabloids — *Hard Copy*, *A Current Affair*, and *Inside Edition* — that, like *People*, treaded "the intersection between public and private life" yet differentiated themselves through interest in the weird, the tawdry, and other sensational subjects otherwise at home in tabloid journalism.[100]

Each station's schedule had a finite amount of "prime access" space between the evening news and prime time. Depending on the time zone and the length of the local news, a station had room for two, three, or maybe four half-hour "strips" at most. By the end of the '80s, "there [were not] any quality access time periods that *ET*, *Wheel* [*of Fortune*], *Jeopardy*, *A Current Affair* or *Inside Edition* had left open."[101] A program might settle for a moderate number of access clearances, building its audience. Yet any program attempting to emulate the *ET* formula needed to expend a similar amount of capital, which, by 1988, was $21 million per annum, or $400,000 a week. In order to turn a profit, a new program required prime access clearance in a similar number of markets, generally upwards of 100. With so few access spots available, competitors faced insurmountable odds. *Entertainment Tonight*'s success was thus a combination of its adaptation of the *People* effect, subsequent innovations, and the ruling logic of the conglomerate media industry.

CONCLUSION

The *People* effect changed publishing and broadcasting landscape, reorienting existing products towards celebrity, personality, and entertainment journalism as it sparked the creation of

dozens of new ones. But *People* also provided a simple business lesson, namely, that the existence of an appetite for a certain type of news and coverage does not mean that any product will satisfy. Consumers, even those of gossip and entertainment news, are discerning. There may be an unceasing fount of personalities, celebrities, and other "fascinating individuals," but in order to sell those stories (and attract advertisers and the all-important 18-48 demographic) they need to be packaged in way that does not seem redundant, stale, or pedantic. With a finite amount of space available, whether at the check-out counter or in prime access, products cannot seem cheap or budgeted, and they need to provide exclusives that make a reader feel like he or she is an insider — attributes that require the capital and connections of a studio or media conglomerate.

As the next chapter explains, the late '80s challenged the rules of the *People* effect, as Movietime, a cable channel chocked full of entertainment news and vested with strong studio ties, struggled to find an audience. At the same time, *Entertainment Tonight* seemed to be stagnating, and Time Inc., newly merged with Warner Communications, renewed plans to dominate the entertainment news landscape in both print and broadcasting. The perceived market for entertainment news continued to expand, but it soon became apparently that even a combination of entertainment news and gossip, placement within a media conglomerate, a soft, digestible form, and cooperation with relationship with the Hollywood publicity apparatus could guarantee success. Chapter Seven thus attempts to tease out the intricacies of the increasingly crowded gossip marketplace, shedding light on the spread of specialized cable programming, the continued growth of entertainment news, and the formation of the conglomerated media landscape that further enunciated the promotional potential — and necessity — of conglomerate-owned gossip outlets.

[1] Scott Donaton, "*People* Soars to 15th Birthday," *Advertising Age*, February 27 1989, 61.

[2] Writers have employed various capitalizations and spellings for *US* throughout its history: *Us, Us Magazine, US, US Magazine.*

[3] "*Entertainment Tonight," Broadcasting & Cable,* October 23, 2006, 30.

[4] Ted Ashley, the head of Famous Ashley Talent Agency, encouraged Kinney CEO Steve Ross to purchase the struggling Warner Bros./Seven Arts, even though it meant that Kinney would have to sell Famous Ashley, as anti-trust laws made it illegal for a single entity to own a film studio and a talent agency. Ross then appointed Ashley as head of Warner Bros. See Connie Bruck, *Master of the Game*: *Steve Ross and the Creation of Time Warner* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994).

[5] The bill instituted federal income tax credits on losses and re-instituted a 7% investment tax credit on domestic production which had been revoked in 1969. David A. Cook, *Lost Illusions: American Cinema in the Shadow of Watergate and Vietnam, 1970-1979* (New York: Scribner, 2000), 11-14.

[6] For an thorough survey of the development and marketing of the high concept film, see Justin Wyatt, *High Concept: Movies and Marketing in Hollywood* (Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 1994.

[7] Lucas's and Spielberg's various franchises not only made them two of the most powerful players in Hollywood but underlined the importance of ancillary markets. The ancillary market – whether soundtracks, lunch boxes, or VHS tapes – would prove the salvation of the movie industry in the face of increased competition from cable and the perceived "Japanese threat" in the form of the VCR.

[8] Stephen Prince, *A New Pot of Gold: Hollywood Under the Electric Rainbow, 1980-1989* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2000), 161.

[9] *Ibid.*

[10] *Ibid.*

[11] "Raising the stakes; A star is bought," *The Economist,* December 23, 1989, 15.

[12] Aljean Hermetz, "If Willis Gets $5 Million, How Much for Redford?" *New York Times*, February 16 1988, C15.

[13] Some agents lowered their percentage in order to attract big clients, but the industry standard is 10%; *Variety* nicknames agencies "ten-percenteraries."

[14] For more on the Ovitz lore, see Robert Slater, *Ovitz: The Inside Story of Hollywood's Most Controversial Power Broker* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1997). While Ovitz is often singled out as a visionary, in reality, he was merely reproducing many of the tactics pioneered by Lew Wasserman at MCA following the break-up of the studio system, from packaging to the cultivation of agent anonymity. Indeed, even his desire to put forth a shiny, opulent package of wealth (even if it embellished reality) is taken directly from the handbook of MCA founder Jules Stein. Such comparisons were not lost on others in the industry: according to long-time agent Irving "Swifty" Lazar, "There hasn't been a phenomenon such as CAA since 1947, when Lew Wasserman and MCA dominated Hollywood. Comparing CAA to its strongest competition is like comparing Tiffany's to the A&P." See Janice Castro and Elaine Dutka, "Pocketful Of Stars: Michael Ovitz," *Time*, February 13, 1989, http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,956963,00.html.

[15] Slater, *Ovitz*, 106.

[16] Ovitz's skill at "packaging" was amongst his most valuable traits – as Prince elaborates, "Packaging was not new to the business, but Ovitz made it the hallmark of the CAA approach, and it is the business practice that is perhaps most closely associated with his tenure. By floating to the majors a package of readily assembled talent (screenwriter, director, stars), Ovitz could leverage production deals in a highly persuasive way. Accepting the package made the studio executive's job must easier. It eliminated the need to expend resources securing a property and the requisite talent and negotiating with all of the agents that would be involved in striking separate, individual deals for the project. Instead of diffusing energy and resources in this fashion, it was more tempting to sign off on the package. Indeed, it was often imperative because a competing major would get it if declined." Prince, *A New Pot of Gold*, 168.

[17] Joshua Hammer and Andrew Murr, "The Blockbuster Game," *Newsweek*, June 25 1990, 50.

[18] Jean-Paul Chaillet, "The Happiest Man Alive," *The Gazette* (Montreal, Quebec), December 15, 1991, F1; "Nicholson May Earn $60 Million on 'Batman,'" *Miami Herald*, July 28, 1989, G12.

[19] Prince, *A New Pot of Gold*, 168.

[20] Slater, *Ovitz*, 224.

[21] "PMK was formed in 1980 when Ms. Kingsley's former company merged with two rivals. After deaths and departures, she emerged on top and was later joined by her New York-based partners, Leslee Dart and Lois Smith." See Bernard Weinraub, "Gatekeeper to the Stars: A Strong-Willed Publicity Agent Has Changed the Rules," *New York Times,* May 3, 1999, E1.

[22] Anne Thompson, "Cruise vs. Pitt: Tale of 2 Publicists," *The Hollywood Reporter*, June 10, 2005, <http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/thr/columns/risky_business_display>jsp?vnu_content_id=1000954611

[23] Weinraub, "Gatekeeper to the Stars," E1.

[24] See Mike Mashon, "NBC, J. Walter Thompson, and the Struggle for Control of Television Programming, 1946-58" in *NBC: America's Network*, ed. Michele Hilmes (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 135-152; Douglas Gomery, "Talent Raids and Package Deals: NBC Loses Its Leadership in the 1950s"in *NBC: America's Network*, ed. Michele Hilmes (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 153-170; Janet Wasko, "Hollywood and Television in the 1950s: The Roots of Diversification," in Peter Lev, *The Fifties: Transforming the Screen, 1950-1959* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 135-146.

[25] See Marilyn J. Matelski, "Jerry Springer and the Wages of Fin-Syn: The Rise of Deregulation and the Decline of TV Talk," *Journal of Popular Culture*, 33 (2000): 64-65.

[26] Megan Mullen, *Television in the Multichannel Age: A Brief History of Cable Television* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2008), 96.

[27] See Kristen Thompson and David Bordwell, *Film History*, 2nd Ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2003), 683-684.

[28] For more on the formation of "The New Hollywood," vertical integration, and the transformation of studios into multi-faceted entertainment entities, see Aljean Harmetz, "Now Playing: The New Hollywood," *New York Times*, January 10, 1988, B1.

[29] Hearings before the Subcommittee on Courts, Civil Liberties and the Administration of Justice of the Committee of the Judiciary, House of Representatives, Ninety-seventh Congress, Second Session on H.R. 4783, H.R. 4794 H.R. 4808, H.R. 5250, H.R. 5488, and H.R. 5705, Serial No 97, Part I, Home Recording of Copyrighted Works, April 12, 1982.

[30] *Sony Corp. of America v. Universal City Studios, Inc.*, 464 U.S. 417 (1984).

[31] Prince, *A New Pot of Gold*, 31-32.

[32] "*NY Times* Dickering to Sell *US Magazine,*" *Variety*, February 20, 1980, 4; "Times Co. Sells *Us Magazine*," *New York Times*, March 7, 1980, D4.

[33] When *Photoplay* did eventually fold in 1980, subscribers received issues of *US* as a replacement. See Anthony Slide, *Inside the Hollywood Fan Magazine: A History of Star Makers, Fabricators, and Gossip Mongers*. (Jackson, MI: University Press of Mississippi, 2010), 222.

[34] "Times Co. Sells *Us Magazine*," D4.

[35] Peter H. Dougherty, "*Us* Delays Plans to Go Weekly," *New York Times*, January 10 1983, D8.

[36] Chuck Reece, "Wenner to Color *Us* a People Pleaser," *Adweek*, May 6, 1985, no page number.

[37] At the time, Telepictures was a syndicator; later in 1985, it merged with Lorimar, which was then bought out by Warner Communications in 1988. "*Us Magazine* is Purchased," *New York Times*, May 7 1985, D11.

[38] Scott Donaton, "*People* Soars to 15th Birthday," *Advertising Age*, February 27 1989, 61.

[39] William H. Jones, "Gannet Airs 2 Prototypes for New Daily," *Washington Post,* Jun 25, 1981, B1; Jonathan Friendly, "Can Gannett Make it Pay?" *New York Times*, January 17, 1982, F4.

[40] Jones, "Gannet Airs," B1.

[41] Alex S. Jones, "The *USA Today* Story: Neuharth's Obssession," *New York Times,* July 3 1987, D1.

[42] Charles C. Mann, "News to Go: *USA Today* and Yesterday," *Washington Post,* August 23, 1987, X5.

[43] Dan Balz, "McPaper Makes Critics Sit Up and Take Note," *Washington Post*, March 13, 1983, F1.

[44] Peter Prichard, *The Making of McPaper: The Inside Story of USA Today* (Kansas City, MO: Andrews and McMeel, 1987).

[45] Jonathan Friendly, "Questions Remain After *USA Today*'s First Year," *New York Times*, September 16, 1983, D15.

[46] Joshua Hammer, "The McPaper Route," *Newsweek*, April 27, 1992, 58.

[47] Patrick Reilly, "Underneath the covers; *Vanity Fair* adds to glitter," *Advertising Age,* January 4, 1988, 3.

[48] *Ibid.*

[49] Geraldine Fabrikant, "*Vanity Fair*'s Slick Formula," *New York Times,* August 26, 1985, D1.

[50] Reilly, "Underneath the covers," 3.

[51] *Ibid.*

[52] Margot Hornblower, "It's New! It's Old! It's *Us*!; Under Wenner, the Mag Goes Full Color," *Washington Post,* June 17, 1985, D1.

[53] Jonathan Alter, "Just Like a *Rolling Stone*," June 17, 1985, 63.

[54] Hornblower, "It's New!," D1.

[55] *Ibid.* As Wenner soon realized, *People* had the formula right. When market research showed that readers thought "real people" articles lent "credibility" to celebrity news and gossip, *US* restored its "everyday heroes" coverage. See Stuart J. Elliott, "Looking for people? Try *Us*," *Advertising Age,* July 21, 1986, 56.

[56] Randall Rothenberg, "Wenner Sets *US* Sights on Quality," *New York Times*, December 14 1989, D25.

[57] *Ibid.*

[58] *US*'s willingness to cooperate had manifest results. Between 1987 and 1989, *US*'s circulation rose 24 percent to 1.34 million and revenues soared 42 percent to $18.4 million. See Rothenberg, "Wenner Sets *US* Sights," D25.

[59] *Ibid*.

[60] Deirdre Carmody, "Jann Wenner and His Empire Grows," *New York Times*, November 25, 1991, D6; Scott Donaton, "Wenner brood grows with *Family Life*," *Advertising Age*, March 15, 1993, 53.

[61] Donaton, "Wnner brood grows," 53.

[62] Mark Adams, "Wenner green-lights *Us* editor," *MediaWeek*, July 31 1995, 12.

[63] As a *Mediaweek* columnist underlined, "publishing a monthly entertainment book was inherently problematic, especially the six-week lead times, which can seem like light years in the context of the fast-moving celebrity culture." Keith Dunnavant, "Tumbling Dice," *Mediaweek*, May 1, 2000, 60.

[64] Keith L. Alexander, "*US* against the world: Magazine goes weekly," *USA Today*, March 16 2000, 2B.

[65]According to one editor, "Jann reinvents the magazine every few years," and "either gets mad and fires the editor or the person realizes that his time is up and leaves." Keith J. Kelly, "It's about that time for a new *US* editor," *Daily News*, May 6, 1998,53**.**

[66] Dunnavant, "Tumbling Dice," 60.

[67] The fist aired on February 11th, 1976, on ABC; the second aired in August 1976 on CBS; the third ran on CBS in September 1978; the fourth aired on CBS on August 4, 1988. See John J. O'Connor, "Lanford Willson's *Mound Builders*," *New York Times*, February 11, 1976, 90; "NBC to Run *People* Special as Pilot," *New York Times*, May 11 1976, 47; "*People*'Pilot for CBS," *Variety*, January 25, 1978, 51.

[68] John J. O'Connor, "Lanford Willson's *Mound Builders*," 90.

[69] *Ibid.*

[70] "NBC to Run *People* Special as Pilot," 47.

[71] "*People*, Money, & Eagles Signal Time-Life Syndie Drive," *Variety*, February 18, 1976, 63.

[72] Aljean Harmetz, "TV Producers Discover New Path to Prime Time," *New York Times*, July 5, 1988, C16.

[73] Peter Funt, "One Man's Formula for Sure-Fire Hits," *New York Times*, April 6, 1986, 14.

[74] Kevin Downey, "*ET*: It Changed Show Biz and Changed the Syndie Biz as Well," November 17 2003, *Broadcasting and Cable*, 22.

[75] Michael E. Hill, "*Entertainment Tonight*: On the Air Fan Magazine," *Washington Post*, May 27, 1984, 5.

[76] "*ET* added Hollywood's vital statistics to a roster of information that TV news audiences now expect as a matter of course." See Michael Joseph Gross, "Famous for Tracking the Famous," *New York Times,* June 23, 2002, A1.

[77] The show's ownership was a "patchwork" of production companies and cable providers: Paramount owned 40%, Cox Broadcasting-owned Telerep held 40%, and Taft Broadcasting had the remaining 20%.[56] Paramount was viewed as "the principal production entity," in part due to its role in funding the installation of the satellite network. For information on Maisani trading his stake to Paramount, see Peter Funt, "One Man's Formula for Sure-Fire Hits," *New York Times*, April 6, 1986, 14. Bob Wold, then president of pioneering satellite service company World Communications, became "the Johnny Appleseed," installing dishes across the country. See Susanne Ault, "*ET*: The Business Behind the Buzz," *Broadcasting and Cable*, July 2, 2001, 15.

[78] Funt, "One Man's Formula," 14.

[79]Rick Kissell, "*ET* Innovations Now Taken For Granted," *Variety*, September 8, 2000, A6.

[80] *Entertainment Tonight* Ad, *Variety*, June 24 1981, 57; Morrie Gelman, "Par TV's *Entertainment Tonight* Marks a Major Step in Networking," *Daily Variety*, June 23, 1981, 10. Part of the reason that *ET* was able to foot such a tremendous bill was its decision to air a sixth show, to be aired on the weekend, which would serve as a compilation of the week's clips edited together. The production price of the 6th show would be low, but it would net another day's worth of advertising dollars. See Ron Miller, "Easy *Entertainment* for Millions," *Miami Herald*, December 24, 1983, A12.

[81] "*Entertainment Tonight* Wins Big-Par TV," *Daily Variety*, October 6, 1981, 12.

[82] James Brown, "All the Fluff That's Fit to Air," *Los Angeles Times*, September 24, 1981.

[83] Howard Rosenberg, "Relentless Pursuit of Fluff," *Los Angeles Times*, March 10, 1982, G1.

[84] Richard Stengel, "Turning show biz into news," *Time*, July 4, 1983, 72.

[85] Gross, "Famous for tracking the famous," A1; Richard Zoglin and Tara Weingarten, "That's Entertainment?," *Time*, October 3, 1994, 85.

[86] John Brodie, "*ET*'s New Competitor sets flack a-flutter," *Variety*, July 25, 1994, 1.

[87] *Ibid.*

[88] Brian Lowry, "An *ET* Exclusive! What's with *Entertainment Tonight*?" *Ottawa Citizen*, Mar 21, 2001, E4.

[89] Susanne Ault, "*ET*: The Business Behind the Buzz," *Broadcasting & Cable*, July 2, 2001, 14.

[90] Gross, "Famous for tracking the famous," A1; Peter W. Kaplan, "TV News Magazines Aim at Diverse Viewers," *New York Times*, Aug 1 1985, C18.

[91] John Thornton Caldwell, "Excessive Style: The Crisis of Network Television," in *Television: The Critical View*, ed. Horace Newcomb. 6th Edition. (New York: Oxford, 2000), 652.

[92] Richard Stenger, "Turning show biz into news," *Time*, July 4, 1983, 72.

[93] "First Run Syndication Leader," *Variety*, Sep 21 1983, 82.

[94] *ibid* ; David Gritten, Quote attributed to *Los Angeles Herald-Examiner*. See *Entertainment Tonight* Advertisement, *Variety*, Feb 1 1984, 67.

[95] Miller A12.

[96] *TV Star* and *All About US* both failed to make it out of the pilot stage — in part because they were both viewed to be too similar to *ET*. See "Plot 'About *US*' Pilot as '84-'85 Firstrun Strip with Mag Tie-in; Metromedia is Equity Partner," *Variety*, November 9, 1984, 43.

[97] Jeremy Gerard, "Last Broadcasts in January for *USA TODAY on TV*," *New York Times*, November 23, 1989, C26; Dylan Jones, "Magazines Struggle for Renewal," *USA Today*, November 28, 1989, D3.

[98] Michael Schrage, "TV Producers Woo The Networks," *Washington Post*, January 15, 1985, E5.

[99] *Ibid.*

[100] John Fiske, "Popularity and the Politics of Information," in *Journalism and Popular Culture*, eds. Peter Dalgrehn and Colin Sparks (London: Sage, 1992). See also: Kevin Glynn, *Tabloid Culture: Trash Taste, Popular Power, and The Transformation of American Television* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000). As the next chapter will show, these programs were popular, but few sponsors were willing to associate their brands with such coverage. By 1993, stations fed up with low ad rates and middling ratings were willing to trade tabloid news for *ET* imitator *Extra* — the first knock-off to succeed.

[101] "*Entertainment Tonight* turns 3,000," *Broadcasting & Cable*, March 8, 1993, 30.

CHAPTER SEVEN
THE SEARCH FOR SYNERGY
1990-2000

The boom in entertainment-focused publications and programming has remained steady since the 1990s, spreading through new technologies and delivery systems. Yet the proliferation of entertainment news had far more to do with conglomerates' desire to create "synergy" than any altruistic desire to inform the public. Broadly conceived, synergy refers to any cooperation between entities in which the combined effect is greater than the sum of the separate efforts. In the 1980s, synergy had become a corporate buzzword, denoting the collaboration between separate conglomerate sectors to cross-promote and cut costs.[1] Disney was so committed to fostering synergistic connections that it created an entire department focused on their development.

In the 1980s and '90s, deregulation facilitated a raft of mergers between media companies, including the union of Time and Warner (1989), Sony and Columbia (1989), Matsushita and MCA (1990), Viacom, Blockbuster, and Paramount (1994), and Disney and Capital Cities/ABC (1995). Unlike the loosely diversified organizations that emerged from the first wave of conglomeration in the 1960s and '70s, these unions resulted in tightly diversified, horizontally and vertically integrated conglomerates in which products (films, television programs, music recordings, books, magazines) joined their means of distribution (television networks, cable channels, film distributers) and exhibition (video stores, VHS and DVD producers, theater chains). As a result, the profitable synergy that had eluded the loosely diversified conglomerates of the '70s and '80s seemed within reach. For conglomerates, an entertainment news product could potentially function as a sort of a synergistic lynchpin. A

cable channel, television show, or magazine could promote forthcoming projects in exchange for "exclusive" content and extensive access at little to no cost to the conglomerate.

The remainder of this chapter examines three newly established entertainment news outlets of the 1990s, all controlled by Time Warner: the Movietime/E! Entertainment channel, *Entertainment Weekly* magazine, and the syndicated half-hour program *Extra.* All three initially struggled to find a format and tone that would resonate with audiences, secure a foothold amidst an already crowded entertainment landscape, and, most crucially, fulfill the promises of synergy that accompanied the 1989 merger of Time Inc. and Warner Communications. Combined with *People*, these three products should have provided the conglomerate with an unrivaled promotional phalanx.

Yet the difficulties Time Warner faced in exploiting these products' potential was but one symptom of the conglomerate's overarching struggle to prove itself as more valuable than the sum of its parts. Time Warner was quite skilled at sustaining individual franchises, whether *Batman*, *People*, or, eventually, *Entertainment Weekly*. But leadership seemed to lack a cogent and clear vision of its future. As even *Time* declared, "squabbling factions" plagued the conglomerate, with its "two distinct corporate cultures that were mingled but never quite merged."[2] In other words, the merger brought together two distinct production cultures — one oriented around publishing, the other around film and television — that clashed and struggled to communicate throughout the 1990s.[3] As a result, Time Warner's '90s track record is pocked by conflicting impulses to condense yet expand, to jettison debt yet avoid losing face, to encourage synergy but keep individual properties content and autonomous.[4]

By the end of the '90s, E!, *Entertainment Weekly*, and *Extra* were all healthy, growing and profitable. But Time Warner had sold off its controlling interest in one, and a 50% equity stake

in another, both to competing conglomerates. Although Time Warner was certainly not the sole player in the entertainment information industry in the 1990s, it was certainly the most invested. By tracing the fate of Time Warner's entertainment news properties, a fuller picture of the difficulties facing conglomerates during the '90s becomes visible, detailing the ways in which they attempted to shed debt, take advantage of deregulation, and pursue all-important, frustratingly elusive synergy. In the process, gossip and entertainment news properties emerge as critical vehicles for bolstering ties amidst vast conglomerate holdings — a status that would only be accentuated with the rise of digital media in the decade to come.

MOVIETIME / E! ENTERTAINMENT CHANNEL

Movietime first became available on July 31, 1987, reaching the homes of two million cable subscribers across the nation.[5] From the start, Movietime was intended as a source of Hollywood promotion. According to co-founder Alan Mruvka, the idea for the channel came when he heard industry types bemoaning the high cost of advertising for films.[6] His idea was to make a cable network to perform that function (and do it at a much lower cost). Mruvka joined with cable veteran Larry Namer and raised $8 million in private investments to start the channel which would be modeled as a "24-hour *Entertainment Tonight*" to serve the same function for the movie and television industry that MTV performed for the music industry.[7] This initial version of Movietime was not officially imbricated within the conglomerate landscape, but planned to profit by serving as handmaiden to studio and network interests.

In order to serve this function, Movietime needed to attract cooperating partners. A series of ads in *Variety* hailed the studios: ". . . if what you need is a better way to market your motion picture, then tune-in to Movietime . . . We're the newest, most powerful, cost-effective medium for promotion movies to come along in years . . . We're America's first window on the movies,

and your best shot at a bigger box office."[8] The advertisement traded heavily on the conglomerate-owned studios' desire to promote products in innovative, "cost-effective" ways that cloaked advertisement under the guise of cable programming.

Before its launch, Movietime had forged advertising and cooperative agreements with over a dozen studios and cable channels, a number that only continued to rise over its first year on the air.[9] As the self-proclaimed "entertainment pages of television," Movietime provided film previews, highlights of upcoming cable productions, interviews with stars, celebrity gossip, and access to premieres, industry parties, and other special events, all obtained with the assistance of studios and cable channels.[10] The resultant channel was a perfect specimen of symbiosis among film, television, and gossip-oriented production cultures.

But cooperation did not necessarily encourage viewership. To turn a profit, Movietime needed to be available in more homes, and it could only do so with the cooperation of major cable systems. In September 1987, American Television & Communications, then the nation's second-largest cable operator, agreed to carry the channel, making Movietime available in an additional 3.5 million homes.[11] On March 8, 1988, HBO, Warner Communications, and a group of six multiple system operators (MSOs) joined in an 80% investment in Movietime.[12] Each of the investing MSOs began to carry Movietime, and by December 1988, Movietime was available in 11 million homes, up from 4 million in March.[13] During this period, programming was designed to promote but maintain an extremely low bottom line, and included *Cable Time,* listing current programs on basic and pay cable, clip shows (*Top 100 Hollywood Moments*, *1988 in Rewind*) and segments funded by individual studios, such as "Behind the Scenes Tour of Universal Studio's *The Big One*."[14]

Despite availability in 14 million homes, many of the 498 cable systems carrying Movietime aired the channel for only a few hours a day, alternating it with programming from other fledgling cable channels. As a result, Movietime's identity was less movie channel than promotional service.[15] Early in 1989, HBO, one of Movietime's eight investors, sought to take control of channel operations and renovate Movietime into a "major-league channel" on par with CNN, MTV, and TBS.[16] HBO submitted multiple business proposals, all of which were rejected until the Time Warner merger was announced on March 12, 1989. Under the merger, four of the ownership holders — Warner Communications, Warner Cable, ATC, and HBO, were placed under the Time Warner umbrella, combining for a 58.4% majority stake in the channel.[17] The majority stake most likely swung the board of directors in HBO's favor, and on August 16, 1989, HBO assumed managerial control of the channel.[18]

What followed was a radical redesign. Instead of straightforward promotion, the newly revamped channel would "emphasize coverage of celebs from all forms of popular entertainment," as emphasized by the channel's new name, The E! Entertainment Channel.[19] HBO also hired Lee Masters, the executive responsible for the rejuvenation of MTV in the late '80s.[20] Masters implemented a "wheel format" similar to that of Headline News, in which each hour was divided into 25-26 segments — "news," "gossip," "celebrity of the day," "behind the scenes," etc.[21] The channel would not break news; instead, it commented on news, clips, and stories already reported by others.[22] This sort of "second-hand" gossip, in which E! recycled, commented, or spoofed existing information and content, would prove crucial to the E! format.

In 1991, E! shed the wheel format in favor of standard 30-60 minute programming.[23] Initial replacements were a mix of syndicated re-runs (*Lifestyles of the Rich & Famous*), straightforward gossip (*The Gossip Show*), and snark (*Talk Soup*). Taken together, the shows

represented the diverse pleasures available to the audience member interested in celebrity and entertainment news. The most successful of the new programs, *Talk Soup,* paired clips from the daily talk shows with a "snide, knowing take on talk-show culture" courtesy of comedian Greg Kinnear.[24] *Talk Soup* exemplified the E! ethos, not because it was smarmy — indeed, most E! programming lacks the bite or wit of *Talk Soup* — but because it cost very little to produce, as all clips were provided free of charge.

But *Talk Soup* also proved problematic. As an "equal opportunity offender," the show made fun of all types of talk shows — even those, such as *Jenny Jones*, produced by Warner Bros. When *Talk Soup* insulted another Time Warner product, it highlighted the conglomerate's growing pains. One side (HBO, originally a Time Inc. subsidiary) was not only failing to promote the other (Warner Bros. Television) but outright ridiculing it. Instead of encouraging *Talk Soup* to steer clear of *Jenny Jones*, Warner Bros. Television ceased providing E! with free *Jones* clips, thus cutting off the negative publicity at its source. The inability of Warner Bros. and *Jenny Jones* to see the hidden benefits of "negative" promotion not only underlined Time Warner's difficulty in managing communications between its various holdings but a general misunderstanding of the role of entertainment news.

From 1994 to 1995, Masters made two programming decisions that would change the image and audience of the channel. In 1994, he negotiated the rights to record the live footage from Howard Stern's radio program. The next year, E! was one of the first channels to offer extensive coverage of the O.J. Simpson trial, making it a go-to source for close followers of the judicial spectacle. *The Howard Stern Show* and the O.J. coverage attracted a swath of viewers who might have been otherwise reticent to seek out a celebrity-filled channel.[25] Both programs manifested slight variations of the E! practice of using cheap or free footage, packaging it, and

airing it as original programming. Both likewise demonstrated the expanding definition of celebrity. The content of Howard Stern's show was entertaining, but Stern himself was the real attraction, with a compelling personality that drew in viewers. In contrast, Simpson was certainly a celebrity, but audiences were more drawn in by the potential of his fall and the addictive minutiae that precipitated it. *Howard Stern* and O.J. trial coverage proved that E! could approach celebrity from several angles, creating a multi-valenced channel that attracted audiences and, hence, advertisers.

As E! expanded the type of celebrity it covered, it also refined the way it did so, as executives and programmers conjured ways to fully exploit celebrities beyond recent gossip and current projects. E! took the arrival of stars at major events (the "red carpet") and turned it into extravaganzas lasting two to three hours. The Oscars, Golden Globes, and other award shows and premieres had been covered for decades, first by the fan magazines and gossip columns, then by *Entertainment Tonight*. Yet E! greeted each attendee with commentary and a barrage of questions concerning the provenance of dresses, suits, shoes, and jewelry.[26] In this way, "E! [took] walking into a building and made it into an event."[27] E! and the other gossip outlets forged an implicit understanding with the celebrities, who understood that talking, even *ad naseum*, with these outlets served as a source of free yet essential promotion.

E! True Hollywood Story performed a similar task, rendering the life of a star or celebrity in docudrama, relying heavily on clips, photos, and heavy voiceover. The stories typically follow a classic rags-to-riches story, invoke some sort of tragedy, but end, like any classic Hollywood narrative, on a note of hope. The disclosure of intimate or negative details connoted authenticity and legitimacy, even if said details had been well-trod in the press. *E! True Hollywood Story* functioned as a carefully censored scrapbook, infused with nostalgia, redemption, and

melodrama. *True Hollywood Story* prided itself on celebrity cooperation and appreciation. In an interview with *Variety*, an exec claimed that celebrities watched the show and, finding it tasteful and authentic, phoned "saying that was the best documentary they've ever seen on themselves."[28] The executive's statement — and its placement in *Variety* — were clearly intended to bolster E!'s reputation with celebrities and the industry at large.

Whether or not the celebrities actually called — if anyone did call, it was likely a publicist — matters less than the notion that E! was attempting to *please*, rather than *offend*, celebrities with the program, accumulating what *Variety* termed a "well-earned reputation as Hollywood's very own lapdog."[29] The more celebrities and their publicists saw E! as a "friendly" promotional outlet, the more they would cooperate, chat at premieres, and offer exclusive interviews. But like *Talk Soup*, *True Hollywood Story* was inexpensive to produce, composed almost entirely of stock footage and interviews, and demonstrative of E!'s proclivity to repackage material produced by others.[30]

While HBO and Time Warner held control of E!, there was little explicit evidence of cooperation with other Time Warner gossip products. No *People* television segments or *Extra* cross-promotions; no large-scale promotional blitzes for upcoming Warner Bros. films. Trade reports of possible *Entertainment Weekly*-branded content never materialized, and despite Warner Bros.' cross-promotional flurry for *Batman Forever,* E! gave it no more special treatment than any other high profile blockbuster, and the film was a financial and public relations disaster.[31] Instead, E! had entered into a deal to provide entertainment news as part of NBC's newsfeed to affiliates. The lack of explicit cross-promotion was due, at least in part, to the fact that Time Warner did not hold complete ownership of the channel, and E! was able to maintain a programming philosophy that did not include Time Warner favoritism.[32] This changed in the summer of 1996,

when Comcast, which had purchased 14% of the channel in 1990, triggered a "buy-sell clause" in its ownership agreement. Once triggered, it forced Time Warner to set a value for the channel, at which point Time Warner could either buy out the other ISOs at market value or sell its own interest.

On December 9, 1996, Time Warner set a purchase price of approximately $500 million.[33] At first, it was unclear whether Time Warner would vie for complete control of the channel, which could have rendered E! a more blatantly promotional vehicle. But with a substantial debt load and the recent acquisition of Turner Broadcasting Systems, E! was less of a priority. Comcast thus joined with Disney to take over Time Warner's 58.4% interest for $321 million.[34] After the purchase, Disney and Comcast held a 68.8% majority stake in the channel, with the remaining 31.2% split among three independent MSOs.[35] As part of the agreement, Comcast would be able to buy out both Disney and the remaining MSOs over the course of the next five years.

Comcast was the mastermind of the purchase, choosing to partner with Disney over NBC, Fox, and CBS due to Disney's willingness to put up the bulk of the investment, allow Comcast's programming unit, C3, to control day-to-day operations, and agree to provisions for Comcast eventually to buy Disney's share. In 2010, Comcast is the media behemoth that recently purchased NBC/Universal, yet in 1997, Comcast was a major cable systems provider — the third largest in the United States — but its cable channel holdings were limited to joint ownership of QVC and a handful of regional sports networks.[36] Coupled with the 1994 purchase of QVC, the E! acquisition signaled Comcast's intention to compete with the conglomerates.[37]

Comcast's partnership with Disney had been gestating for some time. In 1996, Comcast had hired Rich Frank, former president of Walt Disney Studios, to head C3. During the late '70s,

Frank had collaborated with Disney head Michael Eisner, both of whom were then at Paramount, to create *Entertainment Tonight*, and Eisner personally facilitated the talks between Comcast and Disney.[38] With Disney's recent acquisition of ABC/Capital Cities — a move that expanded Disney's television holdings to ESPN, ABC and The Disney Channel — the potential for cross-promotion between E! and the raft of Disney holdings was seemingly limitless. Disney was willing to activate E!'s synergistic potential to an extent never quite available under HBO and Time Warner. For E! to serve that purpose, however, its new owners desired a programming renovation.

In 1997, E! was operating on a "bootstrap" level, spending the bare minimum — between $40-$50 million a year — to fill its production schedule.[39] Of course, this reliance on re-runs and cheaply produced original programming was necessary in E!'s lean early years.[40] But "bootstrap" programming also meant that E! was mostly known for its mix of "cheese" and "cheesecake." With $75 million in development funds, Comcast aimed to change that reputation.[41] For 1995-1996, E! had purchased syndication rights to a number of programs vaguely affiliated to the channel's brand identity, including *Melrose Place*, *WKRP in Cincinnati*, *Alice*, and "a threadbare package of B-movies," with the intention of "bringing in viewers who normally might not have tuned in the channel."[42] The new programming state traded reruns for new shows (*Celebrity Bio*, *Mysteries & Scandals*) and renewed orders for *Talk Soup*, *Howard Stern*, *True Hollywood Story*, and an expanded version of *E! News Daily*.[43]

When Comcast and Disney took control of the channel, only one of the major studios numbered amongst the channel's top eight advertisers.[44] The studios were already receiving free promotion from E! programming — why should they pay for advertisements as well? But the head of Comcast's C3 production company encouraged Masters to ask for more — more ad

buys, and more money for them. The result, according to a *Variety* article, was "bigger, stronger, partnerships with the studios," with Hollywood studios as the top eight E! advertisers by Spring 1988.[45] In publicizing the channel's leveraging power over the studios in *Variety*, Disney and Comcast seemed to announce that E! and its new management understood the channel's value, and would expect *quid pro quo* for the tremendous promotional service E! offered.

When E! first went on the air, it was but one of dozens of programs and publications attempting to profit from the perceived "boom" in entertainment news. But E! was offering something the other shows and publications were not in the form of non-stop programming. In the beginning, not all of it was explicitly focused on celebrities or Hollywood, but E! persisted in providing programming with a certain feel — light, entertaining, and mostly celebrity-focused — that slowly began to codify. Instead of simply offering celebrity and promotional news, as Movietime had tried and failed to do, E! took up the celebrity tune and found its myriad variations. Indeed, under Time Warner control, E! became profitable, but negated its potential as a promotional tool.

After the sale to Comcast/Disney, this began to change. Despite reports that the former "Hollywood lapdog" was "slowly growing a tad less obedient," Disney treated E! as a pure promotional tool.[46] Through ABC, Disney had obtained the rights to past and future broadcasts of the Academy Awards, allowing Disney to funnel viewers from the Red Carpet on E!, to the actual ceremony on ABC, then back to post-ceremony commentary on E! and E! Online. Disney used the same strategy to integrate promotion of other entertainment "extravaganzas," from film premieres to events at the Disney parks, from season finales to the launch of ABC Family in 2001.[47] The promotional line was direct, simple, and extremely lucrative. Perhaps most importantly, unlike Time Warner, Disney's production culture was unified in its overarching goal

of conglomerate-wide synergy. In the end, the contrast between E! under Time Warner and under Disney spoke volumes concerning each conglomerate's willingness to exploit entertainment news sources for greater corporate benefit.

ENTERTAINMENT WEEKLY

Throughout the 1980s, executives at Time Inc. struggled to launch a new magazine. Two forays into the entertainment news format — *TV Cable Week* in 1983 and *Picture Week* in 1986 — resulted in enormous losses and very public embarrassment.[48] When Jeff Jarvis, television critic for *People*, and Michael Klingensmith, general manager of *Time*, independently proposed the idea for a magazine focused on the latest in entertainment, executives put the magazine in development. To promote creativity and an "entrepreneurial" spirit, initial development and market research for the magazine, entitled *Entertainment Weekly*, were carried out independent of Time's "corporate culture."[49] Time Inc. even moved *EW*'s offices to a separate address, emphasizing the magazine's status as a "wholly owned subsidiary, with its own performance standards and incentives.[50] Put differently, *Entertainment Weekly* was to operate independently of Time Inc.'s production culture — a status that, with the merger between Time Inc. and Warner Communications, would soon prove problematic.

Just as *People* had been borne of the "People" section of *Time*, the new magazine would function as the "Picks and Pans" section of *People*.[51] Like *Time* and *People*, *Entertainment Weekly* aimed to "service busy subscribers" by providing a "quick-read, 1-stop guide" to film, video, television, music, and books.[52] But Time Inc. did not design *EW* as a trade publication. As Jarvis reassured the potential advertisers and content providers in the pages of *Variety*, inside trade news will only be covered when "it has an effect on what you're going to be watching." "Dawn Steel leaving Columbia Pictures is not an *EW* story," he explained, "but Jeff Sagansky's new hand on

the CBS programming levers is."[53] The magazine's end goal, according to Jarvis, was to assist the "aging baby boomer" in his quest for an evening's entertainment.[54] To help readers quickly ascertain whether a piece of media was worth their time, "Picks and Pans" was judged according to a scale (A to F) that reflected the "universal experience" of school grades.[55] Unlike *TV Guide,* reviews would be "deliberately provocative" and "opinionated."[56] In their descriptions of *EW,* published in the Hollywood, publishing, and advertising trades, Jarvis and Time Inc. attempted to suggest that the magazine would fulfill a specific niche for a coveted demographic but was also highly readable, informative, and avoided the frivolity and pablum of other entertainment new outlets.

Two-thirds of the initial *Entertainment Weekly* was filled with reviews, with the remaining one-third devoted to features. Charts presenting weekly box office, national book sales, television ratings, and video rentals punctuated each section. In interviews leading up to the magazine's launch, the editors continued their campaign to define the magazine against other entertainment and gossip properties. *EW* would avoid the "interminable personality coverage" that characterized *People* and its imitators. "If we do a story on Michael Keaton, it will be timed to the release of *Batman* and be in the context of the movie," explained Klingensmith to the *New York Times*. "There may be some walk-up about his career, but it won't be about his girlfriend or personal stuff."[57] In another variation, "If you want to read about a star's wedding, divorce or baby, you get *People*," but "If you want to know about that star's movie, you get *Entertainment Weekly.*"[58] The planned focus on the industry seemed viable, as unlike *People* and other personality-focused publications, *EW* was not intended to rely on newsstands sales. As such, editors could afford not to put alluring (e.g. celebrity) faces on the magazine's cover.[59]

Time leveraged its existing publishing and newly acquired non-print connections to build a tremendous subscription base.[60] In the months leading up to the launch, it pushed subscriptions via television advertisements, direct mail offers, Time-Life Book-of-the-Month promotions, HBO subscriber mailings, and inserts in recent Warner Bros. video and compact disc releases. A twelve-page sample edition of *EW* was included in issues of *Time, Sports Illustrated, People, Fortune,* and *Money*, together reaching a readership of 61 million.[61] Before the first issue, *EW* received 790,000 requests for subscriptions and sample issues, allowing Klingensmith to set a rate base of 600,000.[62] The readership profile was exactly what *EW* had desired: a median age of 36.7, split evenly between males and females, and a median household income of $40,300.[63]

Yet *EW* was tasked with simultaneously proving the synergistic potential of a new conglomerate to Wall Street, avoiding the appearance of favoritism in Hollywood, and building a subscription base and attracting advertisers. If the weight of fifteen years of failure was not enough, *EW* was also the first Time Inc. launch following the Time Warner merger. Even though the development of the magazine had occurred before the merger's finalization, analysts viewed *EW* as the first substantial test of its promised potential.[64] As *Advertising Age* explained, "if the country's largest entertainment and publishing concern couldn't successfully produce an entertainment publication, who could?"[65] Yet in the pages of *Variety*, Jarvis and Klingensmith both underlined the magazine's autonomy from conglomerate control, again promising those within Hollywood that "Time Warner entertainment product will find no special favor at *EW*."[66] As industry observers affirmed, such industry agnosticism was essential, as "any tilt toward Burbank [the home of Time Warner] would quickly undermine *EW*'s credibility.[67]

The contradictions of *EW*'s mission took their toll almost immediately. The first issue hit newsstands during the second week of February, 1990, with singer k.d. lang on the cover — a

figure critics at *Advertising Age* and *Time Magazine* deemed "offbeat," "androgynous," and "relatively obscure."[68] The first cover came to represent all that was wrong with *EW*: the layout was cluttered, the typeface too busy, and the cover subject was inaccessible to the vast majority of readers. The verdict from readers, advertisers, and industry critics was unanimously negative. Advertisers complained that the magazine was "elitist" and "snooty," its tone "shrill" and "gratuitously snide."[69] Jarvis made no qualms about the incisiveness of the magazine. As his introductory Editor's Note made clear, "this magazine will be a voice for quality in a business that needs one," a blatant, unapologetic affront of the industry that was to provide the primary source of content and advertising for the magazine.[70]

Readers had difficulty navigating, and the magazine was "not very user friendly."[71] Advertisers continued to voice their disappointment *en masse*: "The quality was not what we had hoped for," said on ad exec, "the design makes it difficult to notice the ads."[72] With features on lang and Tim O'Brien's *The Things They Carried, EW* hailed the elite, not the average American who typically made up the readership for Time Inc. publications. With such a narrow focus, the magazine would never reach the one to two million readership expected of a flagship Time Warner publication.[73]

The timing of the negative criticism was inopportune. In April, Time Warner had reported a first quarter loss of $187 million, added onto a massive $10.6 billion in debt incurred as the result of the merger. Time Warner had already spent upwards of $30 million launching *EW,* a number that would eventually rise to between $50-$60 million.[74] It was incumbent upon *Entertainment Weekly* to succeed, if for image purposes alone. Executives in the magazine division took action almost immediately, turning hands-on in what had theretofore been an autonomous operation. An initial redesign hit newsstands on May 25, 1990, evidencing a dedication to

readability and accessibility. The cover had been de-cluttered, the sidebar removed. Inside the magazine, a new, bolder typeface was coupled with wider columns, bigger photos, and the transfer of the "News & Notes" column to magazine's end.[75] Most importantly, the cover of the May 25th issue featured Tom Cruise in a blatant ploy to boost newsstand sales.

Yet formal redesign did could not change the magazine's critical tone. When *EW* panned *Pretty Woman* in March, "the editorial bosses [. . .] were livid."[76] Not because *Pretty Woman* was a Time Warner product in need of protection — the film was Disney — but because the executives found it "irresponsible not to acknowledge [*Pretty Woman*'s] value as popular entertainment."[77] Whatever its artistic merits, audiences were clearly responding positively to the film, and *EW*'s rejection highlighted the magazine's alienating effect on readers. The *Pretty Woman* pan was no anomaly. According to an *Advertising Age* retrospective, "too many movies were getting bad grades," and Jarvis was clearly "not making nice with the industry."[78] Here, Time Warner's vision for the magazine and its purpose within Hollywood becomes clear. While executives did not expect it to serve as a promotional vehicle for Time Warner media products, they did want it to be populist — celebrating, rather than denigrating, popular trends in culture — and, in the process, cultivate good will amongst stars, producer, directors, agents, and executives.

Yet Time Warner's vision clashed with Jarvis's. Less than a month after the first redesign, Jarvis tendered his resignation, citing "creative differences" with management.[79] As Jarvis later explained, he and his team had developed a subscription-oriented magazine aimed at upper-middle-class, educated Americans while Time Warner wanted a middle-brow publication marketed for the newsstand.[80] Time Warner immediately replaced Jarvis with James W. Seymore, then executive editor of *People*. The symbolism of the move, according to the *New York Times*, was clear. *ET*, like *People*, would become "more personality-driven." As several employees on the

inside of the move confirmed, "management wants more celebrity coverage and a more mainstream magazine" with "a less irreverent approach."[81] Jarvis's vision for a magazine that would focus on "product, not people" was effectively over.[82]

Seymore enacted a second, more radical overhaul of *Entertainment Weekly*. For the November 2nd issue, Seymore expanded features and made more liberal use of photos and images. The new *EW* had a "friendlier tone," with features that *Folio,* the leading trade in the magazine publishing business, deemed "funny and spicy and often hung on a celebrity peg."[83] Despite Seymore's assurances that "I don't want anything bland or formulaic [. . .] I want the magazine to have the snappiest and most interesting reviews anywhere," the influence of his tenure at *People* was clear. [84] The new *Entertainment Weekly*, like the rest of the Time Warner magazine group, was for the masses — albeit the slightly wealthier masses, endowed with a surplus of discretionary income. Over the next two years, *EW*'s rate base rose from 650,000 (April 1991) to 800,000 (June 1992) while ad pages rose 17% despite an 8% decline in the magazine industry as a whole.[85]

Throughout this period, various trade papers highlighted Seymore's eagerness to cross-promote. In 1991, *EW* announced plans to partner with E!; the following year, HBO began airing four-minute editions of "*Entertainment Weekly*'s News Report" ten times while affiliates of the CBS radio network broadcast a 90-second version.[86] Other attempts were less cross-promotion than cooperation: Warner Books, for example, advertised heavily in *EW* and other Time Warner magazines but still paid for the space (with a slight reduction in price) while a partnership with Viacom-owned MTV offered increased exposure for the *EW* brand during the 1992 Music Video Awards.[87] While valuable, such partnerships paled in comparison to the

synergies promised by Steve Ross when courting Time Inc., in which the magazines would serve as promotional vehicles for Time Warner films, television shows, channels, records, and books.[88]

Seymore had made the magazine more accessible and a better fit in the Time Inc. magazine family, yet he insisted on the magazine's autonomy under Time Warner. In March 1995, Seymore repeated his declaration of *EW*'s independence, avowing that the magazine "shows no favoritism towards Warner products."[89] Despite an increased focus on personalities, industry observers agreed that *EW* had "managed to retain its critical voice and edge."[90] In September 1995, for example, an *EW* feature on blockbusters illuminated studio tactics for nudging films over the $100 million mark, including quotes from an industry analyst suggesting that the studios inflate reported grosses by 2.5 percent. The year before, *EW* film critic Owen Gliberman had given *Forrest Gump*, the most popular film of 1994, a C, deeming it "dishonest."[91] Seymore admitted that the grading system had lost the magazine access to certain stars, yet averred "we don't live or die by our access to the stars. If we were to shade our reviews in order to curry favor, I think we would be doomed."[92] While part of Seymore's insistence on independence was intended to foster a certain image for the magazine, that very image was the barrier preventing *EW* from serving the promotional function for other Time Warner products. How, then, could *EW* maintain conglomerate agnosticism *and* help push Time Warner products?

EXTRA

Another program, initially titled *ENT (Entertainment News Television)* was produced by Time's Telepictures TV and distributed by Warner Bros. Domestic TV, had to potential to provide Time Warner with the synergy that *Entertainment Weekly* had failed to provide. Like *Entertainment Tonight*, *Extra* promised to provide entertainment news in a snappy, syndicated format.[93] To produce the show, Telepictures recruited David Nuell who, along with Jim Van

Messell, was credited with revitalizing *Entertainment Tonight* in the late '80s. With *ENT,* Nuell aimed to make an *ET* for the next generation, relying on MTV-style edits, up-to-date graphics, and a slightly "cheekier" style.[94] As Chapter Six explains, previous attempts to compete with *ET* had faced two problems. First, to create a program on par with *ET*, a significant investment was necessary (in the case of *ENT*, the initial investment topped $40 million). Second, to profit on that investment, the show would need to air in prime access. In the late '80s, many stations had already filled prime access with combinations of *ET*, game shows, off-network sitcoms, and tabloids.[95] *Extra* aimed to "knock out the advertisers-unfriendly tabloid magazines," playing on affiliates' disappointment with "horrible content problems" that, according to the trades, regularly scared off advertisers.[96]

Amidst *ENT*'s push for station pick-ups, producers faced a challenge concerning the name of the program. In Spring 1993, E! had filed suit against Telepictures, claiming the name *ENT* was too similar to its own.[97] E!'s claim was dismissed, but Telepictures nevertheless switched the name to *Extra*, claiming *ENT* had been a "working title." Management was scared that *Extra* would siphon off E!'s audience and took legal action even though E! was, at this point, still under the same conglomerate umbrella as *ENT/Extra*. The suit demonstrates the extent to which two Time Warner arms, both tasked with the production of entertainment news, struggled to communicate and foretold how difficult cooperation and cross-promotion would prove.

While the finished product seemed more clone than companion, *Extra*'s strategy had worked. A week before its launch, the program boasted a clearance rate of 90%. Given the dearth of Time Warner O&O stations (stations owned and operated by Time Warner, and subsequently forced to air programming from the conglomerate's production arms) the clearance rate was a tremendous feat.[98] But the pressure to perform was intense. *Extra* was Time Warner's

"highest profile syndie project to date," and Nuell worked to make it perfect.[99] Time Warner funneled an unprecedented $30 million into promoting the show while Telepictures leveraged its conglomerate connections. Time Warner's in-house advertising team placed promotions in supermarket checkout lines, and ads ran before Warner Bros. films and in the Time Inc. magazines.[100] The massive ad penetration — at a relatively reasonable price — was only possible due to Time Warner connections.

Producers had sold *Extra* on its connections to the Time Inc. magazines: as one Warner Bros. television executive exclaimed, "The Time Inc. print connection is going to be huge [. . .] we'll have a deeper well to tap into for exclusive pieces."[101] Nuell had even placed a producer in charge of collaborating with *Entertainment Weekly*, *People*, *Sports Illustrated,* and *Time* to "set up the groundwork" for a collaborative effort in which *Extra* would share gossip and other entertainment stories slated for publication in each of the magazines.[102] But as *Mediaweek* pointed out, Time Inc. staff greeted the prospect of sharing scoops with skepticism. Was a story still an "exclusive" if a television show aired it first?[103] These were the exact questions that had dogged previous potential collaborations. How could two outlets share content and create synergy when they were ostensibly in competition?

Even though Telepictures, the production entity specifically tasked with creating synergy between Time Warner's print and broadcast arms, was behind *Extra,* a single syndicated program was unable to solve such a conundrum. Unlike Disney, where product messages are clearly and explicitly harmonized, obviating the competitive edge, Time Warner generally elided connections between products. In other words, E!, *Extra*, and *Entertainment Weekly* seemed to be in competition because Time Warner allowed them to appear that way. Each was nested within a different production center of the conglomerate, and although communication lines certainly existed,

Time Warner lacked Disney's coherent vision of conglomerate-wide synergy and cross-promotion. Even Time Warner's name betrayed such fractiousness. Unlike Disney or Viacom, which swallowed other companies under a single name, Time Warner was a *merger* of two disparate companies, with both names still on the masthead.

Nevertheless, *Extra* fared moderately well during its first month on the air, earning a 3.9 rating and a small but steady growth in viewership. Still, *Extra* was pulling in fewer viewers than the programming that had held its spot the year before.[104] But Time Warner remained committed to *Extra*. As with *Entertainment Weekly*, it could not afford the public failure of a product meant to showcase the conglomerate's synergistic potential and promised a second season. Executives installed Richard Stolley, founding editor of *People*, as executive producer and assured Hollywood observers, via a *Variety* interview, that he would "focus more on the synergies between the show and Time Inc. mags."[105]

In late summer of 1995, two events brought Time Warner's relative failure to create profitable synergies via *EW* and *Extra* to the fore. On July 31st, Disney announced its merger with Capital Cities/ABC. The marriage of what Warren Buffet termed "the No. 1 content company in the world with the No.1 distribution system" formed a massive entertainment conglomerate that dwarfed even Time Warner.[106] Disney, already known for its cross-promotional skill, promised "synergies that just go on and on," with bold-faced connections between Disney products and its new raft of television channels.[107] As highlighted above, the ABC/Capital Cities deal was but the latest of a series of massive mergers attempting to yoke content with distribution, whether in the form of cable channels, VHS tapes, networks, or rental systems. Granted, nearly all of the deals were clouded with debt and difficulty.[108] Nevertheless, it was

increasingly clear that conglomeration, with its attendant promises of cross-promotion and synergy, would guide the future of the media industry at large[109]

Yet six years after its own merger, Time Warner was still saddled with upwards of $15 billion in debt. Stock prices continued to sag, in part because few could decipher Time Warner's "unusually complex" capital structure.[110] To remedy the issue, Time Warner CEO Gerald Levin had announced plans in February 1995 to significantly reduce the debt load and unravel the most Gordian of ownership agreements in hopes of illuminating Time Warner's value to Wall Street. To enact this change, Levin would sell "non-core assets," a designation that would eventually include Six Flags, Atari, and E!.[111] Initially, analysts believed Time Warner would jettison its minority interest in Turner Broadcasting. Instead, on August 31, 1995, Time Warner and Turner declared their intention to one-up the Disney/Capital Cities deal, bringing Time Warner's existing holdings in film, television, cable service providers, print, and music together with Turner's cable channels (TBS, TNT, The Cartoon Network, CNN, TCM), Castle Rock Entertainment, New Line Studios, Hanna Barbera cartoons, two sports teams, and a massive library of classic and recent films.[112]

The merger promised a path to synergy for which Time Warner had been waiting. Despite fears of anti-trust tie-ups, industry analysts celebrated the union, underlining the ways in which it would allow Levin the chance to "fulfill the promises he has made since the Time Warner merger."[113] Warner Bros. cartoons could air on The Cartoon Network, while Warner Bros. could develop film-length versions of Hanna Barbara cartoons. The ever-expanding web of Time Warner cable providers could cut carriage deals for the Turner cable channels; Warner Bros. television could sell syndication rights to TBS and TNT at a discount; TBS, TNT, and

TCM could air Warner Bros. films. CNN and *Time* could join journalistic forces as *Fortune* and *Money* developed content for the developing CNN financial channel.[114]

CNN also provided an opportunity for "natural" cross-promotion that would not appear as favoritism on the part of the *Entertainment Weekly*. *EW* would not promote CNN; rather, CNN would use *EW*-produced content as part of its *Newsstand* program, which would air three times a week, with each day focused specifically on content from *Time*, *EW*, and *Fortune*.[115] The *EW*-branded episodes first hit the air in 1998, providing entertainment news reviews, with producing and hosting duties performed by *EW* editors and writers. Yet the CNN segments highlighted just how slight Time Warner appeared beside Disney in the arena of entertainment news and cross-promotion. As *Variety* made clear, *Newsstand* was Time Warner's "last chance to keep any semblance of an entertainment news franchise from scurrying away on mouse-like feet."[116]

At *Extra*, even Time Warner's vast holdings following the merger with Turner could not make up for the absence of the "one essential ingredient needed to succeed in the TV programming business these days: a guaranteed broadcast outlet."[117] This lack came into stark relief just weeks after the announcement of the Turner deal when NBC declared plans to launch its own version of *Entertainment Tonight*. The program, later dubbed *Access Hollywood*, would be co-produced by New World and enjoy guaranteed clearance on the dozens of NBC and New World O&Os, which would naturally supplant *Extra* with *Access Hollywood*. The deal was only possible due to the repeal of Fin-Syn, which had theretofore prevented networks from holding financial interest in first-run syndicated fare. Indeed, *Access Hollywood* represented the exact type of collaboration that Warner Bros. and other studios had lobbied against in their fight to keep Fin-Syn intact. The studios recognized that if networks (such as NBC) could produce their own

programming (such as *Access Hollywood*) and guarantee its placement on their O&Os, the studios (such as Warner Bros.) and their television production arms would suffer.

According to industry experts, the announcement of *Access Hollywood* was tantamount to the "death knell" for *Extra*.[118] Without O&Os and with CBS, ABC, and Fox station groups already committed to other programming, *Extra* would be forced to rely on independent stations or settle for less lucrative "fringe" placement on network affiliates.[119] But in a newly forged deal with NBC, *Extra* received a new lease on life.[120] In exchange for partial stake in *Extra*, NBC would continue to carry *Extra* on its O&Os. The following year, the O&Os would pair *Extra* and *Access Hollywood* in an hour-long block leading into primetime.[121] But the deal stipulated for *Extra* to shift its focus from entertainment news — thereafter the provenance of *Access Hollywood* — to celebrities and human interest stories.[122] In other words, the new *Extra* would be more *People*, less *Entertainment Weekly*.[123]

Time Inc. had saved *Extra*, but at a cost. Forced to concentrate on personalities and celebrities, *Extra* could still feature stars and celebrities related to Time Warner products, but it had lost its explicit promotional value for the conglomerate. With an equity partnership with NBC and footage from an NBC affiliate library, *Extra* was not as much an example cross-promotion as inter-conglomerate cooperation. While this type of cooperation bears fruit, the benefits are not nearly as robust or lucrative as true synergistic collaboration within a single conglomerate.[124]

Extra was healthy but failed to fulfill its promotional potential while *EW* was also thriving but still short of its full synergistic capacity.[125] Over the course of the 1995-1996 season, *EW* had devoted several covers to Warner Bros. television-produced *Friends* and *ER* — shows so popular that few would accuse *EW* of Warner Bros. favoritism.[126] *EW*, however, was only willing to

feature the most popular Time Warner products. The products most desperate for promotional assistance, such as *Simon*, a fledging WB series with dismal ratings, received no special treatment.[127] In this way, *Extra* and *EW* exemplified the middling results of Time Warner's renewed attempts to cultivate synergy following Turner Broadcasting merger.[128]

Such lackluster results extended to Time Warner's attempts to expand its brands and synergies into the nascent digital mediascape. Starting in 1994, Time Warner had begun making content from its magazines available online via its new portal, Pathfinder. Apart from a smattering of reader's polls, chat rooms, and links to the websites of other Time Warner properties, these sites simply reproduced content already available in the magazine.[129] In an ill-advised attempt at unifying the conglomerate brand, Time Warner refused to allow products to have a non-Pathfinder domain name. To reach *EW*, for example, users had to enter the cumbersomely long "www.pathfinder.com/ew/" instead of "www.ew.com." In the years before efficient search engines, the extra step could be the difference between a user finding a site or giving up.

Starting in 1998, an EW supplement dubbed "EW Internet" began providing "a guide to Web-surfing and samplings of cool hardware."[130] EW readers were clearly using and buying new media technology, and "dot.com" advertising in the magazine exploded from $500,000 to $10 million between 1998 and '99.[131] Yet *EW* and Time Warner seemed to misunderstand the online market. A digital insert might cater to readers who were using the technology, but it failed to expand the *EW* brand. Instead of using the web as an opportunity for convergence, building a unique web presence that would simultaneously funnel traffic to Time Warner sites and increase readership, Time Warner was essentially offering a hyperlinked version of the print magazine.

By 1999, Pathfinder had proven an expensive failure, draining $8 million a year from Time Warner's bottom line.[132]

Of course, Time Warner and EW.com were by no means unique. In the mid- and late -'90s, only the most visionary of executives were advocating for web content that served a convergent and profitable purpose. Yet E! had been cultivating a unique, complementary web presence for the channel since January 1996, when the channel had joined with CNET to create E! Online, which went live that August.[133] Six months later, monthly ad billings had increased from $25,000 to $160,000 — a figure that would rise exponentially with the spread of the internet.

E!'s prescience in the online arena cannot be underestimated. While *People*, *US*, *Entertainment Tonight*, *Extra*, *Entertainment Weekly*, and a host of other entertainment news providers developed rudimentary home pages, E! understood that an online component could not simply recycle material available to viewers. E! Online offered 90% new material, working to complement, rather than duplicate, its cable counterpart.[134] With little precedent, E! Online was free to experiment with novel storytelling methods. As editor-in-chief Lew Harris explained, "Here, there's no history, there's no template. Everything we do is for the first time."[135] The site included regular features on star blow-ups ("Super Snits You've Never Heard About!"), webcasts from film premieres and red carpets, "First Looks" at breaking industry news, and an easily navigable E! Schedule ("Who's On, When They're On, For How Long").[136] The end product was not simply a "brand extension" but a convergent creation updated hourly and daily.[137]

The E! Channel was never intended as a go-to site for breaking news. In contrast, E! Online labored to be the authority in online celebrity content, developing a "platform-agnostic strategy," by partnering with AOL, Yahoo, Internet Explorer, Netscape, WebTV, Roadrunner,

and others to reach as many consumers as possible.[138] The partnership with AOL, completed in February 1998, made E! an "anchor tenant," meaning any of AOL's 11 million users could alter his/her AOL account to link directly to content from E! Online. Over the next two years, E! Online continued to upgrade and expand, adding new features, increasing download speed, and creating an updated search engine to facilitate use of the site's thousands of audio and video clips.[139] By January 2000, E! Online was receiving 2.7 million monthly visitors.[140] Even as Disney's online portal, Go!, endured the same humiliating failure that befell Time Warner's Pathfinder, E! Online demonstrated profitable convergence at work — a model that Disney, Comcast, and other conglomerates would attempt to emulate in the years to come.

CONCLUSION

At the end of the decade, Comcast had just spun-off the "Style Network," a sister channel projected to reach between 20 to 30 million homes over the next five years.[141] But E! was in steady hands. As a *Variety* retrospective on E!'s ten-year anniversary made clear, the channel had become the veritable "bailiwick" in celebrity and entertainment news.[142] The combination of E!, The Style Channel, and E! Online, coupled with the might of Comcast and Disney's additional holdings, had "positioned the [E!] dynasty for the kind of branding necessary in the new media universe."[143]

This sort of multi-platform expansion and branding would prove the future of the gossip industry. Whereas gossip outlets in the 1950s, '60s, and '70s, including Louella Parsons, Hedda Hopper, Rona Barrett, and Chuck Laufer, had thrived by dominating their specific niches and expanding their respective brands across print and broadcast media, the industrial realities of the '80s and '90s proved that the most successful gossip outlets, such as *Entertainment Tonight* and *People*, were those nested within larger conglomerate interests. But as this chapter has demonstrated,

conglomerate backing did not guarantee immediate success, nor could it ensure that the product could provide the sort of promotion and synergy most desirable in the increasingly consolidated landscape of conglomerate Hollywood.

As proof, contrast the state of E!, Disney, and Comcast in 1999 with that of Time Warner. While individual properties under the Time Warner banner excelled, the overall health of the conglomerate was poor.[144] The lesson, it seems, is that an entertainment news program can thrive even as its parent struggles. While no conglomerate desires any of its divisions to lose money, the value of an entertainment-based product has never been its profits, as *EW* and *Extra*'s contribution to Time Warner's bottom line would always pale in comparison to a single franchise or a season of *Friends*. Rather, the true value of entertainment news and gossip within a conglomerate is promotional potential.

Indeed, when Disney agreed to help finance the Comcast buy-out of E!, it was not for the channel's future profits, but the five-plus years of cross-promotional service the channel would provide. Yet such promotion is only possible within a conglomerate that is not only able but eager to exploit ties and create synergies, even if it means infringing upon the channel, program, or magazine's credibility and image of objectivity.

The larger lesson, already recited by many, is that Time Warner failed to evaluate or exploit its potential synergies in the decade following the merger. The story that has remained untold is how Time Warner's inability to use its entertainment news properties to leverage cross-media foretold such a failure almost from the beginning. In the end, the lessons gleaned from Time Warner's difficulties over the course of the 1990s helped structure the future of the gossip industry in the decade to come, as conglomerates, Time Warner included, refocused their resolve

to exploit discourse about celebrities and Hollywood, both negative and positive, as extensively as possible.

[1] See Steve Prince, ed. *American Cinema of the 1980s*: *Themes and Variations* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2007), 51.

[2] Richard Zoglin, "A Company under Fire," *Time*, June 12 1995, 37-39.

[3] See Keith Negus, "The Production of Culture," in *Production of Culture/Cultures of Production*, ed. Paul du Gay (London: Sage, 1997), 68-104 for a detailed account of the way that clashing cultures of production affected Sony following its acquisition of Columbia in the early 1990s.

[4] See Richard M. Clurman, *To the End of Time: The Seduction and Conquest of a Media Empire* (New York: Touchstone, 1993); Connie Bruck, *Master of the Game: Steve Ross and the Creation of Time Warner* (New York: Penguin, 1994); Alec Klein, *Stealing Time: Steve Case, Jerry Levin, and the Collapse of Time Warner* (New York: Simon & Schuster Press, 2003); Kara Swisher, *There Must Be a Pony In Here Somewhere: The AOL Time Warner Debacle and the Quest for the Digital Future* (New York: Three Rivers, 2003);Nina Munk, *Fools Rush In: Steve Case, Jerry Levin and the Unmaking of AOL Time Warner* (New York: Harper Collins, 2004). All of the above books are written with a specific agenda in mind; as a former Time employee ousted through the merger, Clurman clearly has an ax to grind against Warner, while Bruck tells the story of the merger mostly from the perspective of Warners.

[5] Kim Mitchell, "Movietime Launches Newsy Showbiz Channel July 31," *Variety*, July 8, 1987, 24.

[6] Philip H. Dougherty, "Promoting Movies Via Cable," *New York Times*, July 30, 1987, D18.

[7] Mitchell, "Movietime Launches," 24; "Promo Cable Service Reported Fully Funded," *Variety*, Feb 18 1987, 111; Dougherty, "Promoting Movies Via Cable," D18.

[8] Advertisement for Movietime, *Variety*, April 30, 1987, 9.

[9] The initial list of cooperating studios and cablers included United Artists, Paramount, Orion, Universal, Columbia, DeLaurentiis, New Century/Vista, New World, Buena Vista, Tri-Star, 20th Century Fox, Atlantic Releasing, Sam Goldwyn and Vestron; CNN and HBO, Showtime, WTBS, ESPN, USA, AND CBN. See Kim Mitchell, "Movietime Launches Newsy Showbiz Channel July 31," *Variety*, July 8, 1987, 24. By February 1988, they were also cooperating with Spectra, Lorimar, Universal, Orion, Cannon and 20th Century Fox. See "Cable and Homevideo Briefs," *Variety*, February 1, 1988, 18.

[10] Advertisement for Movietime, *Variety*, April 30, 1987, 9.

[11] "ATV Adds Movietime to Program Lineup," *Variety*, August 15, 1987, 10.

[12] The companies involved were ATC, Continental Cable, Cox Cable, Newhouse Broadcasting, United Cable and Warner Cable. — Warner, through WCC and Warner Communications ties, owns twice as much as other investors. Time Inc., through 80% ownership of ATC and all of Home Box Office, owns almost as much as Warner. See "Movietime service gets MSO Backing," *Variety*, March 16, 1988, 74.

[13] "Movietime Available in 11 Million Homes," *Daily Variety*, December 9, 1988, 8.

[14] A "Universal Rough Cuts" feature, for example, provided audiences with sneak-peaks at Universal features forty-five days before their release. See "MCA, WB Reach Program Pacts with Movietime," *Daily Variety*, February 14, 1989, 30. Movietime also set its sights on becoming a cross-media brand, expanding into publishing and radio in early 1989. The Movietime magazine, "*Movies USA,*" bore the tagline "the official of the Movietime Network," and "shared editorial content, cross-promote, sponsor joint promotions, and offer advertisers cooperative buys" with the channel. An initial press run of one million copies were distributed at theaters nationwide in Spring of 1989; according to Movietime, the magazine was but the first in a series of planned cross-promotions intended to enhance its promotional value to Hollywood. In April, Movietime announced the formation of a "radio wing," tasked with producing a 1-hour weekly series and a series of 60-second syndicated "Movietime Minutes" for newsbreaks. With its content exploited across print, cable, and radio, Movietime could promise advertisers a "potent, 3-prong marketing package." As Movietime continued to bolster its value to potential advertisers, its subscriber base rose as well, up to 11.5 million in April 1989. See "Movietime Launches New Monthly Tie-In Magazine," *Daily Variety*, February 16, 1989, 18; Richard Huff, "Movietime launches radio division to produce programs for syndie," *Variety*, April 19, 1989, 54.

[15] Steve Weinstein, "HBO Plans to Give Movietime Channel a New Identity," *Los Angeles Times*, August 22, 1989, 1.

[16] *Ibid.*

[17] Geraldine Fabrikant, "Disney to Sell Publications Inherited with Capital Cities," *New York Times*, January 29, 1997, D1.

[18] Morrie Gelman, "HBO makes new bid for control of Movietime net," *Variety*, June 21, 1989, 41; "Movietime Channel Reins Thrown to HBO," *Daily Variety*, August 16, 1989, 18.

[19] Morrie Gelman, "New Name, On-Screen Look Heralds Movietime's Rebirth," *Variety*, March 14, 1990, 2.

[20] Richard Gold, "Clamor for glamour sparks media melee," Richard Gold, *Variety*, January 17, 1990, 1; Elizabeth Kolbert, "Slick Take on Talk Shows Feeds a New Little Channel," *New York Times*, June 6, 1994, C11. Masters saw E! as an "MTV for adults" — a channel that adults would watch casually, flipping on after work, watching over breakfast, much in the way that young adults consumed MTV.

[21] Susan King, E! The Entertainment Channel Debuts Today," *Los Angeles Times*, Jun 1 1990, 22. With specific segments tacked to a time on the clock, the wheel provided the dependability absent from the earlier iteration of the channel, even as it oriented E! towards the "grazing" and "zapping" that characterized the early '90s cable consumer. See Weinstein, "HBO Plans to Give Movietime," 1.

[22] Weinstein, "HBO Plans to Give Movietime," 1.

[23] Kolbert, "Slick Take on Talk Shows," C11.

[24] *Ibid.*

[25] Daytime ratings jumped from 0.2 to 0.5 during the daytime coverage, an increase that carried over into primetime, where average ratings rose from 0.3 to 0.6. See Joe Flint,"After five-year fight, E! strikes black ink," *Variety*, February 6, 1995, 25.

[26] Throughout the '90s, Joan Rivers and her daughter Melissa hosted the red carpet and quickly proved as compelling as the stars themselves. The arrival of stars was just fodder for gossip; the presence of the Rivers made it entertainment.

[27] Jerry Rice, "Celebrities Tailored to Programming," *Variety*, July 28, 2000, 24.

[28] Michael Venture, "All H'Wood, All the Time," *Variety*, July 28, 2000, 19.

[29] Ray Richmond, "Ambitious E! Courts News Projects, OJ," *Variety*, October 28, 1996, 37.

[30] James Sterngold, "A Wasteland, and Proud of It," *New York Times*, September 7, 1998, C1.

[31] E! participated in preliminary discussions for unspecified *EW* and/or *People* content, but there is no evidence that they materialized. See Alison Fahey, "Cable's E! eyes print ties," *Advertising Age*, June 3, 1991, 12; See Kimberly A. Owczarski, "Reacting Synergistically: *Batman* and Time Warner," in *The Business of Entertainment: Movies*, ed. Robert Sickels (Praeger Press: Westfield, CT, 2009), 55-76 for the specifics of promotion and failure of *Batman Forever*.

[32] Ray Richmond, "E! Up for Grabs for $500 Mil," *Variety*, Dec 23 1996, 35.

[33] *Ibid.*

[34] See Martin Peers, "Comcast leads race to buy TW's E! Stake," *Daily Variety*, January 10, 1997, 1; Geraldine Fabrikant, "Disney to Sell Publications Inherited with Capital Cities," *New York Times*, January 29, 1997, D1.

[35] The remaining interest was held by Cox Communications, Continental Cablevision and Tele-Communications Inc.'s Liberty Media. See Joe Flint and Martin Peers, "Disney, Comcast pony up $320 mil for TW's E! stake," *Daily Variety*, January 27, 1997, 1.

[36] Flint and Peers, "Disney, Comcast pony up $320 mil," 1.

[37] Chuck Ross, "Time Warner plans to sell stake in E! to Four MSOs," *Advertising Age*, December 16, 1996, 2.

[38] Frank followed Eisner to Disney.

[39] Joe Schlosser, "E! going all-original," *Broadcasting & Cable*, June 2 1997, 67.

[40] By 1996, E! had been been in the black for two years, selling $87 million in ads and receiving $58 million in fees from cable MSOs on an operating budget of $50 million. See Richard Katz, "Outgoing Masters Rates an 'A' for E!," *Variety*, October 5, 1998, 27.

[41] *Ibid.*

[42] Ray Richmond, "Disney's brand E!," *Variety*, February 3, 1997, 26.

[43] Richmond, "E! Stays Course After Fling with Frank," 31.

[44] Interestingly, Warner Bros., owned by Time Warner, was the only studio amongst the top eight advertisers.

[45] Richmond, "E! Stays Course After Fling with Frank," 31.

[46] Richmond, "Ambitious E! Courts New Projects, OJ," 37.

[47] Richard Morga, "'Newsstand' Ads Up for TW," *Daily Variety*, May 27 1998, 4.

[48] "Time stopped publication of TV-Cable Week in 1983 after losing $47 million. The company abandoned plans to publish Picture Week in 1986 after testing a series of prototypes." See Alex S. Jones, "Time Plans February Start for *Entertainment Weekly*," *New York Times*, July 12, 1989, D1; John Elson and Leslie Whitaker, "Reworking the first act," *Time*, June 25, 1990, 53.

[49] Iris Cohen Selinger, "EW Saga: Time Listens to Buyers Knock," *Adweek*, June 18, 1990, no page number.

[50] Alfred Balk, "The 'entrepreneurs' behind *Entertainment Weekly*," *Folio: the Magazine for Magazine Management*, November 1989, 79.

[51] Charles Trueheart, "Embattled Time to Launch an Entertainment Magazine," *Washington Post*, July 12 1989, F1.

[52] Gold, "Clamor for glamour," 1.

[53] *Ibid.*

[54] Patrick Reilly, "Time marches on; 'Entertainment Weekly' launch a go," *Advertising Age*, Jul 17 1989, 50.

[55] Iris Cohen Selinger, "Can 'Entertainment Weekly' stand the test of Time Inc.," *Adweek,* March 19, 1990, no page number.

[56] Gold, "Clamor for glamour," 1.

[57] Jones, "Time plans February start," D1.

[58] Eleanor Blau, "Opening Night for Entertainment Weekly," *New York Times,* February 12, 1990, D10.

[59] Gold, "Clamor for glamour," 1.

[60] Steve Damiano, "Timely entertainment," *Marketing & Media Decisions,* January 1990, 10.

[61] Damiano, "Timely entertainment," 10; Blau, "Opening Night," D10; Randall Rothenberg, "Time Warner's Merger Payoff," *New York Times*, December 31, 1990, A29.

[62] "Time Warner Inc.: Weekly to offer guarantee of circulation of 600,000," *Wall Street Journal,* December 18, 1989, A1.

[63] Pat Guy, "6 Years in making, 'EW' ready," *USA Today,* January 26, 1990, 4B.

[64] Gold, "Clamor for glamour," 1; "It's a hell of a lot more important than a typical monthly-magazine launch," says Joseph Ostrow, executive vice president of advertising agency Foote Cone & Belding. See Guy, "6 Years in making," 4B.

[65] Scott Donaton, "Magazine of the Year: Learning from woes, 'Entertainment Weekly' reinvents itself for turnaround of '91," *Advertising Age,* March 9 1992, S1.

[66] Gold, "Clamor for glamour," 1.

[67] *Ibid.*

[68] John Elson and Leslie Whitaker, "Reworking the First Act," *Time*, June 25, 1990, 53; David Morrow, "That's Entertainment Weekly," *Folio: the Magazine for Magazine Management*, July 1, 1991, 56.

[69] Selinger, "EW Saga: Time Listens to Buyers Knocks," no page number; Morrow, "That's Entertainment Weekly," 56; Donaton, "Magazine of the Year," S1.

[70] Judith Newman, "James Seymore Editor of the Year," *Adweek*, February 17, 1992, A11.

[71] Donaton, "Magazine of the Year," S1; Elson and Whitaker, "Reworking the first act," 53.

[72] Morrow, "That's Entertainment Weekly," 56.

[73] Selinger, "EW Saga," no page number; see also Newman, "James Seymore Editor of the Year," A11.

[74] Selinger, "EW Saga," no page number; Mike Graham, "That's Entertainment," *Campaign,* February 1, 1991, no page number.

[75] Scott Donaton, "'EW' Cleans up look," *Advertising Age,* May 21, 1990, 8.

[76] Morrow, "That's Entertainment Weekly," 56.

[77] *Pretty Woman* was produced by Touchstone, Disney's live action production arm.

[78] Newman, "James Seymore Editor of the Year," A11.

[79] Elson and Whitaker, "Reworking the first act," 53.

[80] Graham, "That's Entertainment," no page number.

[81] *Ibid.*

[82] Newman, "James Seymore Editor of the Year," A11

[83] John Masteron, "Entertainment Weekly's first-year losses near $50M," *Folio: the Magazine for Magazine Management*, Dec 1 1990, 23; Donaton, "Magazine of the Year," S1; Morrow, "That's Entertainment Weekly," 56.

[84] Elson and Whitaker, "Reworking the First Act," 53.

[85] *Advertising Age* named *EW* "Magazine of the Year" in 1992, the same year that *Adweek* named James Seymore "Editor of the Year." See Donaton, "Magazine of the Year," S1; Newman A11.

[86] I have been unable to verify whether the planned programming ever materialized. See Regina Joseph, "Gannett, Time's EW seek tie-in with E!," Dec 9 1991, 4; Evan Smith, "Entertainment Weekly moves onto HBO, radio," *Mediaweek*, Mar 4 1991, 2. Donaton, "Magazine of the Year," S1.

[87] Scott Donaton, "Warner touts books in magazine," *Advertising Age*, Dec 14 1992, 3; It is unclear how *EW* was evoked in the broadcast. Alison Fahey and Scott Donaton, "Mags jam with MTV," *Advertising Age,* Oct 21, 1991, 16.

[88] James Cox, "Time Warner after Ross," *USA Today*, December 21, 1992, 1B.

[89] Deirdre Carmody, "Entertainment Weekly Defies Critics," *New York Times,* March 6, 1995, D7.

[90] *Ibid.*

[91] *Ibid.*

[92] *Ibid.*

[93] Eric Schmuckler, "ET Clone Sown," *Mediaweek*, January 17, 1994, 12.

[94] Tim Gray, "'Extra: The Entertainment Magazine,'" *Variety,* September 12, 1994, 27.

[95] TV syndication is a real-estate business, and prime access time periods are the choicest real estate on a station's schedule." See John Dempse, "Syndies seeking not-so-easy access," *Variety,* September 30, 1996, 1.

[96] Mike Freeman, Joe Flint, and Steve Coe, "Warner looks to topple tabs with ENT," *Broadcasting & Cable*, July 12, 1993, 34; Joe Flint, "'ENT' takes 'Extra' Step," *Daily Variety*, May 12 1994, 4.

[97] Flint, "'ENT' takes 'Extra' Step," 4.

[98] Gray, "Extra: The Entertainment Magazine," 27.

[99] With so much attention directed towards *Extra*, Nuell explained, "we can't afford to fix it on the air." Jim Benson, "11th-hour host switch at WB's 'Extra,'" *Daily Variety,* August 18, 1994, 3.

[100] Kathy Tyrer, "Warner Earmarks $ 30 Million for New TV Show," *Adweek,* August 22, 1994, no page number.

[101] "'Extra' seen stalking 'ET,'" *Mediaweek*, August 22, 1994, 9.

[102] Steve Coe, "Warner Bros.' new 'ENT' to challenge 'ET,'" *Broadcasting & Cable*, June 28, 1993, 6.

[103] "'Extra' seen stalking 'ET,'" 9.

[104] By the May 1994 sweeps, *Extra* was still only averaging a 4.1 rating — .2 lower than the year before and a significant drop from the programming that proceeded it. Previous programming had earned a 4.7 rating. See Peter Johnson and Alan Bash, "Entertainment show vows something 'Extra,'" *USA Today*, September 6, 1994, 3D.

[105] See Joe Flint, "'Extra' exec Nuell exits," *Daily Variety*, May 31, 1995, 1

[106] Richard Siklos, "Disney pays US $19B to grab giant ABC Network," *Financial Post,* August 1 1995, 1.

[107] Bill Carter, "Suddenly, at ABC, The Future Is Now," *New York Times,* August 1, 1995, D1.

[108] Matsushita, for example, had unloaded MCA/Universal on Seagram's in April 1995, largely due to conflicts between Japanese- and Hollywood-based management

[109] "Mergers: Mine Is Bigger Than Yours," *Newsweek,* December 25, 1995, 14; for a detailed rendition of the move towards conglomeration in the '80s and '90s, see Edward Jay Epstein, *The Big Picture: Money and Power in Hollywood* (New York, Random House, 2005).

[110] Geraldine Fabrikant, "Battling for Hearts and Minds at Time Warner," *New York Times,* February 26, 1995, C1.

[111] *Ibid.*

[112] Turner held the rights to the MGM and RKO back libraries.

[113] Mark Landler and Gerladine Fabrikant, "Turner Deal a Chance for Time Warner to Fulfill Promises," *New York Times,* September 23, 1996, D1.

[114] Mark Landler, "The Deal; 3-Way Haggle is now Shaping Deal for Turner," *New York Times,* August 31, 1995, A1.

[115] Newsstand later expanded to include content from *People*. Although the plans for the collaboration were announced in 1996, Newsstand did not hit the air until June 11, 1998; the *Entertainment Weekly* edition aired on Thursdays. See Jennifer Nix, "CNN, newsmags pact," *Daily Variety,* May 20, 1998, 6.

[116] Richard Morga, "'Newsstand' Ads Up for TW," *Daily Variety,* May 26 1998, 4.

[117] Jim Benson and Joe Flint, "Warners seeks an 'Extra' incentive," *Variety*, October 2, 1995, 1.

[118] "Murder Ads Ruffled Peacock but Didn't Injure Ratings," *Daily News* (New York), October 16, 1995, 75.

[119] Joe Flint, "NBC, NW take aim at 'Extra,'" *Daily Variety*, August 24, 1995, 1. Granted, *Extra* could air on Time Warner's fledgling network, The WB, then airing part-time on a web of independent stations, but ratings would have been too low to sustain the production.

[120] Joe Flint, "Peacock, WB seal deal to save 'Extra,'" *Daily Variety,* October 13, 1995, 3.

[121] *Extra* would also be guaranteed continued access to KNBC's file footage library, which had proven crucial to constructing televisual narratives.

[122] Flint, "Peacock, WB seal deal to save 'Extra,'" 3.

[123] The conversion took place gradually over the course of the year, culminating in the replacement of the two co-hosts in June 1996. See Jenny Hontz, "WB drops 2 anchors on 'Extra,'" *Daily Variety*, June 3, 1996, 7.

[124] In January 1999, Warner Bros.'s syndication arm took over joint distribution of *AH* and *Extra*, selling it as an hour-long strip to stations and offering "combo packages" to advertisers. While Warner Bros. received a distribution fee from NBC, the fact remained that *Extra* was essentially partnering with a rival conglomerate. See Cynthia Littleton, "NBC, WB link on 'Access,'" *Daily Variety,* January 12, 1999, 7.

[125] By 1998, *EW* had a rate base of 1.425 million, and single copy sales over 116,000 in 1998, its second year in the black. See Lisa Granatstein, "EW to raise rate base to 1.425 million in January," *MediaWeek,* December 7, 1998, 8.

[126] *EW* released a cover story on each show in fall of 1995, plus an additional cover featuring Jennifer Aniston as "TV's Hottest Covergirl."

[127] Jonathan Storm, "Dynamic Duo," *Philadelphia Inquirer,* December 19,1995, D05.

[128] Morga, "'Newsstand' Ads Up for TW," 4.

[129] Time Warner provided access to its magazines through Pathfinder.com; you can peruse an archived version of the 1998 website at http://web.archive.org/web/19990221045545/cgi.pathfinder.com/ew/.

[130] Lisa Granatstein, "Web Spins More Titles," *MediaWeek*, June 7, 1999, 62.

[131] *Ibid.*

[132] Pathfinder was launched in 1994 and shut down in 1999. See Richard Katz, "Pathfinder site runs out of Time," *Daily Variety*, April 27, 1999, 13.

[133] Frank championed E! online when few other networks, programs, or publications were developing original online content, encouraging the channel to buy out CNET's 50% in June 1997.

[134] Marla Matzer, "AOL Rolls out 'Welcome Mat' in E! Online Deal," *Los Angeles Times*, February 17, 1998, 8.

[135] "From Spike Lee to Pamela Lee," *Advertising Age*, November 4, 1996, S24.

[136] Archived web content from December 20, 1996 available at http://web.archive.org/web/19961220032319/http://www.eonline.com/.

[137] *Ibid.*

[138] Anya Sacharow, "E! Online deal signals major shift at AOL," *Adweek*, February 16, 1998, no page number.

[139] Marc Graser, "E! Online resets site," *Daily Variety*, October 13, 1999, 14.

[140] Kim Cleland, "E! Online," *Advertising Age*, June 26, 2000, S20.

[141] Jim Cooper, "Startup puts faith in style," *Adweek*, April 27, 1998, no page number.

[142] Venture, "All H'Wood, All the Time," 19.

[143] *Ibid.*

[144] See Connie Bruck, "Jerry's Deal," *The New Yorker*, February 19, 1996, http://www.newyorker.com/archive/1996/02/19/1996_02_19_055_TNY_CARDS_000374431#ixzz1B8HGOKuF>.

CHAPTER EIGHT
CELEBRITY DEATHMATCH: *PEOPLE* vs. *US WEEKLY*
2000 - 2005

By 2002, the rivalry between *People* and *Us* had come to a head. This, as the title of a *Washington Post* article made clear, was a "celebrity deathmatch," featuring two innovative editors, two obstinate and entrenched publishers, and two disparate approaches to the way that celebrity should be covered in the 21st century. [1] *Us* did not so much take a segment of *People*'s readership as much as it created a new set of readers, composed of men and women who desired a dramatic approach to celebrity that was heavy on images, light on the words. In so doing, *Us* — its reliance on paparazzi photography, its mercurial rise, and its competition with *People* — helped foster a perception of celebrity culture gone wild.

This chapter details the specifics of the battle between the two magazines, with particular attention to the innovations on the part of *Us* that forced *People* and the rest of the gossip industry to reconsider the way they approached and packaged celebrity discourse. I argue that *Us* weds the most effective components of the tabloid and the traditional fan magazine, resulting in a publication that appeals to readers' desires both to venerate and denigrate celebrities and celebrity culture. *Us* thus mirrored the conception of stars and celebrities as the conflation of the extraordinary and the ordinary, deified and defiled, "just like Us" on one page and absolutely nothing like us on the next. Of course, traditional fan magazines and studio publicity departments had long labored to cultivate images of the stars as equal parts domestic and glamorous. *Us*, however, relied on paparazzi photographs and fashion *faux pas* as evidence of the stars' ordinariness. The stars of old had been *suggested* as "just like us," but the use of off-the-cuff photos of stars caught in the midst of quotidian activities provided *proof* that they were.

The success of *Us* — and the so-called celebrity death match between it and other celebrity publications — also heightened the visibility of celebrity gossip. *Us'* editorial style relied heavily on paparazzi photos, and the resultant demand created a frenzy that came to a head in 2005, when several celebrities were nearly injured in their attempts to escape photographers seeking a candid, potentially scandalous shot.[2] The rivalry also spawned a bevy of imitators — *Life & Style, In Touch*, and an American version of *OK Magazine* — that increased the visibility of celebrity publications at the newsstand. Finally, the conglomerates with full or partial interest in *People* and *Us* (Time Warner and Disney, respectively) leveraged the magazines' brand recognition and content across holdings, enervating newscasts, sports channels, and daytime talk shows with gossip tidbits and branded content. The result was a sense of celebrity ubiquity that the continued spread of New Media. would only be exacerbate.

The competition between *Us* and *People* was ostensibly about subscribers and ad rates. But as this chapter evinces, the ramifications of the competition affected the conglomerated media landscape, the relationship between consumers and celebrities, and the perceived place of celebrity in contemporary culture. I have thus divided the chapter into three sections: the first details *Us*'s "makeover" from the initial move to weekly publication to Fuller's innovations in 2002-2003. The second section focuses on *People*'s retrenchment following *Us*'s upsurge and the efforts on the part of Fuller's successor, Janice Min, to refine the *Us* editorial voice. The third and final section addresses the industrial and cultural ramifications of the *Us/People* rivalry, suggesting that elements of the contemporary frenzy (and anxiety) that attend celebrity culture may be traced to the competition between the two magazines.

US *GOES WEEKLY*

In 1999, *Us Magazine* was regarded as "Wenner's folly."[3] Since Wenner gained full control of the magazine in 1989, *Us* had continually bled money and resources. Circulation numbers remained mired in the sub-million range throughout the '90s, coupled with consistently poor newsstand sales. Analysts estimated that Wenner was still losing $10 million a year on the magazine which had yet to turn a profit in his decade as full owner. But Wenner, determined for *Us* to succeed, funneled $50 million in recapitalization towards market research, a new staff, and yet another overhaul of the magazine in 1999.[4] The newly christened *Us Weekly* would publish one a week and eschew insider industry coverage. "You want to read about Mike Ovitz, you've got to look somewhere else," Wenner explained to *Variety*, alluding to Ovitz's prominent coverage in *EW*, a magazine Wenner elsewhere dismissed as "boring."[5]

While *Us* would still provide reviews of movies and television shows in an effort to appeal to Hollywood advertisers, it would also expand its fashion coverage. In 1994, Time Inc. had successfully launched *InStyle*, a monthly publication that wed celebrity, fashion, and style. *InStyle*'s cover always featured a celebrity while the inside eschewed the traditional fashion shoot for a catalog-style layout where clothing, jewelry, shoes, etc. were labeled with their price and source in a manner that naturally appealed to advertisers. Wenner claimed that the mix of fashion and style had, in fact, been born at *Us*. With twelve pages devoted to fashion, the revamped *Us Weekly* would "claim the franchise back."[6]

The magazine would also change its attitude towards celebrities, both aesthetically and relationally. Inside the magazine, editors allowed large spaces for paparazzi photos, treating them "as if they were fine works of art."[7] *Us* also aimed to cultivate a celebrity-friendly image for the magazine, promising to flattering coverage in exchange for first-hand access to the stars. "We're

not here to deal with people's dirty secrets or expose secrets they don't choose to expose," Wenner explained, "These are not politicians; these are not public officials [. . .] They're entertainers, they're artists, and they deserve our respect."[8] Wenner related this philosophy and details of the relaunch in an extensive profile published in *Brill's Content*. The now-defunct *Brill's*, launched in 1998, had by 2000 weathered criticism for its journalistic standards and cozy relationship with the media conglomerates, especially given the fact that its editor, Steven Brill, was also its publisher. In agreeing to participate in a *Brill's* tell-all, Wenner was addressing a sympathetic (or at least un-offended) readership and effectively associating his product with the *Brill's* attitude towards journalism.[9] In practice, Wenner's philosophy meant that *Us* would publish the narrative proffered by celebrities and their publicists. Wenner might not have allowed press agents to write the stories for him, as they did for the classic fan magazines, but he was willing to paint a flattering portrait of a star in exchange for his/her involvement with the magazine.

When *Us* vowed to flatter and cooperate with celebrities, it was taking a distinct tack from *People*. As highlighted in Chapter Six, *People* aimed to put a positive spin on public events, whether related to celebrities, political mishaps, or natural catastrophes. But as a Time Inc. publication, *People* also had journalistic standards to uphold. In an interview with *Variety*, for example, *People* editor Martha Nelson emphasizes the magazine's precision and ethics. "When it comes to the worlds of celebrity and entertainment," she explains, "I don't think there's a better news gathering organization. It's about fairness, facts, and fact-checking. It's about having the story right and operating with the kind of ethics that are the hallmark of the company."[10] What *Us* bad-mouthed as a "write around," *People* might deem an "objective story."[11]

Nelson's words evidence certain editorial spin, especially given their intended audience of industry insiders. But they also speak to *People*'s refusal to associate itself with a story that lacked

confirmation or was of dubious accuracy, in part because any ethical misstep could potentially mar the Time Inc./Time Warner brand. To ensure this level of accuracy, *People* had more than 275 editorial staffers devoted to fact checking and research; in contrast, *Us* had less than 50 — figures that *People* was eager to publicize as *Us* proved more of a threat.[12] Indeed, both *People* and *Us* were keen to emphasize the differences between the magazines' editorial policies. What *People* considered a compromise of journalistic integrity, Wenner deemed "showing respect."

Wenner was confident in *Us*'s ability to attract star cooperation, even if only due to their frustration with the competition. As he explained to *Brill's*, "Eighty to ninety percent of the stars will not talk to *People*. They don't like it. They don't feel comfortable in it. *People* has a bad reputation out there — it looks pedestrian, it's not very elegant. They've hurt a lot of people out there; they've burned a number of people."[13] Wenner cited no specifics, but he was likely referring to celebrities and their publicists dislike of the lack of control over the final *People* product, and a young, upcoming star may not want to associate him/herself with a magazine that skewed towards the middle-class and middle-aged. Again, celebrities may not have actually been dissatisfied with *People*, but it was essential that Wenner project the notion that they *were*, thereby suggesting *Us* as the go-to publication in the minds of the industry and the audience alike.

Indeed, whatever objections celebrities might have had, *People*'s circulation dwarfed that of *Us*, automatically rendering it a more desirable promotional forum. As Simon Halls, then-publicist to Paltrow, Jennifer Aniston, and a host of other stars explained, *People* not only has a "huge readership" but "a high level of credibility" with readers.[14] It was also a known quantity. In contrast, Halls was wary of working with *Us* which, through its ample use of paparazzi photography and focus on grading celebrities' fashion choices, had become "much less

controllable."[15] Wenner was aiming to change that reputation, but any gossip magazine that relied on paparazzi images would have difficulties sustaining relationships with stars.

Wenner was also attempting to turn *Us* into a highly visible publication with tremendous single-copy sales. Most magazines, including *People*, focused on building solid groups of subscribers. Slashed subscription rates contributed little to a magazine's bottom line, yet subscribers nevertheless composed an attractive community to potential advertisers.[16] Instead of promoting subscriptions, Wenner pushed single-copy sales which would yield a far larger profit margin and shoulder a larger proportion of the magazine's bottom line. When *Us* gained enough momentum via new readers, then Wenner would work to attract a larger subscription base and new advertisers. To bolster single-copy sales, Wenner pursued a two-prong strategy. First, he funneled $10.3 million into the rental of prominent placement in the check-out aisle of supermarkets, putting *Us Weekly* side-by-side with *People* in 150,000 outlets.[17] Second, Wenner and his editorial team spent over a year refining the "art of crafting covers that will entice young women," mixing young celebrity with romance, fashion, and drama.[18]

The first issue of *Us Weekly*, on newsstands March 17, 2000, was a perfect manifestation of the new *Us* philosophy, featuring a smiling Julia Roberts. The inside of the magazine boasted an exclusive interview and portfolio of Robert photos, plus eleven pages devoted to fashion.[19] The interview and photos was sanctioned; the tone was light and airy; the cover was aimed directly at young women. But one week before the *Us Weekly* premiere, *People* countered with its own Roberts cover. The accompanying story was a vintage write-around, relying heavily on old photos and quotes from Roberts's former directors, current boyfriends, and other intimates to make up for *People*'s lack of access to the star. *People* thus deflated the launch of the new magazine — and declared its intention to compete. In the trade papers, coverage of *Us*'s relaunch and *People*'s

response emphasized the latter's malice. *Mediaweek*, for example, reported how the behemoth Time Inc. property had "ambushed" the start-up in a piece entitled "Stealing the Spotlight."[20] The trade papers, whether intended for the entertainment, publishing, or advertising community, had a vested interest in cultivating a "death match" between the two publications. The more juicy and cutthroat the saga between the two competitors appeared, the more compelling their own copy. In this way, the trades amplified and effectively profited from *gossip* concerning the gossip magazines.

US *GOES DISNEY*

Under the relatively small Wenner Media, *Us Weekly* lacked capital, solid distribution, and promotion. Three months after the relaunch, poor sales forced Wenner to lower the ad rate base from one million to 800,000.[21] By December 2000, overall circulation was down 17% to 828,000, single copy sales plummeted 38%, and Wenner had reportedly burned through $30 million.[22] Salvation arrived in February 2001 when Disney exchanged a $35 million investment for a 50% stake in the *Us*.[23] For *Us,* the deal meant an infusion of capital, assistance with distribution, and a web of promotional connections that Wenner Media had simply been unable to provide. In a joint press conference with Disney head Michael Eisner, Wenner trumpeted the "myriad circulation opportunities" allotted through the connection with Disney. It could place *Us* subscription cards in Disney videotapes and DVDs aimed at young women, for example, or in the 40,000 Disney-owned hotel rooms. [24]

For Disney, *Us* was pure promotional potential. Granted, the magazine had been steadily losing money and readers, but Disney wanted a print promotional outlet to pair with its investment in the E! Entertainment Channel. In the same press conference, Eisner justified the purchase to stockholders and industry observers, claiming *Us* was exactly the sort of

"nonaggressive, celebrity-friendly, synergy-ready" product that Disney desired — a means to "spicen-up [*sic*]" properties across the conglomerate.[25] Eisner eagerly listed off a litany of potential synergies. ABC could develop an *Us*-branded awards show; ABC morning programs (*Good Morning America*, *The View*) would air *Us Weekly* gossip segments; *Us*-branded news reports would air on the ABC radio network; the ESPN channel and magazine could partner to showcase celebrity athletes.[26]

Media analysts were quick to point out that *Us* was the kind of property Disney needed in order to compete with the newly expanded AOL Time Warner. As outlined in Chapter Eight, Time Warner had failed to capitalize fully on the potential of its multiple promotional arms throughout the '90s, and while Time Warner's acquisition of AOL would soon prove a miscalculation, it nevertheless spurred Disney — which had recently shuttered its long-struggling online portal, Go.com — to seek further means of cross-promotion. In an interview with *Mediaweek*, Optimedia chairman Gene DeWitt pinpointed the problem. Disney lacked a "showcase for their stars comparable to what Warner Bros. and New Line [both under Time Warner] have with *People*, *EW*, and *InStyle* [. . .] the world has become so competitive in promotion that you need every venue you can get to tell people what you're doing."[27] In other words, Disney needed an outlet that could provide explicit and timely promotion of its stars.

Disney also desired a promotional outlet whose tone and ethos would be reliably positive. Of the conglomerates that had come to dominate the media landscape over the course of the '80 and '90s, Disney was known not only for its tight diversification, unified vision, and tremendous synergy but for its insistence on maintaining a positive, family-friendly image. Disney and scandal simply did not mix. When Eisner and Wenner announced the investment, both were emphatic in their claim that *Us* was no scandal rag. Eisner promised that "as a company, we're

not interested in angst and edginess and scandal. We are not interested in insulting people who work for us." Or, as Wenner added, people "we do business with."[28] Clearly, both men were attempting to assuage any fears that *Us* would sully the Disney name in the way that Miramax had — or compromise the conglomerate's relationships with other corporate interests and, by extension, celebrities.

Us would not hew to this philosophy for long. Starting in 2002, it began printing negative gossip bits and tipping its stories with scandal. Yet such an attitude was rarely, if ever, applied to Disney, its stars, or its productions, even as both Wenner and Eisner were quick to maintain *Us*'s editorial independence. Eisner pointed out that a recent issue of *Us* featured the cast of *Temptation Island*, a reality program airing on Fox, and gave a poor grade to *Recess: School's Out* (2001), the latest animated feature from Disney. *Us* would continue to run features on non-Disney celebrities and products and give deserving grades to Disney films and programs, because, as Eisner explained, "if people think Disney has the edge, [*Us*] will lose [its] ability to attract other media."[29]

Eisner's declarations were clearly lip service to those concerned that *Us* would become a purely promotional vehicle. For as the Disney synergy machine took control, the ties between the magazine and the conglomerate became increasingly explicit. Within months of the agreement, ABC News began feeding a 90-second "*Us* Report" to ABC affiliates, *Us*-branded segments popped up on *The View* and *Good Morning America*, and a massive cross-promotion on "The World's Sexiest Athletes" joined online content, a ninety-minute ESPN special, and an *Us* feature on "hottest jocks."[30] According to *Us*'s liaison to Disney, the collaboration exemplified "what we can bring the table that [Disney] couldn't get from other in-house properties."[31] In other words, *Us* was providing the hoped-for "spice" across Disney's conglomerate content.

BONNIE FULLER'S **US WEEKLY**

Under Disney's wing, *Us*'s bottom line began to stabilize. But the magazine's true turnaround began in February 2002, when Wenner announced that Bonnie Fuller would join *Us Weekly* as editor-in-chief. Fuller transformed *Us* from a magazine with a vague celebrity identity into a distinct brand, cultivating an approach to celebrity culture that clearly differentiated it from *People*. She wed the most assuring aspects of the fan magazine, many of which were already staples of *Us*, with the most compelling components of the tabloid, significantly upping the use of paparazzi photography. Under Fuller, *Us* found a midway point between fawning and mean, between sickly-sweet and sarcastic. It recognized celebrities as something unique — something worthy of readers' attention — but at the same time, humanized them in a way that made it easy to invest in their personal lives and problems.

In this way, Fuller made the travails of celebrities *matter*. As Richard Dyer explains, "stars matter because they act out aspects of life that matter to us; and performers get to be stars when what they act out matters to enough people."[32] To slightly modify Dyer's statement, *personalities* get to be *celebrities* when what they act out — or what gossip magazines construe them as acting out — matters to enough people. Through her invocation of loves won and lost, Fuller, more than any other editor since the halcyon days of *Photoplay* and *Modern Screen*, made celebrities and their stories seem significant and worthy of extended investment. The more these celebrities and their ongoing narratives mattered, the more readers would feel compelled to follow them on a weekly basis. While the maxim was not novel — editors know that reader investment is the most reliable way to sell a story — Fuller was able to spin celebrity narratives in a way that seemed at once indulgent and irresistible.

Fuller achieved this feat through an overhaul of the magazine's approach to celebrity, even when it entailed challenging Wenner and Disney's blueprint for cooperation between the production cultures of the magazine and the conglomerate at large. But no one could accuse Fuller of blindsiding her bosses. She came to *Us* with a reputation as a wild card who, in her previous positions at *YM, Marie Claire, Cosmopolitan,* and *Glamour*, had used sex and glamour to boost circulation through whatever means necessary, and had few qualms alienating or offending conglomerate siblings so long as it contributed to her product's bottom line.[33] As will become clear, Fuller's philosophy yielded a sharp increase in *Us*'s overall circulation but began to alienate Disney's management in the process.

Adweek hailed Fuller for her "brilliant cover sensibilities," which she immediately applied to *Us Weekly.*[34] Instead of simply profiling or interviewing a young celebrity, Fuller employed "steamy, eye-popping cover lines" to make the celebrity's story "as clear as possible and as dramatic as possible."[35] The goal was to exploit readers' desire to know the answers to their intimate questions about a celebrity and his/her love life. In June 2002, Fuller placed Jennifer Lopez and estranged husband Cris Angel on the cover, emphasizing their break-up through a dramatic tear down the middle of the photo. She deliberated over headlines offering to answer "What Went Wrong," "Why It's Over," and "Why They Split" — variations on the very question she thought readers would be wondering when they learned the news of the separation.[36] Other covers offered to answer similar queries: "The Inside Story: Reese — What's She *Really* Like," "Mariah: What *Really* Happened," "Eminem - His Women & His World," and "*American Idol*: Kelly's Untold Story."

Inside the magazine, Fuller's editorial maxim was simple: "Nobody likes to read." Or, more precisely, nobody "likes to read about celebrities, since celebrities don't have much to say

and we presume they're lying to us anyway."[37] For Fuller, the way to sell a celebrity magazine was not through long-form stories but pure aesthetic affect — a cornucopia of oversized headlines, graphs, doodles, and abundance of photos. Fuller thus took the existing format for the front section of the magazine and filled it with a mix of large, striking photos, and applied it to the length of the magazine. The new *Us Weekly* was, in essence, a heavily captioned celebrity photo album. Audiences did not *read* the magazine so much as *look at it*.[38]

However, Fuller needed photos to fill those pages, which she would depend on the paparazzi to provide. As outlined in Chapter Five, paparazzi culture began to spread in Europe in the '50s and '60s concurrent with the transformation of the studio system and appearance of unsanctioned gossip and publicity. *The National Enquirer* and other tabloids had relied on paparazzi photography since the '70s and even "respectable" publications, including *Us* and *People,* had periodically used paparazzi shots to illustrate stories with reticent subjects. Since the 1960s, celebrities had fought back against paparazzi photographers and videographers, negative sentiment came to a head following the death of Princess Diana, whose car crashed while attempting to flee a group of photographers in Paris, France in 1997.[39] In the aftermath, the press demonized both the paparazzi and the hunger for intimate photos that fueled it, but guilt could not disrupt the supply and demand for unsanctioned photos.

Until the late '90s, paparazzi had been a rarified vocation. Unless contracted to a specific agency, an individual paparazzo had to bear the cost of an expensive camera, miles of film, development, and distribution. But with the rise of New Media and digital technologies at the turn of the millennium, it had become increasingly easy — and cheap — to track a celebrity's quotidian activities. Anyone with a digital camera, navigational knowledge of Los Angeles, an internet connection could take and sell unauthorized photos of celebrities. The result

was a veritable sea of photos — celebrities at premieres and special events, but also leaving the gym, bringing their kids to school, and power-lunching at The Ivy. Fuller assigned staff members to seek images in which two celebrities wore the same outfit, committed "beauty violations," or experienced some sort of wardrobe "malfunction." She also used paparazzi and stock photos to craft collages that tread the ground between whimsy and vitriol. "*Us* Investigates: The Celebrity Tan Line," for example, arranged the decoupaged heads of thirty celebrities in a spectrum from "Casper" to "Tanorexic."[40]

Fuller also developed a new recurring feature, ingeniously titled "Stars: Just Like *Us.*" Each week, *Us* printed four to eight paparazzi shots of celebrities performing the most mundane and pedestrian of actions: shopping at the grocery store, tying their shoes, leaving the house with the price tag still affixed to their jeans. One week it paired the headline "Stars: Just like *Us*. . ." with a photo of Spice Girl Geri Halliwell carrying a toilet plunger, appropriately captioned "they even unclog toilets!"[41] *Us*'s strategy with such articles was two-fold. By establishing that celebrities, for all of their wealth and glamour, also had bad hair days, had to schlep groceries, and wore sweatpants, *Us* was not only puncturing the myth of celebrity perfection, but encouraging reader identification in the process.

Unlike the tabloids, Fuller rarely published photos of celebrities at their very worst. *Us* did not truck in photos of cellulite or sagging breasts, and "Just like *Us*" was never used to point out that pot bellies and receding hairlines also afflicted the reader. Yet as in the fan magazines of the '60s and '70s, Fuller did not shy from using captions to manipulate photos to support a headline. A seemingly scowling Ben Affleck, for example, could be captioned to suggest relational turmoil. Fuller also used digital doodles — "headlines stamped over photos, little buttons of color trumpeting juicy bits, scribbled notations" — to differentiate photos from those printed in other

publications and create a sense of bubbly levity.[42] The graphics underscored *Us*'s similarity to a fan scrapbook, only the editor, rather than the reader, collected the photos, penned gossipy captions, paired of dream couples, ridiculed crazy outfits, and absent-mindedly doodled in the margins.

Fuller employed this mix of paparazzi photography, "Just like *Us*," and digital doodles to *humanize* celebrities, highlighting the very ordinary components to their otherwise extraordinary existences. From the beginning of the studio system, fan magazines and studio publicity had emphasized the ordinary components of stars — they raise children, they work hard, they do the laundry, they cook dinner, they grill steaks.[43] But these efforts to humanize stars were always carefully calculated. A *Photoplay* story highlighting Debbie Reynolds's domesticity never portrayed her looking haggard or disheveled as she kept house. Her "ordinary" life was still inflected with glamour. In contrast, *Us*'s use of unsanctioned paparazzi photography demonstrated that celebrities could not only be ordinary, but distinctly non-glamorous, even unkempt.

Us targeted women, but it was not intended to be a stereotypical women's magazine along the lines of *Cosmopolitan* or *Good Housekeeping*. As Fuller glibly explained to *Women's Wear Daily*, "At *Us*, we don't care about your problems."[44] There would be no recipes, no sympathetic profiles of cancer survivors, no question-and-answer columns. In her address to fashionable readers of *Women's Wear Daily*, Fuller was courting a specific audience, filled, as she told the *New York Times*, with "people in their 20s and 30s who like celebrities and who like style."[45] Fuller was also emphasizing *Us*'s deviation from traditional fan magazines which, at their height, had catered to women of all ages with an ample dose of "how-tos," instructions on generating self-confidence, editorials on teen marriage, and star-penned instructions on how to attract a man. But as the fan magazines transitioned away from Hollywood stars and towards celebrity in the '60s and '70s,

editors exchanged long narratives for the short, sensational, and dramatically headlined feature, and earnest advice columns took a backseat to gossip and scandal. Fuller's *Us* most resembled these "late stage" fan magazines, spurning the more blatant elements of the women's magazine in favor of disclosures, fashion faux pas, and romantic difficulties on the part of the celebrity.

As outlined in Chapters Three and Four, these fan magazines had adopted components of the *Confidential* production culture, profiting off readers' desire to know the worst about the figures the rest of the world liked the best. With the eventual decline of the fan magazines in the '70s and '80s, the tabloids filled their role, further stratifying the outlets offering negative and positive publicity. On one side were the tabloids, printed on newsprint, with gossip nested beside fantastical claims of Elvis' enduring life. On the other was *People*, where editors had sanitized into "personality journalism" pablum. Under Fuller, *Us* offered a middle ground in the form of a glossy, high quality magazine inflected with juicy gossip. Or, as *Variety* emphasized to those within the industry, Fuller's *Us* was "upmarket enough to make a career women feel comfortable opening up a copy before a manicure at Bergdorf Goodman's."[46] The new *Us* was no fan magazine, nor was it a tabloid aimed at the working-class— it was low-brow goods for high-class readers.

People had been quick to take action to counter *Us*'s relaunch in 2000, yet *Us*'s initial circulation numbers indicated that the magazine posed little threat. The rumors of Fuller's move to *Us*, however, spurred Time Inc. into action. A week before the Wenner made Fuller's appointment public, Time Inc. announced that Martha Nelson, founding editor of *InStyle*, would replace *People*'s longtime editor Carol Wallace.[47] Under Nelson, *InStyle* had popularized the notion that celebrities — not models — sold fashion, both on the cover and inside the magazine. *InStyle* co-mingled spreads of sanctioned images of celebrities with features relating current trends in

celebrity fashion. Time Inc. had no immediate plans for a redesign of *People*. But in an interview with the *New York Times*, Wallace heralded Nelson's skills while admitted the magazine's struggles, explaining that "You don't hire an editor as stylish and smart as Martha and not give her a chance to address the look of the magazine [. . .] It could use a face lift."[48] In the weeks to follow, the national and trade press framed Fuller and Nelson as "rival geniuses" battling to prove their respective magazines as the future of the industry.[49] As before, publications, and the trade press in the particular, labored to created a gossipy melodrama around the two magazines and the competition between the two.

Yet *Us* was not, in fact, affecting *People*'s circulation. As *Variety* pointed out, *Us* stole "lots of buzz" from *People* but not "actual readers."[50] Over the second half of 2002, sixteen consecutive issues of *People* averaged 1.5 million in newsstand sales — an astounding 60% sell-through rate — while overall circulation averaged 3.6 million. Adjusted for a dip following the 9/11 attacks, *People*'s circulation had remained steady throughout 2001-2002, despite *Us*'s dramatic upsurge during the same period.[51] The readership for celebrity magazines was either doubling up — purchasing *Us* in addition to *People* — or expanding. The trend would continue over the decade to come. The "battle of the newsstand" was not over a finite number of readers. Rather, it functioned to incite overall demand for celebrity publications. Indeed, while the rest of the publishing industry suffered, celebrity publications were thriving.

During this same period, *Us* and Disney were gradually reconfiguring the relationship between their two production cultures. After the initial wave of synergies described above, many of Disney's blueprints for *Us* began to disintegrate. The planned syndicated radio show, *Us*-branded awards ceremony, and joint web content had been canceled or delayed due to cost concerns or the stagnant web market.[52] While Fuller had made a handful of appearances on *The*

View, *Us*'s relationship with ABC's *Good Morning America* was reportedly strained. Insiders related stories of ABC executives who resented having to collaborate with *Us* and rejected many of the segment ideas proffered by its staffers. Frustrated over the decrease in *Us*-branded segments, Wenner exacerbated tensions by going around *GMA* executive producer Shelly Ross and appealing directly to Disney officials. *GMA* even replaced the *Us* on-air interviewer with one of its own staff members.[53] Of course, the trade publications seeking and publishing inside information on the deal were attempting to thicken the plot of the Disney/*Us* relationship, most likely deliberately playing up Wenner's reputation across the industry as a control freak. Yet behind the melodramatic reportage, it was clear the envisioned matrix of synergies had not come to pass.

Yet *Us* continued its explicit and implicit promotion of Disney products in the magazine. A best-selling issue from August 12, 2002, showcased J.Lo & Ben's "Hot New Love" and "what's really going on with their sudden, sexy, and serious" romance on the cover, subjects with nothing to do with Disney or its products. Inside, however, was a Disney promotional bonanza: Julia Roberts, on the press circuit to promote *Full Frontal* (produced by Miramax, then owned by Disney), was featured in five segments, including a two-page spread on her appearance at the *Full Frontal* premiere, a recitation of "Julia's *Full Frontal* Secrets," and "Julia's Little List" on the details of her wedding invitations. The issue also included two pages on *Signs* (produced by Disney's Touchstone Films) and another two pages on the premiere of *Spy Kids 2* (produced by Miramax subsidiary Dimension Films), plus prominent reviews of *Full Frontal*, *Signs*, and the new ABC Family reality series *The Last Resort*. In the end, the synergies between Disney and *Us* might not have functioned exactly as planned, and Fuller's tone was certainly more crass than Disney would

have preferred. But that did not mean that *Us* was not fulfilling its fundamental purpose of providing promotion for a bevy of Disney products.

In February 2003, *Variety*, presumably intent on reactivated the stakes of the competition between *People* and *Us*, propagated rumors that Fuller had turned the *Us* workplace into an "editorial gulag."[54] Yet at the end of the month, Wenner signed Fuller to a new three-year deal with a base salary of over $1 million a year.[55] In the months to follow, insiders reported that the notoriously hands-on Wenner had begun to meddle in the publishing process.[56] The resultant friction at least partially contributed to Fuller's decision to tender her resignation on June 26, 2003. Fuller may well have been fed up with Wenner, but she was also lured by the promise of an even more lucrative deal with American Media to edit its stable of tabloid publications, including *Star* and *The National Enquirer*. [57]

The resignation added another chapter to the competition saga, especially when Wenner appointed Janice Min as editor just later. In addition to stints at *People* and *InStyle*, Min had served as Fuller's "No. 2" and quickly began offering interviews with various outlets in an attempt to put fears concerning the magazine's future to rest. The first two issues under her control — one detailing the new love between Ashton Kutcher and Demi Moore, the other suggesting Billy Bob Thorton's renewed efforts to win back Jolie — proved, according to *Variety*, that "she has the Midas touch for cover selection," selling 541,000 and 600,000 newsstand copies, respectively.[58]

A mere two months into Min's tenure, newsstand sales were up 25% from the same period the year before. While Min adopted many of the hallmarks of Fuller's editorial philosophy, her attitude towards celebrities was markedly warmer. Whereas Fuller had been known for her "take-no-publicists" attitude towards celebrity spin, *Variety* assured agents, publicists, and celebrities that Min "seems to have more empathy for beleaguered celebs."[59]

Wenner supported the claim, emphasizing that "Bonnie really disliked the people we covered [. . .] With Janice, that just doesn't exist."[60] The warmer tone seemed to be resonating, as by the end of 2003, total circulation had risen 18.9% to 1.3 million.[61]

Over the next two years, Min further fine-tuned Fuller's formula, incorporating several innovations of her own. Most visibly, Min devoted significant coverage to reality stars, with specific attention to *The Bachelor* and *The Bachelorette*. A string of covers detailed the forthcoming wedding of "Ryan and Trista," the belabored relationship between "Andrew and Jen," and the philandering of Bachelor Bob, including a cover devoted to asking "Whose Heart Will He Break?"[62] Reality programming provided an endless stream of personalities, all of whom were eager to exploit their new-found fame via the gossip industry. A reality star could eventually use their new-found power to leverage demands, the vast majority were desperate for exposure.

The reality star perfectly embodied the *Us* approach to celebrity. These stars really *were* "just like us" — those on the competitive programs, such as *American Idol,* may have had the type of talent that rendered stars superlative, but all came from humble backgrounds and required a team of stylists to transform them into true "idol material" by season's end. Those featured on other reality programming, such as *The Real World, Big Brother*, and *The Hills,* possessed little skill other than "playing themselves" on television.[63] *The Bachelor/Bachelorette* franchise was a particularly perfect fit for *Us*. Unlike *Survivor,* whose personalities were compelling but not necessarily beautiful or young, the *Bachelor* was replete with attractive men and women who mirrored the very demographic to which *Us* was attempting to appeal. Instead of competing in games or for survival, these contestants were playing the game of romance, complete with betrayals, double-crosses, and proposals on-bended-knee, all inflected with a heavy suggestion of sex. Most importantly, while Time Warner's Telepictures produced *The Bachelor* and *Bachelorette,*

they aired on Disney-owned ABC. *Us* coverage simultaneously boosted magazine sales and framed the program as must-see television.[64]

The trade press applauded Min's recognition that her target demographic "thinks of celebrities as peers — like neighbors, or people you went to high school with."[65] As much as readers wanted to gossip about their peers, they did not necessarily want to see them degraded. In an interview with *Mediaweek,* Min assured media industries insiders that "We don't do mean stories. We don't make fun of people's weight or people's zits."[66] As evidence, Min pointed to a recently printed tidbit concerning Gwyneth Paltrow who had admitted wearing a girdle after giving birth in order to avoid looking plump in photos.[67] *Us* used the comment as a means of highlighting the various machinations employed by "normal people" in their transformation into celebrities. *Us* elevated and reveled in celebrity culture even as it pleasured in deconstructing the elements that composed it, with an attitude it encouraged its readers to share. *People* may have still outsold *Us*, but according to *Advertising Age,* this mix of veneration and demythologization had made *Us* a "cultural reference point," generating the sort of buzz coveted by potential advertisers.[68]

In this way, buzz — and attractiveness to a young, wealthy, "cool" demographic — helped Min solve *Us*'s advertising problems. In 2002, most upscale advertisers were still hesitant to associate their names with the magazine. As analysts in *New York Times* and *Variety* explained, "the same formula of semi-salacious coverage that drives newsstands tends to drive advertisers away," and with advertising budgets tightened following the deflation of the dot.com bubble, "many beauty and fashion advertisers steer clear of anything they see as tacky."[69] In 2002, *Us*'s biggest advertisers were Disney and an amalgamation of "classifieds," i.e. ads for breast enhancement, weight loss, and mail-order skin treatments generally associated with tabloids.[70]

The quickest route to attract high class advertisers was to attract high class readers. To this end, Min publicized a new editorial mantra— "young, better educated, richer" — as part of her campaign to attract buzz and, by extension, the ideal advertising demographic.[71] By 2004, the median income of the *Us* female reader hovered at $83,000, outpacing both *Vanity Fair* and *InStyle*.[72] High-end advertisers, including Mercedes Benz, Coach, and Christian Dior, followed, helping to raise ad pages 27.6%, with an estimated $50 million in profits for 2005.[73] Even if *Us* was not siphoning readers from *People*, it was stealing advertisers. For the same period in 2004, *People*'s ad pages were down 2.2%.[74]

Us's continued success earned widespread industry praise, winning *Advertising Age*'s award for Magazine of the Year in 2004. The following year, *Adweek* named Min Editor of the Year and analysts hailed Eisner's decision to invest in the magazine as "prescient."[75] *Us* was not high-end journalism, nor was it necessarily fulfilling the broad cross-promotional function envisioned for entertainment news outlets. Yet the industry, and the advertising industry in particular, was celebrating a gossip outlet that had managed to attract the sort of demographic usually reserved for high-end fashion and lifestyle magazines — a feat that, just twenty years earlier, would have seemed impossible.

Over the first two months of 2005, three issues of *Us* sold over a million copies on the newsstand. *Us* still trailed *People* in ad revenue and overall circulation, but Min's magazine had set the standard that other publications, whether *People*, the new *Star* under Bonnie Fuller, or celebrity upstarts *In Touch* and *Life & Style* would be forced to emulate. As the next section demonstrates, the resultant competition raised the stakes of celebrity coverage, with *People*, *Us*, and the rest of the competition fomenting an apparent celebrity frenzy.

CELEBRITY FRENZY AND THE PAPARAZZI BOOM

By 2005, the market for unsanctioned celebrity photos had reached a fever pitch. Instead of stabilizing the market, the sheer number of photographers made it even more competitive, as paparazzos vied with one another for the first or best image. In order to snap a celebrity doing something, *anything* that would differentiate his/her shot from the sea of other photographs on the market, paparazzos would verbally and physically goad celebrities in the hope that one would lash out, offer a soundbite, make a face for the camera, or otherwise lose his/her composure.[76] The press dubbed this aggressive, audacious breed of paparazzi "stalkerazzi," invoking the obsessive drive to invade a celebrity's privacy.[77]

Stories of the stalkerazzi and their tactics abounded. In April 2005, Reese Witherspoon called 911 after a group of paparazzi swarmed her in the parking lot of her gym, followed her home, and attempted to force her off the road. The next month, a phalanx of paparazzi chased Lindsay Lohan. In August, Scarlett Johansson accidentally crashed into a family's car as she attempted to evade a pack of paparazzos in voracious pursuit. That same month, a group of paparazzos staking out Britney Spears's baby shower were subject to a hail of BB gun bullets from an unknown location in the surrounding hills.

Tensions between celebrities and the unsolicited, unsanctioned arm of the publicity apparatus had never been higher. As paparazzos resorted to hiding in garbage cans, renting helicopters, and catcalling parents as they walked their kids to school, various celebrities took action. Heath Ledger threw eggs, but Witherspoon and other stars pressed charges.[78] The string of actions by the newly aggressive paparazzi resulted in a criminal inquiry on the part of the Los Angeles police department, culminating in a "Stalkerazzi Law," that promised to levy stiff fines against those who invaded celebrities' private spaces.[79]

Three high profile gossip narratives compounded the sense of celebrity hysteria. First, Britney Spears, a long-time subject of intense paparazzi surveillance, was pregnant with her first child with Kevin Federline, and pictures of her pregnant body (and food and clothing choices) were at a premium. Second, Tom Cruise had engaged in a very public courting of Katie Holmes, replete with myriad photo opportunities, including a date on the top of the Eiffel Tower. While many viewed the relationship as an example of manufactured publicity leading up to the release of *Mission Impossible III* (2006), paparazzi were nevertheless hungry to document potential revelations, especially any image that would prove the relationship a sham. Finally, Brad Pitt filed for divorce from Jennifer Aniston in December 2004, and speculation ran wild that Pitt and Angelina Jolie had begun a romance while filming their forthcoming action film *Mr. and Mrs. Smith* (2005). The pair's secrecy, coupled with a refusal to discuss their love lives in interviews, rendered any pictorial evidence of a romance tremendously lucrative. The scrutiny applied to each narrative — and the desire to be the first to break news of the latest "chapter" — further contributed to the demand.

The perceived boom in celebrity culture was substantiated by statistics. The number of paparazzos had grown from a "handful" in 1995 to eighty in 2004 and 150 in 2005.[80] Dozens of paparazzi agencies set up shop in Los Angeles, vying for access and images of around 50 "A-List" or in-demand celebrities.[81] Frank Griffin, partner in one established agency, compared the environment in 2005 to that of a gold rush: "It starts off with quite a few honest, hard-working prospectors who strike it rich now and again. And then you get the hangers-on, the camp followers, the hookers, all the rest of the garbage that comes along because they think the streets are lined with gold."[82]

The new wave of paparazzi generally had little to no professional training, hailed from overseas, and worked slavish hours. When it came to hunting celebrities, "street smarts" and connections far outweighed skill with a camera.[83] Liberal use of bribes yielded agencies access to license plate numbers, full passenger manifests for coast-to-coast flights, and tip-offs when a celebrity booked with a particular limousine company. Groups of photographers formed tight-knit cabals that could launch complicated "offensives" against a celebrity on wheels, on foot, and in the air.[84] Non-photographers, such as the individual on the scene when Spears married Jason Alexander in a Las Vegas chapel, simply added to the already fierce competition.[85] Suddenly, anyone with a cell phone camera was a potential paparazzo.

For critics, the widespread availability and resultant "obsession" with photographs documenting the quotidian elements of celebrity life bordered on pathological. Academics, analysts, and other pop culture pundits claimed that celebrity culture had taken the media hostage, and Brangelina and Britney now occupied more editorial space than foreign affairs. I would like to argue, however, that the perceived glut of celebrity images and information — the rise of so-called "celebrified culture" — can be specifically traced to the production culture of *Us Weekly*. More specifically, *Us*'s innovations, its competition with *People*, and its ties to Disney. Bearing in mind that no single product is ever uniquely responsible for a cultural phenomenon, I nevertheless contend that *Us* incited the drive for images of quotidian celebrity activity. The frenzied paparazzi culture of the mid-2000s was simply that demand extended to its logical conclusion. To substantiate this claim, however, I must step back from the particulars of the 2000s and briefly revisit the larger shifts in the way that images of stars and celebrities have been procured, valued, and mediated.

As previous chapters have demonstrated, the studios, fan magazines, and other promotional outlets had long labored to construct stars as objects of veneration. Under this paradigm, the more fans admired, worshipped, or respected a star, the more likely they would be to frequent movies in which the star appeared, buy products the star endorsed, or read magazines featuring the star. But in order to sustain such an image, the classic star system had to limit the number of "voices," or sources, allowed to "speak" it.[86] Put differently, all discourse about the star had to be harmonized. To sustain that harmony, the studios leveraged control over the star, the fan magazines, and the popular press. With the decline of the studio and star systems, *Confidential* and other scandal magazines added discourse that was discordant with the otherwise harmonious star image. The transformation of the studio system — both in terms of mode of production and the place of the star within it — made it increasingly difficult to control who "spoke" the meaning of a star and to what end.

In the '70s and '80s, the rise of CAA, the super agent, and super publicist reinstated crucial element of the star system. As Paul McDonald explains, stars acquired teams of individuals — an agent, a publicist, a manager, a stylist, a personal trainer, a chef, a vocal coach — to perform the image management services once provided by the studio.[87] Cruise exemplified the new generation of stars. With an iron-fisted publicist and the most powerful agent in Hollywood, he was able to exert control over the tone and type of discourse in circulation and, in effect, his entire star image. *People*, *Entertainment Tonight*, *EW*, previous iterations of *Us*, and the rest of the gossip industry were eager to add their voices to the chorus reinforcing the images proffered by Cruise and other similarly-controlling stars.

But such stars were able to maintain such high levels of control for much of the 1980s and '90s for two reasons. First, the level of surveillance was relatively low, and a conscientious

star could generally avoid being caught doing anything that contradicted his/her image. If he/she were caught, damage control was possible. In exchange for money or future appearances, a story could be killed. It might not have been as tight a system as that exercised by "The Fixers" of studio system lore, but it worked. Second, the proliferation of gossip outlets created a competitive market in which stars could pick and choose who carried their stories. If an outlet refused to toe the publicist line, the star would simply take his/her story to another outlet.

In the early 2000s, the spread of New Media fundamentally altered the terms of the relationship between the star and the gossip industry, as digital technology, coupled with the increased number of aggressive paparazzos, made it possible to surveil stars on a round-the-clock basis. It became increasingly difficult for stars to avoid being caught on camera when they appeared disheveled in public, went home drunk from a bar, or scolded their children at the park. As the number of paparazzos increased exponentially, so too did the number of voices attempting to speak the meaning of the star. As the next chapter will show, the number of voices would only continued to grow with the spread of gossip blogs, making it impossible for all but the most savvy or prim of stars to control their images.

The tabloids had long sustained a market for paparazzi images. Yet "Stars: They're Just Like *Us*" and similarly-themed *Us* features broadened the paparazzi market, placing a premium on photos evidencing cracks in even the most unified of celebrity images.[88] An *Atlantic Monthly* feature tasked with historicizing celebrity culture made the tie between *Us* and the surge in paparazzi even more explicit, explaining the "evolution of Hollywood paparazzi from a marginal nuisance to one of the most powerful and lucrative forces driving the American news-gathering industry" as "a phenomenon that dates back to March 2002" — the very month Fuller took editorial control of *Us Weekly*.[89]

If Fuller's editorial philosophy and "Just like Us" sparked the market, the ensuing competition with *People* fanned the flame. When *Us* began to encroach on *People*'s circulation and advertising territory, the two began to engage in massive bidding wars over exclusive rights to various photos. With Time Inc. behind it, *People* was able to offer massive amounts of money for all types of photos, even ones it did not plan to use. For example, *People* spent $75,000 for a photo of Jennifer Lopez reading *Us Weekly*, simply to prevent *Us* from publishing the photo.[90] *People* was driving up prices, hoping to shut other magazines with smaller operating budgets from scooping them on any story, no matter how small.

For Min, *People*'s purchase of the J.Lo photo was a "watershed" moment and marked the true escalation of the bidding wars.[91] *People* would always have more buying power, but *Us* relied on its wiles, as evidenced by the magazine's scoop on the Pitt-Jolie romance in early May 2005. When a British agency announced that a photographer had obtained images of Pitt and Jolie on a Kenyan beach, a "dogfight" between *Us* and *People* ensued.[92] *People* believed it had secured the rights at $320,000, but *Us* countered with an offer of $500,000, but only if the agency would sign a contract immediately, without going back to *People*. According to *Variety*, *People* tried to retaliate with a $1 million offer, but the deal was done.[93]

As highlighted above, media industry trade publications had a vested interest in highlighting the dramatic back-and-forth between the two publications. Their reporting of the rivalry, which soon filtered into non-trade publications, effectively transformed a competition rooted in industrial specifics into a public spectacle with the two magazines' reputations at stake. Each week on the newsstands, the newly savvy reader could see which publication "won" that week's battle for exclusive photos. In this way, the trade press, and *Variety* in particular, further exacerbated the competition and, as an extension, the voracious demand for photos.

One-of-a-kind, news-breaking images like those of Pitt and Jolie could net upwards of a million dollars, as evidenced by *People*'s purchase of the first pictures of Shiloh Jolie-Pitt for a reported $4.1 million in 2006.[94] But such photos had always commanded relatively high prices. As a group of veteran paparazzos explained, before 2002, "news value" images, i.e. shots of "a hot celeb's new affair, failed plastic surgery, or sudden weight gain" drove the market.[95] But the success of "Just like *Us*" and its knockoffs had changed the calculus of celebrity photography. An otherwise unremarkable photo of a star playing with his/her child could net much more than the same star looking glamorous at a premiere.[96] The market for these photos exploded, and by 2005, *Us* was receiving 45,000 to 50,000 images every week, 75% of which were paparazzi shots.[97] In this way, *Us*'s pictorial and rhetorical insistence that stars could be both glamorous and "just like us" set the paparazzi market in motion.

CONCLUSION

In truth, the "celebrity deathmatch" invoked in the title of this chapter was not actually between *Us Weekly* and *People*, the glossies and the tabloids, or *ET* and *Access Hollywood*. Rather, the battle was waged internally, with two conceptions of celebrities and two different aesthetic means of illuminating the "true" celebrity self. While discourse has long presented stars as ordinary and extraordinary, the gossip industry of the twenty-first century was struggling with two very different modes of mediating the celebrity for popular consumption. The major players intermingled both conceptions, alternating sanctioned red carpet appearances with unsanctioned paparazzi photography, highly-monitored interviews with gossip and speculation.

Again, these developments were not without historical precedent. A similar mania for unsanctioned photos had occurred in the late '50s and through the '60s when illicit photos of Elizabeth Taylor and Eddie Fisher (later Taylor and Richard Burton) sparked an industry-wide

demand. When Jackie Kennedy went into relative seclusion following the assassination of her husband, photos of her were at a similar premium.[98] Nor was it the first time that magazines had attempted to intermingle different modes of celebrity coverage — the '60s and '70s fan magazines also mixed veneration and accusation, resulting in end products bordered on schizophrenic in their varying attitudes towards the stars.

What changed, then, and what led to the perception of celebrity ubiquity, was the sheer number of outlets that would pay for these photos, put them on the air, or publish them. The so-called pathology of celebrity culture, once limited to a small handful of magazines, had seemingly now infected the entire mediascape. As previous chapters have demonstrated, the success of *People* and *Entertainment Tonight* was responsible for the proliferation of outlets throughout the 1980s and 1990s. While the success of both outlets demonstrated the necessity of conglomerate backing in launching such a product, neither took full advantage of conglomerate promotional ties. Apart from a few veiled promotions, these outlets were contained, whether to the pages of the magazine or the limits of television slot. In contrast, Disney successfully exploited its major gossip holdings — both E! and *Us* — in a manner that dwarfed competitors' efforts.

Whether through a desire to emulate Disney or, in the case of Time Warner, prove the potential of promised synergies, gossip and entertainment news gradually infiltrated all corners of a conglomerate's holdings. By the early 2000s, it was in cable programming, news programming, and morning shows; it was on CNN, ESPN, ABC Family; it held a new place of prominence in newspapers and magazines, from *Time* to *Architectural Digest*.[99] Thus rooted, as the market for paparazzi photographs inflated, so too did the perception that celebrity culture had taken over the whole of the media. While it is nearly impossible to quantify, overall interest in celebrities

and stars may have, in fact, remained steady. What changed was the amount of information available to those who were interested, and that that information co-mingled with the "serious news," sports programming, women's talk shows, and foreign policy.

The frenzy was arguably at its apex in 2005, but it reached its natural, tragic conclusion in 2007, when Spears underwent a very public breakdown in full view of the paparazzi and, by extension, the world. She shaved her head — reportedly due to paranoia that the paparazzi were using her hair extensions to track her movements— and later that night, as she attempted to gain access to the house where her two young sons were begin kept from her, she wielded a large umbrella against the paparazzos who persisted in their pursuit. The photo highlighted the extent of Spears's breakdown: a still-young girl, once the very embodiment of American innocence, driven to a state of grotesque delusion. The overwhelming sentiment: we — the magazines, the paparazzi, the readers — had created a monster. Spears has since undergone treatment and proceeded into recovery, and the market for "stalkerazzi"-style photographs has diminished, in part because celebrities have simply learned to manage the game. Some hire "paparazzi abatement" teams while others forge agreements with paparazzos that allow them to take a choice set of photos at the beginning of the night in exchange for being left alone for the remainder of the evening.[100]

Yet the realities of the market remain. As one agency head explained in 2005, "any picture of any celebrity has a value."[101] That understanding led to the rapid increase in paparazzi, especially those willing to engage in "stalkerazzi" tactics, and led to the increase in the sheer number of photos available, in print, online, and on the air for reader consumption. That understanding ultimately precipitated a sea change in the way that the imagery of celebrity was valued, mediated, and consumed, leading to a widely-held perception that all media had been

"celebrified." Many additional forces contributed to this perception, including the rise of reality television and digital technologies. But as this chapter has thoroughly demonstrated, it was a sea change *originated* and *accelerated* by *Us Weekly*.

[1] Peter Carlson, "People vs. Us: Celebrity Deathmatch," *Washington Post*, August 28, 2001, C01.

[2] Lindsay Lohan, Scarlett Johansen, and Reese Witherspoon were all swarmed by paparazzi in 2005; see the section "Celebrity Frenzy in the Paparazzi Boom" in this chapter.

[3] "The A List," *Advertising Age*, October 25, 2004, S2.

[4] Jonathan Bing, "US mag bows its weekly edition," *Daily Variety*, March 17, 2000, 5.

[5] *ibid*; Abigail Pogrebin, "US and Them: Diary of a Launch," *Brill's Content*, May 2000, 107.

[6] Pogrebin, "US and Them," 107.

[7] Pogrebin, "US and Them," 106.

[8] Pogrebin, "US and Them," 107.

[9] For more on the specifics of *Brill's Content* and its reputation, see James Ledbetter, "Interview with Steven Brill," *Mother Jones*, September/October 1998, http://motherjones.com/politics/1998/09/steven-brill.

[10] Diane Clehane, "Women making Headlines," *Daily Variety*, November 12, 2003, 46.

[11] "March Madness," *MediaWeek*, December 13, 1999, 75.

[12] David Carr, "Gossip Goes Glossy And Loses Its Stigma," *New York Times*, August 4, 2003, E1.

[13] Pogrebin, "US and Them," 107.

[14] *Ibid.*

[15] *Ibid.*

[16] Keith Dunnavant, "Tumbling Dice," *MediaWeek*, May 1, 2000, 60.

[17] Dnnavant, "Tumbling Dice," 60; Pogrebin, "US and Them," 107.

[18] Dunnavant, "Tumbling Dice," 60.

[19] Lisa Granastein, "Stealing the Spotlight," *MediaWeek*, March 13, 2000, 5.

[20] *Ibid.*

[21] Ceila McGee, "Ad Numbers Get Cut at Us Weekly," *Daily News* (New York), July 1, 2000, no page number.

[22] Jeff Leeds, "Disney Returns to Publishing With Stake in US," *Los Angeles Times*, February 28, 2001, C1; Jon Fine, "Magazine of the Year: Us Weekly," *Advertising Age*, October 25, 2004, S1.

[23] *Us* would theretofore be published by a new, jointly owned company separate from Wenner's other magazine holdings. See Jon Fine, "Us rate base grows," *Advertising Age*, October 22, 2001, 8.

[24] Lisa Granastein, "A New Cast Member," *MediaWeek*, March 5, 2001, 24.

[25] Alex Kuczynski, "Disney to Take 50% Stake in US Weekly Magazine," *New York Times*, February 28, 2001, C1.

[26] Granastein, "A New Cast Member," 24.

[27] *Ibid.*

[28] *Ibid.*

[29] Paul D. Colford, "Us Weekly is Taking Celeb Coverage to Disney's Land," *Daily New* (New York), February 28, 2001, no page number.

[30] Lily Oei, "Wenner, ABC NewsOne team up for 'US Report,'" *Daily Variety*, November 7, 2001, 10.

[31] Lisa Granastein, "Growing Up," *MediaWeek*, September 3, 2001, 37.

[32] Richard Dyer, *Heavenly Bodies* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1986), 19.

[33] Peg Tyre, "A New Guilty Pleasure," *Newsweek*, August 12, 2002, 42. David Carr and Lorne Manly, "Editor Coming to Us Weekly May Turn Up the Sex and Glitter," *New York Times*, February 27, 2002, C1. Fuller was not one to play by conglomerate rules. In June 2001, Conde Nast had ousted Fuller as editor-in-chief of *Glamour* after she published a "write-around" on Catherine Zeta-Jones, knowing full well that *Glamour*'s sister publication and superior, *Vogue*, had slated an exclusive interview for the same month.

[34] Lisa Granastein, "Cover Girl," *MediaWeek*, March 4, 2002, 35.

[35] Granastein, "Cover Girl," 35; David Carr, "Us Weekly's Sly Ways Win Readers, if Not Yet Ads," *New York Times*, June 17 2002, C1.

[36] Carr, "Us Weekly's Sly Ways," C1.

[37] Judith Newman, "Cover girl," *MediaWeek*, March 14, 2005, SR8.

[38] Even the handful of pages still devoted to film and television reviews were structured around photos, large headlines, and graphics.

[39] In 1996, George Clooney and the cast of *ER* launched a boycott against *Entertainment Tonight*, citing incursions on their private lives on the part of its sister show, *Hard Copy*. See Sharon Waxmon, "Hard Coy Hardball," *Washington Post*, November 6, 1996, F14.

[40] "*Us* Investigates: The Celebrity Tan Line," *Us Weekly*, August 12, 2002, 42-43.

[41] "Stars - They're Just Like *Us*," *Us Weekly*, August 12, 2002, 20.

[42] Carr, "Us Weekly's Sly Ways," C1.

[43] Richard Dyer, *Stars* (London: BFI, 1998), 43.

[44] Lisa Lockwood, "Fuller's Philosophy on the Fame Game," *WWD*, June 7, 2002, 18.

[45] Lockwood, "Fuller's Philosophy," 18; Carr and Manly, "Us Weekly's Sly Ways," C1. More bluntly, *Us* was not "a magazine that's looking to solve a lot of insecurities a woman might have."

[46] Michael Learmonth, "Print Biz: New Star Pluckers," *Variety*, August 30, 2004, 1.

[47] David Carr, "A New Tone, And Leader, at Time Inc.," *New York Times*, February 21, 2002, C1.

[48] *Ibid.*

[49] Carr and Manly, "Us Weekly's Sly Ways," C1.

[50] Clehane, "Women making headlines," 46.

[51] Lisa Granastein, "Don't Give Up on Us," *MediaWeek*, February 3, 2003, 3.

[52] Matthew Rose and Bruce Orwall, "The relationship is bigger than Us," *Globe and Mail*, November 20, 2002, R5.

[53] *Ibid.*

[54] Craig Offman, "In a People-friendly niche, Us Still looking for support," *Variety,* February 18, 2002, 9.

[55] Nicole LaPorte, "Tabloid lures Us editor," *Daily Variety*, June 27, 2003, 4.

[56] *Ibid.*

[57] *Ibid.*

[58] Nicole LaPorte, "Fuller deputy Min in at US Weekly," *Daily Variety,* July 3, 2003, 15.

[59] Nicole LaPorte, "More celeb-friendly Us notches up sales gains," *Variety,* September 1, 2003, 7.

[60] Newman, "Cover Girl," SR8.

[61] Lynda Richardson, "Celebrity Weekly Shocker: Editor Is No Diva!," *New York Times,* February 25, 2004, B2.

[62] *Us Weekly* issue dated November 24, 2003.

[63] For more on the specific phenomena of reality stardom, see Christopher Bell, *American Idolatry: Celebrity, Commodity, and Reality Television* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland & Co, 2010); Joanne Morreale, "Revising the Osbornes: The Hybrid-Reality Sitcom," *Journal of Film & Video* 55.1 (2203): 3-15; Erin Meyers, "'Can You Handle My Truth?': Authenticity and the Celebrity Star Image," *Journal of Popular Culture* 42.5 (2009): 890-907; Hugh Curnutt, "'A Fan Crashing the Party': Exploring Reality-celebrity in MTV's *Real World* Franchise," *Television & New Media* 10.3 (2009): 251-266; Su Holmes, "Dreaming a Dream: Susan Boyle and Celebrity Culture," *Velvet Light Trap* 65 (2010): 74-76; Sue Collins, "Making the Most out of 15 Minutes," *Television & New Media* 9.2 (2008): 87-110; Su Holmes, "Reality Goes Pop!: Reality TV, Popular Music, and Narratives of Stardom in *Pop Idol*," *Television & New Media*, 5.2 (2004): 147-172; Alice Leppert and Julie Wilson, "Living *The Hills* Life," *Genders* 48 (2008), http://www.genders.org/g48/g48_leppertwilson.html.

[64] Interestingly, *People* did not devote a single cover to *The Bachelor* or *Bachelorette* between 2003-2005. I have been unable to verify whether producers negotiated an exclusive deal with *Us* or *People* or simply deemed them unworthy of coverage. *People* did devote coverage to reality phenomenon *The Apprentice* in 2004-2005.

[65] Newman, "Cover Girl," SR8.

[66] Lisa Granastein, "60sec. With," *MediaWeek,* Nov 15 2004, 24.

[67] Fine, "Us rate base grows," S1.

[68] *Ibid.*

[69] Carr, "Us Weekly's Sly Ways Win Readers, if Not Yet Ads," C1; Clehane, "Women making headlines," 30.

[70] Colford, "Us Weekly is Taking Celeb Coverage," no page number.

[71] Newman, "Cover Girl," SR8.

[72] Newman, "Cover Girl," SR8; Learmonth, "Print Biz," 1.

[73] Fine, "Us rate base grows," S1.

[74] Newman, "Cover Girl," SR8.

[75] Fine, "Us rate base grows," S1; Newman, "Cover Girl," SR8.

[76] Richard Winton and Tonya Alanez, "Paparazzi Flash New Audacity," *Los Angeles Times,* October 16, 2005, A1.

[77] Glenn Garvin, "'Stalkerazzi' ploys worsen," *Miami Herald,* July 17, 2005, A3.

[78] George Rush and Joanna Molloy, "Scarlett's Crash Course on Paparazzi," *Daily News* (New York), August 24, 2005, 22; Winton and Alanez, "Paparazzi Flash New Audacity," A1.

[79] The statute forbids two types of invasion of private space: one literal, one virtual. It makes it an offence to take pictures or sound recordings of anyone "engaging in a personal or familial activity and the physical invasion occurs in a manner that is offensive to a reasonable person," and it also forbids doing so to a person "engaging in a personal or familial activity under circumstances in which the plaintiff had a reasonable expectation of privacy, through the use of a visual or auditory enhancing device, regardless of whether there is a physical trespass." See Russell Smith, "California puts lens rangers on notice," *Globe and Mail*, January 5, 2006, R1.

[80] Gina Piccalo, "Caught in their sights," *Los Angeles Times*, Jun 4 2005, E1.

[81] *Ibid.*

[82] David M. Halbfinger and Allison Hopeweiner, "Eye vs. Eye: Inside the Photo Wars," *New York Times*, Jul 17 2005, B1.

[83] Winton and Alanez, "Paparazzi Flash New Audacity," A1.

[84] It was no coincidence a former member of a Los Angeles street gang headed one well-known agency; he filled his ranks with street savvy (and reportedly reformed) former gang members. See Winton and Alanez, "Paparazzi Flesh New Audacity," A1.

[85] Piccalo, "Caught in their sights," E1.

[86] See Richard DeCordova, *Picture Personalities:The Emergence of the Star System in America* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1990), 117-147.

[87] Paul McDonald, "The Star System: The Production of Hollywood Stardom in the Post-Studio Era," in *The Contemporary Hollywood Film Industry*, Paul McDonald and Janet Wasko, eds. (Malden, MA;Oxford: Blackwell, 2008), 167-181.

[88] David Samuels, "Shooting Britney," *The Atlantic*, April 2008, http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2008/04/shooting-britney/6735/

[89] *Ibid.*

[90] Jill Goldsmith, "People Who Need People," *Variety*, July 10, 2006, 1; 41.

[91] *Ibid.*

[92] Michael Learmonth, "Celeb trysts run up the tabs," *Variety*, May 2, 2005, 7.

[93] *Ibid.*

[94] Goldsmith, "People Who Need People," 1.

[95] Jason Felch, "Sheriff to Probe Pellet Attack," *Los Angeles Times*, August 8, 2005, B3.

[96] Richard Winton, "Chase by Paparazzi Yields No Charges," *Los Angeles Times*, August 10, 2005, B1.

[97] Piccalo, "Caught in their sights," E1; While celebrities naturally disliked the realities of this new economy, many learned to play along. To announce a romance, a couple no longer had to appear together at a public event. Instead, they could simply walk down the street holding hands and, knowing they would be "caught" by the paparazzi, generate the same amount of publicity as an exclusive interview, yet with a fraction of the time and effort. Others exploited the certainty that they would be photographed to their own promotional ends. After her public break-up with Billy Bob Thornton, Angelina Jolie appeared in a public park playing with her son, and Jolie and Pitt's publicists were widely believed to have tipped off a photographer of their beach whereabouts so that the first photos that broke of couple would be in a harmonious, family-oriented unit. The most savvy understood the principles of supply and demand that guided the paparazzi market. Gywneth Paltrow, for example, took a "very public stroll" with her first-born child, effectively exposing herself and the child to as many photographers as possible. An increase in photos meant a decrease in demand, which freed Paltrow and her family from constant pursuit. See Mireya Navarro, "I Love You With All My Hype," *New York Times,* May 22, 2005, H1.

[98] See *Smash His Camera* (Gast 2010).

[99] By 2005, *ET*, *Access Hollywood, Extra,* and *ET* spin-off *The Insider* competed for prime access viewers, E!, The Style Channel, MTV, VH1, Bravo, programmed their schedule with ever more reality star and celebrity-focused programming, while *InTouch, Life & Style*, and *OK!* joined *People* and *Us Weekly* at the newsstand.

[100] Felch, "Sheriff to Probe Pellet Attack," B3.

[101] *Ibid.*

CHAPTER NINE
GOSSIP GOES ONLINE
2004 - 2010

While the demise of the studio system had made the control of star images a much more arduous process, by the 1980s, celebrities and public relations teams had, in collaboration with magazines (*People*), television shows (*Entertainment Tonight*), and other traditional gossip outlets, re-cultivated the illusion of stars as deities endowed with superlative beauty and talent. By the mid-2000s, that illusion was in decline, in large part due to the rise of *Us Weekly* and digital technologies that facilitated the rapid capture and distribution of thousands of images that challenged the notion of stars as extraordinary. But gossip blogs had taken the underlying philosophy of *Us* — that stars are, indeed, just like us — to an even more profound level. As one editor of *Gawker* proclaimed, whereas celebrities once occupied a rarified, immaculate space, "the Internet has created a new reality, and we're all living in it together."[1]

The editor was giving voice to many of the sentiments circulating around blogs and other forms of user-generated content in the mid-2000s. While the utopian discourses of democracy that characterized the early days of the internet had faded into the background, usurped by ascendant, dominating companies like AOL, Microsoft, and Google, the surge of blogs and other user-generated, digital-D.I.Y. following the 2004 presidential election seemed to indicate a second chance.[2] Through links, comments, and blogrolls, the most humble of writers — a mother suffering from postpartum, an expert with statistics, a cinephile in his parent's basement — could gain a national following. Faster internet connections and Google Image Search had made it easier to upload and "borrow" images from across the internet while YouTube made the use, manipulation, and reposting of streaming video a reality.[3]

Around 2002, several upstart bloggers lacking in journalistic or technological training began posting musings, commentary, and breaking news related to Hollywood and celebrity culture. Over the next five years, traffic to these blogs — from the industry gossip of *Defamer* to the camp sensibility of *Perez Hilton* — enjoyed a tremendous surge. The gossip blog offered immediate access to celebrity news and, by publishing posts throughout the day, provided a steady stream of celebrity distraction. The weekly magazines, nightly entertainment news programs, and daily newspaper columns lagged behind, as only E! had developed the sort of convergent, complementary web content that attracted gossip consumers *en masse*.

Crucially, these blogs — *Perez Hilton, Jossip, Pink is the New Blog, Just Jared, Lainey Gossip, Defamer, DListed, Oh No They Didn't*, and countless others — were all independent of conglomerate control with no official ties to the publishing or entertainment industry. Indeed, almost all were run by a single blogger. Only *Defamer*, part of the larger Gawker Media group, ran according to anything resembling a traditional publishing model. Despite their sudden visibility and surging traffic, most gossip blogs still made only moderate profits. Gossip bloggers were a rag-tag bunch, stealing photos from paparazzi sites, publishing unconfirmed rumors, and spackling their blogs with obscene and borderline defamatory remarks in attempt to attract web traffic to their sites.

In many ways, these internet publications were usurping the way the print and broadcast gossip industry did business. As established in Chapter Eight, the dramatic surge in paparazzi photography in the early 2000s — sparked by the twin forces of New Media and *Us Weekly* — had already altered the level of control celebrities could maintain over their images. If each paparazzi photograph was yet another voice attempting to "speak" the meaning of the celebrity and his/her image, gossip bloggers amplified those voices to untold levels. Granted, *Us*, *People*, and their competitors published dozens of paparazzi photos every week, but a single gossip blog

could publish a hundred photos in a single day. By virtue of their independence — from corporate oversight, from fidgety advertisers, from responsibility to the entertainment industry, from most legal constraint — gossip blogs could make their critiques of these celebrities boldfaced. Not-so-blind items, insinuations, fashion ridicule, and photoshop-facilitated mockery ran rampant. There was little, if anything, those within the media industry could do to effectively control them.

The conglomerates thus countered by constructing their own variations on the gossip blog, either building on the scaffolding of existing sites (*People.com, ET.com, AccessHollywood.com, Usmagazine.com*), investing in fledging blogs (CBS and NBC), or assembling their own from the ground up (*TMZ.com*). In the latter's case, as a co-production of Telepictures and AOL, *TMZ* was completely nested under the Time Warner umbrella. Time Warner not only bankrolled *TMZ* but facilitated the launch of a syndicated, televised version of the site, *TMZ on TV*, which would prove to be one of the first examples of successful transfer of content off the web. The *TMZ* model became the standard to which all other gossip outlets aspired, as television programs worked to up their web content and gossip bloggers labored to expand their brands cross-media. The future of gossip, as clearly demonstrated by *TMZ*, was both conglomerate and convergent.

Between 2007 and 2010, these conglomerate-owned blogs gradually overtook their independent counterparts, proving that conglomerate might can out-muscle even the scrappiest of independents. But they have accomplished the feat through two distinct production cultures. The first, exemplified by *People.com*, is a recreation of the tone and philosophy of the traditional fan magazine, catering to celebrities and reproducing their narratives. The strategy has also trickled down into the independent realm where *PopSugar, Just Jared,* and even *Perez Hilton* have (re) oriented editorial content around the adulation of stars and celebrities.

In contrast, *TMZ* has taken a no-holds-barred approach to celebrity culture, forming a production culture that relies heavily on a sprawling web of tipsters and informants. Unlike other gossip outlets that reproduce and comment on celebrity events, *TMZ* procures and breaks new stories, from Mel Gibson's infamous rant to Michael Jackson's death. *TMZ* has also changed the way celebrity images are captured and disseminated, posting dynamic, volatile videos of celebrities in action, jesting, swearing, kidding with paparazzi, and generally offering a more holistic, intimate version of its subjects for reader consumption. These stars not only look "just like us," but talk, stumble over words, and become frustrated "just like us" as well.

In sharp contrast to *People*, *TMZ*'s brand of "personality journalism" is fixated on unearthing hypocrisy, racism, injustice, and, of course, sagging flesh, fashion faux pas, and celebrities tripping over their own feet. Most remarkably, *TMZ* performed these functions with the *de facto* blessing of parent company Time Warner, which permitted *TMZ* to function as an "equal opportunity" offender, even when it entailed targeting stars and celebrities tied to Time Warner products. In this way, *TMZ*'s tone and autonomy bespeak the lessons learned from Time Warner's years of struggle and the corporation's schooling in how to balance disparate production cultures within the conglomerate and the drive to create synergy. In 2010, the conglomerate had *People* on one side, toeing the publicist line, and *TMZ* on the other, exploding it — with both attracting enormous revenues.

To substantiate these claims, I have divided the chapter into three sections. The first and second deal with the rise of Gawker Media and *Perez Hilton* from 2004-2006, looking to the specific ways each organization cultivated unique brands and increased their visibility within the ascendant blogosphere. The third section examines strategies on the part of traditional gossip outlets and their conglomerate parents to both counter and compete with independent blogs,

including an extended analysis of *TMZ* and the particulars of its tremendous success. As will become clear, the rise of gossip blogs in the mid-2000s proved to be the gossip industry's second watershed moment within a decade. It not only further complicated the way that celebrities managed their own images but challenged existing outlets to change the way they produced, mediated, and disseminated gossip.

GAWKER MEDIA

The history of *Gawker* is well-rehearsed. Because the blog claimed to provide inside information on Manhattan's fourth estate, the publications that composed that estate naturally took interest and umbrage, publishing dozens of profiles, retrospectives, and considerations of *Gawker* and its effects on New York journalism. What follows is an amalgam of those histories, bearing in mind that all who profiled Denton, Gawker Media, or the editors of any of its sites had an investment in *Gawker*'s placement within the mediascape. The portrait that emerges is of a media company that gained traction as a voice from the outside, but quickly became part of the establishment itself. While *Gawker* differs from previously discussed gossip outlets — it is based in New York; its gossip is not strictly limited to celebrities — it set the foundation on which all other gossip blogs would be built.

The idea for *Gawker.com* came from Nick Denton, a British digital entrepreneur, and Elizabeth Spiers, a young financial analyst who traded on her identity as "a naif new to the city."[4] The blog went live in March 2002 with observations on the New York journalism culture and received an official launch in December.[5] Gawker quickly acquired a following for Spiers's combination of snark and "gawking" admiration for various journalistic figures and institutions. In what would become standard practice across the Gawker family of blogs, Spiers sourced and penned almost all content on the blog, publishing around twelve posts a day. The end product,

according to *New York Magazine,* was "a sort of industry fanzine or yearbook."[6] As one retrospective explains, "the tone they used for *Gawker* became the most important stylistic influence on the emerging field of blogging and has turned into the de facto voice of blogs today."[7] This "de facto voice" — an outsider's perspective, shaded with tones oscillating between fawning and denigrating — would manifest itself in the raft of upstart gossip blogs then popping up across the internet.

Over the course of 2002 - 2003, Denton expanded *Gawker* into a "suite" of blogs, each with specific focus: *Gizmodo* (gadgets), *Fleshbot* (pornography), *Wonkette* (Washington politics), *Kinja* (blogging) and *Defamer* (Hollywood and celebrity culture). Combined, these blogs could generate the traffic and ad revenue that had eluded the narrowly focused *Gawker* which, in August 2003, was still generating only $2,000 a month.[8] In other words, Denton aimed for the more broadly accessible porn- and gadget-news to bolster *Gawker*'s bottom line. The plan seemed to be working, as by the end of 2004, *Fleshbot*, Gawker's biggest performer, was garnering 4 million page views a month, and *Gawker* had increased its own monthly page views to 2 million[9]

In August 2004, Denton hired 24-year-old Jessica Coen as the new *Gawker* editor. Coen made the site more gossipy, more ruthless, and less explicitly focused on the publishing industry, sending interns to book launches and after-parties, instructing them take pictures, and then positing the results on the site. In this way, *Gawker* began to "treat every subject, known and unknown, in public and private situations, with the fascinated ill will that tabloid magazines have for their subjects."[10] Under Coen, *Gawker* became less of a New York cheat sheet and more of an explicit gossip blog. Stories on Paula Abdul intermingled with analysis of the most recent *Vanity Fair* cover; a post satirizing Fox News's advertisement for a "fact writer" was followed by one detailing Kevin Federline's recent antics in Vegas.[11]

Coen also updated and expanded the Gawker Stalker. Speirs had inaugurated the Stalker as a list with pictures with the explicit purpose of reporting sightings of Anna Wintour (and her various sartorial choices). Under Coen, however, the Gawker Stalker broadened its focus to the New York media elite and celebrities *writ large*. The reports were generally innocuous, such as an April 2005 tip on the whereabouts of Leonardo DiCaprio and girlfriend Giselle Bunchen: "I was walking by the Meier buildings in the West Village with a friend when we walked right by Leo and Giselle. They were on bikes looking up at the buildings. She was wearing a black track suit and a red hat, very skinny with beautiful long hair . . .[12] Other Stalker reports confirmed celebrity rumors: "i was at maria sharapova's (leggy russian tennis player who won wimbledon last year) 18th birthday party at hiro on saturday night. lindsay lohan stopped by and looked cracked out as expected."[13]

Gawker's most visible and notorious engagement with celebrity culture occurred in February 2005 when the site published a sex tape featuring Limp Bizkit lead singer Fred Durst, flooding the site with traffic. When Durst filed suit, Coen's blogged response evidenced the core tenets of the *Gawker* tone and philosophy:

> Honestly, though, we don't know why you're so mad at us. . . .The situation is really rather simple. Someone sent us a link to a video of your penis, we went into shock, and we shared it with the world for about two hours. Then we wept, found God, took a hot bath, and removed the video from our site.

Gawker clearly cared far more about generating page views than catering to celebrities — a philosophy that would undergird the first generation of gossip blogs percolating through the internet.

Denton hired Mark Lisanti, a television writer's assistant, in 2004 to head *Defamer*. Denton tasked Lisanti with applying the *Gawker* sensibility to Hollywood, which entailed aggregating the latest from the trades, providing flippant commentary, and trucking in general

industry gossip. In its first year, Lisanti reposted odd-ball casting calls, dished when agents left their agencies, and live-blogged celebrity events. With the ability to post updates on a minute's notice, his blog could scoop any print publication. Within a year of going live, *Defamer* boasted that it had broken stories on lay-offs at Miramax, Colin Farrell's sex tape, and Tom Cruise's proposal to Katie Holmes.[14]

Just as *Gawker* was intended for those at least somewhat familiar with the New York journalism scene, *Defamer* was aimed at those with a modicum of knowledge concerning the workings of Hollywood. It was less *Entertainment Weekly*, more *Spy*; less for starry-eyed housewives in fly-over country, more for executives, agents, and others inside the industry. As one top studio executive admitted to the *New York Times*, "I read it every morning religiously."[15] But *Defamer* was not a trade publication. With heavy doses of celebrity gossip, it catered to readers of *Gawker* and other celebrity-focused properties. On June 2005, the frenzied month that marked Cruise's couch-jumping and Pitt and Jolie's coy promotion of *Mr. and Mrs Smith*, *Defamer* attracted 5.2 million page views.[16] Its "Hot Topics" coupled industry gossip on "Les Moonves Abuses Jeff Zucker" and "Network Upfronts" with celebrity content concerning "Tom Cruise-Katie Holmes Publicity Stunt," Paris Hilton, and Lindsay Lohan.[17]

Gawker had styled itself as an outsider to the New York publishing world, and *Defamer* applied a similar attitude to Hollywood. Low operating costs allowed *Defamer* to run without the need for outside money that could have curbed or otherwise influenced editorial content.[18] In other words, unlike a gossip outlet housed within a conglomerate, *Defamer* had no mandate to create synergy for any product other than its sister blogs. In this manner, *Defamer* functioned as a sassier, less vindictive antecedent to Nikki Finke's *Deadline Hollywood*. Like *Deadline*, *Defamer* reported on personalities and deals, providing an alternative voice to both the trades and the

conglomerate-owned "entertainment news" outlets. Yet *Defamer* also possessed an indelible cleverness and levity — traits always absent from Finke's reporting. In this way, *Defamer* helped set the tone, pace, and mix of entertainment news and gossip in the 2000s, influencing *Deadline Hollywood* as well as the continued expansion of *Movie City News*, *Movieline*, *indieWIRE*, *Cinematical*, and dozens of other industry/entertainment-oriented sites.

Like the rest of the blogs under Gawker Media, *Defamer* was attracting upper-class, young, and intelligent readers which in turn attracted high-class, high-paying advertisers, including Audi, Nike, and General Electric.[19] *Defamer*'s readership still paled in comparison to *Entertainment Weekly*, yet it was free of the infrastructure and business ties that yoked print publications to their conglomerate parents. In comparison to the costs associated with printing and distributing a magazine, online publishing cost pennies.[20] Since Denton hired "unknown outsiders," he could pay them as if they were assistants, not editors charged with the success of the enterprise. In 2004, the Gawker blogs were not yet posing a serious threat to print publications. But as the current state of the publishing world makes clear, Denton's mode of production — extremely low overhead, internet distribution, catering to a coveted demographic — was the way of the future.

Over the course of 2004-2005, Denton expanded that mode of production to even more publications, adding *Jalopnik* (cars), *Screenhead* (movies), *Gridskipper* (travel), *Lifehacker* (productivity), *Sploid* (games/tech), *Kotaku* (video games), *Oddjack* (gambling) and *Deadspin* (sports).[21] Around this time, the specifics of Denton's pay scale — and its implications — also came to light. A two-page piece on the front of the *Times* business section detailed the Gawker Media pay scale. Denton paid bloggers a $2500 base monthly salary and expected each to publish twelve posts a day, meaning a single blogger was paid between $7-11 a post.[22] If the implicit goal of the article was

to illuminate the disparity between print and online production cultures, that goal had been achieved.

Gawker also offered cash incentives for traffic spikes, cultivating a formula that would accelerated Gawker's general shift towards incendiary, inflammatory, and otherwise sensational content. As a 2010 *New Yorker* profile explained, Denton turned the hunt for hits into a game, even publishing traffic numbers beside the actual posts.[23] Denton's "game" naturally led to pandering and dubious journalistic standards, with highly visual, celebrity-focused posts valued over longer, well-researched, or contemplative pieces. But it was likewise a rather pure distillation of the logic of the blogosphere in general and the gossip blogosphere in particular: the more sensational a post, the more it promised to reveal something intimate, scandalous, or otherwise at odds with a celebrity's image, the more traffic it would attract.

By the close of 2007, *Gawker* alone was attracting more than 10 million page views a month. [24] In the five years since *Gawker* first went live, it had helped accelerate the transformation of the gossip world. What had previously been rooted in the newsstand, nested within the conglomerates, and generally toeing the publicist line faced a sincere threat from the digital, independent, and abashedly un-celebrity friendly blogs that cared far more about generating traffic than celebrity good will. As one Gawker profiler explained, "Very little of what Denton publishes qualifies as gossip in the traditional sense. It's a sensibility."[25] It was that sensibility — the snark, the lack of conglomerate oversight, and unabashed pursuit of web traffic — that would set the standard for competitors.

PEREZ HILTON

Perez Hilton was the most significant of these competitors and arguably the most striking gossip personality to emerge since Rxxona Barrett. Flamboyant and unabashedly *outre,* Perez and

his eponymous blog offered a bombastic, borderline grotesque culmination of the *Gawker* sensibility. Yet Perez's variations on the *Gawker* theme — making friends with celebrities, using his site as an extension of a single personality, outing closeted homosexuals, scribbling on photos — not only distinguished his site from the *Gawker* model but earned him a notoriety that he has since parlayed into a veritable cross-media brand. At the same time, Perez fostered a production culture unlike any other in the gossip industry. He posted at all hours, stole photos, refused to cater to publicists, and blasphemed celebrities at will. The popularity of his product underlined the appetite for a celebrity outlet that operated at a different pace and approached the industry as an outsider and an amateur. With time, Perez, like *Gawker*, would become increasingly imbricated within that system. Yet in the beginning, he emerged and built a following as an independent voice eager to counter the established gossip entities.

Perez (*né* Mario Lavandeira) started *PageSixSixSix* September 2004. When *The Insider* named the blog "Hollywood's Most Hated Website" in March 2005, the surge of web traffic shut down the server, and attracted the attention of the actual Page Six (of the *New York Post*) which immediately sued. *PageSixSixSix* thus became *PerezHilton.com*, a play on the name of celebrity socialite Paris Hilton. The early *PerezHilton.com* is quite similar to its 2011 iteration. Both are bathed in pink, feature a prominent banner with Hilton's visage, and follow the same general format. In what is now the dominant form of the gossip blog, each post includes one to three photos coupled with a few sentences of commentary

Photos depicted celebrities from the United States and, as Perez's global traffic began to grow, a smattering of Indian, Chinese, and European stars. In recent years, the site has also begun to feature news events and "stories of the weird," organic to the traditional tabloid. Commentary generally takes one of two overarching attitudes: denigration/disgust and

appreciation/adulation. Between 2004 - 2006, Perez would publish between twenty and forty posts a day from his "office" at a Hollywood Coffee Bean & Tea Leaf. As the Perez brand expanded, he has hired a small handful staff and expanded posts to around 100 a day.

In contrast to *Gawker*, the personality of *Perez Hilton*'s editor and namesake pervades the blog. Perez is gay and a self-proclaimed "queen" — a sensibility that manifests itself in everything from the blog's camp sensibilities to Perez's self-appointed role as an "outer" of closeted homosexuals.[26] As Perez's traffic and visibility grew, profiles repeatedly compared him to Hedda Hopper and Louella Parsons, in part because he was the first individual to take on such a role in over two decades, but also because his personality and belief system infuses the tone of his gossip and the type of celebrities he embraces and rejects, supports and attacks.

When Perez moved to Hollywood in 2000, he had no star or studio connections; he lacked the means to legally acquire images; his photoshop skills were rudimentary at best. However, Perez's relation to the establishment was not a disadvantage. Rather, it would prove fundamental to the image of his blog and, by extension, influence gossip blogging in the gossip industry at large. Perez lacked capital and official agreements with paparazzi agencies; thus, when he wanted to post and comment on a photo, he simply used it. As gossip blogs began to grow, many paparazzi agencies had forged agreements in which bloggers could post photos in exchange for a link and credit.[27] But Perez was careless and obstinate, and often refused to credit a photo. Other times, Perez obtained a photo that had already been sold to a print publication, such as *Us Weekly* or *People,* and broke the story himself. In 2006, for example, x17 sold a set of photos of Britney Spears kissing an unidentified man to *Us Weekly* for $25,000. When the photos appeared on *Perez Hilton* before the magazine went to press, the price dropped $10,000.[28]

Various paparazzi agencies eventually took Perez to court for multiple counts of copyright infringement, many of which he lost or settled out of court. But Perez had already set a precedent. By stealing images intended for print and broadcast outlets — the weekly magazines, the nightly entertainment news programs — he was changing the dynamics and order of operations of the gossip industry. Images that "broke news" could no longer wait twenty-four hours, let alone a week. While some photos still sold to print publication for top dollar, even those would be scooped. In 2006, Perez obtained and posted scans of the first photos of Shiloh Jolie-Pitt which had been sold to *People* for $4.1 million and British gossip magazine *Hello* for $3.5 million. Perez was ordered to take the photos down — which he did — but the damage, at least in part, was done. Since 2006, the sheer number of lawsuits directed at Perez has forced him to curb the misappropriation of images owned by paparazzi and other outlets. Yet he — and the gossip blogging industry, of which he was the most visible representative — had already changed the pace at which the gossip industry operated.

Perez was an outsider in two ways. Like Denton and the various editors of *Gawker* and *Defamer*, he lacked explicit financial ties to the entertainment industry, leaving him free to denigrate and disparage at will. But unlike Bonnie Fuller, Janice Min, or the editors of other mainstream publications, Perez did not simply want to report on celebrity. Having failed to make it through the front door to stardom, he took the back door instead, virtually associating himself with celebrities in his quest to become one himself. Like Parsons and Hopper before him, Perez played and continues to play the role of sycophant. For every celebrity he ridicules, another receives his gushing affection. He has blatant favorites, and when it comes to one of the celebrities he dislikes — whether for failing to come out of the closet, fashion faux pas, or insulting one of his favorites — he can be relentless and ruthless. Ultimately, Perez's oscillation

between devotion and disgust mirrors the shifting affections of the gossip reader him/herself. While his tone could be alienating and annoying, it also encouraged reader identification.

When it became clear that his site was generating more buzz and traffic than any other gossip outlet on the web, savvy celebrities decided to exploit Perez's affection. Paris Hilton "befriended" Perez, posing with him at events and, eventually, inviting him to private parties where he would take pictures and then post them to his site. The industry became to welcome Perez, inviting him to red carpets and sending him gifts of "schwag" and other free products in exchange for endorsement and promotion on the blog. In this way, Perez gradually became as visible as many of the subjects of his blog. While he jokingly claimed to be part of the "Z-List," his empirical knowledge of celebrity culture underscored the similarities between Perez and the gossip mavens of the classic era, several of whom professed close friendship with the stars and received invitations to star weddings and social events.

Perez's embrace of "schwag" and endorsement culture was, at least in part, financially motivated. Despite steady growth in traffic to the site, he was still making relatively little income. Even with operating costs limited to the cost of space on a server, Perez made under $50,000 in 2005. Perez's page views had reached 220,000 by February 2002, but he was only taking in $202 a week for each ad on the site.[29] The reason, according to one advertising analyst, was a matter of audience. Advertisers would pay premium rates to reach a "lucrative, tightly focused niche" even if the overall readership was small.[30] Perez had a huge readership, but it was either too broad or too scandalous to attract big-name advertisers. As a result, most of his advertisements were for gay dating sites and non-luxury brands.

Perez's status as a technological amateur set the aesthetic standard for other gossip blogs of the period. While Perez had intermittently worked in the publishing industry, he was no

programmer.[31] But lack of professional experience was not a drawback. As theorist Lev Manovich explains, New Media technologies opened up to amateurs fields previously limited to trained professionals. These amateurs created "new standards, formats, and design expectations."[32] In this way, the format of the blog, coupled with Perez's rudimentary photoshop manipulation, served as the defining characteristics of the fledging online gossip industry.

To this end, Perez regularly employed Photoshop to "paint" doodles and digital "graffiti" on an image, adding a secondary valence to its meaning. In a picture of Victoria Beckham, posted March 7, 2006, Hilton declares "Victoria Beckham would be so pretty. . . .if she hadn't had so many damn procedures." In the accompanying photo, four hand-painted arrows point to Beckham's nose, cheeks, brow, and breasts. Fuller, Min, and *Us Weekly* had been using similar tactics since 2002, but their additions were always slick, polished, and relatively inoffensive. In contrast, Perez's were sloppy. When he writes using the paint function, it keenly resembled the penmanship of a preschooler, often toeing the edge of obscenity.[33]

Perez's "painting," like much of his commentary, was lewd, suggestive, and over-the-top, but it formed a unique, recognizable style that drew visitors. By June 2006, he was attracting 750,000 hits a day. A year later, daily traffic had increased to an estimated 2-4.5 million, with 1.7 million unique visitors in the month of May 2007 alone.[34] There were also tangible signs of his power. In September 2005, Perez embarked on a full-fledged campaign to out former N'Sync member Lance Bass, focusing on slips in Bass's production of a straight image. For example, Hilton coined the term "man-sharing" to explain why Bass and friend Reichen Lehmkuhl, an openly gay reality star, were consistently photographed wearing each other's clothing. Hilton's efforts culminated in a July 26, 2006 cover of *People*, featuring a picture of Bass and the announcement "I'M GAY." Members of Bass's family had read bits on his purported

homosexuality on *Perez Hilton* and other blogs, prompting the actor to proclaim his sexuality publicly.

At the same time, Hilton's visibility continued to rise. He starred in a series of VH1 specials (*What Perez Sez*), made regular appearances on *TRL* and *MuchOnDemand*, and competed in VH1's *Celebrity Rap Superstar*. The *New York Times*, the *Los Angeles Times*, and dozens of international press outlets attempted to elucidate his personality and rise to fame while *Newsweek*, *Entertainment Weekly*, and *Stuff* acknowledged his blog as one of the most buzzed about in the industry. Perez was also establishing himself as a veritable music promoter, as his endorsement of various artists guaranteed a dramatic increase in sales and online listens. Big-name advertisers had begun to "rent" out the site for the day, changing its background to promote an upcoming film, television show, or musical act. Granted, these advertisers were more Bravo reality programming, less Audi or Gucci. Yet it signaled that the entertainment industry had begun to realize the potential reach and worth of the gossip blog, no matter how uncontrollable it might be. Perez, the outsider and the amateur, had transformed into a gossip mogul.

THE CONGLOMERATES STRIKE BACK

As *Gawker* and *Perez* expanded in audience and influence, dozens of other gossip blogs emerged. *Lainey Gossip*, *Just Jared*, *Jossip*, *Pink is the New Blog (PITNB)*, *The Young Black and Fabulous (TYBF)*, *What Would Tyler Durden Do (WWTDD)*, *The Superficial*, *DListed*, *PopSugar*, and *Oh No They Didn't (ONTD)* all launched between 2003 and 2006. Each blog catered to audiences with slightly different preferences in gossip. *Lainey Gossip* offered in-depth analysis of gossip, *WWTDD* was written by and for men, *TYBF* focused on gossip related to black celebrities, and members ran *ONTD*, a Live Journal community. The traffic and profits of each blog paled in comparison to the Gawker blogs or *Perez Hilton*, yet the sheer volume of new blogs — and the audiences that

flocked to them — underscored that gossip blogs were no passing fad. From this point on, celebrity news would increasingly be broken, disseminated, and discussed online.

Yet the outlets that created and exploited this new reality were all independent of conglomerate control. *Gawker*, *Perez*, and the rest of the gossip blogs were promising not only to alter the way that audiences consumed gossip and engaged with celebrity culture but, potentially, the entire publishing industry. As the last three chapters have emphasized, conglomerates had long sought and valued gossip properties for their synergistic potential. In the 2000s, their value was more important than ever, as conglomerates increasingly relied on "blockbuster" products whether in the form of "tent pole" summer films, high priced television series, or high profile, highly paid authors and musicians.[35] These properties — especially films — depended heavily on opening weekend and global grosses which would help drive ancillary sales and recoup production costs that numbered in the hundreds of millions. Yet in order for a film (or recording artist, book, or television premiere) to "open big," it required a massive promotional push. Part of this push came from advertising and promotion on the conglomerates' print and broadcast outlets. But an online gossip outlet in the model of *Perez Hilton* — with a demographic squarely in the 18-34 year-old market — could provide cheap, perfectly-timed promotion with a global reach.

The conglomerates were relatively slow in their expansion online. Many of their internet acquisitions, such as Time Warner's merger with AOL, came too late. Other attempts to create online portals and digital content, such as Disney's Go.com, fell flat, in part due to the overall collapse of the dot.com bubble. The true innovations in the production and distribution of digital content were occurring elsewhere, whether in the offices of Facebook, YouTube, or *Gawker*. After watching deals go sour and profits siphoned by other internet outlets throughout

the first half of the 2000s, several conglomerates became serious about cultivating online brands and convergent content to challenge independent outlets. The conglomerates took three distinct approaches in their pursuit of this goal: 1) They launched their own sites; 2) They purchased existing outlets; 3) They expanded and revamped existing and relatively ignored sites for print and broadcast gossip outlets such as *People.com*, *Usmagazine.com*, and *AccessHollywood.com*. In all three approaches, the conglomerates co-opted the most successful elements of the independent blogs, using them as the foundation for new outlets or mapping them onto existing gossip brands.

TMZ

Even though most users have no notion of the site's affiliation with Time Warner, *TMZ.com* is the most successful and visible of the conglomerate-backed gossip blogs. By January 2008, *TMZ* was garnering 10.9 million unique users and 206 million page views per month. The site's syndicated spin-off, *TMZ on TV*, had been labeled "rookie of 2007" in terms of syndication numbers, garnering, since its first broadcast in September 2007, an average 2.3 household rating, while *TMZ*'s "celebrity channel" on MySpace attracted 40,000 views daily.[36] With *People* and *EW* established as synergy-friendly outlets, Time Warner allowed *TMZ* to function as their opposite, cultivating a no-holds-barred attitude to capturing, defaming, and generally lampooning celebrities in action, even when they were affiliated with Time Warner products. In this way, Time Warner effectively "triple dipped" on celebrities. It made money on the products in which they starred, with the news that promoted and elevated them, and via the gossip that ridiculed them — celebrity exploitation to the fullest.

TMZ was the brainchild of Harvey Levin, a longtime resident of Hollywood and former lawyer, law professor, and investigative reporter. For decades, Levin had observed the collision of celebrities with the law, serving as an analyst and executive producer for *The People's Court* and as

host of *Celebrity Justice*. In 2005, Levin created *TMZ*, short for the "Thirty Mile Zone" that serves as the legal boundaries of Hollywood, with backing from AOL and Telepictures, both subsidiaries of Time Warner. Yet *TMZ* garnered little attention. It was one of dozens of upstart gossip blogs, unremarkable save for its bold, black background. This all changed, however, on July 28, 2006, 7 p.m. PST, when *TMZ* broke the news of Mel Gibson's DUI arrest.

Gibson had been stopped in the early morning hours on suspicion of driving under the influence. More importantly, once under arrest, the belligerent Gibson began spewing anti-Semitic remarks towards the arresting officer, referring to a female officer as "sugar tits." *TMZ* broke the news of Gibson's arrest at 7 p.m. By 9:15 p.m., it had posted four pages of the eight-page arrest report detailing Gibson's behavior and language, along with anonymous quotes from a law enforcement officer privy to the incident. A full-fledged media frenzy ensued and web traffic to TMZ soared. Since the Gibson incident, *TMZ* has further distinguished itself for its ability to obtain and publish scoops ahead of print, televised, and other gossip sources.

Comfortably nested under the Time Warner umbrella, *TMZ* enjoyed a general leg up on its independent competition, especially in terms of web traffic. Despite AOL's general decline, it still boasted 10 million subscribers and 58.5 million unique visitors in January 2008 — all of whom were given direct access to *TMZ* content through streaming video and quick links.[37] Even if *TMZ*'s content was less interesting than that of *Perez* or *Defamer*, it would still be the first gossip offering visible to millions of users. As a result, *TMZ* was able to attract what the *New York Times* deemed "the kind of traffic more typical of an Internet iron horse."[38]

With *TMZ*'s finances so interconnected with those of a major media corporation, whose other holdings include the very Hollywood products *TMZ* so derides, one might expect a modicum of friction. In 2006, for example, Emma Watson, star of Warner Bros.'s *Harry Potter*

franchise, was photographed drinking (underage) on the island of Majorca. This tidbit could tarnish the series' (and Watson's) previously wholesome image, potentially damaging Time Warner's profits. If *TMZ* espoused the production culture of *People* or *Entertainment Weekly*, the story might have been quashed or spun in a manner sympathetic to the young star. But a gossip blog, tasked with competing with the likes of Perez, would need to be as ruthless in exploiting Watson's folly as it was with any other celebrity, regardless of her affiliation with a Time Warner product.

TMZ did so with the blessing of its parent company. By 2005, Time Warner had apparently come to understand the push and pull of the gossip industry, realizing that if TMZ did not exploit a set of pictures or video, another outlet undoubtedly would. This understanding represents a distinct sea change in corporate attitude towards stars and celebrities. Before, it behooved the studios to support stars' efforts to maintain their positive, cohesive images as executives believed the success of conglomerate products (films, television shows, music) was inseparable from the public perception of that star. In the 2000s, stars gradually began to recede in importance as the studios and their conglomerate owners increasingly pinned their futures to franchises and other types of intellectual property.

TMZ manifested its attitude towards Hollywood — a combination of the most salient traits of both *Gawker/Defamer* and *Perez* — in three ways: form, content, and tactics.[39] *TMZ* is structured as a gossip blog, publishing around thirty posts a day.[40] While posts predictably thin out during the early morning hours, if something big happens at 3 a.m., TMZ will post before dawn. As Levin explained, by 2007, gossip mongering had become a competitive game, one that, with the immediacy and alterability of the blog, he could always win.[41] The Gibson incident exemplifies this type of treatment. As a *Brandweek* analyst explained, "In the old days, the Mel

Gibson incident might have gotten a tabloid-style news story and then, maybe, some updates. But when TMZ broke the story, it led with a copy of the arrest report and backed it with constant updates."[42] In other words, TMZ changed the way a gossip narrative was told: instead of a one-time overview, Gibson's remarks were transformed into an ongoing scandal, updated on the hour, contributing to the sort of unified, memorable site identity appreciated by *Brandweek*'s readers.

Unlike *Perez*, which relies heavily on images, or *Gawker*, which defines itself through commentary, *TMZ* saturates its content with video. Instead of buying footage from paparazzi agencies, Levin employs a handful of young, in-the-know videographers familiar with Hollywood hotspots.[43] They shoot with lightweight, digital camcorders that can bare the rough-and-tumble paparazzi game. With a charged battery and a few tapes in pocket, each videographer can shoot hours of footage in search of a highly clippable five-second gem. As a result, Levin receives hours of footage everyday for a fraction of the cost incurred by outlets that rely on paparazzi agencies for material. *TMZ* thus cuts out the middleman, gathering gossip firsthand.

TMZ's approach is also noticeably masculine in style, a tactic that opens the site and the show to a far broader audience than traditional celebrity gossip. Unlike the fawning tone of *People, Entertainment Tonight*, or other female-geared outlets that ask readers to swallow the celebrity myth, *TMZ* encourages spitting it out. Where feminized gossip is often accepting and submissive to the will of the stars, *TMZ* is dubious, assertive, and aggressive. Unlike the bathed-in-pink look of *Perez* or the bubbly fonts of *People*, *TMZ* employs red, black, and yellow as its primary color palette, employing a bold, no-frills Arial font is no-frills. The result of such coverage: an audience demographic that split evenly down gender lines.[44]

TMZ shoots video of any notable figure, doing any unnotable thing, from Paris Hilton out clubbing to Jennifer Aniston on her way to the gym, from David Hasselhoff with his shirt off to

Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg taking his girlfriend to dinner. As a result, unnamed detractors within the industry have accused *TMZ* of "lowering the standards of celebrity journalism" by "airing the most banal footage."[45] Yet this is all part of the *TMZ* strategy. The more footage it makes available, the stronger the suggestion that stars are indeed "just like us." Granted, today's in-your-face photo paparazzi catch embarrassing, un-starlike moments. But digital video has a particularly unvarnished quality as the presence of the camera discombobulates all but the most composed of stars. For many, maintaining the gloss of perfection for longer than the flash of a camera proves impossible. All that is unglamorous—an unfortunate outfit, an awkward gait, an offensive phrase—is there, in real time, testifying to their ordinariness.

TMZ made its name covering Gibson's DUI, Michael Richards's racist Vegas stand-up routine, and socialite Brandon Davis's "fire-crotch" comments concerning Lindsay Lohan. Obviously, such incidents were in no way under the control of the celebrities' publicists. Like *Perez* and *Gawker*, *TMZ* has little use for such entities or, for that matter, any other promotional aspect of the gossip industry, whether it be press junkets, movie premieres, or heavily styled photo shoots. It covers the celebrity under pressure and off-guard, drunk or hung over, faltering as she tries to supply a suitable sound bite. As one *TMZ* producer boasted to the television industry in the pages of *Broadcasting & Cable*, "We don't cover the Oscars; we cover the parties after the parties after the Oscars."[46]

According to Levin, before the rise of gossip blogs, "publicists ran Hollywood [. . .] they would set the topics, they would set the agenda."[47] But the blogs' reliance on paparazzi footage liberated it from the production cultures that governed more traditional outlets within the industry. While other programs, such as *Entertainment Tonight*, still "need to maintain good

relationships with their clients to ensure coverage of camera-ready events like red-carpet appearances and on-the-set visits," *TMZ* rejects the need for consent.[48] As a result, Levin and *TMZ* are granted a certain amount of leverage over celebrities. Like Parsons, Hopper, and Winchell before him, publicists fear *TMZ*'s wrath. According to one, "You have to occasionally feed them an item. You have to be in the game with them. If you're a publicist and the only time you call up is to complain about an item, they'll laugh at you."[49] The most savvy of public relations teams understand the new realities of the *TMZ*-regulated world. As George Clooney's publicist averred in the *New York Times*, "We supply them with news all the time because it goes around the world in 12 seconds. There's a pragmatism that takes hold, because people read it."[50]

Apart from occasional tips from publicists, *TMZ*, like *Confidential*, relies on a type of down and dirty journalism. Down and dirty because it hinges on the individual's willingness to betray his/her friends or superiors for cash, yet journalistic in its reliance on research, official documents, and a dedicated army of informants. Through Levin's long history with both the Los Angeles justice system and Hollywood, he has amassed hundreds of sources that provide him with exclusive images, buried documents, and unofficial videotapes.[51] Every new scoop re-emphasizes *TMZ*'s expanding connections: the Gibson tapes and mug shot, the Richards footage, Alec Baldwin's incendiary voice mail messages to his daughter, a police photo of pop singer Rihanna following her domestic dispute with Chris Brown, or verification of Michael Jackson's death from a member of the medical team that treated him. More than any other outlet, Levin and his staff know where smut resides, and where it goes when it tries to disappear.

TMZ distinguishes its production culture through its traffic volume, use of video, and gossip mongering tactics. But what truly sets its mode of production apart — not only from other gossip blogs, but web sites in general — is its ability to migrate content cross-media from

the blog to the television screen and beyond. In September 2007, TMZ launched its syndicated television program, *TMZ on TV*. With Time Warner's blessing, *TMZ* crafted the show specifically for Fox stations.[52] Just a month after its launch, *TMZ* was the highest-rated new show in syndication, garnering a 1.7 household rating, and, as of April 2008, was available in 90 percent of American markets.[53]

Levin was one of the first to understand how a web site and television show can work hand in hand to bolster both web traffic *and* at-home viewership. At the time of its launch, the vast majority of television programs still treated their web sites as afterthoughts rather than complements.[54] In 2007, networks took note when sites for *The Office* and *Gossip Girl* (offering streaming content and innovative forms of user interactivity) began attracting heavy traffic. Yet these sites could potentially pull viewers *away* from the television if they duplicated the show too closely. *Gossip Girl*, for example, suffered tremendously in the ratings in fall 2007, in large part due to alternative viewing via the website.[55] *TMZ*, however, does more than simply duplicate online content. While the show and the site operate on the same principles and are driven by the same scandal-centric ethos, they nevertheless provide two markedly different products to users. In this way, they work in tandem to encourage double-usership. The web site drives users to the television while the television feeds those viewers directly back to the site, sustaining a cycle of synergistic profitability.

Levin had experience trying to migrate content cross-media. When he first began *TMZ*.com, he fashioned it as a serious-minded mash of *Variety*, with business information and columns, and his previous program, *Celebrity Justice*. As he admitted to *Business Week*, "I tried putting TV on the Web. It was awful."[56] He soon altered his content to the headline- and video-driven site that exists today, learning the distinctive demands of web versus a television audience.

While a web audience has come to expect content filled with hyperlinks, easily digestible material, and constant updates, television is still expected to offer some sort of narrative. Levin could use the same raw footage for both the web site and the television show, but he had to package it differently.

The televised *TMZ* thus labors to covey the same bold, irreverent tone of its online counterpart — its titles, graphics, music, and reporting style are all in the same snarky vein. It is also quick-firing and rapidly cut, reporting on material generated even minutes before, thus affecting the same sense of urgency and immediacy as the web site. But *TMZ on TV* also makes ample use of digital manipulation and suggestive storytelling. As Virginia Heffernan, writing for the *New York Times* media section, describes,

> Mr. Levin has made pop art of evidentiary storytelling, in which scraps of video and audio are buffered with cartoonish graphics that instruct viewers how to decipher them. The words 'allegedly' and 'supposedly' can be heard in the narration, but rarely appear in the animation, much of which presents counterfactuals, cartoon images of people doing not just illegal or immoral things, but impossible things, like flying. . . [57]

Ultimately, *TMZ on TV* is more straightforwardly geared toward pure entertainment. It introduces viewers to the *TMZ* product but spends more time making goofy asides than providing the sort of in-depth coverage typical of the web site. In this way, the show functions as a piece of self-contained entertainment, but it likewise serves as a teaser-trailer for the greater, longer, more detailed, and dynamic narrative of the site itself.

TMZ performs this function with remarkable economy. The *TMZ* production culture efficiently repurposes one snippet of footage and does it quickly and across platforms while avoiding user fatigue. *TMZ* videographers carry laptops and lightweight cameras with them at all times. When they shoot something worthwhile, they are able to upload it immediately as a Quicktime file, instantaneously available for both online and television use. As most material

comes in after midnight, editors generally work through the night, making rough cuts of the raw footage that will then be available for Levin and his staff to view, approve, or discard during their 6 a.m. daily meeting.[58]

Even though the *TMZ* staff produces only one show per day, that show is a work-in-progress right up to the moment it goes live. Editors may work to refine the second half of the show while the first half airs, and a producer can even push a button *in medias res* to switch to a live feed of an ongoing drama. In industry parlance, this style is known as "instant" production, characterized by up-to-the-minute manipulation of content that is almost entirely reliant on new media technologies (digital video, editing, and transmission). *Broadcast Engineering* openly praised the program's innovation, highlighting the "open IT infrastructure" that is both "scalable and virtually future-proof," allowing it to expand and grow alongside new technologies and gossip-gathering techniques.[59] All other outlets — multi-platform or otherwise — were left to play catch-up.

NBC AND CBS

One way for other conglomerates to enter the competition was to buy an existing site. Instead of courting Perez, whose style and personality might prove unwieldy, organizations looked to fledgling, malleable sites. In June 2006, CBS (owned by Viacom) launched *Showbuzz.com*, hoping to build on the entertainment section of the CBS News site.[60] But the site performed below expectations, and in October 2007, CBS purchased San Francisco-based gossip blog *DotSpotter.com* for 10 million dollars.[61] Public relations analysts termed the acquisition "audacious," given that *Dotspotter* had only been in existence for ten months and its monthly traffic was a minuscule 350,000. CBS justified the acquisition, claiming the site could be used to buttress both *Showbuzz* and Viacom-owned *ETOnline.com*.[62] Today, *DotSpotter* is defunct, and the

URL redirects to the site for *ET* spin-off *The Insider*. The rebranding and investment were a miscalculation, but the eagerness with which CBS pursued such a property underlines the rising value, both literal and figurative, of such sites to conglomerates in the late 2000s.

Instead of acquiring an untested gossip property, NBC opted to invest in an existing network of blogs published under the banner of Sugar Inc. In 2005, Lisa Sugar had started blogging about celebrities at *PopSugar.com*. A year later, she and her husband formed Sugar Inc. and began to expand the brand. By 2007, the "Sugar Network" boasted seventeen blogs addressing fashion, lifestyle, and celebrity along with *Shopstyle.com*, an e-commerce site where users could browse clothing, including styles featured on the various Sugar sites.[63] The *Sugar* blogs occupied a space in the gossip spectrum quite similar to *People* and *InStyle*, offering gossip discourse centered on positive and glamorous developments (babies, weddings) in a celebrity's life. By June 2007, the *Sugar* blogs were attracting 2.1 million unique monthly visitors.[64]

In June 2007, NBC invested $10 million in Sugar Inc., recognizing the value of its niche, highly concentrated audiences. As part of the deal, NBC took responsibility for selling ads across the *Sugar* blogs, reaping 50% of total ad sales. When *Sugar*'s monthly traffic rose to 4.6 million over the course of the year — a staggering 121% increase — the deal seemed remarkably prescient.[65] But in July 2008, the Sugars called off the deal, realizing they could take the money they saved and hire their own advertising team. NBC had attempted to profit from the ad sales with little risk or involvement in the actual process, and to great success. But without full ownership, NBC could neither control the type of coverage (and whether it could prove promotional to the NBC/Universal brand) or ensure a long-term relationship.

PRINT AND TELEVISION OUTLETS

Apart from *E! Online*, whose digital developments in the mid-'90s now look remarkably prescient, the mainstream gossip outlets were incredibly slow in developing online, convergent content to compete with Perez and other gossip blogs. But with the benefit of conglomerate backing, each has been able to revamp and revitalize online offerings, assimilating the most successful and compelling elements of the gossip blog with existing brands and their built-in audiences.

In 2006, the print outlets' online components were attracting dismal traffic levels. With placement on AOL, *People.com* drew a somewhat respectable 2.2 million unique visitors a month, but the site for *Star* attracted a minuscule 266,000 monthly visits.[66] Sites for televised gossip outlets far little better. As of July 2007, *AccessHollywood.com* attracted 1.446 million visitors, *ETonline.com* brought in 609,000, and *ExtraTV.com* had 278,000.[67] In comparison to the millions of users for *Gawker*, *Perez*, and *TMZ* during this same period, the numbers seem almost embarrassing.

To remedy this disparity, each of the traditional outlets launched a concerted effort to revamp and restructure their online components to resemble the blogging competition.[68] NBC-owned *Access Hollywood* (*AH*) aimed to "borrow elements" from *TMZ* and "marry them to an NBC standard of journalism," making video more prominent and accessible, adding a frequently updated blog-like section, games, and social networking.[69] *AH* began breaking stories online, reversing its previous policy of stockpiling stories until airtime, and partnered with *Yahoo* and *X17*, the leader in paparazzi photo coverage, to offer *oMG.yahoo.com*, a graphic and visual-heavy entertainment site with an acute resemblance to *TMZ*.[70] The site (which drew 9.5 million unique visitors in November 2008) then funneled traffic back to *AcesssHollywood.com.*[71]

Entertainment Tonight revamped its format on air and online. Even before *TMZ* expanded to television, *ET* recognized the encroaching threat of online gossip. In the past, *ET*'s producers had thought of their product as a television show. But now, as *ET* producers assured advertisers in an *Advertising Age* profile, they could no longer think in those terms. "Rather, it has to be a 24-hour-a-day living, breathing brand that supplies entertainment news in various forms, be it in broadband, wireless, radio or TV."[72] In 2008, *ET* forged a deal with *MSN*, then the internet's seventh largest portal, to serve as the "premier provider" of entertainment news and gossip. *ET* increased its web staff by 30%, began breaking stories online, and moved into new, HD-equipped studios where they would aspects of *TMZ*'s digital production culture.[73]

Meanwhile, editors at *People* and *Us* attempted bolster and sophisticate their online components. *People.com* overhauled its advertising strategy, taking control of sales and profits from AOL, while *Us* unveiled a new "comprehensive" website in July 2006.[74] Both publications borrowed components of the gossip blogs' update-driven format, breaking news and touting exclusives on their websites ahead of their print counterparts. In an additional gesture towards cross-platform performance, *People* and *Us* began devoting at least one page of their respective weekly print editions to advertising "exclusive online content" in an effort to mobilize print users towards web content. Importantly, both sites maintained a web magazine-style layout, featuring a bevy of articles, photos, columns, polls, and stories on the front page. In their busy, maximally hyperlinked style, they resemble the *New York Times* website far more than *TMZ* or *Perez*.

By 2007, traffic to *UsMagazine.com* had risen to one million monthly visitors while *People.com* experienced a phenomenal 59% increase in traffic, up to 6.5 million unique users in September 2007.[75] These sites might not attract the coveted demographic that flocks to *Gawker*, *Perez*, *TMZ*, and their particular brands of snark and salaciousness, but their formats are perfect

for the slightly older, slightly less web savvy audiences who already read *People* and watch syndicated entertainment news.

Importantly, the revitalization of *People.com*, *ETOnline.com*, *AccessHollywood.com* and others highlighted the growth, both inside and outside of the conglomerates, of a new tone in online celebrity gossip. *Gawker, Perez,* and the vast majority of blogs that launched between 2004 and 2006 were all invested in puncturing the celebrity myth. If not by outright ridiculing celebrities, the editors of these blogs used commentary, paparazzi photos, and Photoshop to compromise the integrity of the celebrity image. While *UsWeekly.com* extended the attitude towards celebrity cultivated by its print counterpart, the online components of the print and televised outlets worked to prop up celebrity. They were not alone. To various extents, *PopSugar, Just Jared*, *Celebrity Baby Blog,* and others were developing similar attitudes and, increasingly, attracting the same volume of traffic as their derogatory counterparts. *People.com* averaged 13.2 million unique visitors over the summer of 2010 while *Just Jared*, well-known for its chummy relationship with celebrities and "play nice" attitude, attracted 3.3 million unique visitors in December 2010, topping *Perez Hilton*'s 2.2 million.[76]

CONCLUSION

Instead of a phalanx of independent, *Gawker*-inspired blogs dedicated to the destruction of the celebrity carapace, today's online gossip landscape has diversified in both tone and funding. Some sites promote and support celebrities and some tear them and their projects down; some are affiliated with conglomerates and others remain independently-owned and operated. Many of these sites complement established gossip brands while others have become nested larger blogging corporations, such as Gawker Media, Sugar Inc., and Buzz Media.[77] To

describe the online gossip industry in any monolithic terms would neglect the diversity of funding sources, forms, purposes, and tones that characterize the gossip blogosphere today.

Nevertheless, it is clear that much of the discourse that seemed to threaten the smooth operation of the celebrity apparatus in the mid 2000s has been counterbalanced. While I neither condone nor celebrate the bullying that characterized much of Perez's site, his October 2010 pledge to refrain from ridiculing celebrities has rendered the site toothless. As he has made more connections and expanded his brand in the form of radio broadcasts, web channels, memoirs, spin-off sites, and public appearances, rumors abound that he will soon sell his gossip fiefdom to the highest bidder.[78] As *Gawker* continues to steamroll its way through the blogosphere, it has traded its bite, vigor, and transgression for menace, bombast, and nudity; it changed the game only to become its biggest bully.[79] And with *TMZ*, Time Warner proved that a conglomerate could beat the "gossip gangster," as Perez refers to himself, at his own game.

This is not to say that all gutsy, transgressive, transformative gossip has been silenced. Indeed, to my mind, the most interesting, incendiary, and game-changing gossip outlet to emerge over the last decade is not *Us Weekly*, *Gawker* or *Perez Hilton*. Rather, it is *TMZ*, whose quest to unearth celebrity misdoings exposed several of the enduring scandals of the last decade, from Gibson's tirades to Rihanna's domestic abuse. In the process, the site has forced conversations about celebrity behavior, responsibility, and the politics of forgiveness. Yet incisive (and, admittedly, abrasive) gossip and profits are not mutually exclusive, and in 2010, analysts estimated *TMZ*'s worth at over $100 million.[80]

While *TMZ* owes aspects of its form and attitude to the gossip blogs that came before it, it most keenly resembles the tone and mode of production of *Confidential*. *Confidential*'s Robert Harrison and *TMZ*'s Levin share a similar gossip philosophy: build a system of insider

informants, rely heavily on legal documents, and forgo publicists, press junkets, sanctioned interviews, and studio-generated material. Both also succeeded by focusing on hot-button, highly controversial issues specific to the societal climate. Harrison concentrated on sexual deviance while Levin outs racists, homophobes, anti-Semitics, generalized bigotry.[81] Like Harrison, Levin employs a small staff of highly efficient, in-the-know youngsters, exercises firm oversight over much of the content himself, and relies on a bold, garish, headline-heavy packaging.

What Richard Harrison and *Confidential* did not have, however, was the support and shelter of a massive media conglomerate. While drawn-out court battles over sketchy stories attracted attention and readers to *Confidential*, it also exhausted its resources, forcing the magazine to alter its content and style to avoid further prosecution eventually leading to its sale in 1958. Harrison so prided himself on being outside of the system that he failed to see the benefits of operating within it. The lesson, it seems, given the realities of the conglomerated mediascape, is that gossip that endeavors to disrupt and question the production of celebrity may need to originate from inside the machine itself — a lesson to consider as we proceed into the next decade, when flows of information become increasingly global, de-centralized, and dependent upon the infrastructure only a massive conglomerate can provide.

[1] Emily Gould, "Coordinates of the Rich and Famous," *New York Times,* May 4, 2007, A23.

[2] For examples of discourse celebrating the rise of blogs, see "The Revolution Will Be Posted," *New York Times,* November 2, 2004, A27; Maureen Dowd, "Blah Blah Blog," *New York Times,* August 13, 2003, A25.

[3] Within a year of its launch, YouTube accounted for 60% of all streaming video on the internet and boasted 20 million unique visitors a month in June 2006 alone "You Tube serves up 100 million videos a day online," *USA Today*, July 16 2006, http://www.usatoday.com/tech/news/2006-07-16-youtube-views_x.htm

[4] Carla Blumenkranz, "Gawker: 2002–2007: Pageviews to the People," *n+1,* December 3, 2007, http://nplusonemag.com/gawker-2002-2007

[5] Gawker's manifesto promised that the blog would cover all that would fascinate an outsider in the city circa 2002: "Tina Brown, urban dating rituals, Condé Nastiness, movie grosses, Hamptons gauche, real-estate porn, Harvey Weinstein, fantasy skyscrapers, downwardly mobile I-bankers, Eurotrash, extreme-sport social-climbing, pomp, circumstance, and other matters of weighty import." See Michael Idov, "The Demon Blogger of Fleet Street," *New York Magazine,* September 26, 2010, <http://nymag.com/news/features/establishments/68506/>

[6] Vanessa Grigoriadis, "Everybody Sucks: Gawker and the rage of the creative underclass," *New York Magazine,* October 14, 2007, <http://nymag.com/news/features/39319/

[7] *Ibid*.

[8] Blumenkranz, "Gawker: 2002-2007," Online.

[9] *Ibid.*

[10] *Ibid.*

[11] The "Hot Topics" listing at the side of the page in August of 2005 offers a microcosm of *Gawker*'s focus: Paris Hilton led the list, followed by Gawker Stalker, Tina Brown, Conde Nast, (*Vanity Fair* editor) Graydon Carter, *Radar Mag*, *New York Times*, Hipsters, Party Crash, Tara Reid, Drudge, and *Us Weekly*. See the archived web page (via The WayBack Machine) at http://web.archive.org/web/20050406040244/http://www.gawker.com/

[12] See the archived web page (via The Wayback Machine) at http://web.archive.org/web/20050414001113/www.gawker.com/news/culture/stalker/gawker-stalker-debbie-harry-inexplicably-loves-maroon-5-039556.php

[13] *Ibid.*

[14] James Verini, "Gossip, It Seems, Is Now Unprintable," *New York Times,* February 27, 2005, H1.

[15] *Ibid.*

[16] Rachel Abramowitz, "Feeding the Beast," *Los Angeles Times,* July 31, 2005, E1.

[17] See the archived web page (via The Wayback Machine) at http://web.archive.org/web/20051012235947/http://www.defamer.com/

[18] " Because it is independently owned, Defamer.com can break stories that corporation-backed gossip sites can't." See Irene Chang, "Fact File," *PR Week* , October 29, 2007, 9.

[19] David Carr, "At these Web Sites, It's a Man's World," *New York Times,* October 4, 2004, C8.

[20] Blumenkranz, "Gawker: 2002-2007," Online.

[21] Carr, "At these Web Sites," C8.

[22] See Ben McGrath, "Search and Destroy: Nick Denton's Blog Empire," *The New Yorker,* October 18, 2010, http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2010/10/18/101018fa_fact_mcgrath#ixzz1CLa2oFv7. According to McGrath, the flat rate for posts soon became $12.

[23] "It almost felt like a sociological experiment designed to prove the obvious: that readers are herd animals, that heat begets heat." See McGrath, "Search and Destroy," Online.

[24] Brian Stelter, "A Familiar Editor for Gawker," *New York Times,* Dec 17 2007, C2.

[25] McGrath, "Search and Destroy," Online.

[26] For more on Perez's cultivation of a camp personality and his "outing" sensibility, including comparisons to Michael Musto's "outing" campaign at the *Village Voice*, see Anne Helen Petersen, "Celebrity Juice, Not From Concentrate: Perez Hilton, Gossip Blogging, and the New Star Production," *Jump Cut*, 2007, http://www.ejumpcut.org/archive/jc49.2007/PerezHilton/index.html.

[27] Robin Abcarian, "Perez Hilton takes their best shots," *Los Angeles Times,* December 17, 2006, A1.

[28] *Ibid.*

[29] Clive Thompson, "Blogs to Riches: The Haves and Have-Nots of the Blogging Boom," *New York Magazine,* February 12, 2006, http://nymag.com/news/media/15967/.

[30] *Ibid.*

[31] "Q&A - Mario Lavandeira," *PR Week,* December 4, 2006, 10.

[32] Lev Manovich, *The Language of New Media* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2001), 120.

[33] Perez quickly became notorious for "painting" genitalia and white smudges (intended to resemble semen or Cocaine) on celebrities' faces, including that of Maddox Jolie-Pitt, then in preschool.

[34] Linda Nguyen, "One man's gossip is another's dream job," *Toronto Star,* June 20, 2006, C05; Doree Shafrir, "The Truth About Perez Hilton's Traffic," *Gawker.com*, July 10, 2007, http://gawker.com/276369/the-truth-about-perez-hiltons-traffic.

[35] Michael Learmonth, "CBS readies for celeb community," *Daily Variety,* October 12, 2007, 6; See Thomas Schatz, "The Studio System and Conglomerate Hollywood," in *The Contemporary Hollywood Film Industry*, Paul McDonald and Janet Wasko, eds. (Malden, MA;Oxford: Blackwell, 2008), 11-42.

[36] Paige Albiniak, "*TMZ* Finds *MySpace*," *Broadcasting & Cable*, March 3, 2008, http://www.broadcastingcable.com/article/Ca6537185.html.

[37] Emily Steel, "AOL's Websites Show Gains in Traffic," *Wall Street Journal*, April 25, 2008, http://online.wsj.com/article/SB120908335534743525.html.

[38] Jessica Cohen, "If Paris Breaks a Nail, You'll Be There," *New York Times*, July 2, 2006, http://www.nytimes.com/2006/07/02/fashion/02TMZ.html.

[39] Virginia Heffernan, "Web Celebrity Muckraker Opens on TV," *New York Times*, September 13, 2007, http://www.nytimes.com/2007/09/13/arts/television/13heff.html.

[40] Staffers, culled from the young Hollywood cognoscenti, generally start with a flurry of posts under the heading "Let's Get This Party Started." These brief posts, wrought with puns and double entendre, detail overnight and recent developments in the gossip world and work as a starting point for further posts and updates throughout the day.

[41] "I started seeing that if you don't have time periods and publishing cycles, you can publish on demand and beat everybody." Todd Wasserman, "Dirty Laundry Dot Com," *Brandweek*, March 5, 2007, http://www.brandweek.com/bw/magazine/brandbuilders/article_display.jsp?vnu_content_id=1003553357.

[42] Wasserman, "Dirty Laundry Dot Com," Online.

[43] Michael Grotticelli, "*TMZ* Pioneers Instant TV Production," *Broadcast Engineering*, February 1, 2008, http://broadcastengineering.com/newsrooms/broadcasting_tmz_pioneers_instant/.

[44] "In comparison with other gossip sites that skew heavily to female clickers, *TMZ* boasts a viewergender split that is nearly even. (To be precise, it is 54 percent female, 46 percent male; by contrast, *Us Magazine*'s is 73 and 27 percent, respectively.) See Wasserman, "Dirty Laundry Dot Com," Online.

[45] Cohen, "If Paris Breaks a Nail," Online.

[46] Ben Grossman, "'*TMZ*' Good News for Stations," *Broadcasting & Cable*, March 5,2007, 9.

[47] Stephen Brook, "Do Try to Keep Up," *The Guardian,* July 1, 2009, 4.

[48] *Ibid.*

[49] Allison Hope Weiner, "The Website Celebrities Fear," *New York Times,* June 25, 2007, C1.

[50] *ibid*

[51] Wasserman, "Dirty Laundry Dot Com," Online; Weiner, "The Website Celebrities Fear," C1. TMZ's tactics posed a palpable threat. Following the leak of Mel Gibson's arrest transcript, lawmakers passed legislation, dubbed "Mel's Law," that rendered such leaks punishable as a misdemeanor crime.

[52] Jim Benson, "*TMZ* Show Cleared in 80% of U.S.," *Broadcasting & Cable*, February 26, 2007, 5; Paige Albiniak, "*TMZ* Stays in the News," *Broadcasting & Cable*, November 26, 2007, 12.

[53] Brian Stetler, "Celebrities Off Guard? *TMZ* is a Hit," *New York Times*, October 15, 2007, C8. Similar to *TMZ*.com, *TMZ on TV* does particularly well with male audiences With an 0.8 live-plus same-day average rating, it is the highest-rated magazine among men between eighteen and thirty-four. This ratings figure may seem small, but in the world of syndicated gossip magazines, such a figure for male audience turns heads. See Albiniak, "*TMZ* Stays in the News," 12.

[54] "For years, television shows treated the Web as a secondary product to promote the daily broadcast, but it turned out that simply repackaging television segments did not prompt visitors to keep returning." Brian Stetler, "In Race for Gossip, TV Shows Turn to Blogs," *New York Times*, January 5, 2008, C1.

[55] See John Consoli, "CW's Key Demos Dating Other Nets," *MediaWeek* 17.38 (2007): 4-5; Gary Levin, "Viewers' Shifting Habits Redefine TV Hit," *USA Today,* October 24, 2007, <http://www.usatoday.com/life/television/news/2007-10-23-tv-hits_N.htm>.

[56] Jon Fine, "*TMZ*: Cleaning Up the Dirt," *Business Week*, November 19, 2007, 110.

[57] Virginia Heffernan, "Web Celebrity Muckraker Opens on TV," *New York Times*, September 13, 2007, E3.

[58] "This meeting, with Levin at a transparent white board, is so lively that it is sometimes taped, and parts are inserted into the show so that viewers can see how the show is put together." See Grotticelli, "*TMZ* Pioneers," Online.

[59] Grotticelli, "*TMZ* Pioneers," Online.

[60] Peter Johnson, "CBS' Showbuzz joins the online entertainment crowd," *USA Today,* June 12, 2006, 4D.

[61] Irene Chang, "Celebrity sites offer outlet for brands with irreverent appeal," *PR Week,* October 29, 2007, 9.

[62] *Ibid.*

[63] If a user choices to buy the product via Shopstyle, Sugar received a percentage of the profits; by 2008, Shopstyle accounted for 1/3 of Sugar Inc.'s revenue. See Claire Cain Miller, "Ad Shift Throws Blog a Business Lifeline," *New York Times*, September 14, 2009, B1.

[64] Claire Cain Miller, "Sugar Network Leaves NBC Suite," *New York Times,* July 28, 2008, C7.

[65] *Ibid.*

[66] Stephanie D. Smith, "The Brand Plays On," *MediaWeek*, March 27, 2006, 34-36.

[67] Paige Albiniak, "New, Improved *Access*," *Broadcasting & Cable*, September 10, 2007, 9.

[68] Stetler, "In Race for Gossip," C1.

[69] *Ibid.*

[70] Albiniak, "New, Improved *Access*," 9.

[71] Stetler, "In Race for Gossip," C1.

[72] T. L. Stanley, "*ET* 25-Year-Track Record Keeps Marketers in Tow," *Advertising Age*, March 3, 2006, 12.

[73] "ET, MSN Ink Deal," *Broadcasting & Cable*, August 4, 2008, 2; Paige Albiniak, "ET, Insider to go HD," *Broadcasting & Cable,* April 21, 2008, 7.

[74] *Ibid.*

[75] "Special Report: 'People' Pleasers," *Adweek,* October 29, 2007, no page number; Chang, "Celebrity sites offer outlet," 9.

[76] "Bonnie Fuller's Baby..." *WWD*, September 7, 2010, http://bit.ly/a42Zck; Stephen Heyman, "Nice-Guy Bloggers Needn't Finish Last," *New York Times*, January 20, 2011, E1.

[77] Buzz media is now home to nearly a dozen blogs, including *Celebuzz, Go Fug Yourself, Just Jared, Just Jared Jr., The Superficial,* and *What Would Tyler Durden Do*.

[78] Brian Stetler, "Perez Hilton Vows to End Celebrity Insults," *New York Times,* October 13, 2010, http://mediadecoder.blogs.nytimes.com/2010/10/13/perez-hilton-vows-to-end-celebrity-insults/

[79] See Idov, "The Demon Blogger," Online.

[80] "TMZ.com Valuation Tops $100 Million," *24/7 Wall Street.com*, January 3, 2010, http://247wallst.com/2010/01/03/tmz-com-valuation-tops-100-million/#ixzz1CLtR2N1f

[81] Brian Stetler, "Forget Britney; Media Outrage Hits Big Spenders," *New York Times*, March 12, 2009, A1.

CONCLUSION
THE ENDURANCE OF THE MACHINE

On February 28, 2011, as I was completing finishing touches on this project, a major star, with very specific economic value to multiple media identities, underwent a very public meltdown. At the time of this writing, the star has been fired from the program in which he was starring. Even more importantly, this star has turned to mainstream television programs to air his grievances but quickly became disillusioned with the way these outlets mediated his narrative. He has since made a series of decisions and statements that effectively lay bare the industry, its machinations, and his place within it.

This star is by no means the first to undergo a very public self-destruction. But he may be the first to engage the particular powers of the online gossip industry to do so. As will become clear, this star, the extent to which his behavior was tolerated and capitalized upon, and the resultant media frenzy illuminate the inherent conflicts that characterize the current production of stars and the potential for those conflicts to be exploited.

The star in question is Charlie Sheen, son of Martin Sheen, brother to Emilio Estevez, and, from the late '80s to 2011, a major film and television star. For the last eight years, Sheen has commanded upwards of $2 million an episode for his work on *Two and a Half Men* (2003-2011), which has consistently ranked as the top sitcom in America.[1] Years of drug use, repeated accusations of domestic abuse, public dalliances with porn stars and prostitutes, and an intoxicated rampage through the New York Plaza Hotel culminated in a cocaine-induced bender spanning January 26-27, 2011. Sheen ended up in the hospital, and his publicist released an official statement that the star was suffering from "severe stomach pains," which Sheen later claimed to be related to a hernia. The next day, Sheen entered into a self-fashioned rehab in his home, and *Two and a Half Men* officially went on hiatus.

The show was scheduled to resume production in early March once Sheen regained sobriety. But throughout February, Chuck Lorre, the creator and executive producer of *Two and a Half Men* and several of the most popular and profitable sitcoms in America, levied a public critique of Sheen. Since his first sitcom, Lorre has placed "vanity cards" (small-print musings on life and the industry) at the end of each episode. Lorre has subtly decried Sheen's actions in the past, yet following Sheen's January hospitalization, his criticism became increasingly overt. A card placed at the end of the February 14, 2011 episode of *Men* read "If Charlie Sheen outlives me, I'm gonna be really pissed."[2] The same day, a card at the end of the Lorre-produced *Mike and Molly* (2010 - 2011) alluded to Sheen's lifestyle: "He felt dead inside. No matter how hard he partied, he could never escape the simple fact — inside, dead."[3]

Sheen retaliated by calling in to the radio show of friend (and conspiracy theorist) Alex Jones on February 24. He described Alcoholics Anonymous as a "bootleg cult" and exclaimed "I have a disease? Bullshit, I cured it, with my mind!" Sheen also called Lorre "a stupid little man," referring to him as "Chaim Levine." The same day he released a "public letter" to *TMZ*, claiming "I fire back once and this contaminated little maggot can't handle my power and can't handle the truth. I wish him nothing but pain in his silly travels especially if they wind up in my octagon. Clearly I have defeated this earthworm with my words — imagine what I would have done with my fire breathing fists."[4]

In response, Warner Bros. Television and CBS (*Two and a Half Men*'s production company/distributor and home network) issued a definitive statement, declaring that "based on the totality of Charlie Sheen's statements, conduct, and condition" they had decided to cancel the duration of the season.[5] The purportedly sober Sheen then filmed interviews with ABC and NBC in which he continued his attack against Lorre and declared "I am on a drug — it's called

Charlie Sheen. It's not available because if you try it once, you will die. Your face will melt off and your children will weep over your exploded body. . .Too much?"[6] Displeased with the way the networks edited and lit the footage, Sheen invited *TMZ* to perform a live interview in the backyard of his Hollywood Hills home.

TMZ had, of course, been tracking the Sheen story for months, publishing dozens of quips from Sheen in print and taped form. But this was something different. As Chapter Nine made clear, an unvarnished, real-time quality characterizes *TMZ* content, and the Sheen interview was no exception. The conversation streamed live, just hours after his interview aired on ABC. The interviewer, a jeans-and-t-shirt-clad *TMZ* staff member, sat in lawn chairs with Sheen as he chain-smoked, demanded coffee (mixed with Vodka), interacted with members of his entourage (including his two live-in "goddesses") and pontificated for forty-five minutes on his critics, their jealousy of his lifestyle, and the inability of the world to understand that he was "winning at life."

Sheen has since taken to Twitter, accumulating one million followers so quickly that he broke a Guinness World Record.[7] His rhetoric has been transformed into internet memes; his soundbites transformed into haikus, captions for *New Yorker* cartoons, and juxtaposed with the rantings of other famous "Charlies," such Charles Manson. He has been called a one-man sideshow and a visionary, and he has transformed from a film and television star, known for his onscreen portrayals, to a full-fledged celebrity phenomenon, known for his extra-textual exploits. Whatever Sheen is, it is clear that he, like a handful of stars over the last fifty years, has challenged the way that the gossip industry has traditionally mediated stars and their behavior.

I have made this detour into the recesses of Sheen's public rantings with purpose, as his rhetoric — and the mediation thereof — have, more than any recent scandal or celebrity event,

illuminated the machinations of the gossip industry. In the process, he has articulated uncomfortable truths about the way stars and gossip about them are "made," as well as what audiences expect (and demand) from these products.

Sheen exemplifies the continued importance of stars today. His name and presence in *Two and a Half Men* encouraged CBS to pick up the pilot; his particular acting style, coupled with that of co-star Jon Cryer, and the writing, directing, and overall production of Chuck Lorre made the show a phenomenal success. That success, in turn, allowed Warner Bros. to charge unprecedented amounts for domestic and international syndication rights.[8] *Two and a Half Men* is dependent on Sheen, as his character's bad-boy behavior adds necessary (albeit slight) spice to an otherwise bland family sitcom. Warner Bros. and Lorre could replace Sheen, but as the example of James Garner and *Maverick* made clear in the 1960s, a popular program's identity hinges on the presence of its star — a notion validated by the size of Sheen's paycheck.

Some speculate that after eight years *Two and a Half Men* had run its course and Lorre was looking for an excuse to cancel the show. But *Men* still consistently placed in the top fifteen, and every episode "in the can" meant millions in additional syndication revenue. The imperatives of the marketplace demanded that it continue even when Sheen spent the hiatuses between filming trashing hotel rooms, using illegal drugs, and abusing the women in his life. Other stars, including Lindsay Lohan and Mickey Rourke, have engaged in similar vices and have been chastised or fired. In Rourke's case, his erratic behavior made it nearly impossible for a film to be "bonded" and receive funding. In contrast, Lorre, Warner Bros., and CBS tolerated Sheen's behavior, however repugnant, because it did not effect the bottom line — a reality to which Sheen pointed during his interview with *TMZ*. Put bluntly, corporate interests do not

judge a star's actions by their morality or legality, but by how they effect the products with which they are associated.

Still, the tolerance of Sheen, whether on the part of audiences or the industry itself, goes beyond simple economics. He is a white male and the son of a well-respected star, with a long career in Hollywood.[9] Sheen's offenses are also studded with glamour. He parties, but he parties with entire baseball teams, inviting All-Stars to a private yacht for a screening of his hit film *Major League* (1989). As evidenced by the *TMZ* video, his lifestyle is luxurious, seemingly filled with beautiful blondes willing to fulfill his every wish, or, as Sheen explains, he is a "bitchin' rockstar from Mars," and the media has done very little to disabuse viewers of this notion. His lifestyle may be manic, but it is one in which he clearly revels. In contrast, female stars who lead a similar lifestyle, including Lohan, Britney Spears, and Amy Winehouse, are consistently framed as pitiable. Women who live outsized lives are grotesque while Sheen is just, in his words, "grandiose."

The public's willingness to accept or gloss over Sheen's actions is directly linked to the specifics of his star image. Before *Two and a Half Men*, Sheen's image hinged on his portrayals of cheeky jack-asses in *Major League* (1989), *Men at Work* (1990) *Hot Shots!* (1991), and subsequent sequels. *Two and a Half Men* took his existing image and placed it in a domestic environment where it took on a crucial narrative function as the unruliness against which his character's brother and nephew defined themselves. If the roles were exchanged, and Sheen, rather than co-star Jon Cryer, played the upright, loving father, Sheen's actions would seem quite literally "out of character," puncturing audience understandings of what his star image represented. As is, his actions seem a natural, albeit amplified, extension of the role he plays on-screen. Instead of shocking fans, they function as yet another source of entertainment and pleasure. A repeat of

Two and a Half Men, aired the evening of the *TMZ* interview, garnered 9.3 million viewers, as did the complete ABC interview, which aired at 10 p.m. on March 1st and won its time slot.[10]

Sheen himself is cognizant of the harmony between his extra-textual and textual lives. While he admits that *Two and a Half Men*'s writers do not use actual experiences from his life, the show nevertheless "took all my gold, and used it, and then went thanks, goodbye."[11] Sheen emphasizes that his antics have had little effect on the popularity and profitability of the show: "Negative press?!? Did you see the numbers on the show? It's all about commerce, dude."[12] In other words, Sheen's overarching star image — his on- and off-screen antics — are at least part of the reason for the show's enduring popularity.

Indeed, as David Carr points out, Sheen was not fired for living the life of his on-screen counter-part but for his willingness to insult his boss who, at the moment, is one of the few working in Hollywood television that has been able to deliver network product that attracts consistent ratings.[13] Despite rumors that Lorre himself has mistreated and verbally abused his staff and crew, he is nevertheless one of the most powerful men in the business. Warner Bros. and CBS will lose millions as a result of the early termination of the season, but both realize that keeping Lorre happy far outweighs such losses. The rhetorical mudslinging is, in truth, a battle between oversized egos, with Lorre's the more valuable of the two.

As evidenced throughout Sheen's slew of interviews, he understands his worth as a star. However, he was also willing to subvert attempts, whether forced rehab or confessional interviews, to sustain that value. As described in Chapter Two, scandal of all forms require this sort of "reckoning," which may manifest in the form of interviews, a new romance, a trip to rehab, or a come-back role. When Sheen agreed to participate in the interviews with ABC and NBC, the expectation was for him to humble himself, make it clear that he was sober, and win

the support of his fans. Instead, the jittery Sheen seemed unhinged and fragile, and his rhetoric flew in the face of any expectations to create the standard reckoning narrative.

With *TMZ*, Sheen derided the previous attempts to rehabilitate him, spoofing the types of questions, cuts, zooms, lighting techniques, and facial expressions that other programs use to convey repentance. At one point, he cheekily instructed the videographer: "If you can create the moment, though, where you ask that hard-hitting question about when I hit rock bottom and a shot of me like, blinking and looking down."[14] Later in the interview, he directed "Don't get too close to me like they did on the [ABC Interview] they put me in bad light, they put her in good light."[15] In this way, Sheen not only pointed out the otherwise hidden "tricks" of the gossip industry but made them look ridiculous.

Sheen likewise undercut attempts on the part of the publicity apparatus to cushion the impact of his behavior. Sheen's publicist had issued statements explaining the star's hospitalization as the result of "mixed medications." When asked why this statement was released, Sheen replied "I dunno, I was asleep during that moment. I respect Stanley [Sheen's publicist] and he was doing the best he could [. . .] but if I conferred with him I probably would've come up with something better."[16] Sheen thus lays bare the lie of the star making machine: publicists distort the truth and oftentimes lie. While not all publicists are tasked with covering up their clients' recurring drug use, if this publicist did, it seems natural that other publicists do as well. As Joshua Gamson's work with gossip audiences suggests, few gossip consumers are naive enough to believe that all publicist statements are absolutely true, yet never before has a celebrity stated so loudly, and so unequivocally, and to such a large audience that the publicity apparatus manufactures the star image.[17] Indeed, it is telling that Sheen's publicist resigned immediately after the conclusion of the interview.

Sheen is clearly aware of the repentance expected of him. However, unlike misbehaving stars of the past, from Robert Mitchum to Mel Gibson, he refused to cater to those expectations. Some stars, once embroiled in scandal, simply retreat; others choose a single, well-placed outlet to offer their exclusive confession or "side of the story." In contrast, Sheen seems to be talking to anyone who will listen, flooding the mediascape with soundbites, each more outrageous and inflammatory than the next. As he explained, "I'm supposed to be out there begging for my job, I'm sorry, I don't do that."[18] In a nation where the use of drugs and prostitutes is coded as shameful, his lack of repentance seems startlingly honest: "I don't understand what I did wrong, except live a life that you all got jealous of?" Or, nearing the end of the interview, "you guys don't even get the winning concept? The reality of winning? Sorry my life is so much more bitching than yours. I planned it that way."[19]

The coverage of Sheen underlines the close connections between the entities that hire stars and those that exploit gossip about them. Chapter Nine demonstrates that *TMZ*, while housed under the Time Warner umbrella, has defined itself on its willingness to exploit gossip about all celebrities, regardless of their conglomerate affiliation. One can thus view the "collaboration" between Sheen and *TMZ* in one of two ways. First, *TMZ* operates independent of Time Warner editorial oversight and approaches the scandal as it would any other: as an opportunity to attract visits to the website and viewers to the television show, even as it continues to bolster its brand as a go-to source for first-hand, unvarnished gossip. Alternately, Time Warner is mindful of the ways in which they can exploit Sheen even after his utility to *Two and a Half Men* has been exhausted. In other words, what Time Warner loses in profits from future episodes *Two and a Half Men*, it may (at least partially) gain in advertising revenue from *TMZ* and renewed interest in *Two and a Half Men* reruns.

Whether *TMZ* is privy to this strategy — or whether it is an explicit strategy at all — matters little. When Time Warner decided to cultivate an investigative, no-holds-barred, video-heavy gossip outlet, it laid the groundwork for just such a situation as this one. As a result, Time Warner was able to exploit Sheen's star image while he was on the payroll for *Two and a Half Men* and can continue to do so now that he is not. Whether Sheen realizes the irony of the situation is unclear, but his continued willingness to provide *TMZ* (and other websites and television programs) with an endless fount of material again evidences his understanding of the gossip game. If he provides copy — the more unvarnished, crazy-sounding, and clippable the better — it will create a spectacle that will out-shine his adversaries.

It is no coincidence that *TMZ* has been on the forefront of Sheen coverage. Sheen's unabashed revelry in his outsized masculinity also attracts one of *TMZ*'s main target audiences of men between the ages of eighteen and thirty-four. Indeed, Sheen's meltdown grew beyond the traditional audience for celebrity gossip, as both "personality journalism" outlets (*20/20*, *Entertainment Tonight*, *Entertainment Weekly*) and "mainstream" outlets (CNN, MSNBC, *The New York Times*, NPR) began tracking Sheen's every move. Much like the death of Michael Jackson and the Tiger Woods scandal, Sheen has become mainstream news and comedy fodder, underlining the way in which outlets otherwise on the periphery of the gossip industry flock to scandal, especially when it promises vivid imagery, quotable rhetoric, and cross-demographic appeal.

At this moment, Sheen is striving to build a new career as a celebrity on the wreckage of his old career as a film and television star. To do so, he has eschewed official statements and press conferences, instead inviting cameras into his backyard, starting a Twitter feed, and "webcasting" live from his house on a Saturday night. In cutting out the middle man, he is attempting, as Ashton Kutcher once said of his own Twitter-use, to "take back his own publicity."[20] This is not

to say that audiences have access to the real Sheen. "Crazy Sheen" is still an image, only this time, it has accumulated the varnish of authenticity, in part due its pure outlandishness, but also because of his reliance on media tools (live streaming video, Twitter) that connote authenticity.[21]

Sheen's star value, image, and maneuvering of the gossip industry thus serve as the natural, albeit blustering, extension of four phenomena put in motion following the postwar transformation of the studio system: 1) the embrace of "negative publicity," e.g. publicity related to scandal, as "good publicity"; 2) the transfer of star management from the studios to the stars themselves; 3) the growth of gossip outlets and technologies that enable round-the-clock celebrity surveillance and their accompanying connotations of intimacy, "realness," and authenticity, and 4) the increasingly conglomerated gossip industry, wherein properties that rely on stars (movies, films, music) co-exist with others that produce entertainment news and gossip about them.

As evidenced throughout the dissertation, each of these trends has roots in the 1950s and '60s, when the stars began to self-incorporate, take on their own publicity teams, and refuse to adhere to morality clauses. At the same time, gossip publications gradually embraced scandal coverage, expanded in focus, and, increasingly, found themselves under conglomerate ownership where they served a distinct promotional function. In the last twenty years, as more and more outlets, both friendly and "unfriendly," attempt to exploit star and celebrity discourse for profit, stars and celebrities have responded in turn, hiring massive teams to control the type and tone of discourse circulating around their images.

Sheen's meltdown has shown how vulnerable the star image is once the publicity carapace is removed — and how willing gossip outlets are to capitalize on that vulnerability. In this moment, Sheen's antics seem outlandish, hilarious and, at first blush, even refreshing. Here is a celebrity who is not afraid to revel in his privilege, who recognizes that much of the disdain

directed towards him — and towards any celebrity — is rooted in jealousy and resentment, and who is offering himself up, without the protection of a publicist, editor, make-up artist, or flattering lighting, for audiences to consume. Sheen may not be "Just like Us" with his dozen cars, multiple mansions, and stream of "goddesses," and Adonis blood, but his efforts at communicating are as close as a celebrity can come to sitting down in a living room and having a one-on-one conversation.

As the market for paparazzi photos, video, *Us Weekly*, and gossip blogs expanded over the course of the last decade, the demand seemed to be for "authentic" celebrities who communicated via New Media technologies, whose images did not signify as manufactured, who did embarrassing things and shopped at the grocery store, but who, at the same time, lived glamorous lives, dated attractive people, gave birth to beautiful babies, and consumed on a level on which most could never dream. These contradictory impulses — one towards authenticity and normalcy, the other towards glamour and superlativeness — have helped guide the production of star images since the first generation of Hollywood stars.

Charlie Sheen and his actions are exactly what many viewers seem to be asking from the industry: a pedigreed star, living an extraordinary life, but who is also available at all times, and dedicated to shattering all attempts at constructing him as something he is not. But is the Charlie Sheen show a farce or a tragedy?[22] As a recent debate in the *New York Times* following the death of Elizabeth Taylor attempted to contextualize, Sheen and other stars' status as "freelancers" has permitted greater personal and professional freedom, but "far fewer checks on potential imbalances."[23] With his rants, webcasts, and forthcoming tour, Sheen is attempting to lampoon the entire entertainment industry, laughing his way to a higher paycheck, a more lavish lifestyle, and even more renown. Yet his attempts to do so — and the ability of the industry to profit from

his "imbalances" — simultaneously render him a tragic figure, seemingly trapped by his own game. For a brief moment, the ease with which he circumvented the traditional modes of celebrity production seemed to suggest that the gossip industry's strategies were becoming obsolete. Yet as evidenced by the recent backlash and boredom surrounding his series of webcasts from "Sheen's Korner," a campaign to "unfollow Charlie" on Twitter, and decidedly mixed reviews from his national stand-up tour, Sheen has demonstrated that there is no *outside* of the publicity machine. Put differently, the apparent rupture in the gossip industry *modus operandi* is merely proof of its resilience.

Indeed, I would argue that for all of Sheen's apparent rebellion and willingness to broadcast himself to an international audience of millions, he has merely ratified the system. Granted, he lacks a publicist and has rejected counsel. But his ostensible refusal to play the game makes it easier for outlets to *game him*, use the signifiers of his "freedom" (the screed from his mouth, the haggard look to his face, the tousled hair) to sell tickets to the spectacle of an imploding star. Sheen's actions have altered the foundation of his image, but no number of rants can change that his image is commodity disseminated and exploited by the gossip industry.

Sheen thinks he is a rockstar from Mars, that his life is grandiose, that he's "winning at life" and the world is jealous. But he also unemployed, his sons have been taken from him, and his ex-wife has filed a restraining order against him. In truth, Sheen is a cog in a complex, tremendously exploitative industry, with close ties to all forms of media industries. That machinery has expanded, it has grown more complex, some parts have become automated, others rely on digital technology, and some fancy themselves independent. While each cog — the celebrities themselves, publicists, entertainment new programs, gossip blogs — is essential to the industry's smooth operation, it may also be readily replaced, left to rust in the junk pile of

discarded celebrity. In this way, Sheen's meltdown demonstrates the power of the contemporary industry to exploit its celebrity products in real time, on multiple platforms, and around the clock. At the same time, it telegraphs Sheen's eventual decline and the industry's overarching fickleness in regard to the celebrities that fuel it.

In the end, the speed with which Sheen has been picked up and discarded by the gossip industry — all within the span of a month — underlines the disposable nature of contemporary celebrity, in which a seemingly endless stream of reality personalities regularly usurp traditional film, television, and music stars on the covers of the magazines, the broadcasts of entertainment news, and the pages of gossip blogs. The essential operations of the gossip industry has, in truth, altered little, but the speed with which it digests and exhausts material has increased. As the number of outlets increases, so too has the demand for celebrity material — the more salacious, melodramatic, and serialized the better — a demand that the current crop of Hollywood stars, diminished in number in comparison to the height of the studio system, simply cannot fulfill. As a result, since the early 1960s, celebrities have taken on an ever-increasing importance to the gossip industry, fueling it when Hollywood stars could not. Ultimately, the current fascination with celebrity — with "people worth knowing," in all of its myriad interpretations, from Charlie Sheen to Donald Trump — can, at least in part, be traced to the specific logic and demands of the gossip industry itself.

My intention with this project has always been to contextualize gossip. Not necessarily by showing that it is sophisticated (most of it is not), smart (even though some of it is) or culturally valuable (a task already taken up by many). Rather, I wanted to illuminate the industry behind gossip and, in so doing, assert it as a multi-faceted product, throughly imbricated within the production of entertainment media, whether in 1910 or 2010.

Industrial histories work to make opaque processes visible, unraveling the complex ways that the things audiences consume — on the screen, in the pages in front of them, through the airwaves — arrive there and for what reasons. With an industrial history of gossip, I have attempted to do the same, making what might otherwise seem a tangled web of studio, conglomerate, and celebrity interests into a tenable matrix of production, packaging, and dissemination. In the process, I have repeatedly contextualized and historicized events, emphasizing the ways in which our "celebrified" culture is the result of diverse industrial and cultural forces with roots reaching back to the nineteenth century.

This labor contributes to a more abstract aim of the dissertation, which was to historicize a subject that has incited tremendous anxiety across contemporary society. As cultural critics, academics, and others decry the "celebrification" of the media, this dissertation is a crucial corrective to the notion that our current cultural moment, and the fascination with celebrity that characterizes it, is without historical antecedent. Just as the production and exploitation of discourse about stars is not novel, neither is the anxiety circulating around the consumption of that discourse. Entertainment news and celebrity gossip has taken various forms and tones; it has switched in focus; it has expanded and conglomerated along with the rest of the entertainment industry. As a result, its profitability and promotional potential within the conglomerated media landscape have made it increasingly visible and ostensibly ubiquitous. But the gossip industry is not new, and the idea of a newly-obsessed nation of celebrity-frenzied citizens should be disabused. I have thus aimed not only to shed light on how the gossip industry has distributed of discourse about stars, but, through a detailed industrial history, add crucial context and nuance to how each of us perceives and consumes gossip today.

Yet work still remains. Even as the field of celebrity studies continues to grow, the production of celebrity gossip remains understudied. My hope is that my project will spark future scholarship that elaborates, challenges, and complicates the ideas, modes of production, and histories laid out over the last nine chapters. More specifically, the intended scope of this dissertation has precluded extended consideration of the ways in which the products produced by the gossip industry — the gossip itself — have been consumed, both historically and in the present. While I have attempted to throughly investigate the specific machinations contributing the production of gossip, extended and detailed ethnographies and reception studies have the potential to demonstrate whether audiences decode and consume gossip products as a specific outlet or conglomerate interest intends. Reception studies could likewise shed crucial light on consumers' level awareness of cross-promotion, synergy, and conglomerate ties. Some conglomerates are eager to efface these connections and others explicitly promote them, yet it remains unclear how, and to what extent, awareness of conglomerate ties affect audience attitudes towards a particular product or corporate brand.

At various points throughout the dissertation I have briefly addressed formal and aesthetic concerns, especially when they manifest overarching shifts within the gossip industry. Yet my analysis remains relatively brief, drawing on an admittedly limited selection of magazines, issues, and articles, especially in the sections that deal with time periods, such as the 1960s and '70s, for which gossip publications are more difficult to access or scrutinize. A fuller analysis — both in terms of breadth, detail, and the number of texts examine — will require a significant investment, whether in terms of money spent purchasing back copies of magazines or time spent in one of the handful of libraries where back issues of these essentially uncatalogued magazines

reside. I am confident, however, that this type of investment will help shade, substantiate, and add nuance my own argument's broader historical and industrial strokes.

In Chapter Two, I perform a close analysis of four star images, the challenges each of these images poses, and the way the gossip outlets' responses to these challenges indicated burgeoning shifts in the industry at large. In the chapters that follow, I touch on subsequent star and celebrity images — Elizabeth Taylor, Debbie Reynolds, Jacqueline Kennedy, Tom Cruise — that proved significant to various outlets' operation and success. Further scholarship would consider these images and others in greater depth, examining the wealth of gossip on each and forming more nuanced conclusions as to their particular significance to the production, distribution, and value of star images.

My analysis also depends heavily on interviews and statements filtered through other mediums, whether national newspapers, sanctioned histories, or trade publications. Throughout the dissertation, I have labored to contextualize and interrogate these sources and their respective motivations in framing a piece of information, gossip outlet, or its placement in the entertainment industry in a certain light. With that said, reliance on secondary discourse lacks the sort of revelation that attends research rooted in primary documents. While it is unlikely that the archives of the classic fan magazines will ever come to light, further research in the extant papers of Parsons, Hopper, Winchell, and other press agents and publicists involved in the gossip industry during the studio era and its immediate aftermath could either texture or challenge the assertions levied in these pages. When, and if, the archives of the major media conglomerates such as Time Warner are made open to the public, they would provide a veritable treasure trove of scholarly potential, evidencing or negating motivations and goals on which I have only been able to speculate.

Finally, this history is explicitly limited to Hollywood stars, American celebrities, and gossip outlets intended for American audiences. Future scholarship will investigate, compare, and contrast the gossip industries of non-American markets, looking to the ways that varying approaches and attitudes towards regulation, conglomeration, publicity, freedom of the press, defamation, and gossip in general have shaped the development of unique production cultures, the ties that bind them, and their relationship, or lack thereof, to their American counterparts.

So long as there are celebrities, there will be discourse about them; so long as America remains a capitalist society, there will an industry that produces, packages, and disseminates that discourse. As such, the continued study of the gossip industry is crucial not only to our understanding of stardom, celebrity and Hollywood but of society's means of venerating and denigrating its popular figures at a given moment. This dissertation may be the first large-scale examination of the industry that produces entertainment news and celebrity gossip, but by no means should it be the last.

[1] Sheen receives $1.2 million per episode plus a share of the syndication profits, averaging a total of $2 million an episode.

[2] Nellie Andreeva, "Chuck Lorre: 'If Charlie Sheen Outlives Me I'm Gonna Be Really Pissed,'" *Deadline Hollywood*, February 15, 2011, http://www.deadline.com/2011/02/chuck-lorre-if-charlie-sheen-outlives-me-im-gonna-be-really-pissed/.

[3] "Chuck Lorre Productions, #330," Chuck Lorre Productions Official Vanity Card Archives, February 14, 2011, http://www.chucklorre.com/index-mnm.php?p=330.

[4] "Charlie Sheen RAGES in Open Letter," *TMZ*, February 24 2011, http://www.tmz.com/2011/02/24/charlie-sheen-open-letter-two-and-a-half-men-chuck-lorre-tirade-turd-production-season-shut-down-crew-cbs-warner-bros/.

[5] David Carr, "Insulting Chuck Lorre, Not Abuse, Gets Sheen Sidelined," *New York Times,* February 27, 2011, http://www.nytimes.com/2011/02/28/business/media/28carr.html?ref=television

[6] Alessandra Stanley, "Famous, With Foot in Mouth," *New York Times*, February 28, 2011, http://www.nytimes.com/2011/03/01/arts/television/01watch.html?_r=1&ref=television.

[7] Darren Franich, "Charlie Sheen's Twitter Account Sets Guinness World Record," March 3, 2001, *Entertainment Weekly*, March 3, 2001, http://popwatch.ew.com/2011/03/03/charlie-sheen-guinness-guinness-record/?utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=Feed:+ew/popwatch+(Entertainment+Weekly/EW.com's:+PopWatch).

[8] As of 2011, the show airs in forty-eight countries around the world.

[9] See Anna Holmes, "The Disposable Woman," *New York Times*, March 3, 2011 http://www.nytimes.com/2011/03/04/opinion/04holmes.html?_r=3&src=ISMR_HP_LO_MST_FB&pagewanted=all for more on how reality television has conditioned audiences to accept Sheen's treatment of women.

[10] Tim Molloy, "Sheen Denies Sending Text Saying He'd 'Execute...Stoopid Jew Pig' Manager," *The Wrap*, March 2 2011, http://www.thewrap.com/television/column-post/charlie-sheen-loses-custody-twins-after-ex-gets-restraining-order-25165.

[11] *TMZ* Staff, "Charlie Sheen Spills His Guts on TMZ," *TMZ.com*, February 28, 2011, http://www.tmz.com/2011/02/28/charlie-sheen-live-interview-tmz-two-and-a-half-men/

[12] *Ibid*.

[13] Carr, "Insulting Chuck Lorre," Online.

[14] *TMZ* Staff, "Charlie Sheen Spills His Guts on TMZ."

[15] *Ibid.*

[16] *Ibid.*

[17] Joshua Gamson, *Claims to Fame: Celebrity in Contemporary America*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994.

[18] *TMZ* Staff, "Charlie Sheen Spills His Guts on TMZ."

[19] *Ibid*.

[20] See Anne Helen Petersen, "'We're Making Our Own Paparazzi': Twitter and the Construction of Star Authenticity," *FlowTV*, May 28, 2009, http://flowtv.org/2009/05/were-making-our-own-paparazzi-twitter-and-the-construction-of-star-authenticity-anne-helen-petersen-university-of-texas-austin/

[21] For the ways that celebrity use of Twitter connotes authenticity, see Petersen, "We're Making Our Own..."

[22] For a convincing account of Sheen's antics as tragic sideshow, see Linda Holmes, "Paying a Penny at Bedlam," *NPR Monkey See*, March 1, 2011, http://www.npr.org/blogs/monkeysee/2011/03/01/134161063/paying-a-penny-at-bedlam.

[23] Lisa Dombrowski, "Fewer People Saying 'No,'" *New York Times*, March 24, 2011, http://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2011/03/23/is-it-harder-to-be-a-celebrity-now/fewer-people-saying-no.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Allen, Robert. "The Role of the Star in Film History [Joan Crawford]." In *Film Theory and Criticism,* edited by Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen, 606-619. New York: Oxford University Press, 2004.

Anderson, Christopher. *Hollywood TV* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1994).

Anderson, Mark Lynn. "Shooting Star: Understanding Wallace Reid and His Public." In *Headline Hollywood*, edited by David A. Cook and Adrienne McLean, 83-106. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2001.

Association of National Advertisers. *Magazine Circulation and Rate Trends 1946-1976.* New York: The Association, 1978.

Balio, Tino, ed. *Grand Design: Hollywood as Modern Business Enterprise, 1930-1939.* Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1995.

———. *United Artists: The Company Built By the Stars*. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1976.

———. *United Artists: The Company that Changed the Film Industry*. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1987.

Barbas, Samantha. *Movie Crazy: Fans, Stars, and the Cult of Celebrity* (New York: Palgrave, 2001).

———. *The First Lady of Hollywood: A Biography of Louella Parsons.* Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2005.

Bell, Christopher. *American Idolatry: Celebrity, Commodity, and Reality Television.* Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland & Co, 2010.

Bernstein, Samuel. *Mr. Confidential: The Man, His Magazine & The Movieland Massacre that Changed Hollywood Forever.* New York: Walford Press, 2006.

Bingham, Adrian. *Family Newspapers? Sex, Private Lives, and the British Popular Press, 1918-1978.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009.

Braudy, Leo. *The Frenzy of Renown: Fame and Its History*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1986.

Brodsky Jack and Nathan Weiss. *The Cleopatra Papers: A Private Correspondence.* New York: Simon and Schuster, 1963.

Brooks, Peter. *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama, and the Mode of Excess*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976.

Bruck, Connie. *Master of the Game: Steve Ross and the Creation of Time Warner.* New York: Penguin, 1994.

———. *When Hollywood Had a King: The Reign of Lew Wasserman, Who Leveraged Talent Into Power and Influence*. New York: Random House, 2003.

Buscombe, Edward. "Ingrid Bergman: The Face of Authenticity in the Land of Illusion." In *What Dreams Were Made Of: Movies Stars of the 1940s*, edited by Sean Griffin. New York: Routledge, Forthcoming 2011.

Caldwell, John Thornton. "Excessive Style: The Crisis of Network Television." In *Television: The Critical View,* sixth ed., edited by Horace Newcomb. 649-686. New York: Oxford, 2000.

Clurman, Richard M. *To the End of Time: The Seduction and Conquest of a Media Empire.* New York: Touchstone, 1993.

Collins, Sue. "Making the Most out of 15 Minutes." *Television & New Media* 9.2 (2008): 87-110.

Cook, David A. and Adrienne McLean, eds. *Headline Hollywood.* New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2001.

Cook, David A. *Lost Illusions: American Cinema in the Shadow of Watergate and Vietnam, 1970-1979*.

New York: Scribner, 2000.
Currid-Halkett, Elizabeth. *Starstruck: The Business of Celebrity*. New York: Faber and Faber, 2010.
Curnutt, Hugh. "'A Fan Crashing the Party': Exploring Reality-celebrity in MTV's *Real World* Franchise." *Television & New Media* 10.3 (2009): 251-266.
Curry, Ramona. *Too Much of a Good Thing: Mae West as Cultural Icon*. Minneapolis: MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1996.
Davis, Ronald L. *The Glamour Factory.* Dallas, TX: Southern Methodist University Press, 1993.
DeCordova, Richard. "The Emergence of the Star System." In *Stardom: Industry of Desire* edited by Christine Gledhill, 3-16. New York: Routledge, 1991.
———. *Picture Personalities:The Emergence of the Star System in America*. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1990.
Desjardins, Mary. "'Marion never looked lovelier,' *Hedda Hopper's Hollywood* and the negotiation of glamour in post-war Hollywood." *Quarterly Review of Film and Video* 16.3-4 (1997): 421-437.
———. "Systematizing Scandal: *Confidential Magazine,* Stardom, and the State of California." In *Headline Hollywood,* edited by David A. Cook and Adrienne McLean, 206-231. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2001.
Deuze, Mark. "Popular Journalism and Professional Ideology: Tabloid Reporters and Editors Speak Out." *Media, Culture & Society,* 26.6 (2005): 861-882.
Dick, Lesley Anne. "I Just Want to Be Wonderful: The Cultural Legacy of Marilyn Monroe." PhD dissertation, University of Iowa, 1985.
Dimaggio Paul and Paul Hirsch. "Production Organization in the Arts." *American Behavior Scientist* 19.6 (1976): 735-752.
Doherty, Thomas. *Pre-Code Hollywood.* New York: Columbia University Press, 1999.
Dyer, Richard. *Stars*. 2nd ed. London: BFI, 1998.
———. *Heavenly Bodies*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1986.
Eckert, Charles. "Shirley Temple and the House of Rockefeller." In *Stardom: Industry of Desire*, edited by Christine Gledhill, 60-73. New York: Routledge, 1991.
Eells, George. *Hedda and Louella*. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1972.
Elsaesser, Thomas. "Tales of Sound and Fury: Observations on the Family Melodrama." In *Home is Where the Heart Is: Studies in Melodrama and the Woman's Film,* edited by Christine Gledhill, 43-69. London: British Film Institute, 1987.
Elson, Robert. *Time Inc.: The Intimate History of a Publishing Empire*. New York: Atheneum, 1986.
Epstein, Edward Jay. *The Big Picture: The New Logic of Money and Power in Hollywood*. New York: Random House, 2005.
Fairclough, Kirsty. "Fame is a Losing Game: Celebrity Gossip Blogging, Bitch Culture and Postfeminism." *Genders* 48 (2008): http://www.genders.org/g48/g48_fairclough.html.
Feasey, Rebecca. "Reading *Heat*: The Meanings and Pleasures of Star Fashions and Celebrity Gossip." *Continuum: Journal of Media and Cultural Studies* 22.5 (2008): 687-699.
Feeley, Kathleen A. "Louella Parsons and Hedda Hopper's Hollywood: The Rise of the Celebrity Gossip Industry in Twentieth-Century America, 1910–1950." PhD diss., City University of New York, 2004.
Fisher, Eddie. *Eddie: My Life, My Loves.* New York: Harper Collins, 1984.
Fiske, John. "Popularity and the Politics of Information." In *Journalism and Popular Culture*, edited by Dalgrehn, Peter, and Colin Sparks. London: Sage, 1992.
Fleming, E.J. *The Fixers: Eddie Mannix, Howard Strickling, and the MGM Publicity Machine.* New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2001.

Frost, Jennifer. *Hedda Hopper's Hollywood: Celebrity Gossip and American Conservatism* (New York: New York University Press, 2010.

Fuller-Seeley, Kathryn. *At the Picture Show: Small-Town Audiences and the Creation of Movie Fan Culture*. Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institute Press, 1996.

Gaines, Jane. *Contested Culture: The Image, The Voice, and the Law*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991.

Gelley, Ora. "Ingrid Bergman's Star Persona and the Alien Space of *Stomboli*." *Cinema Journal* 47.2 (2008): 26-51

Glynn, Kevin. *Tabloid Culture: Trash Taste, Popular Power, and The Transformation of American Television*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2000.

Gabler, Neal. *Winchell: Gossip, Power, and the Culture of Celebrity*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1995.

Gaines, Jane. "War, Women and Lipstick: Fan Mags in the Forties." *Heresies* 18 (1986): 42–47.

Gamson, Joshua. *Claims to Fame: Celebrity in Contemporary America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994).

Gomery, Douglas. "Talent Raids and Package Deals: NBC Loses Its Leadership in the 1950s." In *NBC: America's Network*, edited by Michele Hilmes, 153-170. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2007.

Gripsrud, Jostein. "The Aesthetics and Politics of Melodrama." In *Journalism and Popular Culture*, edited by Peter Dahlgren and Colin Sparks, 84-95. London: Sage, 1992.

Haviland, John Beard. *Gossip, Reputation, and Knowledge in Zinacantan*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977.

Hermes, Joke. *Reading Women's Magazines*. Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1995.

Hilmes, Michele. *Hollywood and Broadcasting: From Radio to Cable*. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1990.

Hofler, Robert. *The Man Who Invented Rock Hudson: The Pretty Boys and Dirty Deals of Henry Willson* New York: Caroll & Graff, 2005.

Holmes, Su. "Dreaming a Dream: Susan Boyle and Celebrity Culture." *Velvet Light Trap* 65 (2010): 74-76.

———. "Reality Goes Pop!: Reality TV, Popular Music, and Narratives of Stardom in *Pop Idol*." *Television & New Media*, 5.2 (2004): 147-172.

———. "'Starring...Dyer?': Re-visiting star studies and contemporary celebrity culture." *Westminster Papers in Communication and Culture* 2.2 (2005), 6-21.

Holt, Jennifer and Alisa Perren, eds. *Media Industries: History, Theory and Method.* New York: Blackwell, 2009.

Hopper, Hedda. *From Under My Hat*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1952.

Jacobs, Lea. *The Wages of Sin: Censorship and the Fallen Woman Film, 1928-1942*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991.

Kashner, Sam. *The Bad and the Beautiful: Hollywood in the Fifties*. W.W. Norton: New York, 2002.

Keane, John. *The Media and Democracy*. Cambridge, MA: Polity, 1991.

Kelly, Kitty. *Elizabeth Taylor: The Last Star*. New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1982.

Kemper, Tom. *Hidden Talent: The Emergence of Hollywood Agents*. University of California Press: Berkeley, 2010.

Klaprat, Cathy. "The Star as Market Strategy: Bette Davis in Another Light." In *The American Film Industry*, edited by Tino Balio, 351-376. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985.

Klein, Alec. *Stealing Time: Steve Case, Jerry Levin, and the Collapse of Time Warner*. New York: Simon &

Schuster Press, 2003.
Leppert, Alice and Julie Wilson, "Living *The Hills* Life," *Genders* 48 (2008), http:/www.genders.org/g48/g48_leppertwilson.html.
Lev, Peter. *Transforming the Screen: 1950-1959*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 2003.
Lewis, Anthony. *Make No Law: The Sullivan Case and the First Amendment*. New York: Random House, 1991.
Lowenthal, Leo. *Literature, Popular Culture, and Society*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, Inc, 1961.
Mann, Denise. *Hollywood Independents: The Postwar Talent Takeover*. University of Minnesota Press: Minneapolis, 2008.
———. "The Spectacularization of Everyday Life: Recycling Hollywood Stars and Fans in Early Television Variety Shows." In *Star Texts*, edited by Jeremy G. Butler, 333-360. Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 1991.
Manovich, Lev. *The Language of New Media*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2001.
Marill, Alvin. *Robert Mitchum on the Screen*. South Brunswick, New Jersey: A.S. Barnes, 1978.
Marshall, P. David. *Celebrity and Power: Fame in Contemporary Culture*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997.
Mashon, Mike. "NBC, J. Walter Thompson, and the Struggle for Control of Television Programming, 1946-58." In *NBC: America's Network*, edited by Michele Hilmes, 135-152. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2007.
Matelski, Marilyn J. "Jerry Springer and the Wages of Fin-Syn: The Rise of Deregulation and the Decline of TV Talk." *Journal of Popular Culture* 33 (2000): 64-65.
McClintick, David. *Indecent Exposure*. New York: William Morrow and Company, 1982.
McDonald, Paul. *The Star System*. London: Wallflower, 2000.
———. "The Star System: The Production of Hollywood Stardom in the Post-Studio Era." In *The Contemporary Hollywood Film Industry*, edited by Paul McDonald and Janet Wasko, 167-181. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2008.
McLean, Adrienne. *Being Rita Hayworth*. New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2004.
———. "'New Films in Story Form': Movie Story Magazines and Spectatorship," *Cinema Journal* 42.3 (2003): 3-26.
McLeland, Susan. *Fallen Stars: Femininity, Celebrity and Scandal in Post-Studio Hollywood*. PhD diss., University of Texas, 1996.
McLuhan, Marshall. *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1965.
Meyers, Erin. "'Can You Handle My Truth?': Authenticity and the Celebrity Star Image." *Journal of Popular Culture* 42.5 (2009): 890-907.
———. *Gossip Talk and Online Community: Celebrity Gossip Blogs and Their Audiences*. PhD dissertation, University of Massachusetts, 2010.
Monaco, Paul. *The Sixties: 1960-1969*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 2001.
Morreale, Joanne. "Revising the Osbornes: The Hybrid-Reality Sitcom." *Journal of Film & Video* 55.1 (2203): 3-15.
Morton, Paula. *Tabloid Valley: Supermarket News and American Culture*. Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2009.
Mullen, Megan. *Television in the Multichannel Age: A Brief History of Cable Television*. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2008.
Munk, Nina. *Fools Rush In: Steve Case, Jerry Levin and the Unmaking of AOL Time Warner*. New York: Harper Collins, 2004.

Murray, Susan. *Hitch Your Antenna to the Stars: Early Television and Broadcast Stardom* (New York: Routledge, 2005.

Naremore, James. *Acting in the Cinema*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1988.

Negus, Keith. "The Production of Culture." In *Production of Culture/Cultures of Production,* edited by Paul du Gay, 68-104. London: Sage, 1997.

Orgeron, Marsha. "'You Are Invited to Participate': Interactive Fandom in the Age of the Movie Magazine." *Journal of Film and Video* 61.3 (2009): 3-23.

Owczarski, Kimberly A. "Reacting Synergistically: *Batman* and Time Warner." In *The Business of Entertainment: Movies*, edited by Robert Sickels, 55-76. Praeger Press: Westfield, CT, 2009.

Payne, Tom. *Fame: What the Classics Tell Us About Our Cult of Celebrity* (New York: Picador, 2010.

Petersen, Anne Helen. "Celebrity Juice, Not From Concentrate: Perez Hilton, Gossip Blogging, and the New Star Production." *Jump Cut* 51 (2007), http://www.ejumpcut.org/archive jc49.2007/PerezHilton/index.html.

Ponce de Leon, Charles L. *Self-Exposure: Human-Interest Journalism and the Emergence of Celebrity in America, 1890-1940* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002.

Prendowska, Christina. "Marlon Brando as the Auteur." *Literature Film Quarterly* 7.1 (1979): 120-126.

Price, Stephen. *A New Pot of Gold: Hollywood Under the Electric Rainbow, 1980-1989* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2000.

Prichard, Peter. *The Making of McPaper: The Inside Story of USA Today.* Kansas City, MO: Andrews and McMeel, 1987.

Reynolds, Debbie. *If I Knew Then.* New York: Random House, 1962.

Rojek, Chris. *Celebrity*. London: Reaktion Books, 2001.

Rose, Frank. *The Agency: The William Morris Agency and the Hidden History of Show Business*. Harper Collins: New York, 1995.

Rosnow, Ralph L. and Gary Alan Fine. *Rumor and Gossip: The Social Psychology of Hearsay*. New York: Elsevier, 1976.

Sampson, Anthony. "The Crisis at the Heart of Our Media." *British Journalism Review* 7.3 (1996): 42-51.

Schatz, Thomas. *Boom and Bust: American Cinema in the 1940s*(Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997.

———. "The Studio System and Conglomerate Hollywood." In *The Contemporary Hollywood Film Industry*, edited by Paul McDonald and Janet Wasko, 11-42. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2008.

Scott, Henry E. *Shocking True Story: The Rise and Fall of Confidential*. New York: Pantheon Books, 2010.

Sheppard, Dick. *Elizabeth: The Life and Career of Elizabeth Taylor*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1974.

Schudson, Michael. *Discovering the News: A Social History of American Newspapers*. New York: Basic Books, 1978.

Shulman, Irving. *Jackie! The Exploitation of a First Lady*. New York: Trident Press, 1970.

Slater, Robert. *Ovitz: The Inside Story of Hollywood's Most Controversial Power Broker.* New York: McGraw-Hill, 1997.

Slide, Anthony. *Inside the Hollywood Fan Magazine: A History of Star Makers, Fabricators, and Gossip Mongers*. Jackson, MI: University Press of Mississippi, 2010.

Smit, David W. "Marketing Ingrid Bergman." *Quarterly Review of Film & Video*, 22.3 (2005):

237-255.
Sparks, Colin. "Introduction: The Panic over Tabloid News." In *Tabloid Tales*: *Global Debates over Media Standards*, edited by Colin Sparks and John Tullock, 1-40. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2000.
Spoto, Donald. *Notorious: The Life of Ingrid Bergman*. New York: Citadel Press, 1970.
Stacey, Jackie. *Star-Gazing: Hollywood Cinema and Female Spectatorship* (New York: Routledge, 1994).
Staiger, Janet. *Bad Women*: *Regulating Sexuality in Early American Cinema*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995.
———. *Media Reception Studies*. New York: New York University Press, 2005.
———. *Perverse Spectators*. New York: New York University Press, 2000.
———. "Seeing Stars." In *Stardom: Industry of Desire*, edited by Christine Gledhill, 17-29. New York: Routledge, 1991.
Stewart, Pamela J. and Andrew Strathern. *Witchcraft, Sorcery, Rumors, and Gossip*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004.
Stoloff, Sam. "Fatty Arbuckle and the Black Sox: The Paranoid Style of American Popular Culture, 1919-1922." In *Headline Hollywood*, edited by David A. Cook and Adrienne McLean, 56-68. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2001.
Studlar, Gaylyn. "The Perils of Pleasure? Fan Magazine Discourse as Women's Commodified Culture in the 1920s." *Wide Angle* 13 (1991): 6-33.
Swisher, Kara. *There Must Be a Pony In Here Somewhere: The AOL Time Warner Debacle and the Quest for the Digital Future.* New York: Three Rivers, 2003.
Taylor, Elizabeth. *Elizabeth Taylor: An Informal Memoir*. New York: Harper & Row, 1965.
Thompson, Kristen and David Bordwell. *Film History.* 2nd ed. New York: McGraw-Hill, 2003.
Tulloch, John. "The Eternal Recurrence of New Journalism." In *Tabloid Tales: Global Debates Over Media Standards,* edited by Colin Sparks and John Tullock, 131-146. Lantham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2000.
Turner, Graeme. *Understanding Celebrity.* London: Sage, 2004.
Vitek, Jack. *The Godfather of Tabloid: Generoso Pope Jr. and* The National Enquirer. Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky Press, 2008.
Wasko, Janet. "Hollywood and Television in the 1950s: The Roots of Diversification." In *The Fifties: Transforming the Screen, 1950-1959,* edited by Peter Lev, 135-146. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003.
White, Susan. "Marlon Brandon: Actor, Star, Liar." In *Larger than Life: Movie Stars of the 1950s*, edited by R. Barton Palmer, 165-193. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2011.
Wilkie, Jane. *Confessions of an Ex-Fan Magazine Writer.* Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1981.
Williams, Linda. "Melodrama Revised." In *Refiguring Film Genres: History and Theory,* edited by Nick Browne, 42-70. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1998.
Wyatt, Justin. *High Concept: Movies and Marketing in Hollywood*. Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 1994.