

**KEEPING UP WITH THE JENNIFERS:  
ENTERTAINMENT EDITORS AT WOMEN'S MAGAZINES ON EDITORIAL  
DECISION MAKING**

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by  
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## ABSTRACT

### KEEPING UP WITH THE JENNIFERS: ENTERTAINMENT EDITORS AT WOMEN'S MAGAZINES ON EDITORIAL DECISION-MAKING

This professional project is an attempt to answer the following question: How do women's magazine entertainment editors decide which people and topics get covered, in which format, and which don't? In a series of semi-structured interviews, a dozen entertainment editors at eight women's magazines were asked about how they approached their work. The editors described different procedures for award show coverage, stories timed to new releases and celebrity brand deals. Publicists, editors from different departments and social media feedback all had varying levels of impact on their work. As these editors reckoned with the future of their magazines in an increasingly digital world, a new truth emerged: the capital that magazines used to hold when featuring celebrities has shifted and, in some cases, diminished.

By having a more defined understanding of how editors make their decisions, future writers can adjust their pitching strategy for greater success in growing their portfolio, distinguishing themselves from the dozens of publicists and writers flooding editor inboxes. Current magazine editors can use the takeaways from this report to reflect on their work and the future of their industry.

**Key Words:** entertainment journalism, celebrity news, women's magazine, lifestyle journalism, entertainment editor, publicist, social media, influencer, audience, site traffic

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## CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Picture it: you work for a women's magazine. A Slack direct message from your editor about a Kylie Jenner style moment pops up on your phone for the fifth time this month. The repetition tugs at you — how did she become the focus of the women's magazine you work for? How was it decided that she was the best person to cover? What are you and your colleagues gaining (and missing) by covering the Kardashian-Jenner family extensively? Soon enough, the latest Kardashian-Jenner antic is gracing the pages of the magazine website. As you prepare for the next Instagram digital cover launch, you start to ponder why your editor chooses to cover the celebrities they do over and over.

Now, the celebrities that drive entertainment journalism have different inclusion criteria. Where a starring role in a blockbuster film was once required, a viral moment or high follower count could take its place. The ubiquity of the internet requires a re-examination of celebrity and entertainment journalism. Social media is changing the average reader's access to a celebrity, and the glossy magazines that line the walls of newsstands and flank grocery store aisles have different names in their cover lines.

Alternatively, picture your editor's inbox, flooded with pitches from PR representatives for various rising stars. How do they sort through it all? How do they choose which person to uplift? This curiosity led me to want to answer a research question as I enter my career: How do entertainment editors at women's magazines decide what gets covered and what doesn't?

Previously, I'd considered doing a project on all editors at women's magazines, but I chose to narrow the scope to entertainment editors. Not only is this a type of journalism I hope to build a career in, but the scholarship on entertainment journalism in women's magazines is limited, so my project could flesh out academic literature on women's magazines. Previous

literature on women's magazine content focuses on other types of coverage, including health, beauty, commerce, relationships, and fashion. However, as the celebri-fication of women's magazines grows, there is a dearth of scholarly literature on this type of coverage, which I'd contribute to with my project. A needed perspective in this examination is that of the people who direct the content of these publications. Women's magazine editors have a responsibility in their position that could impact their coverage decisions.

The purpose of this research is to understand how entertainment editors at women's magazines make their coverage decisions. In addition to deciding what topics and which celebrities deserve coverage in their publication, how do they approach that coverage? How do they balance the needs of the audience and the needs of the publication? Academic literature on women's magazines often focuses on the evolution of their content over time, providing a textual content analysis (Demarest and Garner, 1992). Lifestyle journalism research tends to focus on the lived experiences of the reporters themselves (Fürsich, 2012). This research is lacking a perspective from organizational leadership in these publications. Academic literature on magazine journalism requires an understanding that these magazines don't exist in a vacuum; people direct their content. In a 2020 analysis of a survey of over 600 lifestyle journalists, around half of the lifestyle journalists admitted they considered publishers' or managers' interests when producing content (Hanusch et. al, 2020). With the established connection between lifestyle journalism and women's magazines, a comprehensive understanding of the editorial process might lie in the decisions of editors and managers.

My professional project's research aimed to answer the following question: How do entertainment editors at women's magazines decide what gets covered and what does not? For the purposes of this project, "entertainment journalism" is a subset of lifestyle journalism.

Entertainment journalism and “culture writing” are often used interchangeably, and they focus on the celebrities at the heart of pop culture topics such as TV, film, theater, books and music. Entertainment journalism also concerns itself with general celebrity news, including social media influencers in the 2010s and 2020s. As my research focuses on the editorial process from the perspective of editors and managers, it’s crucial to understand how their content direction can influence, change and shape what is deemed as “important” in the public agenda.

## CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

Women's magazines first appeared in Britain in the late 17th century. Upon their founding, their primary audience was upper-class literate women, who both had disposable income to spend and time on their hands to indulge in reading (Talbot, 2010). The readership of these publications soon expanded to include middle-class women looking for advice and products to help with domestic duties, among them maintaining a marriage, taking care of children and completing domestic work. One of the first U.S. women's magazines was Godey's *Lady's Book*, first published in Philadelphia in 1830. Breaking onto the national scene in 1867 was *Harper's Bazaar* (then "Bazar"), which remains at high circulation today and is a subject for this project (Tucker et al., 2017). At the turn of the 20th century, The Seven Sisters set the trend for women's magazine popularity among the everyday consumer. These seven publications were *Better Homes and Gardens*, *Family Circle*, *Good Housekeeping*, *Ladies' Home Journal*, *McCall's*, *Redbook*, and *Woman's Day*, which is a subject for this project. The magazines reached a combined circulation of 45 million at their prime (Carmody, 1990).

Over the centuries, women's magazines have evolved to reflect the societies of their consumers, creating content for the "working woman" and the suffragette when the situation called for it. Women's magazines play a crucial role in identity setting, so as the definition of womanhood expands and shifts, it's a requirement to continue to examine these magazines as agents of socialization.

Academic literature on women's magazines often focuses on the evolution of their content over time. Sample topics include the evolution of marriage norms and sexual scripts (Cancian and Gordon, 1988; Kim and Ward, 2004), advertising's purpose and ad strategies in women's magazines (Stevens and Maclaran, 2005), as well as the rise and influence of the

advice industry (Lulu & Alkaff, 2019; Madsen and Ytre-Arne, 2012). However, previous literature fails to adequately address the role of entertainment journalism coverage as defined for this project. Existing articles on entertainment journalism are still trying to justify its place in the industry (Gorin & Dubied, 2011) rather than critically examine its role, let alone its role in women's magazines. Three more common coverage topics I witnessed in previous scholarship are health and wellness, advice, sex and relationships; and the commercialization of the home.

To prepare for research on editors of women's magazines, it is crucial to understand the history and founding of these magazines in the first place. Previous literature sheds a light on what societal needs these magazines tried to fill and which audiences the publications aimed to reach. From a broader perspective, as journalistic agents, it is helpful to examine how they navigate journalism and mass media as gendered institutions. Lifestyle journalism is a common type of coverage for women's magazines. However, it is often relegated to the feminine label of "soft" news, as opposed to the masculine label of "hard" news, traditionally associated with political reporting.

### **Women's Magazines in a Feminist World**

A content analysis of articles published in *Ladies' Home Journal* and *Good Housekeeping* between 1954 and 1982 revealed a change in content that reflected societal change (Demarest and Garner, 1992). The kinds of published articles represented a gradual decline in "themes of women as wives, mothers and homemakers," with a concurrent increase in articles with "political, social and economic themes," emphasizing the increasing commonality of women finding careers outside the home. The time elapsed between changes and the publication of new content would seem to indicate that women's magazines respond to societal change as a mirror. However, traditional roles for women still dominated as articles between the 1950s and

1980s still focused on the “efficient homemaker,” marriage and family. In *Ladies’ Home Journal* articles, “travel and career development,” despite its growth, was still the least represented topic. It was a similar pattern in *Good Housekeeping* with articles on “personal growth and development.” Beyond editorial content, the types of products advertised in women’s magazines remained the same over the three decades, the majority of them being “cooking, cleaning and personal hygiene products” (Demarest and Garner, 1992).

Women’s magazines, as a form of journalism, navigate journalism as a gendered institution. The commercialization of news journalism is connected to the gendering of the practice, especially within the division of topics between male and female journalists. Female journalists would more commonly be assigned to “fluff” pieces and “soft” news (Ruoho and Torkkola, 2018), creating this association that creative topics were feminine in nature, and the maintenance of “women’s” beats even in traditional publications. The examination of journalism as a gendered institution has a need for intersectional feminist communication theory that encompasses class and race (Byerly, 2018). From a class perspective, who has access to the products peddled in women’s magazines? From a race perspective, who is the “girlboss?” Are women of color the feminists whose causes are so heavily commodified? The knowledge of commercial influences on feminist pop culture (Banet-Weiser and Portwood-Stacer, 2017) can provide a more holistic assessment of these girlboss moments in modern women’s magazines.

### **The Gendering of Lifestyle Journalism**

Lifestyle journalism and women’s magazines, due to the gendering of certain beats, are closely connected. Lifestyle journalism has many different definitions and names. The term is often used interchangeably with “service journalism,” “human interest stories” and “soft news.” The common features of lifestyle journalism are “dimensions of review, advice and

consumerism,” (Fürsich, 2012). These dimensions are connected to journalism’s purpose within a public forum, especially treating advice as problem-solving, in which “audiences or affected parties define problems and offer solutions” and lifestyle journalists serve as “mediators of a community of lay experts” (Fürsich, 2012).

The topic areas that comprise lifestyle journalism are often covered in women’s magazines, including fashion and beauty; health, wellness and fitness; food, cuisine and cooking; living and gardening; parenting and family; and people and celebrity (Hanusch, 2019). Entertainment journalism lives within the “people and celebrity” topic area of lifestyle journalism. Entertainment journalists are focused on the people — the actors, directors, models, singers — who drive the entertainment industry. The majority of lifestyle journalists view their role as inspiring entertainers (creating content to help audiences relax) or service providers (promoting lifestyle industries and providing advice to audiences). The gender of a journalist is also an indicator of how they view their role, with women “significantly more likely to want to provide direction to people’s lives than their male counterparts” (Hanusch, 2019). Lifestyle journalism is steadily adding itself to a list of socialization tools, providing advice to consumers the way a friend or family member might.

Since the 1970s, lifestyle journalism has undergone an economical shift, now addressing audiences as consumers, and recognizing advertising and PR efforts as a necessary evil to fund their publication (Hanusch et al, 2017). This coincides with the academic dismissal of lifestyle journalism as impure due to commercial influences, and had contributed to a limited scholarly conversation on the subject.

### **Constructing Identity and Persona**

As the definition of womanhood continues to evolve, it's also necessary to examine agents of socialization such as women's magazines. Women's magazines impact identity-forming in varied ways. Even in a non-American context, women's magazines play a role in defining femininity. In women's magazines in Singapore, the tolerated social perceptions of women are defined by who they're in relation to. A textual analysis of feminine traits (emotion, gentleness, kindness, awareness, understandability, warmth, sex appeal, slimness) and masculine traits (independence, dominance, active, competition, decisiveness) in popular Singaporean magazines, found that "positive depictions of conventional feminine themes prevailed in women's magazines." This overrepresentation of feminine traits implied that "women should play their traditional role" in relation to others (e.g. workplaces, social and economic events). In relation to the self, more masculine traits of independence and decisiveness were tolerated. (Basnyat and Chang, 2014).

Celebrity journalism is closely tied to the creation of identity. The very nature of celebrity involves self-identity in the public sphere. As "public personas became powerful cultural signifiers and props of the socio-economic and political systems in which we live," celebrity journalism plays a role in maintaining this persona construction (Usher, 2020). Repeated coverage of these cultural signifiers solidify their importance in the public eye. When celebrity journalism's role in persona construction is placed in juxtaposition with women's magazines and their shaping of feminine identity, the resulting intersection is a salient area of study, one this project hopes to contribute to.

### **Finding and Defining Entertainment Journalism**

The dearth of literature on entertainment journalism might stem from a previous scholarly belief that "journalism is incompatible with the coverage of celebrity issues, and that the

juxtaposition of these two nouns demonstrates that journalism cannot be considered to be upholding its true purpose if it is dealing with celebrity” (Conboy, 2013). In previous literature, it is difficult to find an agreed-upon coinage of the term “entertainment journalism.” However, based on previous studies that employ this term, I can infer that entertainment journalism refers to reporting with a focus on celebrity coverage (Meeuf, 2014), and the popular media that made that celebrity famous, often film and TV (Meeuf, 2014), music (Oredein et al., 2020), or social media influencers, categorized as microcelebrities (Usher, 2020). “Celebrity journalism,” also commonly used in studies on the topic, is tangentially related (Usher, 2020; Conboy, 2013). While both entertainment journalism and celebrity journalism focus on people of note, celebrity journalism does not explicitly require a pop culture connection.

Music is just one of the genres entertainment journalism concerns itself with. When examining hip-hop entertainment journalism, a 2020 study moved beyond what is analyzed in the music and music videos to address the coverage of this content, finding that “a significant portion of hip-hop journalism communications contain violence.” This accelerated an already prevalent depiction of violence in the music itself. Within the different approaches to hip-hop entertainment journalism, “news articles depicted more consequences, whereas interview articles and radio interviews depicted more positive portrayals,” (Oredein et al., 2020). As I prepare interview questions about how the entertainment editors approach reactive (responding to news in the industry) vs. proactive (setting up interviews, seeking out rising stars) coverage, this is a guiding study.

Examining prevalent celebrity journalism outlet *TMZ* reveals how celebrity news maintains relevance and profitability in the digital age: market-driven journalism. *TMZ* caters to its audience with tenacity and a wide range of subject matter (real estate, politics, feuds, bizarre

behavior) outside of popular media (Kalika & Ferrucci, 2019). The outlet's focus on providing the first looks at celebrity behavior is a blueprint for how entertainment journalists might approach breaking news, as well as discern which leads to follow.

Entertainment journalism provides a platform for maintaining or deconstructing Hollywood's stereotypes, as explored by Russell Meeuf in a 2014 study. The coverage of Peter Dinklage in entertainment journalism called into question the celebrity system and the structural and cultural barriers it enforces (Meeuf, 2014). A continued examination of celebrity selection in entertainment journalism allows for deeper understanding of who is directing this platform.

The increasing use of celebrity coverage in women's magazines has been referred to as a "celebri-fication" (Hendrickson, 2005). A 2005 study of this phenomenon identified "micro-level decision-making regarding celebrity placement in women's magazines" from editors, describing how celebrities started showing up in women's magazines because of the "illusion of substance" over a supermodel. Despite how the publicist who manages the celebrity might or might not have their desires correspond with the wants of the magazine, the inclusion of celebrities helps with boosting the bottom line, especially in cover stories (Hendrickson, 2005). Editors described celebrity as the "only constantly evolving section of women's magazines," and following this evolution is yet another reason why women's magazines are a notable place to study celebrity and entertainment journalism.

Previous research on the existence of celebrity in women's magazines focuses on the existence of celebrity in magazine journalism from a print focus (Hendrickson, 2005). Although this is a thorough foundational document for the subject I wish to study, it requires an updated understanding for how these publications navigate the digital age. The dominance of social media has changed how celebrities communicate with the public, artists often having their own

webpage, Twitter or Facebook account rather than an impossible-to-get phone number (Silva, 2018). These new digital sources “play an important role in the overall editorial, business and engagement media’s strategy,” highlighting the importance of updating research for the digital age.

The advancement of the Internet and social media since 2005 has given way to new metrics such as SEO and engagement on social platforms. These metrics can easily guide editorial decision-making due to their impact on how readers find content. My project will contribute to this newer understanding. Further research on women’s magazines and lifestyle journalism tends to focus on textual content analysis. This research is lacking a perspective from organizational leadership at these publications. It requires an understanding that these magazines don’t exist in a vacuum; there are people who direct their content. The purpose of my future original research is on managers and editors running these magazines. I intend to understand their perception of the decisions to be made, as well as what pressures they may feel.

### CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

With a series of interviews, I aimed to answer the following question: How do women's magazine entertainment editors decide which people and topics get covered, in which format, and which don't?

For the purposes of this project, an "entertainment editor" could be both an editor who holds that specific title and one who oversees entertainment coverage without that title. I used circulation metrics to identify specific publications to focus on. Publications with a remaining print arm were either classified as women's magazines by their media kit or by the Alliance for Audited Media (AAM). These print magazines have also broken 500,000 in paid & verified circulation, according to Alliance for Audited Media, and carry a dedicated entertainment or celebrity news vertical. In an effort to include digital-only publications that might not have AAM circulation numbers filed, I've measured those by publications that have broken 10 million in monthly unique site visitors and carry a dedicated entertainment or celebrity news vertical. Every editor I interviewed works or worked for a magazine or a magazine-style digital outlet (one that planned digital issues, employed a magazine-style editorial approach, etc). I contacted 27 different entertainment editors at national women's magazines. The public nature of magazine mastheads made it easier to pick who could be a potential interviewee. I also reached out to entertainment editors who had left their role at a women's magazine within the past five years as the recency of their insight was still helpful.

From the pool of editors whom I contacted, I interviewed 12. I feel that my intent to keep my interview respondents anonymous in my final report helped the number of interviews I was able to secure. As opposed to group interviews, I conducted them individually to prioritize

anonymity and ensure lack of data loss. The majority of editors I interviewed worked at outlets that no longer print or never printed issues, but three of them work at outlets that still distribute print copies. There was a combination of editors from legacy media outlets and editors from digital native publications. I organized 11 of my interviews via email and one via Twitter Direct Messaging.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted between early February and mid-April 2023. The semi-structured nature of the method uses the knowledge from my literature review without creating self-fulfilling prophecies in the editors' responses. My interview questions were largely based on understanding editors' perspectives on individual decisions. This allowed for a deeper analysis of the motives behind editorial decisions as they varied from person to person. As responses to open-ended questions, editors explained how they view their role in coverage decision making. I preferred the flexibility and opportunity to ask follow-ups though I wanted to keep the base questions similar.

My questions helped me establish the editors' main responsibilities and priorities, before diving into more procedural descriptions. I asked about typical entertainment coverage topics the publication gravitates to, how editors deal with publicists and what makes them likely to cover a certain person. I asked some editors to share specific stories about the difficulty of getting a celebrity for a cover story, but this question was quickly incompatible with the anonymity of their participation. The editors were often forthcoming but would hesitate on naming something so specific that it would identify them through context (e.g. a specific cover star).

Given my residence in New York City for the duration of my research, I was able to complete three of my interviews in person as many of these publications are headquartered in

New York City. The remaining nine interviews took place virtually over Zoom. Interviews lasted between 25 and 58 minutes, and following each interview, I ran the recording through Otter.ai to transcribe them. As I reviewed quotes and statements from editors, I separated procedural answers, and I identified similar and differing opinions on the necessity and definition of celebrity. I initially anticipated statements about audience influence, discerning between different types of pitches, financial influence and SEO. Some of these topics still arose during the interview, but there was a far greater focus on the future capital and influence of these magazines. After learning about concrete motivations described by the editors, as well as any specific measures used to guide coverage, there's an opportunity to share my findings on how their editorial process comes together in a thematic analysis.

## CHAPTER IV: PROFESSIONAL ANALYSIS

Over the course of interviews with a dozen entertainment editors at national women's magazines, I dived into the editor's mind, hearing and recording their perspectives on what drives their work. There's plenty that they're responsible for covering, from award shows to premieres to celebrity brand deals. Several of them are the primary site traffic drivers for their outlet, so thoughtful approaches to their work are crucial to the rest of their team. I gradually came to understand the "why" behind the "who" of celebrity and entertainment journalism.

Several factors make these editors more or less likely to cover a certain celebrity, TV show, movie or album release. Due to their lack of accessibility, events that are more tied to an in-person location and are not televised, such as live theater and art exhibits, are not the main purview of these national women's magazines. Previously high site traffic, household name status and viral or trending moments are all viable reasons. When those metrics fail them, there's a natural instinct they develop for discerning who will capture their audience's interest. Beyond their own instinct, there are external voices that influence a magazine's coverage, whether coming from inside the publication via supervisors and other departments, from their audience via social media comments, or from publicists who control access to the celebrities they cover in the first place. Layered over all of this discernment is a changing criteria for who a celebrity is, and a change in necessity for them to speak to magazines in the first place.

Below, I present what I've learned in answering the following question: How do women's magazine entertainment editors decide which people and topics get covered, in which format, and which don't?

One contingent of my subjects' participation was that they remain anonymous. As such, I've assigned pseudonyms to each subject for reader accessibility, outlined in the chart below.

I'm also referring to all of my subjects with the singular plural pronoun "they" to remain gender-neutral in identification.

<b>Name (Pseudonyms)</b>	<b>Role</b>	<b>Years In Entertainment Editor Role</b>	<b>Print/Digital or Digital-only Outlet</b>
Sutton	(former) Associate Editor (culture, entertainment, fashion)	1.5	Print/Digital
Parker	Senior Entertainment Editor	1	Digital-only
Jamie	News Editor (celebrity beauty)	2	Digital-only
Cameron	Associate News Editor (celebrity beauty)	4	Digital-only
Kirby	TV Editor	1	Digital-only
Sloan	(former) Senior Entertainment Editor	2	Digital-only
Quinn	Entertainment Director	4	Digital-only
Harper	Entertainment Director	4	Print/Digital
Kendall	Deputy Editor (former Digital Entertainment Editor)	6	Digital-only
Blair	Assistant Editor, Celebrity and Entertainment	1	Digital-only
Avery	Entertainment Editor	2	Print/Digital
Riley	(former) Entertainment Editor	3	Digital-only

## **Process and Procedure**

In my interviews, I asked for clarification on procedure and approach for specific, yet common coverage topics in entertainment journalism.

Women's magazine entertainment editors focus on coverage of the "tentpole" awards, namely the Oscars, Grammys and Emmys. The majority of editors cited that as women's magazines, they're not "trade publications" and leave in-depth coverage of the awards results themselves to the likes of *The Hollywood Reporter*, *Variety*, *Billboard* or *Entertainment Weekly*. Instead, editors direct their focus on the red carpet. Sutton mentioned checking what a particular celebrity is wearing, who dressed them, who they arrived with and who they're dating. Kirby emphasized coverage of surprises, such as a pregnancy reveal or a couple who "hard launched their relationship on the red carpet." Access to a list of nominees and presenters ahead of time helps these editors prepare shells of stories in order to stay on top of red-carpet news.

Second-day coverage of these events often capitalizes on publicists who reach out to provide behind-the-scenes looks at red-carpet fashion. Cameron mentioned this is also a way for celebrities who might not get regular coverage at the outlet to get a one-off piece if their look is particularly notable. However, celebrities who regularly perform well at an outlet are likely to be the first priority to be covered at an awards show. This focus on fashion made the Met Gala fair game for several editors.

The declining viewership of award shows over the years has changed editors' approach to their work. Where they used to be "all hands on deck" operations as Jamie and Sloan put it (Quinn affectionately referred to it as a "war room"), there's now a greater focus on next-day coverage of trending moments, from an impactful speech to sweet, humanizing moments on the

red carpet. As a women's magazine editor, Kendall is constantly watchful for history-making moments for women as well. Kirby acknowledges them as cultural moments but feels that readers "just want the recaps." The highlights are what's still worth covering as Kirby says their readers want to experience the award shows through Kirby's coverage rather than watch it themselves. Sloan remarked how unique second-day coverage of these award shows allows the outlet to "cut through the noise" of all the other people covering an event, and how the delay in coverage is also necessary given smaller staff sizes across the board in women's media. "It's really about thinking smarter and trying to find those Easter eggs and the things you may have missed as a person at home consuming content," Sloan says.

Entertainment coverage exists at the intersection of celebrity and the projects that create or maintain their fame. TV show finales, movie premieres and album drops are all time pegs for potential celebrity (often called "talent") interviews. Entertainment editors are often given access to "screeners" — advance footage of upcoming TV or movie releases — in order to gauge coverage potential. Even without screeners, publicists will share information about their client's role in a new project ahead of time. Publicists get to generate excitement for their client's work, and editors can use this access for long-lead planning. For the upcoming film *Barbie*, releasing in July 2023, Parker described how the magazine is already asking for interviews with the film's makeup and costume teams. Parker anticipates that the film's stars, Margot Robbie and Ryan Gosling, will be too in demand for cover interviews but wants to focus on some other members of the star-studded cast.

Jamie prefers to do less coverage timed to the release, and instead let projects come out, assess popularity and then determine whether they're worth covering. Both Sutton and Avery described how their team would approach some shows and films with what they call a "swarm,"

— several articles covering the show from several different angles. It could be a combination of talent interviews, a trend piece connected to the show, a fashion story, explainers on the show’s likelihood of longevity, and even more. Other shows, however, would just have one or two pieces associated with it, perhaps a couple of recaps or straightforward reviews. For Sutton, deciding which approach to take depends on the potential audience size and the “talent” — a word commonly used by editors to describe celebrities.

The size of the audience for a particular show can even affect long-lead planning. Harper explained that for shows with huge audiences, a la *Stranger Things*, *Game of Thrones* and *Euphoria*, there’s bigger potential for online chatter and thus, more “wiggle room” in timing strategy. “For *Euphoria*, if [the publicists] announce a release date four months before, and we already have a cover booked for the series premiere, that’s a big enough series that we would book someone pegged to the finale,” Harper says.

Sloan pays close attention to their team’s capacity when deciding which new releases to cover. “If The Weeknd announces that he has a new single dropping, [trade publications] are going to cover that instantaneously,” Sloan says. “I’m not going to assign that because I don’t have the bandwidth for it. What I will look for though, is that when that song does come out, my team will dissect the lyrics, for example, or the visuals, and we’ll say, what are the theories behind what The Weeknd or any celebrity is trying to tell us, and how does it connect to his discography?”

Partnership with a particular brand is another common coverage scenario. The announcement of said partnership usually influences the timing of when a celebrity’s publicist will reach out to a magazine for coverage. It’s then up to these editors to decide whether it’s worth the effort. Jamie explained that if the product is coming from a brand that’s a priority for

their audience or their commerce team, the interview is more likely to be accepted, but similarly to Sloan, Jamie is wary of the push on bandwidth for what is typically a 10- to 20- minute interview. For Sutton, it depends on whether the celebrity and brand pairing makes sense. “Selena Gomez and Rare Beauty make sense, Rihanna and Savage X Fenty, even Kendall Jenner and her 818 Tequila,” Sutton says. “Sure, we can talk about your tequila, that’s fine. But if Sabrina Carpenter is trying to sell her pimple patches, maybe, but is there probably a better way, a less weird promote-y way that we could talk to this person? Probably so.”

SEO (search engine optimization) is a commonly cited metric for directing coverage. Avery, when planning entertainment coverage, would work side-by-side with the magazine’s SEO manager and peruse a release calendar, anticipating what topics readers would be searching for that hadn’t been covered yet. There’s a near-universal effort for digital publications to be one of the top search results for any given topic. Kirby, however, anticipates a decrease in prominence for SEO, much to their surprise. Google, the search engine most in mind for SEO, changes its algorithm too frequently for editors to establish a salient strategy, creating an “inconsistent space.” Kirby and their team are making SEO less of a priority and focusing more on having their stories perform well on social media as it provides “more consistent returns than Google.” Future studies could examine which metric, if any, would replace SEO as data to guide digital journalists.

As I spoke to these editors about how they decide who to cover and what they have to consider in the reporting, editing and producing process, I also wanted to learn what, if anything, would be considered a dealbreaker for covering a certain star. “Cancel culture” is a phenomenon born out of celebrity, exacerbated by internet fame. Across the board, controversy or scandal involving that celebrity was generally unfavorable, but editors had different opinions on what

level was necessary to say no, and for how long a no could last. Controversy could mean anything from perceived arguments with another star to hateful rhetoric such as racism and antisemitism, and the two came with different results. Blair's outlet is quick to cover celebrities in an uplifting way, but when a celebrity is involved in a scandal, Blair will withdraw regardless of popularity, and "stop covering them in a fun context." Sutton explained that "if someone has done something legitimately that is an issue, then there's no question" as to if they'll be blocked from coverage. Sutton has no interest in furthering damaging perspectives. Parker addressed that their magazine isn't a "hard news outlet," and though the magazine focuses on the lighter side of entertainment, that responsibility of picking and choosing how to cover things still makes things difficult. Kirby and Harper both described steering clear of what's "speculative," as they're not in the business of rumors. Both Jamie and Cameron drew the line at "racist rhetoric" that the fame of certain celebrities could not excuse. Parker faced this concern in deciding how to cover Kanye West, a rap superstar who has become infamous for his hateful and ignorant online comments. "Yes, he's a newsworthy figure, but what is our responsibility as the media to not give him a platform to perpetuate this anti-semitism?" Parker says. For Sloan, the responsibility to their audience comes first. Sloan looks to provide an "uplifting, positive experience" while providing information and resources, especially for their younger audience, who Sloan thinks are still "discovering the world."

Some star power, Jamie described, is too powerful to fully cancel. "The cycle of celebrity is so stinking quick now that it's come to the point that there are a lot of people who will find themselves in hot water over small things for like a couple of days at a time," Jamie says. "For instance, Kim Kardashian, there was an instance where over the summer she was in headlines for ignoring water drought rules. She was using way too much water and breaking the law in

California and facing no repercussions for it. In that circumstance, we just kind of didn't cover Kim Kardashian for a few days, because you can't cancel Kim Kardashian, you know?"

Harper pointed out the economic side effects of cancel culture, and how having dealbreakers for specific people can be financially damaging. "We have to be cognizant of what works for our bottom line, and we want jobs," Harper says. "It would literally kill some people's livelihoods if people were like 'Boycott XYZ brand because they featured XYZ person.' So Zendaya? Always. Easy to get behind. We all love her. We like to look for unproblematic queens."

### **The Voices in Their Ear**

I asked each of the editors I spoke to how they dealt with publicists in their inbox, each of them acknowledging it as a standard part of their jobs. Editor-publicist relationship building is a major part of their work, and it's frustrating for them when pitches from PR professionals seem untargeted or irrelevant. Those emails are quick to be deleted, especially for Sutton, who said they receive hundreds of emails a day. Jamie says they spend a "solid 30%" of their day deleting emails, in particular, irrelevant product pitches. The celebrity interview pitches they do get are "usually people who are in a guest role on a television show that you probably don't watch. Most of the time they're not super big names." Curated, short messages that mention interviewing or a punchy headline in the subject line of the e-mail are more likely to catch an editor's attention. Sloan pointed out that when a desired celebrity is in a press cycle, the editor then has to make the best case to the publicist for their outlet being the one to interview talent, "always trying to be, in some capacity, first." Parker says they "don't trust a pitch from a publicist" and aren't a fan of being pitched "talent that's up-and-coming." They explained that they don't have to be the editor

pleasing and negotiating with publicists, but did not specify who on their team fills that role, if anyone. Harper, meanwhile, responds to every email they receive, even if it's with a no, to make the publicists who reach out feel heard. "It takes a lot of work to put together a really comprehensive pitch," Harper says. "So not only do I try to get back to everyone, even if it's a no, I also try to give them a reason why it's a no. It seems like a lot of work, but it really helps foster solid relationships within the industry." Sloan did not echo this practice, but did point out that because they work for a magazine-style outlet (as opposed to a newsier outlet), they have much closer relationships with publicists. "So you never want to burn a bridge with somebody who may help you book another celebrity that is of value to you," Sloan says.

Although some of the editors I interviewed work at outlets that still operate a print arm, all of them have a digital and social media presence. This opens them to direct commentary from their social media audience. The editors are aware of this fact but are split on how much anticipating that response should affect their content. Sloan is very careful to avoid offending readers but isn't afraid to share a contentious opinion, so long as the subject is harmless. "We'll say, to give you an example, 'Rihanna had the best Superbowl performance ever,'" Sloan says. "And that is a very polarizing statement. That's fine. We're not hurting anybody by saying that. It's one writer's opinion. But yeah, people are going to be mad in the comments. And we're not going to interfere because it's freedom of expression, and people can comment on whatever they want." Quinn had a similar response to the sheer number of comments they could receive on any one post. "It's hard because there's so much noise about everything, right?" Quinn says. So we can post a cover on Instagram, and you can look through 10,000 comments, and then you'll see someone be like, 'That's a weird thing,' or 'What is she wearing?'"

These editors don't tend to make their decisions in a vacuum. Other staff members, from supervising editors to other departments, often weigh in to help with decision-making. Parker described how checking in with other editors on staff exposes them to a variety of knowledge and experiences, while one editor is really into reality television, another is informed on soap operas. Jamie prefers temperature checks with their team on newer celebrities before going forward as they trust their team's pop culture knowledge. "[You're] only one person, your eyes can only go so many places," Jamie says. "If I don't know who someone is, I don't find that to be a particularly big deal. If I've got 20 very pop culture-savvy editors being like, 'I have no clue who this person is,' it's probably not worth your time." Inter-department collaboration makes for a more holistic approach to coverage, and Sloan is quick to check with editors from different verticals (dating, lifestyle) to ensure that angles beyond entertainment are explored. Social editors, meanwhile, use their knowledge of how things perform on different platforms to help indicate the angle of a certain story.

### **The "Why"s of the "Who"s**

Celebrity and entertainment news is driven by the "who." Household names are a driving factor for several editors for their easy recognition. It often comes down to the question: How famous are they? Jamie says that even with an amazing headline and hard work to make a post likely to perform, celebrity news comes down to who the story is about. Interestingly enough, several editors referenced "The Jennifers" — Jennifer Lopez and Jennifer Aniston, and occasionally Jennifer Hudson and Jennifer Garner — as focus points of routine coverage. Sutton, Parker, Jamie and Riley all referenced The Jennifers and their ubiquity and reliability. "It's like Jennifer Lopez sneezes and we're writing about it," Parker says. "Our audience is so thirsty for

anything that they do.” For Jamie, the decision to focus on household names is budget-driven as well. With a limited budget for freelance work every day, they can only assign so many stories, and if “on that particular day, Hailey Bieber, Jennifer Lopez and Megan Thee Stallion are all doing things, that’s just what has to get covered.”

This repetitive coverage sometimes causes stress for these editors as they worry about who or what they miss by giving the platform to the same celebrities over and over. The people who “click” routinely take priority, for better or for worse. The Kardashians are another example. Kirby mentioned how on their staff, one writer is on the “Kardashian beat” and responsible for knowing everything about them, as whatever they do “is a big deal.” This constant coverage of the Kardashians doesn’t always sit well with Jamie, however. “These are people that are known for enforcing really unrealistic beauty standards, promoting products that are wildly fatphobic, a la flat tummy tea in the early 2010s,” Jamie says. “These are people who have appropriated Black looks time and time and time again. And yet they’re that powerful, and they’re so influential that as a women’s publication, you ultimately have no choice business-wise, letting them have the microphone.”

A recognizable name isn’t always necessary, however, if the star in question has a recognizable moment. The advent of social media gave way to viral moments and trending topics, and those celebrities with a high following on social media or who did something (be it a project or a scandal) trend-worthy can earn the spotlight. When Kanye West was seen with Julia Fox, Parker tested the waters by covering the latter’s dramatic eyeliner look. “All of a sudden, it’s like we can’t stop covering Julia Fox because our audience is responding so heavily to her, even though we wouldn’t have probably picked her out of the lineup to cover in the first place,” Parker says.

Sutton described these stars, who “are not necessarily household names,” but can become the center of conversation because of a popular project they’re involved in or a viral moment on TikTok. Sloan works for a digital magazine and is constantly searching for people who will “get the attention of people on Twitter,” often using the Twitter account Pop Crave as a benchmark.

Kirby pointed out that they felt one of their outlet’s main responsibilities should be to expose their audience to something novel or under-the-radar. A lack of traffic history is not a death sentence, as Kirby sees the merit in branching out and challenging their audience. The upcoming release of a project (a TV show or movie premiere, an album drop, a series finale) can also drive celebrity selection in entertainment coverage. Sutton pointed out that, though they don’t prefer the term, this is where “B-list or C-list celebrities” get to have their moment. Rather than suggest interviews purely on personal interest in a certain person, Sutton keeps abreast of upcoming releases and uses that to consider talent on a project basis.

Site traffic and audience engagement also help editors discern who to cover. Several of the editors I interviewed described themselves as data-driven. Riley says a heavy traffic stream is a necessity, as that often translates to ad sales and revenue for the publication. Revisiting engagement metrics like time spent on page and page views helps Parker and Kendall determine who performs well. Regularly, celebrities who perform well or lead to numerous clicks are covered again and again. “We were talking about Florence Pugh the other day,” Kirby says. “Anytime we do a fashion story on her, that gets lots of clicks. And so it's just like anything she does, it's going to be big, so we just keep going for it, right? Our audiences care about these celebrities, they've proven it to us by clicking our articles, interacting with our social media pages when we do post about them.” Kendall describes this repetitive coverage as a bit of a “chicken-or-egg situation,” however, as some things keep performing because it keeps being

covered. They prefer a chance to get “new information,” by testing the waters, seeing the value of knowing what doesn’t work, too. Riley described that as you’re publishing, you start seeing more of what hits and what doesn’t. Over time, the scope of your coverage narrows and defines, which makes the job less daunting than covering the whole Internet of famous people.

For editors like Sutton, engagement might not be the main driver, but instead a guideline for expectations. Sutton will check to see how a celebrity performed on the site before considering talking to them again but doesn’t let it sway their decision too much. “Stories can perform very, very differently depending on the time period that they’re in, what’s going on in the news cycle or what that talent is doing on that given week,” Sutton says. Jamie described a pressure on the celebrity news portion of her outlet to be “the backbone of the traffic of the site,” and without delivering it, it becomes “a problem for everybody” by decreasing traffic to all of the other stories. Cameron checks on interesting angles to make something about a new celebrity pop, but prefers to see how someone has performed with their audience in the past.

Several editors cited an internal instinct, developed over years of experience writing and editing in entertainment journalism. Parker follows that instinct, and Cameron’s editor trusts Cameron enough to just have them pitch people. Quinn says, “Through my general knowledge of pop culture, and film and TV or books, I’ll be able to say, ‘I know this is going to be big. So this is something we should be covering, it’s going to be in the zeitgeist, and we should jump on it in whatever way that may be.’” That inkling drives which up-and-comers they’ll give a chance with an article. Their fellow colleagues trust that instinct — which Kendall called their “Spidey Sense” — and follow these editors’ leads when it comes to star potential. A “cult following,” or a “spark” as Sutton put it, helps indicate an audience for this person or the possibility for a bigger one.

The faces of different celebrities that grace magazine covers and website homepages can send an important message about who the outlet views as important and influential. Repetition of the same faces (or same kinds of faces) can create a homogeneity that Sutton calls “boring.” In terms of combatting this homogeneity, some editors preferred not to quantify it, finding it a natural instinct and outcome of conversations had on staff. Others, however, found that quantifying and mapping representation in their coverage was the best strategy. For Sloan, that looks like abiding by the 15% pledge: 15% of the projects they report on “came from directors, actors, screenwriters, who had some contribution to the project that would then help consider that project diverse.” Sloan’s aim is that every single story they publish “doesn't feel like it's really trying to reach just one reader, being aware that there are many different types of readers and entry points for a story.” Harper, meanwhile, would create a map of the eight issues they put together in a year. “I move people's headshots around so that I can have a visual cue of, are we hitting certain marks in terms of body diversity, ethnicity,” Harper says. Cover stories at Harper’s outlet take up a lot of print real estate, so they aim for balance in representation with other pages. “I try to do my best to make sure that the other pages — the six-page story, the four-page story — are people of color, queer talent, et cetera,” Harper says. As Jamie mentioned, however, the cycle of celebrity is unpredictable, and Jamie finds themselves at the whim of when celebrities decide to be active. “So then you get a week where you're like, ‘All right, this is looking like a lot of Bella Hadids up in here. We need to branch out,’” Jamie says. “And luckily, that doesn't happen very often. Mostly because Lizzo is our savior who posts an amazing look every single day.”

Editors from underrepresented backgrounds described themselves as naturally gravitating toward covering people who reflect their background. “I am a Black writer, and I don't have any

problems with people putting “Black” in front of whatever I do because pretty much anything I do, I think about Black people,” Cameron says. “So in terms of actual celebrities that I care to keep up with, most of them are Black and typically Black women or Black non-men for the most part.” Kirby, as a Latina editor, says they naturally follow shows about Latinx characters because of familiar experiences. “I want to watch them and see how the media is portraying them and how that's evolving,” Kirby says. Quinn says their South Asian background exposes them to more diverse talent than some of what’s in the mainstream, and pitches that showcase something different from what’s repeatedly covered always interest them.

As we discussed entertainment coverage at these various publications, some editors acknowledged a feeling of fortune in being able to work for a women’s magazine. Quinn uses this opportunity to not only stay on top of pop culture and entertainment coverage but support multi-hyphenate women who are breaking glass ceilings. They found the content they created and organized to be inspirational, uplifting and entertaining, which they didn’t think was possible everywhere. “The joy of writing for and about women is that women are interested in everything,” Sutton says. “That is not how people have always thought of women and their interests, but it is the truth.” Riley echoed this sentiment, and added that everything they worked on at their outlet felt “purpose-driven.”

“Even if it wasn’t writing this groundbreaking feature about this Congresswoman who’s doing this great thing, even if you’re just writing about Blake Lively wearing a cute dress, you’re doing it in a way that’s optimistic,” Riley says. “You’re doing it in a way that doesn’t put anything bad into the world.”

## The Internet's Impact on Celebrity Journalism

Traditional avenues to fame such as starring in a movie or TV show, signing with a major record label or publishing a best-selling book are still go-to indicators of prominence. However, internet celebrities such as social media influencers are increasing in importance. Editors were split on how much to include these internet celebrities, but most acknowledged the change. Kirby cited the Kardashian family as the “first example of the influencer celebrity,” and with their TV show *Keeping Up With The Kardashians*, which ran from 2007–2021, they became ingrained in the mainstream. It’s a path to Kirby's “traditional sense of celebrity,” and it set a precedent that the D’Amelio family (of TikTok superstar Charli D’Amelio) followed with their series *The D’Amelio Show*, a move that Kirby says made Charli D’Amelio more desirable to cover. “I think that if you are a person in 2023, and you're not identifying influencers, TikTok specifically, as celebrities, you're doing a disservice to your reader because that is just intrinsically how that industry has evolved and is evolving,” Sloan says.

Publications with an older audience — those of the Gen X and Millennial generations, as opposed to Gen Z — were less eager to include influencer coverage. Quinn says their outlet’s audience is the millennial woman, and they are not necessarily “in the business of up-and-comers,” preferring to focus on more established stars. “So, the 19-year-olds who are getting mega-fame through TikTok are not necessarily ever really going to be one of our cover stars,” Quinn says.

As editors described what the celebrities wanted out of the reporting experience, logistical difficulties arose as a common concern. A difference in preference for length of interview, time management, and budget can all be stressors on talent interviews. Particularly for the publications that still print, real estate in an issue when there’s only eight to 12 issues a year

is not given up easily. In Sutton's experience, sometimes talent will sit down to speak for several hours, but others want to be done in 20 minutes, simply to promote their project and leave.

"Obviously one of those is a lot more beneficial to a story than the other," Sutton says. "You learn to work with what you get."

The editors I interviewed are abreast of the change in the women's magazine's position when it comes to a celebrity's press arsenal. "In the 90s and early 2000s magazines were really shaping culture and who a celebrity was and what their narrative is," Quinn says. Where they once would've been the introductory conduit of a star's inner life to the curious populace, individual social media accounts have removed the need for that liaison. Social media provides a new way for celebrities to gauge the loyalty, scope and strength of their fandom. "Twenty years ago, magazines were setting the trends," Harper says. "They were the ones that were telling the general public whom to love, whom to follow, what to be interested in, et cetera. But social media and the Internet has changed that tenfold. It's sort of why we see less and less print media existing today because there isn't as much of a need for celebrities to be validated by media brands when they can seek their own validation on their own social media." Now, editors like Harper take cues from the public rather than give them. Social media's prominence is even more essential for emerging celebrities, as without it, there are fewer ways to gauge public interest.

Celebrities might not need the magazine for the same reason, but they're still being chosen. Their capital has changed, as Sutton describes, from a social to a cultural nature, though the two overlap. Superstars like Beyoncé will still go on magazine covers, though they don't need it to help sell more concert tickets or get more followers online. "It's more about relevancy," Sutton says. "It's about conversation. It's about cultural capital. If you are on the cover of a magazine, that says something about your place in the conversation. Especially in an

age when relevancy on social is so fast and so temporal. It says something to be in a magazine because even on digital there's a little bit more of a lasting impact.”

Journalism is, by nature, a changing industry and profession. It requires the adaptability of editors and writers alike. As pop culture, the media landscape and the zeitgeist change, the definition of entertainment will change. Journalists will have to change with it. Sutton and Sloan pointed out how what we define as “art” or “entertainment” is already changing, particularly with podcasts and short-form video platforms such as TikTok. Sloan wonders about how long digital outlets like theirs will continue to hold public attention as it’s easy to access “juicy and enticing” information on TikTok (regardless of if it’s accurate or vetted). “I feel like we're moving in that direction where I always ask myself, do people read anymore?” Sloan says. “To be honest, and it's a funny question, but I'm always like, is that of interest? Is the world changing as a result of the commodification of information that's easily accessible in short-form video?”

Retaining journalistic scrutiny and quality as we adapt will be a crucial survival skill, one that has Sutton pondering a change in the medium for their work, in an effort to meet the audience where they are. Harper notices a similar change in how their audience members interact with their outlet but also notes how it can change from print issue to print issue, as “different cover stars attract different readers.”

## **Conclusion**

My interviews with these editors were a re-immersion in the world I occupied as a previous trending news writer at a women’s magazine. I remembered my own consistent coverage of the Kardashian-Jenner family, writing about Jennifer Aniston’s hair on a slightly humid day and mapping the Kanye West-Julia Fox relationship timeline. I knew the what and the who, and these editors showed me the how and the why.

I was taken aback by just how wide the spectrum of editorial decisions was. Though there was a consensus on how entertainment journalism is celebrity-driven, there was a stark contrast between editors who viewed publicists as a nuisance and deleted most of their emails versus seeing them as a necessity and responding to every single contact. A similar thesis on the celebri-fication of women's magazines (Hendrickson, 2005) I felt needed an update for the digital age. In hearing how these editors watched the magazine landscape change from the early 2000s to today, I could see how those changes took shape. I was fascinated by the difference between those who welcomed the presence of influencers and those who dismissed them.

Of the many parts of the entertainment editor role discussed, three remained with me the most. First, the economic implications of cancel culture were relatively new to me, as well as what it means for these magazines to take a stand against a certain celebrity (or not). Some editors could name names as to who they'd never give the spotlight to, and others were reluctant to, for fear of damage to their bottom line. This delicate balance pits audience needs against revenue, and it's fascinating how the two can be incompatible. Second, I felt the difference between cultural and social capital was an interesting way to look at the new dynamic between celebrities and women's magazines. With social media creating a way for these celebrities to reach their fanbase directly, the need for a magazine cover has changed. Beyoncé doesn't need to be on the cover of *Vogue*, but she still seeks it out. Although I agree that it says something about her cultural place, I do wonder about the people who wouldn't have known about her cover story had she not posted photos from the shoot on Instagram. Third, although we discussed many concrete procedures for entertainment journalism, the one that stood out the most was the "Spidey Sense" – that nebulous editor's instinct honed by years of experience that helps them

identify early-level talent. Some of the motivation was easy to track, measurable (scanning previous page views, clicks, time spent on page).

The changes in magazine journalism reflected by my interviews with these editors have implications for everyone involved in media. Editors will have to keep up with changing platforms that show what an audience is interested in. Today that might be Twitter's Trending page, but tomorrow that platform could shut down. Navigating burnout amidst the constant adaptation required will be tricky. This could also change pitching strategy for writers, for as editors' priority continues to change, it could be harder to predict their needs for coverage. Publicists who represent up-and-coming celebrities could find it increasingly difficult to get the attention of these editors. Readers have much of the power in this new landscape, but they should beware the self-fulfilling prophecy bolstered by repetitive coverage. Celebrities who continue to trend will continue to be covered, and because they continue to be covered, they continue to be put in front of readers. Content faces the danger of growing stale in this cycle. Journalists creating that content will need to be nimble, constantly examining the saturation of certain celebrities on their site to avoid creating dull, repetitive spaces in their outlets. They should also communicate this new approach to their publisher. Where journalists might be practiced in constant change, publishers benefit from a level of predictability (and marketability) that could easily dissipate with this new status quo.

In these reflections are several seeds for future studies and conversations. Women's magazines were quick to separate themselves from trade publications, so how is entertainment journalism addressed there? What about men's magazines such as *GQ*, *Esquire* or *Men's Health*? Although I opted not to stratify my subjects by background, Cameron's comments on approaching their work as a Black editor and writer made me curious about how inclusivity in

magazines is approached from POC editors. It's also worth examining not only who gets covered, but in what order? Do Black celebrities with high traffic influence such as Lizzo and Megan Thee Stallion face being relegated to second fiddle if Jennifer Aniston does something notable on the same day that they do. If multiple of the Jennifers (Aniston, Lopez, Hudson) are active on the same day, which is the first to be covered? How, if at all, does race factor into that decision, consciously or subconsciously? Without taking the time to examine this, editors run the risk of reflecting an inaccurate picture of diversity, in Hollywood and beyond.

As for the participants who ignored or dismissed backlash on social media commentary, it could be salient to explore why. How, if at all, do social media comments have an impact on magazine editors' approach to their work? It's such a direct way of hearing from their audience, why dismiss it?

A tension lingers between celebrities and the magazines whose pages or sites they grace. Cover stories in a print magazine remain one of the few scarce resources left in media. As there are only so many covers in one year, how carefully do print editors allocate them? Can advocacy for this precious real estate be used as a negotiation tactic to maintain the importance of a cover as a cultural signal? Will a new cover model be needed if more celebrities decide not to maintain relationships with magazines? Can these stars maintain their capital without this? In hearing from editors who don't consider internet celebrities because of perceived lack of importance to their audience, I was curious about if the strategy could switch from audience loyalty to audience expansion and growth. The internet's continuous impact on women's magazines calls for agility and adaptability.

Kirby's comments on SEO indicate an anticipated decline in the use of the metric. Editors have a reliance on this metric to help them understand audience needs and questions.

However, it appears that tech companies such as Google have a need to constantly change and evolve, as shown by its consistent updates to its Google Analytics software. This constant change is incompatible with the journalists trying to rely on a particular metric. More stable metrics such as page views, time spent on page and social media impressions are likely metrics to replace what SEO once accomplished.

The references to how a magazine story would “perform” for its “audience” was delightfully ironic when compared to the celebrities they feature and how they perform for their audiences. The increasing focus on external means such as previous traffic, trending names and upcoming projects are all indicative of how women’s magazine entertainment editors have started to cede control. Where there was once a focus on shaping culture, there’s now a mission to reflect on it and respond to it. The once powerful gatekeeping theory editors were the face of falls by the wayside when cancel-proof celebrities such as Kim Kardashian crash through the gate. Editors are now looking for the “unproblematic queens” who hold up a mirror to society as is.

## APPENDIX I: WEEKLY FIELD NOTES AND PUBLISHED WORK

### 01/16–01/20

Goals I hope to achieve through the NY Program:

1. Grow my commerce writing skills. One of my main responsibilities as a Food Network intern will be to write content that helps the publication fund itself by assisting consumers with their shopping experiences.
2. Consult with Bianca Rodriguez (Commerce Manager at Elle) and Meg Donohue (Associate Fashion Commerce Editor at Elle) to get professional advice on commerce writing prior to the start of my internship.
3. Regularly write with Food Network commerce team and build a robust portfolio of pieces with shoppable products
4. Increase my entertainment writing portfolio. I will continue to work towards this niche I am passionate about by writing about the intersection of food and pop culture. I've been advised by my manager, Rachel Trujillo, that this is right up Maggie Wong's (Food Network News & Culture Editor) alley, so I will be regularly pitching to Maggie on this topic. Aim to have 3 articles like this written by the end of the internship.
5. Prepare for a post-grad future in NYC. I intend to move to NYC after I complete the program, so I'd like to take advantage of my time here to prepare myself. Outside of work/assignment hours (e.g. on the weekend), I will visit neighborhoods in my real estate price range to set myself up for success on the apartment hunt. I will update my resume and cover letter with the skills I've learned at Food Network. I will apply for open writing and editing positions in NYC on a rolling basis.

My internship has yet to start, but on January 10, I met with my manager via Zoom to discuss goals for the internship and logistics.

This week for my master's project, I focused on contacting interview subjects. I've adjusted my project timeline to allot for the winter break delay, and am now focused on having all of my interviews scheduled by February 9, and conducting them between February 13 and March 5. As of Thursday, Jan. 19, I've contacted all 25 of my committee-approved subjects. Seven editors have confirmed their willingness to participate so far, and I'm in the process of scheduling with them.

### 01/23–01/27

My internship with Food Network will start on February 6th, so in the past week, I spent some time doing research to prepare. I spent time on the Food Network Dish website, reading typical and recently published articles to get a sense of voice and what current events are in the brand's wheelhouse to cover. My manager, Rachel Trujillo, asked me to keep a close eye on TikTok for current trends, so I've been paying attention to what non-recipe shopping videos are gaining traction on the app. I want to use my unique perspective as working with a small kitchen space on a smaller budget to help our consumers find deals on new gadgets.

In my project, I've succeeded in getting nine confirmed participants, and six of those interviews have been scheduled, the first of which will take place this Wednesday.

In the process of scheduling these, I noted that these editors schedules fill up quickly, and multiple days between responses will cause consistent rescheduling. This was yet another indicator to me of how fast-paced the journalism industry in New York City is. However, those

subjects who said yes did so readily and seemed excited to participate, a sign of how important passion and persistence are.

My work this week (and lack thereof) uncovered my need to improve in the timeliness of my responses when communicating professionally. I often let the anxiety of responding when I am falling behind or have incomplete work delay me, which serves neither party involved. This is an area I want to improve both in and out of my internship work, not only by staying on top of things, but also by openly and proactively communicating about any delays.

The main challenge I've faced so far is being too focused on my future, and not having enough focus on doing well in the present. I've been trying to build from an unsteady foundation. Starting by catching up on and completing my digital marketing training, I'm going to focus on the current tasks, rather than spiral thinking about what's to come.

My goal is to complete my training for digital marketing and Google Analytics 4, getting certified and understanding SEO better before entering my writing role with the shopping team at FN Dish. I plan to do this by mimicking a work schedule and focusing on this task during working hours outside of my dorm.

### **01/30–02/03**

This week I had my first interview for my master's project. This was an enlightening interview, and Harper was very open about how they perceive and approach their work. The interview lasted 38 minutes, which fell under my 30-40 minute time limit I'd set.

One of the main things I learned related to entertainment journalism in particular is how responsibilities are divided at a publication. My conversation with Harper taught me that while entertainment editors might oversee day-to-day coverage on entertainment news, and the occasional shorter interview, it's the entertainment directors who are in charge of the cover stars. It's a near universal expectation that a celebrity will grace a magazine cover, and people like Harper are the gatekeepers for who gets that honor.

I want to work on my ability to accomplish self-paced work. I feel that I excel when I have an established routine and a team to report to, but I struggle when the main person benefiting from my work is myself. Making room to catch up on (and complete) my digital marketing training over the next two weeks would be particularly helpful.

During my interview with Harper, I learned about which topics were touchy and which answers would align with revealing company secrets. Anything that wasn't already on newsstands they didn't feel comfortable talking about (on the record). Harper was still relatively open, but switched between on and off the record for some questions. Moving forward, I'll address that frustration by phrasing my questions more carefully - asking about content that made it to the public eye rather than implying unpublished content.

The week ahead is the first week of my internship. Much of it will be focused on onboarding and training. By the end of this week, I want to be confident in navigating WBD apps and platforms, including and especially the CMS where I will be building shopping article posts. My manager has sent me some how-to information for me to get familiar with, and in addition to that, I will ask my manager to help me build a sample post and assess my ability.

For my project, I will review Harper's interview for takeaways to prepare me for the next interview (questions that were well received, answers I wish they'd elaborated on etc.). In addition, I will finalize scheduling with the editors who confirmed their participation, as well as follow up with editors who didn't reply to my initial request.

## **02/06–02/10**

This was the first week of my internship, and as expected, much of it focused on getting my bearings and getting to know the company. Once onboarding tasks of getting access to certain software were completed, my manager and I outlined what my main tasks and ongoing projects for the internship would be and established a priority order. I established an editorial routine for myself and completed product research for one story. I wrote the draft of another, sent it to my manager, and had a check-in call to ensure quality standards. The feedback I received was that I was on tone with message and voice, matching the FN brand. She also advised me against making product guarantees in future writing, which is incredibly helpful for all the e-commerce writing I'll be doing. This was a lighter week for my master's project.

One goal my manager shared with me about the FN team's editorial mission was a desire to reduce new content as an SEO strategy. Rather than flood the internet with FN articles that distract from some of its earlier strong pieces, she and the team are focused on strengthening already published pieces. That could mean anything from updating links to finding new assets altogether, ensuring that the reader experience is as seamless as possible and any external linking doesn't lead to dead ends. This was a preview into what the future of the digital media landscape could look like, where coming out on top in SEO becomes a priority and competition increases between media brands and news sites.

Trust in my ideas is a bit difficult in such a new role. My editors want me to focus on pitching, and though I have plenty of experience doing it for the admittedly smaller audience of Columbia, Missouri, pitching for the national audience of Food Network is a different beast.

Less of an issue and more of a potential problem: I scheduled many of my interviews back to back for my project, with the hopes that once I had completed all my interviews and no longer had to worry about tracking down other people, it would be easy to focus on transcribing and coding. I'm unsure how to make room for transcribing in the interim and am concerned that this might cause me to fall behind.

In my internship, I hope to complete two story drafts and send them to my editor: one a write-up of an existing FN Instagram video, and one a shopping story that I built from scratch. (This will also result in my first FN byline!)

Many of my project interviews are scheduled between 2/16 and 3/1, so in the coming weeks I will be concentrating on completing those interviews and getting them uploaded to my Otter.ai software, so there will at least be an automatic transcription to work with when I sit with the interview recordings.

## **02/13–02/17**

This week, I was given access to Food Network's CMS, and my manager trained me in how to use the browser extensions to build articles and products for the site. I started building my first articles, one of which is a roundup of 10 kitchen products under \$10. In creating this, I had a Zoom call to review 20 potential products with my manager, so that I could see her discernment and learn what makes a good product and what isn't the best to feature. One of my main takeaways was to avoid unitaskers: products that could only be used one way. Alton Brown's vendetta against them has stuck with FN and its audience, so it was good to have that understanding. For my project, I had another interview with an editor at Magazine F over the weekend. It went well, but it made me want to sit down and understand how I will credit these editors anonymously. (I won't use their name, but how should I approach saying where they work? It appears to be a concern).

One thing that stood out was regarding media company structure. Food Network's website is a subsidiary of Warner Bros. Discovery. This week I attended my first pitch brainstorming meeting, where we talk through ideas with junior editors before bringing them to senior editors. I noticed that horizontal promotion of WBD properties was widely encouraged. For example, we spent a while talking about food moments in *The Last Of Us*, a show from HBO, another WBD company. This incorporation appears to be a natural way to do in-house marketing, saving WBD some money in outsourcing that kind of work.

Part of the way through this week I hit a bit of a block in my creative energy, and it made me unable to focus as well in the last two work days. Going forward, I'd like to be more realistic about how I spread my duties, allowing for lower output days that still make progress, rather than complete shutdowns.

Product writing can feel a bit difficult to navigate without sounding repetitive, or like an advertisement. I'd like to find a middle ground that feels closer like I'm speaking to the audience but not on behalf of the brand. I think the best thing to do would be to use my manager and I's weekly check in and ask her how she has mastered this. I want to take advantage of the fact that she's there to help me learn.

This week at my internship, I'd like to complete my first articles with my bylines attached. They might not be published this week, but I'd like to see them to completion with my manager. I'll put a focus on that for the beginning of the work week, and circle back to smaller tasks later. I'd also like to gather a list of needed SEO updates from my manager so I can jump on them when I'm ready. I have 5 interviews scheduled in the coming days, and I want to set myself up for success with them while avoiding hitting that creative wall. I might reschedule some of them to allow for more time to dissect.

## 02/20–02/24

This week in my internship, I had my [first article published](#)! Now that I'm aware of how to write these non-recipe shopping video articles, I'll be completing them once a week. This will build out consistent content for the site and a proper portfolio for me. I also finished my second article draft, which my editor and I are set to review this upcoming Monday. My editor shared a list of SEO updates she'd like me to treat as a rolling project for the semester, and I think getting my reps in, so to speak, with this kind of work will be incredibly helpful for me.

This week, I completed three more interviews for my project with editors at Magazines E, D and C. These were very insightful, and I'm already starting to identify patterns in responses across editors, as well as differences in opinion on topics like what makes a deal breaker for celebrity coverage.

In an industry where smaller and smaller staffs are becoming more common, independent journalists are becoming an essential asset. When I asked my editor about the life of a story beyond her and she explained there wasn't much of one, it made me realize that in addition to being a good writer, I need to be a good editor and social media promoter, writing to all of the needs a story has to make my team's job easier. If my editor and I were the main people to work on a story, then I want to make the copy airtight and engaging, so it's easy to publish and promote.

Sometimes I don't put my absolute best foot forward in my writing because I trust my editor to catch anything and call me on what can be reworked. This is also because I'm used to three to four reads on any given story before it reaches publication (such is the nature of a teaching publication with a lot of staff). However, at Food Network, my editor is going to be the

first and often last read of my work. I want to combat that reliance on one other person and turn in more airtight work.

In my interview with the editor from Magazine C, I found that they felt a bit quiet and less forthcoming as some of my other interviewees, despite my best efforts to create a welcoming environment. I wonder if there's more I can do to assuage worry before the conversation starts.

In my project, I need to follow up with my other subjects, some to reschedule and some who never responded in the first place. I also need to transcribe the interviews I already have, but not to overextend myself, I will concentrate on making sure I speak to more subjects.

In my internship, I'd like to fill my manager's quota of 5-10 SEO updates per week. I had two pitches accepted and assigned this week, and I'd like to focus on research for those, having sources outlined and contacted by the end of the week in order to meet a mid-March deadline.

### **02/27–03/03**

One of my first assignments to be assigned to me, a roundup of 10 kitchen products that cost less than \$10, was [published](#) after I reviewed it with my manager. In going through the copy together I could see each change, and I'm gradually getting more confident in my commerce writing. My next non-recipe shopping video write-up was [published as well](#). My manager shared with me that she was impressed by the clean copy she was seeing and shared that with her boss, the Food Network editorial director, which was a sign of good performance in my eyes. One of my pitches from the Dish meeting has been accepted: a story on spring mocktails. I'm currently researching and finding the right people in the city to contact, and hope to have that completed by its deadline of next Friday. Most of my focus this week was on my internship, so there wasn't much I accomplished related to my master's project this week.

My work for Food Network thus far has really highlighted the importance of commerce writing as a revenue strategy, especially for digital news outlets modeled after a magazine. It's a primary stream of revenue and reader service rolled into one. There's quite a bit of eggshell walking you have to do to avoid getting the publication in legal trouble, especially when it comes to you explaining what a product can do. If we were to claim a product makes it safe to clean knives, someone bought it off our recommendation and hurt themselves, we could be found liable.

My reporting skills feel a bit rusty after spending so long as an editor. I truly think this will come back to me with more reps, as it were. More phone calls and original reporting will hopefully sharpen my skills of what to look for in an interview and a source. I'd spent so much time directing the coverage that I'm putting myself back in the shoes of the people I need to manage.

My manager asked me how I'm feeling about the workload, and I explained that the internship itself was feeling good, but outside responsibilities (namely my project) were starting to stress me. I'm trying to find ways to make sure I have creative energy left at the end of the day to dedicate to my project.

I let my manager know about my concerns about my workload this week given that I was missing two days of work for this week's media tour. She pushed back some of my deadlines accordingly, and my focus is on preventing further delay in my internship responsibilities. For my master's project, I want to contact subjects early this week to have all of my interviews done by next Saturday if possible, before spring break at the latest.

### **03/06–03/10**

Early this week, heading into the media tour, I was feeling a bit overwhelmed and asked to push back a deadline. I was working on two news pieces, SEO updates, and the NRSV I do each week, and wouldn't be able to hit my Wednesday deadline being out for two days. By the end of the week, I had completed the first couple of SEO updates and was awaiting publish dates for the others. After our media tours, I played catchup. I confirmed several contacts and started interviewing for my mocktails piece.

Most of the learning about the media ecosystem I did this week was after spending March 7th and March 8th, on media tours scheduled with various publications such as Cosmopolitan, Woman's Day/Good Housekeeping, Insider, New York Magazine, Real Simple, Elle/HGTV, Hearst Health, and The Cut. Visiting publications that were legacy magazines, digital natives, printed and ceased printing reminded me of the diversity of the different publications in New York.

My procrastination delayed my progress on interviewing for my mocktails piece. I'd been putting off sending some emails for interview requests, and though I was able to get a lot done on that front, I want to work on the hesitation I have on this. I felt overwhelmed in losing two days of work, and I still need to catch up on my project.

My focus for the week ahead is to keep my deadlines on the NRSV from being pushed any further, and to gain clarity with my editor on what the angle/approach for my news pieces should be.

### **03/13–03/17**

This was a week of catching up, making progress and adjusting deadlines as needed. I continued conducting interviews, outlining articles, and building product ingests. Two new write-ups of mine were published this week, [here](#) and [here](#). In a successful check-in with my editor, she mentioned that the news editor who stepped in to edit my articles this week while my manager was out of town was impressed with how clean my copy was.

Commerce writing, editing and updating can feel very rhythmic after a while. You gain a sense for what a shopper who's reading might want to hear.

Though my reporting was rusty, I remembered the enjoyment of putting together a story, despite it being a tedious process. Once the pieces start clicking, and an outline starts coming together in my head, it feels fantastic. I want to continue exercising that reporting muscle.

Though I have another story due on Monday, I am currently spending all my time on the mocktails article because I find it fun. I need to switch gears to focus on the upcoming deadline. I'm also committed to staying informed and up-to-date on industry news and trends, though I find myself too focused on upcoming tasks to take a step back and look at the industry.

This week I might attend my first press event on behalf of Food Network. I will focus on learning the lay of the land, networking at the event, and paying attention to how publicists interact with news outlet representatives. Coverage is not promised for attendance, so rather than walk around with a notepad for a future story outline, I will aim to simply engross myself in the environment.

### **03/20–03/24**

This week I had two more stories published: one about [spring cleaning areas of your kitchen](#) and another product review of an [over-the-sink colander](#). The colander review I've figured out how to outline, build and execute in one day, which is a speed I'm proud of.

Regarding my master's project, I've fallen behind on my interviews so I've done the outreach to hopefully reach my minimum of 10 interviews. I've contacted four more subjects who were previously interested, as well as those previously interested to hopefully round out the information-gathering sooner rather than later.

At national publications, communication between the editor and the writer tends to be minimal unless working on a major cover story or feature. When the writer turns in the story, it's then in the editor's hands, and the editorial machine moves too fast for the editor to have time to explain their changes to the writer. I find myself scanning my articles after publishing to see what, if any, changes have taken place.

I'd like prioritization to be a focus moving forward. With the amount of effort I put into my mocktails piece, I still was faced with the classic problem of "too much information, so it takes a while to distill." It delayed me in delivering what could've been a much simpler task (the spring cleaning article) that had a sooner deadline.

I honestly think the best thing for me is to check in with my committee relatively soon. The end of April is coming sooner than I thought and I feel like I'm going to have an untraditional timeline of completion. So once we get on the same page of all of that we can work together.

This week, I hope to confirm my final interview subjects. When I emailed them, I included a Calendly to allow for easier scheduling. I also hope to complete the mocktails piece I've been working on, as I'd like to have that wrapped up in order to start my April assignments from my editor.

### **03/27–03/31**

SPRING BREAK. NO PROJECT WORK COMPLETED/INTERNSHIP HOURS LOGGED.

### **04/03–04/07**

This week, my biggest piece to date was published. [This story on mocktails](#), their popularity and expert tips on elevating them beyond Shirley Temple status was truly a delight to create. I loved speaking to people so passionate and knowledgeable on the subject. In reading the published version, I noticed minor edits, typically a good sign of the quality of my copy. Both the News Editor and the Editorial Director complimented the piece's quality unprompted, which I was quite proud of. For an upcoming story on shopping at H Mart, I scheduled three interviews for this upcoming week, and I'm proud of myself for getting a jump on that considering it's not due for another 11 days. My manager and I discussed the possibility of doing contract work post-graduation (the first glimmer of hope in the job search!) during her surprise office visit!

For my project, I completed two more interviews on Friday! I had a third scheduled for Tuesday who didn't show, but later emailed and asked to reschedule, and we did for this Tuesday. I also checked in with my chair on the status of my project, the first apparent themes and a timeline to help me be on track for May graduation.

It's not always necessary to reinvent the wheel. So many of my responsibilities are related to refreshes, updates, additions and edits of already existing content. This kind of cross-promotion and re-utilization of what has already performed well is a way to save resources, but it's also a concerning look into the future of creative content in journalism. How much can we afford to recycle before we tire our audiences, assuming we have those loyal readers we so strive for.

I want to be wary of biting off more than I can chew. The number of interviews I did while reporting for the mocktails piece helped it be as informed as possible, however my disproportionate focus made it come in later than myself or my editor would prefer. It's my instinct to cast a wide net, but at times I hit a saturation point in my reporting that I could save myself a lot of trouble without.

This week is the third to last at my internship. As the weeks wind down, I feel the instinct to shove as much work as possible into the end of my time at Food Network. I've spoken to my manager and there isn't the budget to hire me right away, so I hope to accomplish as much as possible. I don't want to plan anything un-realistic, but I also don't want to short-change myself.

The main challenge going into this week is balancing a busy week at work (three deliverables due Wednesday, Thursday and Friday plus working toward a deliverable next week) with a deadline for my project draft (to my chair by Thursday). I need every bit of time I can spare to work on everything and keep up, and I'm worried of hitting a creative burnout wall before getting through it all. As for how to make it happen: caffeine?

#### **04/10-04/14**

This week, I continued my reporting process for a story I'm writing about shopping at H Mart. I interviewed three chefs who are practiced in making Korean dishes who regularly shop at H Mart. The deadline for this story isn't right away, so it felt good getting a head start. I also wrote another NRSV write-up, which was published!

For my project, I sent out a final call email that resulted in several more yeses from potential subjects. I was delighted to have their perspectives, but it was a lot to include so close to the draft deadline. I'll have to incorporate it slowly over time.

Flexibility is a valuable skill when it comes to managing a team of journalists. Our editorial director recently went on maternity leave, and everyone has been adapting and adjusting their roles as needed. The lines between editor and writer can blur on such a small staff.

Working across language barriers is not something I'm particularly practiced in. In my interviews for the H Mart story, there were several Korean recipes, dishes and ingredients that I was unaware of and will take some time to recognize as I go back over the transcript.

I felt myself struggling to juggle everything this week with my project and my internship (a consequence of waiting too long to begin coding). I ended up needing to ask for the day off in order to try and keep up, and I was still trying to catch up with my project anyway.

Next week, I'll do my first (and likely only) bout of editing when I edit a product review a freelancer completed. This will be a fun exercise for my editing skills, especially when it comes to building an article that I had no influence over the reporting or writing of.

#### **04/17-04/21**

This week, I did my first (and only) editing assignment of my project. The writing was the main tentpole of my internship, but as I expressed a desire to edit to my manager, she shared this assignment with me. A freelancer for Food Network had reviewed a new Ninja appliance, so I edited and built that article in the content management system for a higher editor to oversee. This week also had my final pitch meetings. Though I wouldn't be the one to write whatever got assigned, I still brought forward timely and interesting pitch ideas, wanting to set up the team for future success. I focused on making my chair's edits on my project, which consisted of expanding on my final analysis and re-writing the findings to read much smoother for the reader.

Prioritization is key for digital native publications trying to cut through the noise of the internet. My editor was clear to emphasize the importance of my working on the SEO updates of previously high-performing roundups. This emphasis reflected the lessons from my research about bandwidth. With a smaller staff, you have to focus on what will drive the most traffic to your site, and sometimes that means keeping the old fresh rather than taking a chance on the new (my pitched blog posts).

I am a very introverted person. It's good for my ability to put my head down and focus on my work, but as my internship winded down, I realized I hadn't spent enough time getting to know my individual teammates, let alone other interns. I contacted two of the editors I really wanted to know better and asked for one-on-one lunches and they quickly and gladly threw time on the calendar luckily.

This week was a lot of back and forth between my committee chair and me to get my project to a readable state. I was glad that the information I needed was present and that I had such salient takeaways, but the simple magnitude of the project was not compatible with my constant procrastination. I spoke with my manager, and she agreed I could take the last day of my internship off as that's also my defense day. I've been lucky to have such an understanding supervisor.

Going into the final week of my internship, my focus is on ending on a strong note. I have an outstanding article to write and build, as well as several other admin tasks to complete. I want to have the article built and sent to my editor, along with notes she can use to fill in the gaps after I depart.

#### **04/24-04/28**

This week, as my internship ended, I spent some time gathering resources (documents, contact information, etc.) that I would want to have access to after the internship ended. I also finished my last assignment, a beginner's guide to shopping at H Mart, and sent that to my editor. I'm leaving it in her capable hands, so I'm curious to see what changes will appear in the final product. For my research project, while my committee reviewed my project, I built a slide deck to talk them through what I felt were the key takeaways of my experience in a succinct manner.

Sometimes, but rarely, reader service can win out over revenue. In my H Mart guide that I'm building, I include interactive, shoppable products. However, H Mart does not have an affiliate link with Food Network, so there's no revenue being driven from this story besides site traffic. As I asked my editor how to proceed, because every other product-driven story has been with affiliate-linked products, she explained that it was okay to use non-affiliate URLs for ease of reader experience.

The little things you do and the energy you give off in a workplace environment are more recognized than you realize. I was surprised by how many people reached out to wish me well, send good luck for my defense and say how much of a pleasure I was to work with. I'm increasingly reminded of the importance of being kind and a good person in the journalism industry. I'd like to keep that up and be more active about it in future roles.

I felt like I did a good job of meeting challenges this week. I ended my internship on a strong note, was prepared to answer questions about my master's project and successfully defended. Frustrations arose from having many balls to juggle, but that's par for the course when being a student and working at the same time.

My internship is now complete, so my only focus will be reflecting on the experience and how I've grown as a journalist. I'll also keep an eye on the site to see when my final article will be published. This week, I passed my master's defense (woohoo!), and I have some edits to make. I'll be focusing on having those done by early in the week in order to have the final product submitted by Friday. These edits will allow me to expand on my analysis.

## **PUBLISHED WORK**

Over the course of the Spring 2023 semester, I worked as an editorial intern for Food Network Digital. My internship at Food Network immersed me in two beats that were relatively new to me: shopping writing and food journalism. I'd scratched the surface of both of these at Glamour. I'd built shoppable products for my articles and written SEO-driven recipe roundups that didn't go into much detail. This role turned what previously was an afterthought into my main responsibilities. I was a direct report to Rachel Trujillo, an Associate Content Editor whose focus was shopping and commerce. I created written accompaniment articles for shopping videos published to Food Network's Instagram, giving them extra traffic on the website. In addition, I pitched original blog posts to News Editor Maggie Wong, who oversees news posts on FN Dish. These stories were ones I ideated, reported and built from scratch. They took longer, but were an opportunity to flex my writing skills and learn more about food journalism. In support of the Food Network Digital team, I would also complete refreshes of previously high-performing articles, timed to high search terms. All of my published work for the semester can be found at the links below.

### **Shopping Video Write-Ups**

- [This Drying Stand Is Just What Your Water Bottle Collection Needs](#)
- [These Cord Organizers Save Your Kitchen From Clutter](#)
- [Spice Up Your Kitchen With This Organizing Carousel](#)
- [This Bottle Brush Cuts Down Your Time Washing Dishes](#)
- [This Over-the-Sink Colander Is a Small Kitchen Must-Have](#)
- [Cut Down on Your Prep Time With This Vegetable Chopper](#)

### **Original Blog Posts**

- [7 Expert Tips for Making Really Good Mocktails](#)
- [8 Things That Should Be On Your Spring Cleaning Checklist](#)
- [10 Must-Have Kitchen Tools That are Less Than \\$10](#)

### **Timed Refreshes**

- [9 Ways to Spring Clean Your Pantry — And Make Something Delicious](#)
- [14 Popsicle Molds That Are Perfect for Summer](#)

### **SEO Refreshes (no byline)**

- [5 Best Vacuum Sealers of 2023, Tested by Food Network Kitchen](#)
- [6 Best Cookware Sets, According to Food Network Kitchen](#)
- [7 Best Nonstick Frying Pans of 2023, Tested by Food Network Kitchen](#)
- [7 Best Chef's Knives, Tested by Food Network Kitchen](#)
- [5 Best Milk Frothers, Tested by Food Network Kitchen](#)
- [5 Best Meat Thermometers, Tested by Food Network Kitchen](#)

## APPENDIX II: SELF-EVALUATION

An average week at Food Network would consist of the following: Between Monday and Tuesday, I would review one of the non-recipe shopping Instagram videos (NRSVs) my editor had assigned to me. I'd take notes on what features of the product were most important to highlight. By Wednesday, I would create an accompanying written post for the Instagram video. This write-up would be published on the FN Dish website, completed with a shoppable version of the product. With this pattern, I became incredibly practiced at building affiliate links for items, a crucial part of the blog's revenue strategy. The emphasis of shopping writing as a revenue strategy for digital media was immense. I have a newfound appreciation for quality shopping writing, as someone purchasing a product on our review turns into revenue for us. At the same time, there was this pressure to maintain authority when writing about certain products. A loss in credibility could damage our bottom line. The biggest learning curve with this task was figuring out how to write these without sounding like an extension of the product's advertisement. Leaning into potential uses and qualifying certain claims was helpful.

When my NRSV write-ups are complete, I'd make progress on whatever blog post I'm writing for Maggie Wong. Interviewing, transcribing, researching and outlining would fill my remaining days in the week. I was particularly proud of my piece on mocktails. As I saw Gen Z TikTok influencers posting more and more about mocktails, I could see a trend of interest in non-alcoholic drinking. I used this, combined with Food Network's reputation, to interview some expert bartenders and booze-free bottle shop owners. I was rusty in my reporting at first, but over time thoroughly enjoyed the writing process. When not working on NRSV write-ups or original blog posts, I was refreshing previously written, high-performing articles on the FN Dish site. Any stories with shoppable products were checked for out-of-date language and changes in price or stock.

Rachel Trujillo was my manager, main editor and supervisor. She is based at the Burbank, California Warner Bros. Discovery office, so we worked from separate offices for the entire internship (save for one impromptu visit she made to the New York Park Avenue South office). I worked in the office on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays. On Mondays and Fridays I worked from home. Working with an editor who wasn't in the same office led to a hands-off approach that I genuinely feel like I thrived under. The team trusted me to complete my work independently, and quickly provided resources, tips and support whenever I asked. It lowered my stress levels, and the lack of micromanaging gave me the freedom to be creative. However, I did spend a lot of time in my own little world, to the point where some coworkers wouldn't know if I'd come into the office for the day. If I could change one thing about my tenure, I'd position myself in front of my coworkers and colleagues more often and focus more of my energy on building those relationships.

I'm very proud of the progress I made in understanding the world of shopping writing. It feels like I started the semester with a more narrow idea of what my future in journalism could look like. That has expanded, and I think I'll be better off for it.

I felt that I fluctuated in success when executing my project. I would find myself in bursts of productivity and send a bunch of contact emails or complete a bunch of interviews at once, but then would feel burnt out and stall for a few weeks. I never really found a balance between working on my internship and working on my project. At times, working and using my creative energy at work but then needing to turn around and apply that same energy to my project was just too much. During the execution of the interviews, my editors were deeply concerned with their anonymity. I'd consider taking a thesis approach if I could do this over again. The balance

of the project and an internship becomes quite the heavy lift, especially when your method is interviewing. The organization of several interviews becomes tricky when the majority of your daylight hours are spent working. It shrinks your availability and your bandwidth, which isn't helpful when dealing with subjects who have packed schedules.

### APPENDIX III: SUPERVISOR EVALUATION

This is meant to be a letter to my master's committee stating what I did during my internship and outlining that I fulfilled the requirements as to hours, etc. (Please sign your name at the end!) Below are some guidelines you can use to help structure your letter.

Score performance on a scale of 1 to 5 in each category.  
Please write 2-5 sentences explaining each score.

Fact-checking/research: 5

*While this position admittedly didn't require a lot of fact checking or research, she had to research products for articles and update and check prices and products for updates. While it was a small part of the internship, it was still done well.*

Editing: 5

*During Janae's internship, she was tasked with editing one large, in-depth product review, which is a project that is typically taken on by editors. I was excited that Janae was confident and prepared enough to tackle a more hearty project than most interns are willing or able to do. The article looked great when submitted, and I would have felt comfortable assigning more of these larger projects had time allowed.*

Writing: 5

*Writing became a tentpole of Janae's internship, averaging almost one article per week. Overall, her copy was really clean and ready for publication and needed very little editing or revising. I felt like she took the time to understand the publication's voice and style, referencing older articles, interlinking to existing content and making sure everything she turned in fit well without our catalog of content.*

Job knowledge: 5

*The two areas that tend to be a learning curve with interns is understanding and getting comfortable in our content management system (building and updating articles is a large part of the position) and feeling confident enough in pitch meetings to bring ideas to the group that are thought through enough to be approved. I felt like Janae exceeded in both these categories from the start. She took to the CMS quickly, needing very little refresher training or changes to her work, and was an active participant in all pitch meetings she was in.*

Communication/listening: 5

*From the beginning of her internship, Janae was really communicative about not only her availability and progress on projects but also with her expectations for the internship. I think her communication is what made her internship such a success. She was really clear about what she wanted to get out of the internship and made sure to communicate that with me weekly.*

Time management: 4

*Overall, Janae did a great job managing her work and was really good at meeting deadlines. If there was one area for improvement in the time management area, there was one project that required her to pace article updates throughout the semester that sometimes got moved or pushed back.*

Attendance and punctuality: 5

*I actually managed Janae remotely, but the team in NYC was really happy that she prioritized going into the office as regularly as the full-time employees. She was always punctual and updated me regularly when she was online in the morning and was always punctual with*

meetings.

Overall work quality: 5

*Janae was a great intern and overall exceeded expectations. Her energy in the office and the great work she submitted was noticed by editors at all levels. She was trusted by editors to go to press events, which further proved her level of professionalism and understanding of the industry.*

Would you be likely to hire this person if given the opportunity?

Yes!

What would you recommend for this person to do following the internship (in terms of courses, skills acquisition, etc.) to be better prepared for the workforce?

*I think Janae is ready and prepared for a position as either an editorial assistant or at the coordinator level. In order to be more prepared, I would recommend taking any time before securing a full-time position to freelance at as many publications as she can. Her writing would be a good fit for lifestyle publications, and having a good variety in her coverage and work will make her even more appealing as she applies and looks for positions.*

Rachel Trujillo

Associate Content Editor, Food Network

#### APPENDIX IV: REFERENCES

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