

UPPER-CLASS WOMEN READING CELEBRITY NEWS: AUDIENCE RECEPTION  
STUDY ON CELEBRITY NEWS VIEWED THROUGH THE LENS OF CLASS

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UPPER-CLASS WOMEN READING CELEBRITY NEWS: AUDIENCE RECEPTION  
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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	ii
ABSTRACT .....	v
CHAPTER	
1. INTRODUCTION .....	1
2. LITERATURE REVIEW .....	7
Audience research in cultural and literary studies	
Women’s magazines	
Celebrity news	
Upper-class women	
3. METHODOLGY .....	38
4. DATA: ACCESSING AND CONSUMING CELEBRITY NEWS .....	44
The where, when of upper-class women celebrity news readers	
Buying on the fly	
Me time: Reading celebrity news as a leisure activity	
How long has your garden grown? Cultivating a celebrity news reading hobby	
5. INTEPRETIVE REPERTOIRES: CLASS AND READING .....	51
The new playgirl: The aesthetic appeal of celebrity news	
I want glossy candy: Celebrity news as an addictive power	
It’s about them, not me: Critical distance and celebrity news	
I’ll show you mine if you show me yours: referential readings	
Whistle while you work	
My precious: Celebrity news as material capital	
Keeping up with the Jolie-Pitts: Celebrity news as a guidebook	
6. CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION.....	70

BIBLIOGRAPHY .....75

APPENDIX

I. TRANSCRIPTS ..... 80

II. INTERVIEW PARTICIPANT SURVEY .....142

III. INTERVIEW QUESTIONS ..... 143

IV. PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS ..... 146

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ABSTRACT

This research attempts to understand the reception of celebrity news magazines among upper class women in the U.S. The ultimate goal of this research is to identify cultural repertoires about the consumption and use of celebrity news. These repertoires are compared to ones found in Joke Hermes (1995) study on British tabloid readers.

Qualitative research methods provide the framework for this study and in-depth interviews were conducted in order to collect detailed data. Data was collected from the interviews and analyzed for common themes and repertoires. I found most of the subjects read celebrity news with resistance to its dominant message. In fact, most readers negotiated the text and imprinted their own meanings onto it.

Celebrity news permeates nearly all media outlets and has seen a recent surge of popularity and press time over the past ten years. Understanding what attracts readers to celebrity news is useful information for media scholars and professionals. A more intimate understanding of how women use celebrity news also helps to illuminate how being a celebrity newsreader affects women's lives

## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

I aimed to explore an important idea: How do upper-class women readers of celebrity news magazine weeklies read celebrity news? More specifically, what interpretive repertoires can be identified in accounts concerning their reading of the text? How does their class membership affect interpretation?

Recently, it appears as if celebrity news has infiltrated the media. For the purpose of this research, *celebrity news* is defined as news that concerns itself with the personal lives (rather than the body of work or talent) of celebrities. Celebrity news makes appearances in all mediums such as TV, newspapers, magazines, blogs and so on. It can also now be found across news outlets; the nightly news show *Entertainment Tonight* is no longer the only evening news chasing the beat. Reporters and cameras from *NBC*, *ABC*, *CBS*, *Fox News*, and *CNN* are right there, too. The current cultural atmosphere is a crucial time to study celebrity news because many fear it is acting like a virus that deteriorates both “good” journalism and our nation’s fabric. As *Chicago Tribune*’s Tim McNulty lamented to *The Guardian* how celebrity news encroaches front-page real estate and worried about celebrity news’ growing popularity. “For features, I want reviews and criticism and real substance but also utility.” In other words, he doesn’t want to feature celebrity news. Like McNulty, many other media professionals wondered what (if any) utility celebrity news offers the world and how the media’s consistently increasing celebrity coverage will affect journalism as we know it.

This research focused on discovering what if any utility celebrity news has for upper-class women readers. It focused on upper-class women who received their *celebrity news* from the *weeklies* medium. A celebrity newsweekly is a weekly publication that's published 52 times a year and features both short and mid-length articles about the latest make-ups, break-ups and babies occurring in celebrity set. The most prominent and powerful player in the celebrity newsweekly medium is *Us Weekly*. By far, this magazine has the largest circulation. Other smaller contenders are *In Touch*, *Life & Style*, and *Ok!* This research specifically interviewed women who regularly read *Us Weekly*.

*Us Weekly* was selected because it has the highest circulation of celebrity magazines of its type such as *In Touch*, *Life & Style*, and *OK!* According to *Us Weekly's* media kit, the 2008 rate base of *Us weekly* is 1,900,000. The rate base and number of subscribers has continued to grow since the magazine became a weekly in 2003.

*Us Weekly* is in an unusual spot in the media industry, which should be noted, studied and even perhaps admired. In a world where many media outlets are struggling to make profit goals, *Us Weekly* is the anomaly. The magazine both turns profits and wins awards. *Us Weekly* became a weekly magazine only two months after Y2K passed quietly. The celebrity-driven glossy garnered momentum, perhaps due to a consumer market ready for escape from the post-9/11 world and *Us Weekly* has continued to attract a constantly growing readership, which currently approaches nearly two million. *Us Weekly* reigns as prom queen of the growing celebrity weekly market.



*US Weekly* began to be the media-outlet-that-could after Bonnie Fuller took it over 2002. According to Newman's (2005) *Media Week* article, the magazine's success stems partly from its Fuller's captain role:

The ship Fuller ran wasn't exactly the Love Boat. Still, by the time she left in an ocean of bad blood in 2003 and Min, her executive editor, took over, *Us* was prospering. Critics predicted Fuller's abrupt departure to rival American Media would be *Us*' death knell. Not so. 'By the time Bonnie left,' says Brownridge (general manager of parent company), 'We were overjoyed circulation had gone from about 300,000 to 500,000. Now if we had a 500,000 week, we'd all be in tears.'

Under Min's helm, the magazine has continued to flourish. In 2007, *The New York Post* named *Us* editor-in-chief Min the number 18 most powerful woman in New York. "18. Janice Min, 37, editor, *Us* magazine. With her mag's profits placed as high as \$90 million a year and readership up 191 percent in the last five years, Janice is not just like us." In addition to the *Post* accolades, Min won *Mediaweek's* 2005 editor of the year. And in March of 2008, GLADD named *Us Weekly* as one of the publications that offer positive depictions of gay people.

*Upper class women* were chosen as the demographic to interview because a) they make up a larger portion of *Us Weekly* readers, b) it's an understudied group, and c) it's a group with large financial and social capital. For the purpose of this research, upper class women were defined as women with household incomes (HHI) over \$100,000. According to *The Wall Street Journal*, a household income of \$97,000 or more puts you in the top 20 percent of households. In *Us Weekly's* media kit, \$100,000 HHI is highest income bracket listed in the media kit's demographics; it is an income that's often used in market research to denote 'wealthy.' Of course, it was difficult to put an income number

to mark class, but it helped to have defined a specific criterion for the demographic. According to *Us Weekly's* media kit, 30 percent of its readers fall into this class demographic.

As demonstrated with *Us Weekly's* success, celebrity newsweeklies play a large role in many people's lives. People spend both time and money consuming the information inside its glossy pages. This research hoped to find out what upper-class readers of *Us Weekly* did with all the information on Jessica Simpson, Katie Holmes and the other court members of Hollywood royalty.

Through in-depth interviews, I asked this demographic how they consumed the celebrity news and how they processed the information they found in the magazines. These in-depth qualitative interviews with upper-class women celebrity newsreaders were not designed to produce statistically significant or generalizable findings. Rather the aim was to inform the reader the ways a specific group of women read a particular type of text and what they do with the information from the text. For the purpose of this research, looking at the women's *news consumption* encompassed exploring upper class women's reading habits (where they purchased, where they read, how long they read, with whom they read) as well as to explore how they read (what they selected to read, how they processed what they read, what they did with the information that they read).

After completion of these interviews, I coded the interviews in hopes to find interpretative repertoires about upper-class women's consumption of celebrity news. Wetherell (1998), one of the social psychologists credited with the term *interpretative repertoire*, defines it as "an interpretative repertoire is a

culturally familiar and habitual line of argument comprised of recognizable themes, common places, and tropes” (Potter & Wetherell, 1987, 400). To further, interpretative repertoires “are recurrently used systems of terms used to characterize and evaluate actions, events and other phenomena,” (Potter and Wetherell, 400). Interpretive repertoires are discovered through examining discourse. As Potter and Wetherell (1987) explain, “the whole argument doesn’t need to be spelt out in detail. Rather one fragment or phrase evokes for listeners the relative context of the argumentation — premise, claims or counterclaims,” (401). Wetherell (1998) famously used interpretative repertoires to explain how a group of males in discussion described relationships with the opposite sex. She found “male sexuality as performance and achievement, a repertoire around alcohol and disinhibition, and an ethics of sexuality as legitimated by relationships and reciprocity,” (Wetherell, 400).

This research study aimed to confirm or dispute established interpretative repertoires about celebrity magazines consumption (such as those identified by Dutch researcher Joke Hermes) as well as identify potentially unique repertoires about the specific role of celebrity magazines in upper class American women’s lives. Hermes’ most significant finding was that women were attracted to magazines because they were easy to pick up and easy to put down. This research sought to see if celebrity news was as disposable in women’s lives as Hermes found. This research asked if celebrity news reading played a significant and meaningful role in these women’s lives.

This research hoped to contribute to the growing canon of audience-based research on women’s magazine readers. In addition to understanding the cultural

role of celebrity news in these women's lives, the research target was to understand the powerful forces that draw money and attention toward celebrity news. If media scholars and professionals could better understand celebrity news popularity, those same scholars and professionals could use these lessons and apply them to less financially successful media news genres. Additionally, this research hoped to put its oar into the conversation about purported meaningless purpose of celebrity news. Is it possible that women find real utility in these magazines? In the footprints of other studies on "low brow mediums," what purpose does celebrity news play in these women's lives? And is its purpose as insignificant as many claim?

## CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

This study focused on the audience rather than the medium, and audience reception studies and theories informed this study. The celebrity newsreader was assumed to be an active reader, capable of decoding text and inscribing her own meaning onto it.

Audience research is a descendent of uses and gratification theory. Scholars have debated over when uses and gratifications first began. As scholar Ruggiereo (2000) explained,

Wimmer and Dominick (1994) proposed that U&G began in the 1940s when researchers became interested in why audiences engaged in various forms of media behavior, such as listening to the radio or reading the newspaper. Still others credit the U&G perspective with Schramm's (1949) immediate reward and delayed reward model of media gratifications (Dozier & Rice, 1984). (Ruggiero 4)

The first U&G studies were often criticized "because the early research had little theoretical coherence and was primarily behaviorist and individualist in its methodological tendencies," (Ruggiero, 2000, 4). Klapper (1963) is considered the father of modern-day uses and gratification theory. As Ruggiero (2000) articulated, "Klapper called for a more functional analysis of U&G studies that would restore the audience member to his rightful place in the dynamic, rather than leaving him in the passive, almost inert role to which many older studies relegated him" (6).

The previous assumption to focus on the medium rather than the consumer dated back to the humanities tradition, which determined that meaning resided within the text. As Jensen (1991) explained, the text, not its

uses, was the epicenter of research: “Work in this tradition has tended to focus its analysis around the text itself rather than its cultural uses. Most important, the tradition as applied to mass media has implied view of media effects as acting directly and powerfully on audiences” (136). According to Curan (1990), early uses and gratifications studies focused on the dominant ideology and how it was reinforced through the media.

Later scholars, the pioneers of revisionism in audience research, argued that dominant ideology wasn’t all unencompassing or persuasive. There was a

reconceptualization of the audience as an active producer of meaning.. it is sufficient to note here that audiences responded in prescribed ways to fixed preconstituted meanings in texts to be found in certain forms of formalist analysis was challenged by the notion that meaning was constructed through interaction of the text and the social and discourse positions of the audience,” (145).

This pushed researchers to examine the multiplicity of ways that audience members interact with media.

This revisionist new audience approach was the most appropriate for the study. This study did not focus on what the celebrity news media produced, but rather what and how the celebrity newsreaders consumed. Specifically, how their class status reacted or influenced their consumption of celebrity news. Uses and gratification theories don’t account enough for how cultural and socioeconomic factors can affect news consumption; uses and gratification theories focus its methods on individual differences and psychology. This study concerned itself not with individual differences in consuming celebrity news, but rather on the nuanced, complicated relationship among reader, class, and text. This follows the tradition of McQuail, Blumer and Brown (1972). They showed how people with

different educational and economic backgrounds viewed quiz shows differently; this study hoped to see if socioeconomic class might also have an affect on how celebrity news is consumed.

Morley (1980) and his book *Nationwide* also forged groundbreaking media audience studies that involved class differences. He contributed in helping media scholars to revision the audience as active because his studies found the possibility for pleurisy of readings. Specifically, Morley's research found that audience members, particularly those of different socioeconomic backgrounds, read the text in ways that opposed its dominant reading (138).

Gamson, Croteau, Hoynes, and Sasson (1992) eloquently argued for why we shouldn't assume a passive audience:

Some writers on media content ignore the decoding process, assuming an undifferentiated audience in which everybody will passively accept the dominant meaning. Those who examine how people actually use the media in constructing meaning invariably challenge such assumptions and find various kinds of oppositional and negotiated readings of cultural text (375).

Studying how specific groups decoded texts differently also led to a better understanding of how those groups inscribe meaning to text and how they utilize the text. This study hoped to be another study in the canon about the various ways that readers challenge and interpret mediums and how socioeconomic class can affect interpretations.

As Evans (1990) noted, recent audience work in media studies could be largely characterized by two assumptions “(a) that the audience is always active (in a non-trivial sense), and (b) that media content is ‘polysemic’ or open to interpretation” (279) Conducting audience research on celebrity news was

important because it moved away from the seemingly shallow substance of the text to investigate the potential meaningful ways the text was read and used. As previous research pointed out, it was a fallacy to assume that a shallow text concerning the romance, fashion and diets of celebrities was always read straightforward without resistance. The text might act as mobility and capital in readers' lives.

By pinpointing a specific demographic, in this case upper-class women, it was hypothesized that unique repertoires influenced by class would emerge. Additionally, the research aimed to see if a plurality of readings and uses of celebrity news existed among the interviewees. Audience research was the most appropriate as a theory because it's based on the variety of the ways the text is used rather than the text itself. I, however, tried to remember how Curan warned that an important part of audience research is to remember to not practice "over-reliance on group discussions and consequent failure to adequately probe intra-group and individual differences," (150). No one answer, or group think method, would be the goal. This looked to account for reading patterns (and disparities) among a group of upper-class women celebrity newsreaders.

Lastly, it was important to find out about the appeal and uses of celebrity news because it's such a successful branch of journalism and other branches of journalism should take note on *why* it's so attractive to the consumer. Celebrity news distinctly differs from hard news because it's not need-to-know information. It's often personal and fluffy, and it doesn't affect our world in any obvious or meaningful way. News, however, is information that gets disseminated, so if the popularity of celebrity news causes celebrity news to take



front stage —does that transform celebrity news into real news? The implications and forces behind the celebrity news surge needed to be explored. A good first step was to do audience research with some of its biggest fans.

### **Audience research in cultural and literary studies**

Cultural and literary studies have established a large canon of research of audience-based studies. This particular study falls into a similar thematic bucket as many studies conducted by cultural (rather than communication) studies. Cultural studies as Gamson, Croteau, Hoynes, and Sasson (1992 )wrote was one of the first academic disciplines to pay attention to audiences and their interaction with cultural mediums, especially about off-beat or low-brow mediums. Storey and Turner (1999) explained how cultural studies focused more on the dynamic rather than the static:

Cultural studies has always been more concerned with the meanings of cultural texts, that is, their social meanings, how they are appropriated and used in practice, meaning as ascription rather than inscription...the meaning, which circulated and becomes embedded in the lived cultures of people's lives (163).

Storey and Turner explored how the process of reading isn't an expedition but rather an adventure: "Reading is not the diving into a text to find a hidden treasure, we do not read *into* a text, we read *with* it, and *across* it. In this way, to read a text is to mobilize and to make something out of its specific materiality" (156). This is an important analogy, one that helped to elucidate why this research was worthwhile.

This research's concern was not what's within the pages, but rather this research focused on what materializes during and after the process of reading. It

aimed to see how being a celebrity newsreader affects one's life. This study aimed to copycat elements of a highly celebrated audience reception study by Janice Radway (1983) on romance novel readers. Radway conducted interviews with actual romance readers; she went beyond the seemingly vapidness of the often poorly written novels and examined the processes of reading these texts. Her work found complicated cultural repertoires about the reading of romance novels and how novel reading acted as a safe space to play out gender ideals. Her study pointed out how a medium that's often mocked (especially for its Fabio-inspired covers) could be studied through audience research and insightful points on gender, romance and culture materialized. Radway's research related to this study because her method (in-depth interviews and interpretative repertoires) was the same method plan for this research. Her focus (and original findings) about a "low brow" medium inspired this research and proved that important gender and cultural repertoires can be unearthed through interviews about reading habits. Radway's study, however, didn't select a specific economic class to interview and this study hoped that narrowing down the demographic from celebrity news readers to upper-class celebrity news readers might provide some insightful repertoires into class.

Building on Radway's research on how women's reception of media was more nuanced than initially thought, Jackie Stacey (1994) explored women's reception of 1940s films, and how the women negotiated the medium in order to find their own meaning. Through reading letters about cinematic female spectatorship in the 1940s, Stacey found that female spectatorship wasn't an escapist activity, but a process "of negotiating the dominant meanings of

Hollywood cinema, rather than one of being passively positioned against it” (106). Like Radway, Stacey discovered that women audiences don’t simply inhale the material they receive rather they are active participants in making powerful (and often alternative) meanings. As Radway and Stacey showed, women audiences weren’t just beakers to be filled rather they are elements that are ready to react in ways that cannot be assumed: They need to be questioned and researched. These previous scholars’ work exposed how one can learn about culture through viewing how its audiences ingest and digest media. This research hoped to use both studies on women’s reception of media as a starting block, but this also hoped to improve on them as well. Rather than to use letters like Stacey, this research chose to do face-to-face interviews to help make the conversation more dynamic and have the opportunity to clarify. The methodology of in-depth interviews with readers was derived from Radway’s study, but this study hoped to include an additional variable of class to pinpoint how it affected readership and interpretation.

Similarly to how Radway and Stacey studied women’s audience reception, Stanley Fish is the father of reader-response theory, the literary equivalent of audience reception research examined how different groups interpret text. Fish coined the term *interpretative communities* and their responsibility in making meaning in his seminal 1980 book *Is There a Text in this Class?* According to Fish, interpretative communities created the meaning of texts through their active reading: “Interpretation is not the art of construing but the art of constructing” (69). For Fish and other followers of the importance of audience

reception, there was no one meaning; there existed a plethora of possibilities as created by specific communities.

The idea of interpretative community was an important concept for audience research; it validated that the idea all objects are made not found. For instance, Fish's poetry class thought that a simple list of names was actually a poem with Christian and Biblical allusions. He credited this to the fact that they had all learned specific techniques to understanding poetry. Fish's theory of interpretative communities asserted the fact that a class of poets would come up with one insular meaning whereas a class of engineers would use their collective resources and land upon a very different one all together. This particular research sought to find out how membership to the upper class, this study's interpretative community, would influence the reading of celebrity magazine. It begged to ask, how did class affect interpretation? What common tropes or experiences from being part of the upper class would alter the reading of celebrity news?

Other audience studies have singled out various factors to see how a certain membership affects interpretation. For example, an important media study by Liebes and Katz (1986) demonstrated how ethnicity altered interpretation. As explained in by Storey and Turner (1999), Liebes and Katz's (1986) Dallas study pointed out how *Dallas* "may beam a homogenous message to the global village, but our study argues there is a pluralism in decoding," (89). The study also found a differing in *critical distance*: the Arabs and Moroccan Jews interpreted the story *referentially* and related it to their own lives; Russians interpreted it more *critically* and were less emotionally attached; the American and Kibbutz groups interpreted it more *flexibly*. Liebes and Katz partly attributed

the plurality of readings to varying levels of socialization with TV genres. With similar interest in the idea of critical distance, this research questioned the ways that an upper-class women might have affected the reader's distance from the text and whether she reads its referentially, critically or flexibly.

While the *Dallas* study looked at how ethnic backgrounds channels the interpretation, Mason and Meyers (2001) examined how fandom might affect audience engagement with media text. Their study on Martha Stewart fans and how they used her products was another good example of audience reception. The study used in-depth interviews as methodology to find out the roles of Martha's products in the lives of fans and why and how Martha Stewart fans used her products: Through analyzing the interviews, the researchers found that Stewart and her media products appear to play three main roles in the lives of the women in this study:

First, Stewart and her media encourage the fantasy of an upper-class lifestyle of elegance and luxury while providing an escape from the routine of their daily lives. Creating a look of affluence in their homes and gifts allowed fans to strive for the semblance of a desired lifestyle outside their financial reach. Second, they validated the women's interest in domesticity by making domestic work respectable and seem important, if not crucial, to living. Third, Stewart and her media foster creativity and feelings of accomplishment and pride among those who complete projects and recipes (819).

Similarly to Mason and Meyers study, this research aimed to find a variety of roles that celebrity news magazines played in women's lives. Instead of seeing how products influenced a woman's life, this looked to see how a text affected a woman's life. It hoped to go deeper than the Meyer and Mason's (2000) study by identifying more repertoires and seeing how class affected each of them. How

does that consumption of celebrity news play out into the homes and interactions of celebrity news? How does it affect one's clothes and lifestyle?

Collectively, these studies illuminated the need to study the different ways texts and media were used. One person might use a celebrity magazine as a fan to keep cool on the beach, and another person might worship its pages like false idols. As Wood (2004) who revisited Radway's seminal piece in "What Reading Romance Did for Us?" summed up the seeming simplicity of its purpose: "It seems to me that Radway returned to a very simple question: what do we do with literary texts?" (148). The utility of texts is important and it deserved to be explored, whether it is utility gleaned from religious texts, classics novels, romance novels or 'trashy' magazines.

### **Women's magazines**

A decent body of research on women's magazines was unearthed, but it was mostly composed in the form of complaint over what was in women's magazines. There existed a deficiency of research on relationship between magazines and their consumers. When audience reception theory was applied, the interaction between text and reader became more important than the text itself.

Ballaster, Frazer, Beetham and Hebron (1991) wrote in their book *Women's Worlds: Ideology, Femininity and the Woman's Magazine*: "Reading women's magazines can have exactly the same effect as eating two or more bars of chocolate — the original craving was real but in the end seems to have been for

the wrong thing ” (43). Among academics, women’s magazine bashing has qualified as an Olympic sport.

This might have been because in the academic world the ways people used magazines were often overlooked, and the focus too often remained on what’s in the magazines. Textual analysis had consistently been the preferred methodology to examine women’s magazines. Massoni (2004) credited Betty Freidan with the first in-depth textual assessment of women’s magazines:

Betty Freidan (1963) is often credited with the first textual analyses of women’s magazines in her feminist treatise, *The Feminine Mystique*. Freidan reported that women’s magazines of the 1950s and 1960s were ‘crammed full of food, clothing, cosmetics, furniture and the physical bodies of young women,’ (pg. 36) with limiting portrayals of women as mothers, housewives, and sex objects” (50).

More recent textual analysis of women’s magazines haven’t found any more flattering portrayals of women inside the glossy pages than Friedan did more than fifty years ago.

Aronson’s (2000) research offered a thorough inventory for the many reasons women’s magazines entice the criticism from angry critics:

In general, women’s magazines have been denounced for debilitating women, making them dependent on men (and on the magazines themselves), preventing self-realization, promoting self-denial, and creating the reader as little more than ornament, object, euphemism, maid, or mom machine. The genre has often been seen as a medium capable of perfect domination and its popular women readers as phantasmagorically ‘feminine’: passive, dependent, and witless in the extreme (111).

As Aronson’s explanation discussed, most research on magazine critiques how women’s magazine’s primary concern was to address the female as a sexual being (McClenghen, 2003, McMahan, 1990). Myrna Blyth (2004) wrote a book

entitled, *Spin Sisters: How The Women of the Media Sell Unhappiness, and Liberalism, to the Women of America*, her book critiqued both top magazine editors' quality standards and women's magazine's unrelenting sex coverage. Featherstone (2002) reported that women's magazines not only overemphasize the sex beat, but often sex coverage wasn't held to the same accuracy and editorial standards as other sections. Featherstone included, however, that some women's magazines were recently attempting to steer away from the idea of a women as just a sexual being. She wrote, "Top Glamour editor, Cindi Leive, recently revamped the magazine to include more non-sexual content — "Our readers are whole people," she says "Not just pelvic areas" (p.62). Perhaps this came in reaction to McCleneghan's (2003) research that discovered that the word "sex" appeared in 45 percent of *Cosmopolitan* and *Glamour* headlines and was implied in 62 percent (p. 320). This textual analysis found out great revelations about what editors think women want, but it didn't touch upon how readers read or negotiated these messages. Do women laugh at *Cosmo's* super-sized selling of sex and read it for camp or do they internalize this message? Because McCleneghan's research ended at textual analysis, we only learned what the magazine's editorial content contained rather than access a closer understanding of how women read it. This research aimed to step away from magazine's content to explore reader's interpretation.

The research that has been conducted on the relationship between reader and text contradicted the hypodermic needle assumption that reigned media studies for decades. Lowe (2003) organized a study with teenage girls on media texts concerning Britney Spears. She found that teenage girls were anything but



vacuous vehicles for media to manipulate. “In this qualitative study of adolescent girls and their complex relationship to singer Britney Spears, I engage this audience not as passive recipients of questionable material but as active agents in the creation of their own culture (123).” Lowe validated the importance of studying the unfixed active dynamic between audience and text: “Post-feminist criticism likewise questions a cause and effect approach, particularly the images of women theorizing that dominated second wave feminism. No longer do we assume an unproblematic relationship between image and audience, one in which the text clearly transmits meaning and the viewer easily decodes it” (123). Lowe’s words encouraged the need to look at the vibrant collaboration and subsequent creation that occurs between text and audience. Just as it was important to see how teenagers interpret the portrayal of Britney Spears, it was also important to see how upper-class women read the celebrities displayed in celebrity news magazines. Lowe’s model of a focus group of particular demographic, teenage girls, is informative, but this research goes a step further in depth by conducting individual interviews with readers in order to gain privilege into the private process of reading.

Much of this research’s methods and techniques is based off Dutch Hermes’ large study and book *Reading Women’s Magazines (1995)*. To date, Dutch researcher Joke Hermes had conducted one of the most substantive and substantial research on women’s magazines and audience reception. In Hermes’ book, she began with a critique on previous research on women’s magazines

The harmful quality of women’s magazines is emphasized, and this, however, implicitly, undermines the respect shown to readers for their point of view...How do magazines ‘harm’ readers? Do they do

so more than other media or other constructions of femininity? Do they do so more than harmless and innocuous constructions of femininity? Do harmless and innocuous constructions of femininity exist at all?

She further accessed that the existing research is more about the researchers than the readers: “It seems highly probable, therefore, that we know more about the concerns and views of researchers than we do about actual practices of women’s magazine use and the experience of the readers,” (10). This quotation highlighted the need to step away from textual criticism to start exploring not what researchers found in the text, but what readers found.

Hermes research was essential to formulating this study because she carried out in-depth interviews with actual readers about their reading habits. She concluded that “women’s magazines as a text are not highly significant, but as an everyday medium they are a means of filling a small break and of relaxing that does not interrupt one’s schedule, because they are easy to put down,” (144). This research aimed to test if reading celebrity news magazines functions in a similar way. Are celebrity newsweeklies really a disposable escape tool?

In her work, Hermes also touched upon British tabloid magazines and audience reception. She found four repertoires for why readers engage in tabloids:

1. Pleasure
2. An extended family repertoire “It engenders a highly personal form of address in which solidarity and connectedness resound” (127).
3. The repertoire of melodrama. “It questions what makes life worthwhile, thought normally not by rational reasoning, but by emotional appeal or outrage. Thus the repertoire of melodrama may provide solace for individual readers,” (128).
4. The moral community of gossip. “Gossip draws speakers together in their sharing and evaluation of ‘news’ and ‘third parties’” (129).

Hermes' repertoires on British tabloid research were helpful in establishing questions for interview guide. This research aimed to test if the repertoires on reading British tabloids overlapped with the repertoires on reading American celebrity newsweeklies by upper class American women. While Hermes' study was used as a good blueprint, her research and this research deviated in several integral ways. Celebrity tabloids are not a new medium in Britain, and they center more on the British royalty than U.S. movie, TV and music stars. Additionally, Hermes interviewed both men and women, and she didn't select any one particular class demographic.

Hermes repertoires, however, were extremely useful as guidelines and helped to inform questions. This research looked to see if any new repertoires (especially ones that were influenced by class) emerged since the interviews were conducted with only upper-class women. This research hoped to be an updated United States compliment to her extensive and renowned study.

In addition to looking at Hermes study on tabloids, I reviewed gossip studies because celebrity news is (and can be fairly) equated with gossip. It delves into the personal lives of others, sometimes without regard for the subject, his or her feelings and even the truth. Discourse studies had spent time analyzing and theorizing whether gossip has any positive functions. Guendouzi (2001) and Rosnow (1997) saw gossip as a way of establishing "in" and "out" groups and a means of social control. Rosnow also suggested, "gossip has a transactional function and may be used as form of social exchange, items of gossip being exchanged in order to gain material or symbolic capital," (Guendouzi, 1997, 33). Dunbar (1996) argued that gossip forms bonds and keeps social networks

adhered. This research used Dunbar's assessment to inform questions to see how gossiping about celebrities helped to form or adhere social or occupational networks.

Unlike Dunbar's positive view of gossip, Eggins and Slads (1997) had the thought "that gossip is a way in which large groups 'cohere and control' the behavior of groups" (Guendouzi, 1997, 33). Guendozi's research accessed that although gossip may exhibit some positive functions like bonding and language evolution, it also had drawbacks. It might, when it devolved into bitching, set back the women's movement:

In examples of gossip as bitching, there is a highly competitive function, one that continually reproduces and recycles hegemonic versions of femininity that ultimately constrict the options of gender identity available to women in a so called *post feminist world of choices* (48).

I noted this and also looked for comments on how celebrity news gossip affected reader's views on gender and feminism. This study hoped to piggyback on these gossip studies but also to continually monitor the distance between gossiping about people you know and people you know only from magazines.

Through reviewing the research on women's magazines, tabloids, and gossip, it became apparent the need for more studies on magazine audience research. This echoed Hermes' concern that more scholarly attention should be devoted to women magazines and how they are read. She lamented that:

This denigration of women's magazines and especially of their readers (a group to which many women, as well as considerable number of men from time to time) is based on elitist and inaccurate stereotypes that assume readers are not capable of assessing the value of text and are completely taken in by it (149).

Massoni (2004) whose research included work on occupational messages in teen magazines, reiterated Hermes' plea for more serious cultural and audience studies on tabloids: "At least one aspect of tabloidization — the specific performance of that which describes itself as journalism — demands more scrutiny than it currently gets from cultural studies," (60).

As just heard, a small chorus of academics sang to invite more research on tabloids and their audiences. Specifically, this research hoped to fill the void on United States celebrity newsweeklies and how they function in our culture. If we truly live in the age of celebrity news, academia must acknowledge it and see how celebrity news magazines are read, decoded, hated, and enjoyed. Before we damned the medium and by association condemned its readers, there needed to be more research. As Joke Hermes voiced, we need to unchain these readers' from shackles of pity and scorn in order to fairly judge both the text and the medium:

I have always felt strongly that the feminist struggle in general should be aimed at claiming respect. It is probably for that reason that I have never felt comfortable with the majority of (feminist) work that has been done on women's magazines. Almost all of these studies show *concern* rather than *respect* for those who read women's magazines (Storey and Turner, 120).

As Hermes elaborated, there existed an assumption in some feminine critical studies that these readers needed saving and that assumption needs to be challenged: "They need to be enlightened; they need good feminist texts in order to be saved from their false consciousness and to live a life free of false depictions as mediated by women's magazines, of where a woman might find happiness"

(Storey and Turner, 120). As Hermes pointed out, how did we know what women want (or get) from magazines unless we asked them?

### **Celebrity news**

A timeline of celebrity news must be flushed out in order to understand recent surge in celebrity news' popularity. In recent times, celebrity and news have begun to cohere to the point where it's difficult to separate one from the other. The categories of hard and soft news have melded with the *CBS* nightly news' Katie Couric reporting on Katie Holmes and Tom Cruise and *Us Weekly* interviewing presidential candidates. It's murky water. Scholars have noted this and many books have recently been published that documents the braiding of celebrity and news. This section delves into the history of celebrity journalism and explores the concerns about celebrity journalism from psychiatric, medical, and religious and journalism professionals. It also gives proponents for celebrity news a chance to argue why celebrity news is important. Finally, it looks at the future for celebrity news and the reasons a study with celebrity newsreaders was valuable.

To put it simply, journalism and celebrity news have history. Sydner (2003) pointed out how celebrity and journalism have always been linked: "Journalists may think of it as a delinquent child, but celebrity journalism has deep roots in the family" (447). Marshall's (2005) book *Intimately Intertwined in the Most Public Way* traced the history of celebrity in journalism. He attributed newspapers of the late nineteenth century with creating the celebrity news trend: "American newspaper magnates of the late nineteenth century such as Joseph Pulitzer and William Randolph Hearst built their empires on a brand of news

story that acknowledged a wider proportion of the population and attempted to cater to what was believed to be their interests and desires,” (21). By focusing on well-known figures, subscriptions increased.

Marshall explained how this type of journalism, often called yellow journalism, especially appealed to the United States because of its narrative message: “(It) represented heightened examples of individual achievement and transformation and thereby challenged the rigidity of class-based societies by presenting the potential to transcend these categories,” (21). And as the United States became more of a melting pot, celebrity news acted as a common ground: “In the US, newspapers, worked very hard at making stories that appealed across class and ethnic lines. Entertainment reporting over many decades gradually served as the principal sites for such a crossover” (23). Although celebrity news might be exponentially increasing, scholars have pointed out that it has always been a star in the journalism constellation.

Recently, scholars fretted that the celebrity news star shone so brightly that it started to fade out other branches of journalism. According to Chinni’s 2007 article in the *Christian Science Monitor*, “Condi Vs. Britney, Will Soft or Hard News Win?” the celebrity news market continued to dilate while ‘mainstream’ media contracted: “*The Star*, which became a glossy magazine in 2004, has seen its numbers go from 1.3 million to 1.54 million since 2004. *In Touch* has grown from 1 million to 1.26 million in that same time.” Chinni, and many other journalists and academics, lamented that the celebrity news craze encroaches on hard news territory, making it even more difficult to lure readers

away from Britney Spears' latest Starbucks trip and toward Condoleezza Rice's diplomatic tours.

It wasn't just the journalism field that's worried: Medical research pointed out that being a celebrity news junkie had negative side effects other than usurping hard news: Matlby, Houran, and McCutcheon (2003) research showed how celebrity news following might start as an innocent activity in childhood, but could potentially lead to personality disorders in adulthood:

The adoration of celebrities as idols or models is a normal part of identity development in childhood and adolescence (Green and Adams-Price), but beyond this form of parasocial interaction is the seemingly abnormal phenomenon whereby persons with assumed identities become virtually obsessed with one or more celebrities—similar to erotomaniac type of delusional behavior. This type of obsessive-like behavior is known as celebrity worship (25).

The trio of researchers concluded that stalking is the “perhaps the most dramatic and widely reported expression of this phenomenon, but celebrity worship can also affect on a private level the person with the fixation” (25).

In today's media, complete with tickers, blogs and RSS feeds, it's difficult to even know how to categorize what it means to just be in the “know” and what's a troublesome “fixation.” Where does stalking someone's ink trail devolve into stalking someone actual footsteps in the streets? In fact, the researchers' conclusion asserted this point: “The present findings suggest that, among UK samples, celebrity worship is not an uncommon phenomenon and its expression may be explained in part within wider personality theory,” (28). This research looked to explore the complex (perhaps damaging) relationship between the readers and celebrity news. Did the readers feel like they followed celebrities to a dangerous degree or is that simply an infliction for very few?



Researchers had also explored if our celebrity love put us at a high risk not just for personality disorders, but also threatened our ties with God: Maltby, Houran, Lange, Ashe, and McCutcheon (2002) administered a celebrity attitude scale to 307 British participants in an attempt “to provide further psychometric validation of the former and determine the relationship between celebrity worship and religiosity.” Religious subjects were not more likely but also not less likely. The researchers found this troublesome in regards to the commandment to not worship any other God: “This implies that many religious persons either ignore the aforementioned teaching or due to compartmentalism they fail to perceive celebrity worship is actually a violation of that teaching.” This study informed this research to explore what rank celebrity news had in these women’s magazine readers. Was it a hobby that they ‘d put in front of friends, lovers, family or even God?

Not everyone was worried that celebrity news was making us lose our minds or our religion. There existed academics that celebrated, or rather sought the positive, from the eruption of celebrity news volcano. Mendelson (2007) envisioned the paparazzi as detectives rather than as the bloodthirsty pack of technology-toting wolves, as they are often depicted. He argued, “In this view, paparazzi can be thought of as investigative journalists, attempting to uncover another ‘truth about celebrity’” (169). Mendelson characterized (and redeemed) the paparazzi by framing them as watchdogs of the rich, beautiful and — most importantly — powerful: “The paparazzi can be seen as an extension of a power structure, keeping the celebrities under surveillance,” (179).

Others also challenged the notion that ‘fluffs’ (the lives and trials of celebrities) made our brains go to mush and produced no positive outcomes. Brooks (2004) *USA Today’s* article “What Celebrity Worship Says about Us” argued that our interest in celebrity wasn’t as simple as just desiring to know the name of the latest Jolie-Pitt bunch, but rather our interest in celebrity news came from the desire to find common ground in a fractured society:

What we need is one universal cultural currency; a means of social grooming that extends across all of our villages. What we need is a cast of village characters- the good pretty girl (Jennifer Anniston), the poor little rich kid (Mary-Kate Olsen), the mom who lets herself go (Kirstie Alley)- whom we all know...we can connect between generations and across socioeconomic religious, gender and cultural divides (21A).

The optimistic article ended on a cheery note that a nation’s obsession with stars and starlets could be read positively. Brooks didn’t portray the US as nation of stalkers, rather she used the nation’s interest in celebrity to explain a need (and attempt) at solidarity: “What the rise of celebrity says about America is not that we’ve lost our minds, abandoned our heroes or given away our power, but we’re committed to connecting to each other.”

An anthropologist also jumped into the conversation to say some nice things about celebrity news and its place in academia: Peterson (1991) argued for the importance of studying tabloid magazines:

There is something culturally significant about newspapers that are bought in the millions, read aloud over morning radio shows, commented on by stand-up comedians in clubs and on television, and whose headlines are read and laughed over in checkout lines by millions of shoppers who would never dream of purchasing one (or at least to admitting to it)(4).

Additionally, Peterson theorized that tabloid news mirrors the work of anthropology because it “specializes in the marginal,” (5) and it describes “the Other to those here at Home.” The academics that found gems of positive value in celebrity news helped inform this research as well; they pushed the research to remember to look for utility (rather than just destruction) from celebrity news.

Whether or not celebrity news is a peril wasn't the only argument among scholars concerning celebrity news. Scholars bickered just as fiercely over who's to blame: For example, *USA Today's* inclusion of an article that defended celebrity news wasn't exactly surprising as that particular newspaper's gates have opened (or were forced to open) to include celebrity news. A master thesis by Boxleitner (2006) found that most *USA Today* editors didn't believe that the inclusion of celebrity news pushes out “harder news” from its pages. The editors he interviewed claimed: “Celebrity news is just part of the balance that the newspaper gives readers every day. Covering celebrities heavily is a way that keeps *USA Today* relevant in the ever-changing media landscape ” (4). Is the increasing coverage of celebrity news editors fault because they caved in? And did the inclusion of celebrity news automatically mean the loss of hard news? Is it a coin toss, which can only land on one side?

Weiskel argued that yes, we needed to chose, and media professionals needed to stage a resistance. “The rapid merging of news and entertainment businesses with the “hollywoodization” of news content, the dumbing down of public affairs programming, the trivialization of investigative journalism, and the ascendancy of reality TV” (396) has damaged our cultural and political fabric:

“The politics of distraction have triumphed in recent years through the wide-scale acceptance of national politics as a form of entertainment,” (396).

Others thought whether *USA Today* and other media gave prime real estate to Jolie’s Cambodian-born child, Maddox, over problems in Cambodia was not the media’s choice, rather it was the media relenting to the pressures and demands from the audience to feature celebrity coverage. Journalist Shenk (1997) tossed his blame into the audience cup: “If just one person moves a teaspoon of earth from one neighborhood to another, it makes no difference. But when a hundred million do it, it creates a canyon, a floodplain, and a wasteland. The same goes for sleazy media” (53). Shenk blamed the audience for the paparazzi’s increasingly guerilla tactics: “What the paparazzi do is wrong, whether it’s legal or not it’s illegal, whether or not it gets anyone killed. There’s no excuse for them. But that’s not the end of the story. Because they don’t buy their own pictures. We buy them”(53).

Although Shenk vilified the audience, he was unsure that the consumer audience can save itself. He advocated for more controls within the media: “When control becomes that diffuse and consumers are somewhat detached from the collective power of their actions, the market can get ugly” (55). Shenk wrote his book, *The End of Patience*, nearly ten years ago. Since then, the celebrity market moved from a kiddie pool and side attraction to become an Olympic-size pool and the main event. As Shenk predicted, “Tiny, seemingly insignificant consumer actions — like watching a few moments of a television show, or buying a tabloid at the supermarket — quickly add up to lucrative business”(53). In Shenk’s view, the consumers screwed the bolts and nuts in to create a monster of

Frankenstein, which now preys not only on the fringes but also the masses. Shenk's and others' argument, however, depended on two assumptions 1) celebrity journalism was definitively bad, and 2) that no productive meaning could be gleaned out of the medium. This research hoped to dispute this claim and to find levels of meaning in celebrity news reading just as Radway had found in romance novels.

As too often was often the tradition in media studies, the medium has been the focus. The medium has been judged without figuring out how the medium was actually used and what meaning its audience deduced from it and inscribed onto it. In the words of Radway (1984),

If we learn, then, to look at the ways in which various groups appropriate and use the mass produced art of our culture, I suspect we may well begin to understand that although the ideological power of contemporary cultural forms is enormous, indeed sometimes even frightening, that power is not yet all-pervasive, totally vigilant, or complete (222).

By spending time with readers, a better understanding of the forces (and whether they were dark forces) that herded readers to celebrity news became apparent.

In the mad dash to pin the guilt of our decaying moral fabric on the celebrity news' tail, scholarship forgot to make any clear links between readers migrating away from hard news and moving to celebrity news. Through this audience research, a better portrait of a celebrity newsreader was hopefully painted.

## **Upper-class women**

Upper-class women were chosen as the demographic for three reasons. First, they were chosen because they are an understudied group. Second, they were chosen because theory asserted they are a group whose habits are often emulated by others. Third, they were chosen because some cultural studies research theorized that, contrary to other countries, familiarity in the U.S. with pop culture had been used for social capital.

As a demographic, the upper class had not been studied often by social research. This might be because scholars were more interested in helping (and studying) groups in need and it might also be because access to the upper class has been notoriously difficult. But the void of research has not gone unnoticed: In 2007, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation even funded a study on the rich to fill the void of social research on the matter. The study hoped to “boost charitable giving by offering a better understanding of the wealthy.” Robert Frank, in his reporting about the study, notes that universities are “much better at studying the poor than the rich.” Although there were perfectly good reasons for not focusing on the upper class in research, this has led to misperceptions and misconceptions. Upper-class women were particularly affected by the thin canon. Ostrander (1984) commented: “Social scientists have conducted very few studies of the upper class, and those studies do not focus on women of this class. When women are mentioned, it is most often in relation to their husbands and their family role” (6). This research hopefully contributed to the slowly growing body of work on the upper class, particularly the women.

Ostrander's work attempted to fill the abyss of academic research on upper-class women. She noted how despite the fact that upper-class women are fixated and mythologized by pop culture, they were rarely touched upon in social science:

Although the upper class woman has rarely been empirically studied by social scientists, her life is of great fascination to the popular media. The society pages of urban newspapers portray her as a frivolous lady of fashion and leisure, planner of empty upper class rituals like debuts and club luncheons, pampered wife, organizer of charity balls, and lady bountiful at civic events where trappings of fashion and decor are seen as of greater significance than the trappings of community power surrounding the event. These popular portrayals of women of the upper class are empty and inaccurate; and I have no reason to think that they have not influenced social scientists along with everyone else (7).

Ostrander's research also used in-depth interviews in an attempt to better understand this particular demographic. By using in-depth interviews, Ostrander explored "the activities of upper class women in the context of class-defined contributions, constraints, awards and motivations as defined by the women themselves" (153). Ostrander's research, however, never explored upper-class women beyond their roles as mothers, wives and volunteers; her research only examined upon the personal and leisure activities of these women.

In a vein similar to Ostrander's research, this research aimed to mimic Ostrander's goals by studying "meaning and consequence" (4) of an everyday activity of some upper-class women: celebrity news reading. The research examined what this activity means to the women themselves.

The second reason upper-class women were picked to study is that they represent a powerful group. As Ostrander noted, one of the functions of "women

of the upper class is the setting of social and cultural standards for the rest of the population to admire and emulate population” (8). If one followed this theory, the popularity of celebrity news among upper-class women might have contributed to the widespread obsession with celebrity news due to the fact that many wish to emulate not only the celebrities but also upper-class women who read the celebrity publications.

Veblen, a late 20<sup>th</sup> century philosopher, had similar thoughts on the leisure class. For Veblen, the idea of leisure class is a class that is powerful but whose actual work contributes very little. In his opinion, society would always have a leisure class but how their actual occupations change throughout time. The leisure class stays in power through influence. As Brown (1998) explained, Veblen’s (1899) seminal work, *The Leisure Class*, theorized that in attempts to emulate the leisure class, our society became obsessed with participating in wasteful practices:

Members of the leisure class adopted various symbolic representations of their power to waste time and wealth. Due to respect for their prowess, the leisure class enduring ‘wasteful’ practices became honorific. And, again under the stimulus of emulation as members of lower ranks gradually imitated the symbols associated with leisure class status to the extent possible (Veblen 1899, pp. 84-85; 103-104) the principle of conspicuous waste inexorably penetrated the conventional scheme of life at all levels of society- ‘no class of society.’ Veblen averred, ‘even the most abjectly poor, forgoes customary conspicuous consumption,’ (Veblen 1899, p. 85).

Celebrity news can easily be viewed as a practice of “customary conspicuous consumption.” Modern scholars in Brown’s (1998) book *Thorstein Veblen in the Twenty first Century* argued that Veblen’s theories are still very applicable and at work. Dugger (1998) discussed that the continuous obsession with emulating the



leisure class would eventually doom us into a cycle of worthless wasteful engagement:

Conspicuous leisure: enormous amounts of human effort will be wasted with the global spread and intensification of conscious leisure. This does not mean people will be idle. It means that people all over the globe will be caught up in an emulative drive to devote ever more of their time to unproductive activities that demonstrate their worthiness, through their demonstrated exemption from work, (82).

To further: “Veblen would have examined today’s extravagances with insistence on recognition of the hierarchal order of spenders, with each stratum taking its spending inspiration from those above it,” (96). Applying this to the increasing popularity of celebrity news, the habits of wealthy women might have acted as the push button for a Rube Goldberg effect, one where the indulgence in celebrity magazines trickled down from the upper class to all other social classes.

In order to assess whether celebrity news magazine consumption fits in with Veblen’s theory of “conspicuous leisure,” research into if — and in what ways — upper-class women celebrity newsreaders read and used the medium was examined. Through interviewing the women themselves about the practice, it was further assessed whether celebrity news consumption by upper-class women readers should be simply classified as a wasteful practice of the upper class, conspicuous consumption, and one that other classes might have emulated to negative effects.

Lastly, upper-class women were picked for this study to examine if Peterson and Kern’s (1996) sociological study was applicable to celebrity news magazine consumption. The study found that though in the past engagement in highbrow culture was the mark of high status, this might no longer be the case. The

researchers found the snob, someone who only participates in highbrow, was in the decline while the omnivore, someone who dabbles in high- and low-brow, was on the rise. This countered French researcher Bourdieu's (1973) theory that

cultural capital, defined originally in terms of familiarity with and an appreciation of legitimate or "high" culture, contributes to the maintenance of boundaries between the members of different social classes. Specifically, he claimed that a familiarity with "high" culture serves as a basis for distinguishing members of the dominant class from members of the subordinate class (Allen and Barnett, 146).

Allen and Barnett's study on films found that in the "Conversely, cultural capital in the United States can take the form of a cultural repertoire, consisting of a general familiarity with a fairly broad range of cultural codes that encompass both high and popular culture," (149). Similarly, this study aimed to see if being in the celebrity "know" is now a marker for social or class status.

This literature review sought to demonstrate three important criteria 1) the validity for audience research in this study, 2) the need for audience research on upper class women celebrity newsreaders, and 3) evidence that relevant culture repertoires have been found through researching reading habits.

If the elephant in the newsroom is celebrity news, this research aims to see who is feeding it peanuts. If you ask, what propels our culture to read about celebrity DUIs rather than to read about international genocides? Most would answer "the reader." So what role does the reader have in consuming celebrity news? Is there utility that we continually miss? Does celebrity news fill a void that modern day culture has drilled into our cultural fabric? Or is celebrity news drilling a hole into our nation's fabric?

The theories that inform this research are theories that point to how different groups use media in various ways and how everyday media consumption does have significant (if not positive) contribution to our society. As a qualitative study, this study doesn't aim to answer, rather it aims to start questioning one particular demographic about how and why they read celebrity news.

## **CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY: INTERVIEWING UPPER-CLASS WOMEN**

Perhaps because so many disdain the increasing popularity of celebrity news, it was more important to try to find out the reasons that so many consumers are drawn to it. This research used audience theory to find the repertoires of how these upper-class women read and use celebrity news magazines.

The research used qualitative interviews to answer the research questions. Interviewing as a qualitative method became popular as method for clinical diagnosis and counseling in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century.

First, interviewing found great popularity and widespread usage in clinical diagnosis and counseling, where the concern was with the quality of response. Second, during World War I interviewing came to be widely employed in psychological testing; here the emphasis was on measurement (Denzin, 2003 65).

Over time, interviewing evolved into an effective way to enter the worlds of others: “As Gubrium and Holstein (1998) had noted, the interview had become a means of contemporary storytelling, where persons divulge life accounts in response to interview inquiries,” (Denzin, 2003, 63). Miller and Glassner (1997) dubbed interviewing “a methodology for listening” and named its chief concern as “seeing the world from the perspective of our subjects,” (Silverman, 2003, 345). Burgess (1984) called interviews “a conversation with a purpose” (Mason, 1997, 38). This was the appropriate method for the research because the research involved questioning women about a potentially intimate activity: reading.

Because the focal point was not on the text but on the readers, interviews were an excellent methodology because they focused on the subjects and their opinions and habits. According to Mason (1997), interviews should be used only when “your ontological position suggest that people’s knowledge, views, understanding, interpretations, experiences, and interactions are meaningful properties of the social reality which your research questions are designed to explore,” (40).

Interviews worked for this particular research because it was one of the only feasible ways to obtain the data. Because the focus was on the audience and how she used the text, only direct participation or interviews would have been appropriate methods. Since reading magazines wasn’t a scheduled or public routine, it would have been nearly impossible feat to observe the reading and all the ways that this information was used in daily life. Interviews with the readers provided me with this information.

I interviewed 17 women for the study who met two criteria: 1) they read *Us Weekly* at least every other week, and 2) they have a household income more than \$100,000. They were found through networking and snowballing. Much of the networking took place on Nantucket Island, a summer retreat for many wealthy people, this location provided greater and easier access to the intended demographic. A semi-structured interview was used. Researcher Mason (1990) stated that these types of interviews are characterized by “a relatively informal style, for example, with the appearance of a conversation or discussion rather than a formal question and answer format the assumption that the data generated via the interaction are the data sources,” (38). All interviewees filled out an identical survey to obtain demographic information (see appendix IV).

This information was used to more accurately detail this particular individual's demographic.

Sixteen of the 17 women are Caucasian; one woman is Hispanic. Fifteen of the 17 women are working professionals; the other two are stay-at-home mothers with adult children. The average age was 30, and the range of ages went from a 19-year-old college student to a 58-year-old housewife. Most of the women identify New York as their hometown, but there is a diversity of locations from Los Angeles to Washington, D.C.

The interviewer had a list of questions on hand, but additional questions were added in order to clarify or further explore areas not covered by the questions (see appendix III). The list acted merely as a rough guide. The questions on it were formulated with Berger's advice in mind: They started shallow and became deeper as the interview progressed. All the questions were informed by different theories on audience research, celebrity news, gossip and class. Ethical concerns, as Silverman outlined, were addressed with each participant before beginning the interview. I obtained informed consent from each participant, and each participant was granted the right to privacy and protection from harm (Silverman 89).

During the interview, Kvale's (1996) advice for quality interviewees was consulted and practiced. Kvale determined that quality interviews depended on: "the extent of spontaneous, rich, specific answers from the interviewee; the shorter the interviewee's questions and the longer the subject's answers, the better; the degree to which the interviewer follows up and clarifies meaning of the relevant aspects of the answers," (145). The questions in appendix III were also

formulated with this in mind; these questions hopefully acted more as topics to explore rather than a strict question and answer.

The idea of pop culture as represented by celebrity news was examined. Interviewees were queried to see if knowledge gleaned for the magazines is used as a form of social capital in any of the circles that they participate in. Additionally, Allen and Barnett wondered “is the manner in which individual with different cultural repertoires interpret various forms of popular culture. Very little was known about the ability of individuals from different social classes to adopt an ‘aesthetic disposition’ toward various forms of popular culture,” (162). The interviews helped illuminate if upper class, as a collective, adopted any particular or specific aesthetic disposition to the medium. It aimed to highlight any particular repertoires that may be derived from their class setting.

Research (Morgan, 1988, p.22) suggested that a disadvantage of research was the unnatural social setting. Krueger and Casey (2000) explained that this had been especially a problem for academic research: “Academics went to the target audience ... As a result, academics began using alternative locations such as homes, public meeting rooms and restaurants” (162). In order to make subjects feel comfortable, the research was conducted at participant’s homes and at coffee shops. The location was the participant’s choice in order to ensure she felt comfortable in the setting. Two friends were interviewed together in order to accommodate their schedules.

Each interview lasted approximately a half hour. Some extended to nearly an hour though. The interviews were taped with the participant’s permission, and a confidentiality agreement was signed. The interviews were subsequently

transcribed verbatim. The transcripts from these 17 interviews can be found in the appendix I.

I followed Krueger and Casey (1994) suggestion to “set up the tape-recording equipment and remote microphones before the meeting begins and in plain sight of the participants” (105). This hopefully helped the participants feel more comfortable and more familiar with the process.

I transcribed the tapes from each of the interviews. As recommended by Meyers and Mason, the transcripts were read and reread as preliminary analysis: “The continual reading and rereading of the transcripts allow classification to emerge from the data rather than letting predetermined categories or preconceived ideas establish categories,” (809).

After a few initial listening to the tapes and readings of transcripts, the researcher followed Krueger’s (1994) method for analysis:

As the researcher comes across an idea or phenomenon a label is attached. When the idea or phenomenon reappears the label is once again attached. In focus groups this process consists of codes placed in the margin of the transcript, or if the computer is used a selection of text is marked and assigned the designated code. Later the researchers may want to selectively retrieve and review information pertaining to certain codes, combination of codes, or related situations. This information can then be assembled differently from the original version. The process, which is called axial, coding, allows the researcher to fracture the data and to reassemble it in new ways (128).

When I transcribed, the purpose to finding out repertoires of how celebrity news was used constantly kept in mind. As Krueger states, “The decision of which quotes to include sometimes presents a problem to the researcher. The selection choice should be influenced by the purpose of the study,” (131). Particular attention was paid to results that run contrary to evolving conclusions. Krueger



explained that good analysis didn't silence the contrarians' evidence: "They attempt to find discomforting evidence. They make efforts to explain the outliers, the unusual cases, or those who have a minority view" (137).

Common errors, as described by Silverman( 2003), were also kept in mind during the analysis:

1. Explaining a turn at talk by a reference to the speaker's intentions.
2. Explaining a turn at talk by reference to the speaker's role or status.
3. Trying to make sense of a single line of transcript or utterance in isolation (358).

When I identified similar themes, she wrote out the quote and grouped it with similar quotations and ideas. If a certain thought pattern or theme was repeatedly recognized, I combed the transcripts from additional support (or contrary evidence) of the repertoire. Although the goal of the research was not to make asweeping generalized statements, my analysis hopefully captured more than just 'sound bites' and identified verifiable repertoires about reading celebrity news.

## **CHAPTER FOUR: DATA: ACCESSING AND CONSUMING CELEBRITY NEWS**

### **The where, when, of upper-class women celebrity news readers**

An important part of understanding celebrity news readers is learning about reader's reading habits. In particular, where, when and for how long the celebrity news reading occurs.

### **Buying on the Fly**

Most of the participants do not have subscriptions. Most purchase celebrity news magazines on the fly or the first place they encountered them. From the responses, it appears that although the subjects are regular readers of celebrity news, the purchase still often happens impulsively.

A sampling of the responses:

**Subject 1:** Mostly at airport. Or grocery store.

**Subject 4:** Wherever they sold it. The closest bodega.

**Subject 10:** Drugstore, bookstore

**Subject 11:** Convenience stores:

**Subject 12:** Either at the supermarket or newsstand in my office building.

This might be especially particular of this demographic who can afford to pay newsstand prices on a consistent basis. Respondents may also purchase celebrity magazines impulsively because of the complex emotions that the interviewees felt towards readings them. For example, **Subject 5** admits that she canceled her *Us Weekly* subscription because she decided to no longer read it.

She then confesses that she purchased around 35 out of 52 issues of *Us Weekly* the following year. This complex dynamic of the love/hate relationship will be further explored in later sections.

For most respondents, an issue takes less time to read than to watch a half-hour sitcom. For a few of the respondents, the duration of time depends on whether they actually read the articles of that particular issue.

**Subject 3:** 40 minutes. Longer if I like and then actually read the articles.

**Subject 4:** It takes me 30 minutes. Maybe an hour if I read the main article.

Interestingly enough, the older the participant, the longer she reports it takes to read an issue. **Subject 8**, a housewife in her mid-50s, states it takes 2 days. The three women in their 50s, **Subject 12**, a commercial real estate agent, **Subject 8** and **Subject 6**, a different housewife in her late 50s, also report the most overall time talking about celebrity news per week. I hypothesize that this might be that more available time a woman has, the more in-depth she might be able to engage with a particular issue.

In general, however, these celebrity magazines appear to be disposable, quick reads rather than mediums that are pored over.

Some of the women are involved in almost magazine-club type trading activities, but most women just publicly display the magazines until it was time to recycle. Interestingly to report, several women say the magazines are placed on the coffee table until recycled. It can be inferred that most of these women have no problem self-identifying as celebrity newsreaders; some even prominently display their affection for celebrity news on the coffee table.

**Me time: reading celebrity news as a leisure activity**

Most of the participants read the magazines either on the couch, at the gym, or in transit (airport, airplane, subway). Some of the answers indicate the participant's class: such as Subject 1, a 25-year-old sales representative, and response:

**Subject 1:** "On the couch. On the plane. There's a stack. And on weekends, my roommate will go to CVS, and she'll buy a bottle of water, sunscreen and every magazine. And we'll go to the pool to read them."

Reading celebrity news magazines at the pool certainly qualifies it as leisure activity. Other responses also have class embedded in them. **Subject 10** says she reads, "at the gym, getting a manicure/pedicure." These locations imply a certain amount of free, leisure time and expendable income. **Subject 8** responded: "Home, beach, on vacation." For Subject 8, a stay-at-home mom, the magazines provide fodder for leisurely conversation while on the beach.

The majority of the interviewees read the magazines at home while lounging. **Subject 4**, a particularly enthusiastic reader, says she read her magazines "in the elevator. Right after I get it out of mailbox." The locations may vary, but the answers all state that the magazines are part of a leisure routine. A way to distress or perhaps multitask while doing another mundane activity like traveling, lounging or spa treatments. Additionally, it should be noted that the readers describe this a personal activity; for these readers, reading celebrity news magazines is not a group activity where a bunch of people huddle around a magazine. It's "me" time.

## **How long has your garden grown? Cultivating a celebrity news reading hobby**

Most subjects respond that this has been a hobby for approximately five to seven years. This supports the point that many women became more interested in celebrity culture after the shock of 9/11. It's hard to determine, however, because more and more titles debuted around this time.

Many subjects also comment on how magazines like *People* and *Us Weekly* expanded on (and legitimized) what used to be the *Enquirer's* tabloid territory. Subject 1 explains how *People* took the tabloids out of outer space and got us hooked on human scandal: **Subject 1:** “*The Enquirer* was all aliens.... I remember the only celebrities were just like Kirstie Alley and Princess Diana. I do remember the first *People* I bought with Princess Diana in the black turtleneck. I became obsessed.” Princess Diana was a frequent gateway to celebrity culture for these interviewees. Interest in her morphed into interest in all things celebrity. As **Subject 6** states, she remembers the start of the new celebrity magazine: “People could buy *People* and not feel shameful about buying this trashy magazine that had UFOs in it. *People* came out by the people that do *Time*, *Newsweek*. It didn't feel sleazy.”

**Subject 11** can even pinpoint the day her celebrity fascination was born. “The first issue of *People* in 1974.” Other younger participants explain that their fascination in celebrities started with one particular celebrity interest or crush, (examples ranged from the New Kids on the Block to the cast of *Friends*, to singer Tiffany to ice-skater villain Tonya Harding) and they became magazine readers in order to learn about their fascination. This particular gateway interest often

became the rabbit's hole into interest in all things celebrity. A crush on one favorite star appears to be enough fodder for the magazines to cultivate someone into a regular celebrity newsreader. For the purpose of this research, this idea will be called *Princess Diana Gateway Cultivation*, which refers to the ability to cultivate a celebrity newsreader out of one particular celebrity interest. This is an important area for magazine editors to explore in order to increase circulation.

### **Readers as cultural omnivores**

Most of the women report themselves to be hungry readers of many forms of media; one could fairly call them news and cultural omnivores. A smattering of their responses to what other types of media they use:

**Subject 1:** I read the paper, mostly online. .I read nytimes.com, I'll go to business journals. “

**Subject 9:** NPR, news Web sites, newspaper

**Subject 17:** I read the newspaper online. *New York Times*. I read the subway newspaper. Then I watch the news before I go to bed.

**Subject 8:** Television, radio and Internet

**Subject 3:** *Best week Ever*. I DVR it. *Soup on E. E! True Hollywood Story*. Local or nightly news. I go to the internet a lot, but not for celebrity. I read nytimes online.

While these women enjoy their celebrity news, they are also apt to pick up a variety of well-respected news publications. Most of the respondents also consider themselves up-to-date with both world and US events. This adheres with Peterson and Kern's (1996) study that found that while previously engagement in

highbrow culture was the mark of high status, this might no longer be the case. The researchers found the snob, someone who only participates in highbrow, was in decline while the omnivore, someone who dabbles in high and low brow, was on the rise.

In a similar vein, the interviewees are consumers of both hard and soft news, somewhat the journalism equivalents of high- and low-brow. This challenges whether it's fair to blame celebrity news for hard news' recent trouble when most of the respondents were consumers of both. As **subject 7** puts it, there's room for both at the dining room table: "I tell my husband when we are discussing the actual news of events of the day, if you can believe it. Like this: 'Israel is going to bomb Pakistan and Britney Spears is going to be on the VMAs.'"

Additionally, this also runs contrary to Bourdieu's theory about cultural capital and class: Bourdieu argued that cultural capital, defined originally in terms of familiarity with and an appreciation of legitimate or "high" culture, contributes to the maintenance of boundaries between the members of different social classes. In this case, reading celebrity magazines is not a clear marker of one's class. Only one third of *Us Weekly's* celebrity newsreaders are upper-class readers, this shows that this medium isn't a high culture medium. Mediums that are considered high culture are the quote-unquote finer arts (opera, symphony and other artistic expressions that often require background knowledge to appreciate). Celebrity news is accessible to most, therefore, does not fall into Bourdieu's idea of cultural capital.

Class indication no longer means sticking to a diet of one particular type media. This evidence ventures to say that in today's world what people read

doesn't necessarily predict their class or preclude one from reading a variety of types (and quality levels) of journalism. Celebrity news may well not be who killed the hard news star.

Understanding the patterns of consumption helps to better explain the role of celebrity news in these upper class women's lives. As demonstrated by the facts that these magazines are often bought on the fly, consumed leisurely and discarded quickly, celebrity news plays a role, mainly a personal pursuit of leisure, in these women's lives, but the celebrity news isn't as extremely important identifying aspect of these women. Mainstream media outlets don't need to give up celebrity newsreaders. For many, celebrity news reading is merely a dessert; they still like to fill up on other media for their mea- and-potatoes diet. It appears that we're moving toward (at least for upper-class women) a demographic of media omnivores. This might be evidence for unusual partnerships between media outlets, and media should take notice that people do want to access hard news as well but not give up on Brangelina.



## **CHAPTER FIVE: INTERPRETIVE REPERTOIRES: CLASS AND READING**

The main goal of this study is to establish interpretative repertoires about audience research of celebrity newsreaders. A secondary goal is to compare the newly found interpretative repertoires to ones established by Joke Hermes. To review, the four repertoires identified by Hermes (1995) were:

1. Pleasure 2. An extended family repertoire “It engenders a highly personal form of address in which solidarity and connectedness resound” (127).
3. The repertoire of melodrama. “It question what makes life worthwhile, thought normally not by rational reasoning, but by emotional appeal or outrage. Thus the repertoire of melodrama may provide solace for individual readers,”(128).
4. The moral community of gossip. “Gossip draws speakers together in their sharing and evaluation of ‘news’ and ‘third parties,’ (129).

I identified nine interpretative repertoires about upper class women celebrity news reading. Only one of the interpretative repertoires from Hermes’ tabloid research repeats itself. The interpretative repertoires found are 1) The New Playgirl: The Aesthetic Appeal of Celebrity News, 2) I Want Glossy Candy: Celebrity News as an Addictive Power, 3) It’s About Them, Not Me: Critical Distance and Reading Celebrity News, 4) It’s Okay Because They Asked for it: Celebrity News Reading Justifications, 5) I’ll Show You Mine If You Show Me Yours: Referential Readings, 6) Whistle Why you Work: Celebrity News in the Office, 7) My Precious: Celebrity News Magazines as Material Capital and 8) Keeping Up With the Jolie-Pitts: Celebrity News Magazines as a Pocket Guide. The first six repertoires are not definitively affected by class membership; however, the last two repertoires do reflect the reader’s upper-class status.

### **The new playgirl: The aesthetic appeal of celebrity news**

The first interpretive repertoire, more than any other, weaves its way into nearly all of the seventeen interviews. Like a broken record, participant after participant utter the same idea: celebrity news magazines should be looked at, not read. Dominantly, the candid photographs, the who wore it best section and images in general are listed as the favorite sections. Additionally, most confide, even aggressively assert, they do not *read* celebrity news rather they look at the pictures. The following excerpts elucidate this point:

**Subject 17:** I study the pictures. Look at what everyone's wearing.

**Subject 15:** I always look at the pictures first.

**Subject 6:** I like the beginning sections of *Us Weekly* where they show pictures of people doing regular things. I have no idea why — probably a voyeurism issue.

Participants explain how if they were to read something, it wouldn't be a magazine like *Us Weekly*. They don't care about the actual text, they are satisfied to browse the magazine and write their own narratives as they read the pictures.

**Subject 4:** I can't stand the main article. I don't care about Britney's meltdown.

**Subject 9:** Pictures. I only really look at the pictures. The articles often feel too subjective.

**Subject 14:** The fashion. I read that part but don't look at it as fashion magazine. I read so many other fashion magazines, so I don't pay attention like I do to *Vogue*.

**Subject 1:** I'll read a *Vanity Fair* article on Angelina but not so much *Us Weekly*.

**Subject 15:** I look at *Us Weekly*. *Cosmo* is fun to read. Polls and stories. *Vogue* is too many advertisements and articles.

These responses indicate that celebrity news magazines are not picked up for their prose rather they are purchased in spite of the narrative and narrative style. The magazines are selected for the visual rather than textual elements. This appears to be for two reasons: First, if the reader would chose to actually read, celebrity news magazines would not be the publications they'd go to. For many women, it's a quality issue. Both **Subject 1** and **Subject 8** express distress over celebrity news' sourcing. As **subject 1** put it, "The source says something, but who's the source. It could be the gardener; it could be the best friend." So while the women might *buy* the magazines, they don't *buy* into contents inside the magazines. The second reason is these readers think of celebrity newsweeklies as a special medium; their main purpose is to produce pleasure with minimal effort. This is best achieved through looking rather than reading.

This interpretive repertoire is very akin to Hermes' (1996) first repertoire about tabloids, which was pleasure. Both this research and Hermes found that celebrity news gratifies a need for brainless pleasure. This supports Broker's (2003) research on the British magazine *Jackie*, which he wrote "key features are ...that it asks to be read at a leisurely pace, indicating that its subject matter is not wholly serious, and is certainly not news. The dominance of the visual level, which is maintained throughout reinforces the notion of leisure," (Brooker, 2003, 240). The interviewees from this research second this point; they buy celebrity newsweeklies for visual, rather than textual, qualities. Apologies to the writers.

I speculate whether membership to the upper class affects this particular repertoire. As Allen and Barnett mentioned, “Very little was known about the ability of individuals from different social classes to adopt an “aesthetic disposition position.” It is possible that these women’s class membership prejudices them (unknowingly or knowingly) against the written text and any element of so-called newness, so instead they focus on the aesthetic element, how the celebrities look, what they wear, how they wear it. Stanley Fish’s (1983) idea about interpretive communities is helpful in flushing this idea out. The basic idea of Fish’s interpretative communities is that they use their similar encoding and decoding skills to make particular meaning out of a text. It’s possible that this specific community, young and middle-age upper class women, are fluent and knowledgeable in clothing designers and labels, which draws them all to the aesthetic elements of the magazines. But in our weight- and appearance-obsessed culture, it’s also entirely that people from all classes care more about how people look rather than who they are and what they do. In order to flush this out, interviews with multiple economic classes of women would need to take place.

In the first repertoire, there begins to be hints of contradictions in the women’s talk about the magazines. On one hand, they attest they do not *read* the magazines, but they often admit to details that indicate they must read the magazines such as knowing who sources from specific articles were.

Contradictions like this occur throughout the interviews and further illuminate women’s personal, complicated and often unclear relationship with the text.

**I want glossy candy: celebrity news as an addictive power**

The dynamic between celebrity news magazines and interviewees sometimes crosses lines into what can be considered addictive behavior. For the purpose of this research, addictive behavior is defined as habits that people continue to participate in despite wanting to quit. The language the interviewees use especially conjures up notions of addiction. **Subject 6** even bluntly says, “I feel like an addict. You say you don’t want it but you go back and get it. I feel like a dope addict and a dope.” This comment, without context, could be about any addictive substance, but in fact, it’s about her relationship to celebrity news magazines.

**Subject 1** even describes *bingeing* on celebrity news when she fell behind. “If I have been busy and I haven’t caught up in my blogs, it’s like Christmas.”

**Subject 7** refuses to read celebrity news online because of the infinite amount of time that could be spent looking at the hundreds of pages, blogs and sites devoted to celebrity news.

Respondents, similar to many who struggle with drug addiction, explain both the pleasure and pain that they experience from being hooked on celebrity magazines. **Subject 5**, a lawyer, admits that she attempted to give it up but was unable. **Subject 5**: “ I tried to give it up for New Year’s. But then after a couple of weeks went back onto Perez. Maybe not forever, when I have more going on. If it’s really busy at work, I won’t go on. But if it’s not, it’s a great procrastination.” Although few participants admit to an actual dependency on celebrity news, many echo the sensation of at points wanting to give it up and being incapable of doing so.

I ask **Subject 7** what it would be like to miss an issue of her favorite celebrity news. **Subject 7** answers, “I don’t care, however, ask me this same question a year ago and I would tell you it’s like getting my arm cut off.” **Subject 7** has somewhat weaned herself off from being constantly engaged in celebrity news but she admits it’s nothing she can imagine ever abandoning completely. The faint echoes of addiction that run through the interviews support Maltby, Houran and McCutcheon (2003) research that following celebrity news might begin innocuously but can develop into dangerous, obsessive behaviors. I did not interview anyone that I felt actually had a disorder that affected being able to live a normal life (for example, stalking), but I did notice how celebrity news can consume a person’s time in ways that the reader doesn’t welcome and the reader can feel helpless to resist.

Hermes main finding in researching women magazine readers was “women’s magazines as a text are not highly significant, but as an everyday medium they are a means of filling a small break and of relaxing that does not interrupt one’s schedule, because they are easy to put down,” (144). This research challenges this notion. For these women, celebrity news is not easily put down or given up. It’s consumed hungrily, sometimes even on elevators. The concept I coined to explain this phenomena is *self-fulfilling guilt gratification*. Despite the fact that guilt is the known feeling that results from reading these magazines, readers find themselves propelled continue this cycle. This follows in Veblen’s (1899) idea of conspicuous consumption. These women consume these magazines without restraint. According to Veblen’s theory, this consumption becomes a tipping point and other classes follow pattern. This repertoire of

addictive consumption is seen throughout classes, but this study doesn't explore whether other classes might be "addicted" to celebrity news because of the constant pursuit to mimic the leisure class.

Group reading patterns might also be part of why so many have a difficult time beating the habit. Most interviewees affirmed that nearly all their friends and family also indulged. This might speak to why it's so difficult to let a celebrity news habit go; it's all around you in 21<sup>st</sup> century information. This is especially heightened when your friends all "do it."

To clarify, this interpretative repertoire also doesn't appear to be channeled through class. These impulsive and addictive purchases might not be as financially risky for the upper class, but it appears the impulse to buy and consume (despite better intentions) is not affected by class. Similar to Fish's interpretative communities, it appears that friends and families often share celebrity news reading as a hobby even if it's one that many yearn to quit. Most importantly, this repertoire seriously challenges the idea that women's magazines are disposable materials in women's lives. These interviews serve as evidence that magazines, specifically celebrity magazines, could potentially be listed with other compulsive, addictive and possibly dangerous activities such as smoking, drinking and shopping.

### **It's about them, not me: critical distance and celebrity news**

Liebes and Katz's (1968) study showed how different cultures interpreted the popular show *Dallas* differently. Different nationalities watched it with a differing degrees of critical distance, some saw the show more referentially and

others more critically. I notice veins of both types of readings in her interviews with celebrity newsreaders.

The most common reading technique and interpretive repertoire the researcher identifies is that readers created a large, vast critical distance in order to establish a valley between themselves and the subject matter. This allows readers to enjoy the celebrity news because they disassociate themselves from its principal characters and remain disinvested in the text. For the purpose of this research, this sensation will be called *disengaged reading*. A consistent theme of reading and not feeling is repeatedly mentioned in interviews.

**Subject 3:** I am not feeling. Mindless entertainment.

**Subject 8:** (I feel) complacent.

**Subject 3:** I don't have to think about it when I read it. I don't have to engage. I feel good. Great.

**Subject 6:** I find it cathartic, I suppose. It's a wonderful escape to read about other people who do nothing but look attractive.

**Subject 10:** For me, it's a way to relax and tune out the day-to-day stresses.

**Subject 1:** It's not malicious. You sit around and talk about how jacked Madonna's arms are, who cares? It's almost like there are no feelings, it's a vacuum.

Most women interviewed are lured into the magazines because they aren't emotionally engaged in the narratives or the characters. It's difficult to discern if the readers remain emotionally distant through selecting only to look at the pictures or if the women would continue to remain disinvested if they did read the text. Unlike how Hermes found that British readers enjoyed the tabloids



because it enrages and engages them in melodrama, many of these upper-class American readers flock to the magazines because they feel nothing. It's an epidural from their own lives and feelings. As **subject 6** asserts, it's precisely the distance that makes it enjoyable. **Subject 6**: "Who cares? You could do the same news about everyone else. Who's pregnant? Who's dating?" The difference, however, between your neighbors and celebrities is the distance and you might actually feel something towards real people. For **subject 7**, it's precisely the fact that it doesn't matter and is so unrelated to her own life (or what matters in life) that it's enjoyable. As **subject 7** says, "It's not news. Madonna going to the grocery store is not news. I go to the grocery store. Life does not change based on celebrity news, as it does with real life. Hugh Jackman doing a new movie impacts nothing. Gas prices affect everything." For her, it appears celebrity news is a portal into a place where effects and consequences of real news can't touch her. **Subject 8** perfectly summarizes why this critical distance makes reading celebrity news enjoyable: "I don't know any celebrities."

The distance allows readers to remain emotionally distant and therefore sterilized to feeling. These readers admit to being interested in the subject matter but not emotionally invested. Reading and gossiping about celebrities protects readers because of their critical distance. It's like throwing stones in a brick house. As **subject 3** admits, "If I talk about Angelina Jolie, she doesn't care what little old me says about her." Critical distance draws readers to these magazines because of the seemingly one-way flow of feelings and information. Readers feel a large critical gap between themselves and the celebrities. This gap then allows

them to read (or at least) look at celebrities without emotion. The non-feeling is the draw. It's a moment to disconnect.

Additionally, these readers wedge more distance between themselves and the celebrities when they swear that they have nothing to relate to celebrities. As **subject 12** explains why she doesn't use any advice in these magazines: "Advice, no. I could not be one of those in the magazines no matter how much they say you can really do this yourself." Interviewees purposely make celebrities into "others," perhaps to cushion themselves from the diet and appearances pressures of being like superhuman celebrities. This distance helps to reinforce the disengaged reading.

Interviewees also further separate themselves from any utility from the magazines offer because readers adamantly deny that the magazines espouse any truth. As **subject 1** puts it, "No I don't have the self-control (to use their tips) and their diet is like a pound of coke a day. They are all like I ate fish and it fell off. It's bullshit." **Subject 1**, like many other interviews, participates in a negotiated reading; they actively resist the dominant reading. **Subject 17** also doesn't believe what she reads: "I have gone to the gym my whole life and I know how hard it is to have a good body. If you want to do drugs, smoke, drink caffeine, then you can look like that." As part of a disengaged reading, many interviewees reject what they read and offer their own theories about celebrity bodies. This echoes Lowe's (2003) study where young girls negotiated the Britney Spears the media presented and the real Britney Spears. In a similar vein to this, interviewees read (or looked at) at a particular text but do not ingest it at a face value. They take the text and make their own reality from it.

The opposition against believing what they read or see reverberates Radway's comments that "we may well begin to understand that although the ideological power of contemporary cultural forms is enormous, indeed sometimes even frightening, that power is not yet all-pervasive, totally vigilant, or complete," (222). Just because readers confront images of perfect bodies maintained apparently by fish and lunges, the readers resist taking this at face value and challenge the advice's legitimacy. This type of reading can be perceived as a comforting defense mechanism where women protect themselves from some of the seemingly impossible ideals and pressures that magazines might exert. Some interviewees also use a negotiated reading to justify why the darker side of celebrity news such as privacy invasion and the paparazzi. Most subjects argue that celebrities ask for this and deserve this when they decided to become stars.

**Subject 9:** It's the price that becomes with fame.

**Subject 12:** I feel that they do it for publicity.

**Subject 17:** It's part of the business. You are going to be torn to shreds whether you do it or not.

**Subject 6:** They have given permission. They want their life out there.

A few interviewees even assert that many of the celebrities bring the press and tabloids upon themselves. **Subject 13** says, "The celebrities complain, but it's like stop calling the magazines, and they'll stop doing trash." **Subject 14** also says, "It comes with the territory," although she admits, "if I had cameras following me around, I would flip out." Again the interviewees use critical distance to justify the tactics that celebrity news magazines employ. Many beliefs align with Mendelson (2007) revision of the paparazzi as watchdogs who fairly

keep the celebrities power and influence in check. The general consensus is they chose this life.

But the interviewees weren't without worries about celebrity news.

**Subject 16** asserts that there's a balance to being concerned with celebrities. She says, "One girl at work, she blogs about where she's gone, what celebrity she's seen, and what products she uses. It's too much. There's another girl who doesn't watch TV, and you put a celebrity on the cover, and it's like who's that? And that's different too. There's a happy medium. You got to find it." Additionally, most of the interviewees said while they'd let (or will let) their children read celebrity news, they don't want their child to become a celebrity. Once again, the critical difference between a celebrity and a celebrity newsreader is projected. This repertoire also doesn't seem to be affected by class. Celebrities are often fashioned into the other; despite how much we know about them, readers from various economic classes appear to keep a certain distance. It might be as simple as people don't want one more thing to worry about, so celebrity news happily becomes an apathetic disengaged reading activity. In today's world, it's hard to ignore the politics and to remain apathetic, so perhaps celebrity news is the best way to fill a need for meaningless entertainment.

### **I'll show you mine if you show me yours: referential readings**

While most readers view celebrity news through a critical distance that allowed them to remain detached (therefore enjoy pleasure from it rather than commiserate in others' pain), some interviewees construct a more referential reading. Referential reading is when you relate one's own life to what you read

and find comfort in sympathize with the subject matter. Brooks (2004) theorized that we read celebrity news to connect a fractured society. We want to have similar, common narratives and celebrities fulfill that role. The majority of interviewees didn't mention this as a reason for reading, but a few did read and then relate to the celebrities. In particular, interviewees like to compare age with celebrities.

**Subject 15:** And she's young, and I am young.

**Subject 6:** My young adult daughters. The people are their age and they like to see the extremes of what people are doing. It scares me that my children would do that.

**Subject 16:** Like to see what she's doing. I notice myself comparing ages. Reese Witherspoon, she's my age too.

**Subject 14:** I compare age. I can't believe we're the same age. That's what she looks like?

Apparently, negative or unflattering coverage helps bring a celebrity down to a human level and relate to a reader. **Subject 1** says, " They want to worry about Uma Thurman's cottage ass. She's gained 20 pounds. Awesome. I did too last week. It's a common bond for women." **Subject 3** says she relates to Jennifer Anniston because she too is a good girl that was dumped. Although not many mention it, some find solace in celebrity disappointment, whether it's cellulite or a break-up. An alternative to the resistant reading is the referential reading where readers allow themselves to identify with the subjects. Interestingly enough, readers appear to share and empathize more with the sorrows and challenges rather than victories.

## **Whistle Why you Work**

The BBC, in 2006, reported that the global entertainment industry would be worth 1.8 trillion by 2010. It makes sense that celebrity news (and knowledge of it) would be beneficial in many different industries. The interviewees affirm this. For example, **Subject 10**, an entertainment lawyer, uses her celebrity news as more than a couch companion. As she says, “I actually learn a lot of things that are useful to my job and the blogs break a lot of information about upcoming concerts and blogs.” **Subject 13**, a celebrity news public relations associate, receives free celebrity news magazines in order to keep her abreast. **Subject 17**, who works for a cosmetic company that uses celebrities for product endorsement, tells how one department at work is responsibly solely for keeping the company up-date with celebrity news. As she explains, “If anyone we work with does something, a department sends us an email. Like Britney. Bad or good. They want us to be knowledgeable about who we are representing.” For **subject 13**, the PR consultant, finding jobs where she could hone her lifelong affair with *People* magazine and a celebrity was a dream come true. As celebrity news continues to flourish, I predicted more and more young women will flock to its expanding empire for both work and pleasure. While class doesn’t dictate this pattern, it can be hypothesized that celebrity knowledge could help women advance in certain fields, and thereby be essential to class climbing.

It’s not just those whose work intertwines with celebrity news that use celebrity news at work. For many interviewees, work colleagues are their main audience for discussing celebrity news. As **subject 3**, a teacher says, “I talk about

it with my coworkers. Who wears what. Who's gained weight." **Subject 4** also says she mainly gossips about celebrities with work friends. **Subject 1** says that celebrity gossip can halt a workday: "When Heath Ledger died, it was wildfire in my office. Anna Nicole Smith too." As **subject 6** puts it, it's become a neutral topic, cushioned by distance. "It's like guys and sports. You don't want to talk about your (personal) business, so you talk about celebrities instead."

This echoes Brooks' (2004) point "What the rise of celebrity says about America is not that we've lost our minds, abandoned our heroes or given away our power, but we're committed to connecting to each other." People no longer live in the same cities that they grew up in and many people frequently move jobs; having a cast of common characters, albeit celebrities, stitches diverse groups together and allows them to converse, albeit superficially, with groups of people like coworkers. Marshall's (2005) research indicates that entertainment reporting has always "gradually served as the principal site" to cross age, gender and ethnic lines. In this sense, celebrity newsreaders are able to connect with coworkers and friends (of many classes) by using celebrity news as water cooler fodder. Here, celebrity news bonds classes and groups.

### **My precious: celebrity news as material capital**

Material capital can take many forms: coins, bills, poker chips and apparently magazines. In exchange for material capital, people usually receive some sort of return, either material gain or power gain. In this research, the actual material object, the glossy newsweeklies, appears to play a dynamic role in many interviewees' relationships. Many of the subjects either give or trade the

magazine and in return form bonds and possibly get other magazines in return. As **subject 17** says, “ I’ll bring in my *Us Weekly* and my manager doesn’t have it, so I give it to her. She gives it someone else.” **Subject 4**, a kindergarten teacher, even gets her students into the loop. **Subject 4**: We have delivery days. I make my students take the old ones down to the secretary. And the kids go ‘oh no, not another delivery.’ For **subject 2**, the magazines bring her friends, on a magazine treasure hunt, to her apartment. **Subject 15** will give her old ones to anyone “as long as they don’t read over my shoulder.”

While the actual reading of the celebrity news magazines appears to be a personal pursuit, the material object (and its exchange) becomes a way to bond with friends and coworkers. **Subject 1** passes hers off to strangers: “I was on the plane and I saw this girl and I figured she must be as shallow as me, so I gave her my *Us Weekly*. It’s like a bond. I do it at the gym all the time and people are like ‘thank you.’”

Rosnow suggested that gossip acted as function; to gossip has a transactional function and may be used as form of social exchange. In this case, it’s not the gossip, but rather the magazine that’s used as a form of material capital. This supports Dunbar’s (1996) argument that gossip forms bonds and keeps social networks adhered. In this case, it appears that material gossip also forms bonds and keeps social networks adhered. Upper-class women are probably the most likely to be the highest on this food chain and are the ones able to purchase and pass on the magazines. Watch out book clubs! This also follows Veblen’s assertion that the leisure class, here upper-class women, set the



standard for conspicuous consumption. In this research, these women are the catalyst or provider for many others to receive celebrity news.

### **Keeping up with the Jolie-Pitts: celebrity news as a guidebook.**

The last repertoire I identify is the one most embedded with class. Many interviewees mention that they can relate (and have visited) many of the restaurants and nightspots the celebrities also frequent. The magazines act like Frommer's guide to the Bright Young Things. Many interviewees list this as one of their favorite parts of the magazine. Because of their higher-than-average salaries and metropolitan locations, these readers can referentially read the celebrity news magazines differently than a woman in the Midwest who has never visited New York. Examples of referential readings include:

**Subject 16:** So and so was at Pastis. And I've been there a bunch so it's fun. Since I live in new York, it's fun. Sometimes I think, oh I'd like to go there. And I do.

**Subject 1:** Yes. They were in DC. I work right by there. I go to that bar.

**Subject 3:** We have common experiences. The places we've gone. Places we've shopped. I have seen them out. I think it's because of my background I can relate to the activities but my life is really boring.

**Subject 14:** Oh, I look at the restaurants. If something pops up a bunch of times, I think we should go here if I haven't been.

**Subject 15:** I've been there since I grew up in New York. I mean, I don't actually stalk them, but I like to see the places that I've been to.

Because of a certain amount of capital mobility, these readers can identify and emulate aspects of celebrity life and consumption. This affirms Hermes

(1995) point that: “Repertoires are the cultural resources that speakers fall back on to and refer to. Which repertoires are used depends on the cultural capacity of an individual reader” (8). These particular readers can mention shared places and experiences with celebrities because of their class and regional situation, their cultural capacity. Yet most of the interviewees are careful, however, to distinguish once again between themselves and celebrities. So even when certain locales and interests overlap between reader and text, the reader still maintains her critical distance from the subject. She continues to practice disengaged reading.

Some readers discuss worry over how others read and interpret this same section. **Subject 2** says, “I have friends that stare at the places they go. My friends want to follow the path of the celebrities. I am lucky and go to those places, but I realize it’s not all that.” **Subject 16** echoes her point, “ They feature the hot places to go. Who’s seen where and then those places become so hot. I am might go check it out, but I am not going to wait in line for two hours. Some friends that is all they want to do. They want to see New York as it is in the magazines. I live here, so I am used to it. But that’s all they want to do when they get here. That’s absolutely what they want to do.” These interviewees express concern about how others read this section. For these particular readers, the restaurants and hot spots they frequent might overlap but these readers do not aim for their lives to imitate celebrities, as they fear some of their friends might.

Ostrander (1980) commented on how one of the functions of women of the upper class “is the setting of social and cultural standards of the rest of the population to admire and emulate” (8). For these interviewees, they can follow in

celebrity's high-heeled footprints and go to similar restaurants, bars and events. But as Verblen (1899) worried, what precedent does this set for the average Jane? He worried that in attempt to emulate the leisure class, "members of the lower ranks gradually imitated the symbols associated with leisure class status to the extent possible." With the omnipresence of celebrity news and culture, there's extensive pressure for all classes to emulate the very expensive habits of the wealthy. While these particular interviewees could relate to the lifestyle, what affect does celebrity's conspicuous consumption have on other readers?

Class membership most affected what the women could do with the information they accessed. Most of the readings could be considered escapist activities, a passport to tune out and tune off. Information was either avoided or muted through negotiated readings. Reading as an escape is not something that only upper class women participate in, but using the information as a guidebook is something that requires a certain financial status. This is when the reading transcends fantasy and play, and it moves away from the page onto the streets. Recognizing and/or frequenting exclusive, expensive establishments takes the reading out of the private leisure arena and makes it public. This sense of identification (or copycatting) is a repertoire that only some can fiscally afford. For others, the pages and scenes enclosed inside celebrity newsweeklies are no different than movie sets, fictional landscapes that will never be accessed.

## CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION

To review, the interpretative repertoires found were 1) The New Playgirl: The Aesthetic Appeal of Celebrity News, 2) I Want Glossy Candy: Celebrity News as an Addictive Power, 3) It's About Them, Not Me: Critical Distance and Reading Celebrity News, 4) It's Okay Because They Asked for it: Celebrity News Reading Justifications, 5) I'll Show You Mine If You Show Me Yours: Referential Readings, 6) Whistle Why you Work: Celebrity News in the Office, 7) My Precious: Celebrity News Magazines as Material Capital and 8) Keeping Up With the Jolie-Pitts: Celebrity News Magazines as a Pocket Guide. These repertoires show that celebrity news reading by upper class women is not a straight-forward activity rather celebrity news consumption is an active, creative exchange between reader and text. It is a leisure activity, but one that affects these particular participants' social and work lives.

According to de Certeau, reading a text "has all the characteristics of silent production" as the reader "insinuates into another person's text the ruses of pleasure and appropriation: he (or she) poaches onto it. In this way, he claims, the reader 'makes the text habitable, like a rented apartment'(51). For most of the readers interviewed, celebrity news reading is like vacationing in an igloo, a place where the reader goes to enjoy herself through maintaining a chilly and definite critical distance from both the actual text and the celebrities featured in the text.

But celebrity news isn't without its thorns for these particular readers. It appears to be an addictive force that often haunts readers who no longer want to participate. This fact is worrisome when applied to Verblen's (1899) idea that

members of lower ranks imitate the leisure” class and the principal of conspicuous waste permeate all levels of society. Verblen’s term of conspicuous waste accurately details many celebrity newsreaders’ relationship to celebrity news magazines. Many interviewees practiced *disengaged reading*, which is a way to disconnect from society, thinking, and especially feeling. This is something that if it trickles down through society might not produce good results.

But to be fair, each reader is capable of her own decoding and is an “active agent in the creation of their own culture” (Lowe, 2003). Just because this group of interviewees primarily used the text to participate in everyday, meaningless leisure, this doesn’t mean that other groups (or individuals) appropriate it for the same reason. Additionally, many interviewees contradicted themselves, which shows the complexity of every reader’s relationship to the text. It’s hard to accurately describe and access one’s own relationship to it. Future studies might benefit from a focus group approach where interviewees would elaborate and feed off of each other. More audience research will need to be conducted in order to access this.

This research shows the cornucopia of ways that 17 women use celebrity news magazines. Just as the movies have monopolized on cheap laughs and escapist films, celebrity journalism appears to benefit for the human desire to disconnect, disengage and escape into media. This fact, however, should not be read as people consume celebrity news instead of real news. This study did not make any such connection, and this should please media specialists worried about the tabloidization of journalism. They can coexist, and they are not mutually exclusive. This research asserts that celebrity news has a real,

important role for many readers, but this shouldn't threaten traditional non-celebrity journalism as much as some worry it will. Media professionals will come realize that celebrity news doesn't need to ruin the quality or quantity of hard news. They are different animals. The idea of a news omnivore should be embraced and should be marketed to it. Ideally, this research will entice others to investigate celebrity news and its popularity, and nudge others to stop just complaining about its ills.

This research also contributes to the expanding canon of audience-based magazine studies. This research embraced the idea that readers are often image driven, and print journalism should take into account how sometimes consumers do not read the text but rather just stare at the images. How can we most effectively utilize images to tell important stories? How can we effectively tell stories when people look and not read? Textual analysis will always be helpful in categorizing and cataloguing what's in magazines. But as this research shows, women sometimes don't even read the text, and they often negotiate the text as if it were a corn maze. Interviews with actual readers can possibly shed the most light on not what people see and do with a magazine rather than restating what's in a magazine. I believe the Princess Diana Gateway Cultivation theory should be further studied in order to access how consumers get into media consuming. This is important information for media specialists to understand as they attempt to grow another generation of media consumers. Additionally, disengaged reading should be further noted: how can magazines be most effective when many of the readers aren't actually reading them? Or caring about the material?

During the course of this study, many other fertile celebrity news-related research areas sprouted in my mind. Audience research of celebrity magazines readers is a thin cannon, but the relationship between men and celebrity news magazine readers is especially sparse. Hermes (1995) touched upon British tabloids, gay men readers and the genre of camp. I believe there are plenty of areas to mine about how men read and use celebrity news. The number of men both interested in her study and celebrity news astounded me. Additionally, many of this research's interviewees mentioned that they knew many men (brothers, husbands, friends) that were also interested in celebrity news. It would be fascinating to note how their interpretative repertoires differed from the upper-class women one found in this study.

Although upper class women often sets trends and has financial influence due to economic ability to consume at higher levels, it is still a small group. This study established class as a lens, and this study will hopefully prompt others to look into class and celebrity news. I think that other groups will read the magazines very differently. Interviews with readers of different genders, classes, races, and from varied regional areas would be a smart area to explore. This study has an extremely narrow focus, mostly younger professional upper class white women, and comparing results and interpretative repertoires from other demographics would be revealing.

In order to fully understand celebrity news' affects on women and culture, we need more interviews and focus groups with actual readers. Additionally, this research alerts other scholars to the need for more micro- and macro-sized studies on celebrity news functions. For a micro study, what role does celebrity

news play in a traditional office? For a macro study, how do regional and class differences affect celebrity news interpretation?

Also, research into non-celebrity newsreaders is important. Like any good research, those who abstain as well as those who indulge should be interviewed. Why don't some women read celebrity news? Are they conscientious objectors or merely uninterested?

Research with the youngest readers, middle school and high school readers of celebrity news, is a significant place to research because it could illuminate how the younger generations consume and use celebrity news.

Finally, this research occurred before the falling of the stock market in the Fall of 2008. How did and does the recession affect both readership circulation and readership interpretation of celebrity news. In times of economic trouble, what happens to celebrity news coverage? Celebrity news consumption? Studies on this and other areas might help the media industry better forecast the future role of celebrity news in our nation, in both the cultural and media landscape.



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## **APPENDIX I: TRANSCRIPTS**

**Interview 1. 25-year-old single white female. Works in sales.**

**Washington, D.C.**

**Researcher:** Where do you buy celebrity news?

**Subject 1:** Mostly at airport. Or grocery store.

**Researcher:** How often do you travel?

**Subject 1:** Twice a month.

**Researcher:** Where do you travel to for work?

**Subject 1:** Tennessee. And one weekend a month for vacation.

**Researcher:** Where do you read them?

**Subject 1:** On the couch. On the plane. There's a stack. And on weekends, my roommate will go to CVS and she'll buy a bottle of water, sunscreen and every magazine. And we'll go to the pool to read them.

**Researcher:** Do you try to coordinate?

**Subject 1:** No. We buy multiples of the same magazine. (Laughter)

**Researcher:** When do you remember starting to read magazines?

**Subject 1:** Start of college. Blogs. Start of work.

**Researcher:** Why did you start?

**Subject 1:** Distraction. Something to do after lunch, between classes and before I went out..

**Researcher:** What magazines did you read when you were younger? Did you read *People* magazine? *Seventeen*?

**Subject 1:** Was *Us Weekly* big when we're younger? Was *Us Weekly* even around I wasn't allowed to read *Seventeen* until I was fourteen. I was so excited.

**Researcher:** Do you remember at what time celebrity news became more prominent?

**Subject 1:** My senior year of college. At least in my mind, I think that was it.

**Researcher:** Do you remember celebrity news from when you were younger?

**Subject 1:** I don't ever remember it being like it was how it was now. I remember being at the grocery store when I was little, thinking it was so fake. *The Enquirer* was all aliens. But I remember the only celebrities were just like Kirstie Alley and Princess Diana. I do remember the first *People* I bought with Princess Diana in the black turtleneck. I became obsessed.

**Researcher:** What do you do with the magazines after you are finished?

**Subject 1:** I let them stack up until I do spring-cleaning.

**Researcher:** Does your family read celebrity news?

**Subject 1:** No they are like, read the *Wall Street Journal*. Read the paper. This is worthless.

**Researcher:** Which publications do you like the best?

**Subject 1:** I like *Us Weekly* the best. It's the most credible. I had a subscription for a while. I like Perez Hilton (blogger)

**Researcher:** What are your favorite sections?

**Subject 1:** I like the pictures. It's a lot of pictures. I don't read the articles.

**Researcher:** Do you consider it journalism?

**Subject 1:** "No, but I don't actually read them. The source says something, but who's the source. It could be the gardener; it could be the best friend.

**Researcher:** What do you look at the pictures for?

**Subject 1:** See what they're doing. Fashions If *Vanity Fair* does an article on a celebrity, then that's journalism. Like the Angelina Jolie one. It was about how she has identity crises. Her tattoos. I am going to put this on my body to embrace this identity.

**Researcher:** What other media do you use?

**Subject 1:** I read the paper, mostly online. I won't buy newsweekly magazines. I read nytimes.com, I'll go to business journals. "

**Researcher:** Do you feel behind if you don't know celebrity stuff?

**Subject 1:** If I have been busy and I haven't been on my blogs and I go on, it feels like Christmas because I haven't read any of it yet. When Anna Nicole died, my mom called and I had to get off the phone. My mom was like why do you care? But I did and then my office talked about it all day. I pass it on the on too. The plane, I'll give it to the girl next to me and she'll be pumped. I do it at the gym too. Everyone seems excited.

**Researcher:** What emotions do you associate with reading?

**Subject 1:** Blankness. Judgmental. It's my time to judge. But there are times that I am like they are normal. They are just like me. They're doing a job just like I do a job. But I feel bad sometimes. Like Michelle Williams. It's like stop. And then sometimes I am jealous. It's like protectionism. You project your feelings onto them. It's like 'me too.' I have cellulite, me too. People don't want to worry about the war, the oil prices, they want to think about Uma Thurman's cottage cheese butt. She's gained 15 lbs, awesome. I did too. It's like women have a common bond. We start talking about Madonna's arms. It's kind of neutral.



**Researcher:** If you had to choose, what would be your favorite section of *Us Weekly* type magazines?

**Subject:** *Us Weekly* the first two pages are women wearing the same dresses.

**Researcher:** Do you get fashion advice from it?

**Subject 1:** Accessories. Sometimes I get embarrassed a couple of months ago. At the airport, I bought *In touch. Us weekly*. And then I got *an Economist* too, to balance myself out. I don't want businessmen to think that I am dumb girl.

**Researcher:** Do you think about the way that women are portrayed?

**Subject 1:** "Not at all. I like it because it's neutral. Because they are trying to make them look normal. And I like to identify it- it's like hey are DC, I live in DC. I have been there."

**Researcher:** Do you follow the advice given in the magazine?

**Subject 1:** Obviously, I look at it but I have no self-control. I am shoving chex mix down my throat. And I know that they are liars, it's cocaine and cigarettes. It's like 'ohmigod' I have really high metabolism. I just ate fish. Yeah right.

**Researcher:** What percentage of people in your life read it?

**Subject 1:** 90%. Just my mother. Like she'll watch E! if it's on but that's it.

**Researcher:** What about guys in your life?

**Subject 1:** That's a good one. I would say 60%. Guys love that website what would Tyler Durban do? My brother hates celebrity news but he'll read that. They won't buy it but they'll go on the blogs or steal their girlfriends. I was shocked by the number of publications when I live in Scotland. They have less people than us and way more publications. I stereotype the British: I am like at least we're not as obsessed. In Scotland, the reality stars are the big people.

**Researcher:** Do you think celebrity news is a trend?

**Subject 1:** NO. This will be part of my life. We have access to so much information. Unless they put like celebrity stalking laws. I love hearing stories about people and it's not malicious. I am not gossiping about what my friend did, which might be malicious. It goes into a vacuum gossiping without getting in trouble.

**Researcher:** Would you let your kids read it?

**Subject 1:** Yes. But I would worry because it's now that celebrity news is like a 16 year old gets pregnant! And I might want to shelter her from that.

**Researcher:** Who else do you think reads it?

**Subject 1:** People like mindless entertainment. It's not a certain type of person. It's like what we talk about: Britney Spears shaved her head. And then she got terrible extensions. Listen to me, it's terrible but it's better than talking about a friend.

**Interview 2. Subject 2. 29-year-old single woman. Part-time teacher.**  
**New York City.**

**Researcher:** Where do you purchase celebrity magazines?

**Subject 2:** Ha-ha, actually I got a free subscription to *Us Weekly* from eharmony.

**Researcher:** Do you subscribe to any other celebrity publications?

**Subject 2:** I go on Perez once every four months.

**Researcher:** Where do you read?

**Subject 2:** In my apartment. On my couch.

**Researcher:** When do you read them?

**Subject 2:** When I am bored. Probably on the weekends. In the afternoon when I don't have anything to do. When My friends are around because they hunt them down in my apartment. They know that they are there.

**Researcher:** Do you remember when celebrity news became more prominent?

**Subject 2:** I had a friend in college who was obsessed. Probably 2001ish.

**Researcher:** How much time do you spend per issue?

**Subject 2:** 15 minutes.

**Researcher:** Do you remember celebrity news from your childhood?

**Subject 2:** I remember *People* and reading *People's like 50 most beautiful*. Then I remember Brad Pitt. The cast of *Friends*. What they were doing. Tom Cruise and Nicole Kidman.

**Researcher:** Why do you read *Us Weekly*?

**Subject 2:** I like people better b/c it has a crossword puzzle. I like to see who wears the outfits the best. Uh, I like the destinations. The places you can go.

**Researcher:** What other media do you use?

**Subject 2:** I do read- Monday Friday the free subway magazine. But I like the gossip section the best.

**Researcher:** What other media do you use?

**Subject 2:** Well, I don't watch the news.

**Researcher:** What emotions do you associate with reading the magazines?

**Subject 2:** I really just look at the pictures. It also makes me think how much cocaine these people do. I think that they lie... Contempt. Jealousy. I like imagining my body will once look like that.

**Researcher:** How do you feel about the way that life is portrayed in these magazines?

**Subject 2:** It creates an unrealistic standard. I have friends that dream about eating at the restaurants for months. When they visit me in NY, that's all they want to do. Just follow the path of the celebrities.

**Researcher:** How do you feel about the way women are portrayed?

**Subject 2:** It's about women have to look a certain way. now actually, it's like men have to look a certain way, too. They are more critical in the articles when I actually read them. But they still give more slack.

**Researcher:** Do you think about stopping reading celebrity news?

**Subject 2:** I just look at the pictures. It's hard not to see it everywhere even if you want to quit.

**Researcher:** Do you relate to the magazines?

**Subject 2:** I have been to the shops. I have seen the clothes that they wear. But I don't sleep around like them. I come from a different background

**Researcher:** What percentage of people in your life read them?

**Subject:** 80% of my friends read them.

**Researcher:** What about guys?

**Subject 2:** I don't have many guy friends but yes, they read them.

**Researcher:** What do you do with the magazines?

**Subject 2:** I keep them around until there's a stack and I recycle them.

**Researcher:** Do you enjoy quote unquote highbrow activities?

**Subject 2:** I mean I eat at nice restaurants but I don't go to plays. I am not a hipster.

**Researcher:** Do you think this celebrity news is a trend?

**Subject 2:** I don't think it will ever disappear. I think there will be less and less of self-made celebrities. There will always be places to get information.

It's a weekly. So I don't go for news breaking stories at weekly. We'll go online.

Now weeklies are more "how I survived my depression" or "best summer diets"

It's different. The other stuff is on news. The regular news. The top spots on news go to celebrity stuff.

**Researcher:** How do you feel about the gossipy element of the magazines?

**Subject 2:** I am good at keeping secrets. I don't gossip. I think that people gossip about celebrities One because it is all hearsay. It's all what the PR people want you to see. The lives that they live and the lives that we see aren't the same. The PR people fit the actual image. People in real life you know intimately, it's worse because what you know and say can hurt them and you. If I talk about Angelina Jolie, she doesn't care what little old me says about her.

**Researcher:** Do you feel guilty about celebrity news?

**Subject 2:** No. Because they chose it. But there are two types of celebrities. The type that chose it and they type that it's forced upon. There's the type that can't live without being in *Us Weekly*. The ones who want to live secluded life and have children, I feel bad. The ones that don't: I don't feel bad for. The ones that wouldn't be famous for, the ones that hawk themselves, I don't feel bad. They wouldn't be celebrities otherwise. You can't whine to me when you created the situation.

**Researcher:** If you had children, would you let them participate in it?

**Subject 2:** Right now, the best thing is to be a celebrity. We surrounded by it. I don't want to shelter my kids. Even the Disney kids are celebrities. I would just hope they would inspire to be something else. It's just an interesting thing: celebrity is all around us.

**Interview 3. Subject 3. 30-year-old single woman. Teacher. New York City.**

**Researcher.** Feel like you can talk about what you want. I have a crib sheet just as a guide.

**Researcher:** What celebrity magazines do you read?

**Subject 3:** *Us Weekly* and *People*. I have subscriptions. *People* for five years. *Us Weekly*. I went on for a year. Felt guilty. Went off for six months Went back on for another year.

**Researcher:** It was a conscious decision to go off?

**Subject 3:** Yes.

**Researcher:** Why did you go back on?

**Subject 3:** To motivate myself to go to the gym.

**Researcher:** When do you read the magazines?

**Subject 3:** I get *Us Weekly* on Thursday. And *People* on Friday. So I read them then, but I try to save them to take to the gym. If I want to do something really special, I read them in the bath.

**Researcher:** How long does it take you to read?

**Subject 3:** 40 minutes. Longer if I like and then actually read the articles.

**Researcher:** What are your favorite sections?

**Subject 3:** My favorite section is stars like us. I also like seeing what they are wearing.

**Researcher:** Do you read the articles?

**Subject 3:** That's why I like people. Their articles are better, more pop culture, less celebrity. I am trying to think of an example. The astronauts' wife is in

*People*, not *Us weekly*. It's pop culture reference. *People* is all culture. What, that sounds wrong. Not all culture, pop culture.

**Researcher:** What other media do you use?

**Subject 3:** *Best week Ever*. I DVR it. *Soup on E. E! True Hollywood story*. Local or nightly news. I go to the internet a lot, but not for celebrity. I read nytimes online.

**Researcher:** What emotions do you associate with reading the celebrity publications?

**Subject 3:** Pleasure. Guilt. It's like a candy bar: I enjoy every single moment of it but I know I will feel terrible. I try to save them for the time when I need them.

**Researcher:** How do you feel about the magazines' portrayal of women?

**Subject 3:** Women aren't really judged for their appearance. It's not who looks the best. It's who is skinnier. There was one issue where they talked about men's bodies I really, really enjoyed that. Each one is like diet tips.

**Researcher:** Do you use them?

**Subject 3:** I devour them. I don't use them.

**Researcher:** How do you feel class is portrayed in the magazines?

**Subject 3:** I think about Britney Spears and how I have my own ideas of class. I think of different kind of culture and class. I don't like how they manage their money. I don't want their lives but I would like their access to free stuff.

**Researcher:** Do you identify with them?

**Subject 3:** I don't wish to emulate them. I wish to emulate the perks. But I identify with their struggles. I went through a break up, the same time as Jennifer



Anniston. I am the girl next door who gets left. And know I don't read the Brad and Angelina articles and I think that's why.

**Researcher:** Does anyone in your family read the magazines?

**Subject 3:** I bring it home for my mom and she reads them, but she does know who the people are. It's like reading someone else's yearbook.

**Researcher:** What percentage of your friends read the magazines?

**Subject 3:** 80% of my friends read them. I talk to people about when I go out. It may be how they look and what they are wearing, more than what's going on in their lives. I am sometime embarrassed because there's some that don't know. It's too lowbrow. So I feel embarrassed but I would rock at trivia.

**Researcher:** How do you feel about the gossipy element of celebrity news?

**Subject 3:** I don't want to gossip about my friends, tell their secrets. There is a degree of separation with celebrities.

**Researcher:** When do you think you became interested?

**Subject 3:** I started reading people because it was fun. It's interesting to know what's going on in other people's lives. It's like TV. A soap opera. I read *YM*, *Sassy*. I got interested because Tiffany was dating the celebrity new kids on the block. Johnny? He was on soap opera. He has anxiety now.

**Researcher:** Would you let your kids read it?

**Subject 3:** Sure. But I would have anxiety if it were a 15 -year-old. A 19 -year -old has made up their mind but not a 13-year-old. You are never going to look like that. I actually don't want my kids to aspire to be actors and singers.

**Researcher:** I think I will become less interested in it when I have a family but maybe being busy will drive me to be more interested. To get towards fluff.

**Subject 3:** I think it will get worse. PR people in the 1950s used to block all the rehab, drinking. Now people put it out there to get more press. I feel bad for celebrities that have families. Reese Witherspoon. She has two kids. I feel bad that her life is being followed. I think the paparazzi are shitty and bottom feeders but I support them. I enjoy it but I know how ridiculous it is.

**Interview 4. Subject 4. 28-year-old. Single. New York City.**

**Subject 4:** Okay. Don't judge me.

**Researcher:** What celebrity magazines do you subscribe to?

**Subject 4:** *Us Weekly*. But I buy *In Touch*.

**Researcher:** For how long have you been reading celebrity news?

**Subject 4:** I became addicted My sister got it for me because I requested it. At my school, we swap magazines. I give *Us Weekly* for *Vogue*.

**Researcher:** How long did you read before you subscribed?

**Subject 4:** Years.

**Researcher:** Where do get *In Touch*?

**Subject 4:** Wherever they sold it. The closest bodega.

**Researcher:** What do you remember of celebrity news from when you were younger?

**Subject 4:** As a kid, I read *YM* and *Seventeen*.

**Researcher:** Where you influenced by a particular individual to start reading it?

**Subject 4:** No. I just liked reading it and started a habit.

**Researcher:** Do you go online?

**Subject 4:** Ever so often, Perez Hilton. I really just went on because my friend told me about a spray on condom.

**Researcher:** What other media do you use?

**Subject 4:** I watch NY 1 and they read the newspapers to you. They read the headlines.

**Researcher:** Are you current on US and world events?

**Subject 4:** No.

**Researcher:** Why do you engage in celebrity news?

**Subject 4:** Because don't have to form an opinion.

**Researcher:** How do you feel when you read celebrity news?

**Subject 4:** I feel great!! I love it. I feel great. It makes me feel better about my life. My life isn't half as bad.

**Researcher:** What are your favorite sections?

**Subject 4:** I like when they rate the stuff. I can't STAND the articles. I don't care about her depression.

**Researcher:** When do you read the magazines?

**Subject 4:** The elevator. Right after I get it out of mailbox.

**Researcher:** How long does it take to read an article?

**Subject 4:** It takes me 30 minutes. Maybe an hour if I read the main article. The secretary gives me *In Style*. I actually have my students deliver. We call it delivery days. They are in kindergarten. They go, "oh no, not another delivery"

**Researcher:** How do you feel about the ways women, class, race are portrayed in the magazines?

**Subject 4:** Oh Tyra Banks. And they'll call her fat and then she loses weight. It's kind of sad. But I don't feel bad. It comes with territory. They chose this.

**Researcher:** Do you identify with any of the celebrities?

**Subject 4:** Paris Hilton, oh yeah. (Laughs) No I don't identify. I like to see what they read. I like to see where they go, so I can say I want to go there or I have been there. It's inspirational.

**Researcher:** Do you relate to any of their life events?

**Subject 4:** Do I feel bad?. I don't want bad things to happen. It's like one of my friends. That either, that's awesome or that's not right for her.

**Researcher:** What percentage of your friends read the magazines?

**Subject 4:** All of them.

**Researcher:** What about males?

**Subject 4:** They come to my apartments and then say why do you buy this trash. Then they won't pay attention to me, they just read them.

**Researcher:** Who do you discuss celebrity news with?

**Subject 4:** At lunch with other teachers. We talk about who looks the best basically.

**Researcher:** Does the gossipy element bother you?

**Subject 4:** No. Whatever I say out loud, I will say to someone's face.

**Researcher:** Do you think it's different to read gossip about celebrities?

**Subject 4:** I don't relate to them at all, so I don't care.

**Researcher:** Do you ever feel embarrassed about being a celebrity newsreader?

**Subject 4:** No I am so proud of it. I am in this interview, right? I know a lot and I think everyone reads it. If you aren't reading you are watching it. It's on the cover the post. Everyone has a hand in it.

**Researcher:** Would you let a child read it?

**Subject 4:** I don't know. I don't know about that. At my camp, the little campers would ask if I have *Us Weekly* on me. I don't want them to think it's okay. It's not okay even for me at 28. They are normal. I may do the same things as they, they're just unfortunately in the spotlight and no one cares or reads that I do it. Not Paris though, I don't do that.

**Subject 5. 29 years old. Real Estate Lawyer. Single. New York City.**

**Researcher:** How long have you been reading celebrity magazines?

**Subject 5:** Regularly, six years ago. For my birthday, four years ago, my roommate got me subscriptions. I got into it when I moved to NY. I only have *People* now.

**Researcher:** How many *Us Weeklys* do you read a year now that you don't have a subscription?

**Subject 5:** 30.

**Researcher:** Where do you read?

**Subject 5:** At my couch at home. The airport.

**Researcher:** When?

**Subject 5:** *People* comes out Fridays, so Fridays. *Us Weekly*. To be honest, I don't really read them. I just look at the pictures.

**Researcher:** How long does it take you to read them?

**Subject 5:** Half hours to two hours.

**Researcher:** What do you usually do with them after you read them?

**Subject 5:** I give them to My sister. My mom. I store them under this thing.

**Researcher:** Your favorite part is the pictures. What sections of pictures?

**Subject 5:** The very beginning. Like the section about all the celebrities who wore silver dresses recently.

**Researcher:** Do you prefer *People* to *Us Weekly*?

**Subject 5:** *People* has too much writing. *Us weekly's* my favorite.

**Researcher:** As a child, were you into celebrities' news?

**Subject 5:** No, well my grandma read *Star* and *Enquirer*. *Star* before it became glossy.

**Researcher:** What are the first big celebrities things you remember?

**Subject 5:** Britney Spears. I dated her brother's good friend. I met her once actually. Since then, I was obsessed. It started out wanting to know what Britney was up to ...then everyone.

**Researcher:** Do you use diet tips? Fashion tips?

**Subject 5:** The diet tips are always the same. Yes, I use the fashion. I try to find the same things. Love scene and heard. Definitely. Who went where?

**Researcher:** Do you feel you identity with celebrities?

**Subject 5:** No. No. I go some of the same places but do not identify.

**Researcher:** What emotions do you feel when you read the magazines? Happy. Sad?

**Subject 5:** Usually, I feel bad for them because you see them out grocery shopping. Looking ugly. They look so terrible. Picking apart cellulite. How got beach bodies. How they gain 10 lbs. I am fascinated but I feel bad. I can't imagine what's like to be followed. Everyone knows everything but they chose that life.

**Researcher:** Do you feel anticipation before you read the magazines??

**Subject 5:** Yes. I am like *People* came on Fridays. *Us weekly* used to come on Tuesdays and if it wasn't in my mailbox, I would be so sad.

**Researcher:** Who do you talk about the celebrity news with?

**Subject 5:** I talk about it with my friends. My sisters. My coworkers aren't as into it but they'll still chat.

**Researcher:** When you talk about it? Lunch?

**Subject 5:** Don't take lunch but do save 5 mixtures for page6 everyday.

**Researcher:** What people at the office?

**Subject 5:** The men won't initiate the conversation but they'll be like 'oh yeah.

**Researcher:** What percentage of your friends read it?

**Subject 5:** I would say, all in a group, over half.

**Researcher:** Ok. Do you think celebrity news will always be in our life?

**Subject 5:** I tried to give it up for New Year's. This is why I didn't renew it. I spend too much and started getting envious. But then after a couple of weeks went back onto Perez. Maybe not forever, when I have more going on. If it's really busy at work, I won't go on. But if it's not, it's a great procrastination.

**Researcher:** Would you let kids?

**Subject 5:** Yes. Not an 8-year-old. But Yes. I am proud of it. I enjoy it. I watch Hannah Montana. But after the Britney stuff, there's a backlash. Leave her alone. It's a catch 22. You want to leave them alone but you are engrossed. It can't get any worse. They invade everything but I think people will stay interested.



**Interview 6. Subject 6. 58-year-old woman. New York City. Housewife (grown children).**

**Researcher:** How long does it take to read one issue?

**Subject 6:** About 10-15 minutes.

**Researcher:** When do you remember celebrity news becoming more prominent?

**Subject 6:** When *People* came out. Not sure when that was *Enquirer* was first but *People* legitimized it. People could buy *People* and not feel shameful about buying this trashy magazine that had UFOs in it. *People* came out by the people that do *Time*, *Newsweek*. It didn't feel sleazy.

**Researcher:** How much time do you spend a week?

**Subject 6:** The answer is too much time. In a week's time, I watch 1/2 hour of celebrity news. They repeat themselves over again and switch it. 2 1/2 hours a week of trash.

**Researcher:** What are your favorite sections?

**Subject 6:** The cover. The cover story, usually. I would say, the pictures of people. What they are doing. What they are wearing. Where they are shopping. There's nothing much else in there. There really isn't

**Researcher:** What other type of media do you use?

**Subject 6:** TV.

**Researcher:** What other media do you read?

**Subject 6:** Nytimes. Not every day. That's also boring. I read Tuesday because of science. And Sunday. And if it's a big story.

**Researcher:** Would you consider yourself current?

**Subject 6:** Yes. I watch the evening news. I watch a good two hours of the Today show. They also cover celebrity news and whatnot.

**Researcher:** Do you think it's good for the evening news to cover celebrities??

**Subject 6:** No. Actually no. Who cares? You could do the same news about everyone else. Who's pregnant? Who's dating? It's no more important that what your neighbors are doing.

**Researcher:** What emotions do you associate with it?

**Subject 6:** Why I am doing this? I read this before. I saw this picture before. This is silly.

**Researcher:** How do you feel?

**Subject 6:** Satisfied. I feel that I have been entertained. I have taken a station break. I didn't have to use my brain really.

**Researcher:** Do you feel, how do you feel about being a consumer?

**Subject 6:** I feel like an addict. You say you don't want it but you go back and get it. I feel like a dope addict. And a dope.

**Researcher:** How do you feel towards the celebrities?

**Subject 6:** Ridiculous. They are a product. Their whole idea is to see themselves. The more pictures they get into a magazine, the more money they make. They do things to attract people to take their photo. They wouldn't go to Starbucks themselves. They'd send an assistant. They are not a person. They are a brand.

**Researcher:** Do you use the magazine for fashion or diet advice?

**Subject 6:** I see trends but I pass the age of following trends. I like to see colors that are popular. It's nice to know that everyone's wearing purple.

**Researcher:** Diet or exercise tips?

**Subject 6:** I read it. I do it to motivate myself. But it doesn't get me to loose weight.

**Researcher:** Do your friends and family read?

**Subject 6:** Most.

**Researcher:** Which?

**Subject 6:** My young adult daughters. The people are their age and they like to see the extremes of what people are doing. It scares me that my children would do that. I think its people that just are more interested in the human element of people. I don't know.... they are interested in people. I don't know how to explain it. They like to know about people's lives. Most of the people..oh, I don't know. Bored, maybe. It takes time.

**Researcher:** What do you do with the magazines?

**Subject 6:** Put them in a garage and hope people come and read them.

**Researcher:** Who do you discuss it with?

**Subject 6:** My daughters. Their friends. My sisters.

**Researcher:** Do you think gossiping about celebrities are different?

**Subject 6:** They have given permission. They want their life out there. Other people don't do that and aren't being paid. People actually do things just do get publicity. Get remarried. Start dating other people. All these people come from highly dysfunctional families.

**Researcher:** Who else do you think reads these magazines?

**Subject 6.** Well, it costs money so I imagine that forms the demographic.

**Researcher:** IF you worked in an office, do think you'd read it?

**Subject 6:** Yes. It's like guys and sports. You don't want to talk about your families business, so you talk about celebrities instead.

**Interview 7. Subject 7. White 30-year-old woman. Married. Architect. Boston.**

**Researcher:** Where do you purchase celebrity magazines?

**Subject 7:** I don't purchase them have a subscription:

**Researcher:** Where do you usually read them?

**Subject 7:** When I travel ...airport/plane/car....

**Researcher:** What time of day do you usually read them?

**Subject 7:** During the day.

**Researcher:** About how long does it take to read one issue?

**Subject 7:** In hour, with at least 15 of those minutes re-reading sections to my husband who feigns interest.

**Researcher:** When do you remember celebrity news becoming more prominent?

**Subject 7:** I'd say in the last 10 years, when the Internet started to take off.

**Researcher:** On average, how much time a week do you spend reading or watching celebrity news?

**Subject 7:** Hmm...2 hours?

**Researcher:** Can you recall an instance in your childhood of someone reading any type of celebrity news magazines?

**Subject 7:** My mother and grandmothers have better things to do than I; they didn't read them and so I don't have any memories from my childhood of them doing so.

**Researcher:** Do you have a preference for where to get your celebrity news?

**Subject 7:** I prefer the Internet, but it's too time-consuming to have it available at your fingertips.

**Researcher:** What is it about the style, format, and articles or features that you find attractive?

**Subject:** To tell you the truth, I have no idea. I find the style and format so ridiculous, but I do like the pictures. I used to read "The Awful Truth" because I liked the way the writer used a gossipy tone of voice in his writing.

**Researcher:** Do you consider celebrity news journalism?

**Subject 7:** It's not news. Madonna going to the grocery store is not news (I go the grocery store). Life does not change based on celebrity information, as it does with real news. Hugh Jackman doing a new movie impacts nothing (although he's crazy hot). Gas prices going up impacts everything.

**Researcher:** What other media do you use?

**Subject 7:** I read online newspapers every day.

**Researcher:** Do you think being involved with celebrity news makes you less informed about other news?

**Subject 7:** interesting question. My short answer is no; however, I find that celebrity news sources also try to make themselves into "real" news sources by stating opinions on politics and other events, which is a shame to both real news reporting and the fact that many of their readers buy into their propagandized ridiculousness.

**Researcher:** How do you feel as you read magazines like *Us weekly*?

**Subject 7:** This is a really tough quiz. I find it cathartic, I suppose. It's a wonderful escape to read about other people who do nothing but look attractive.

**Researcher:** What sections do you read enjoy most?

**Subject 7:** I like the beginning sections of *Us Weekly* where they show pictures of people doing regular people things. I have no idea why – probably a voyeurism issue I should work through with a therapist.

**Researcher:** How do you feel about the portrayal of women?

**Subject 7:** I think the women in those magazines know exactly what they are getting themselves into; however, the emphasis on weight is way out of hand.

**Researcher:** How do you feel after reading?

**Subject 7:** The same as when I began – more relaxed.

**Researcher:** How do you feel if you miss an issue?

**Subject 7:** I don't care; however, ask me this same question a year ago, and I would tell you it's like getting an arm cut off.

**Researcher:** How do you feel about being a celebrity news consumer?

**Subject 7:** Like a jackass. People reading these dumb magazines make these young celebrities act terribly in order to get in them and be famous.

**Researcher:** How do you feel towards the celebrities in the magazine?

**Subject 7:** Apathetic most of the time -as if they are puppets of real people- and sorry for them the rest of the time.

**Researcher:** Do you use the magazine for fashion advice?

**Subject 7:** Yes – well, the older ladies I'm an old lady; I can't wear leggings and a vest to work.

**Researcher:** Or do use it for diet and exercise advice?

**Subject 7:** No. If I used it for diet and exercise advice I'd have to switch diets every time I got an issue.

**Researcher:** Do you relate or take solace in identification with the celebrities and parallels to your own life?

**Subject 7:** Good question – no. However, I just started fertility treatments, and I explained it to my husband by giving a J.Lo parallel.

**Researcher:** Do your friends and family also read celebrity news?

**Subject 7:** Some friends, yes. Family – no.

**Researcher:** Which friends?

**Subject 7:** Most of my celebrity gossip friends are members of my husband's law school class. My fabulous mother-in-law was really into it, too, but she is now deceased.

**Researcher:** What do you do after you've finished reading the magazine? Do you throw it away? Do you pass it on?

**Subject 7:** I put it in my bathroom, and the pile slowly disappears as people come over to visit. I used to bring them to my mother-in-law and we would trade.

**Researcher:** When you discuss celebrity news- what do you usually talk about?

**Subject:** tell my husband when we are discussing the actual news events of the day, if you can believe it. Like this: Israel is going to bomb Pakistan, and Britney Spears is going to be on the VMAs.

**Researcher:** Do you think celebrity news is a trend?

**Subject 7:** No. People need escapism.



**Researcher:** How does gossiping about celebrities differ from gossiping about people you know?

**Subject 7:** They are in the public eye, and you don't know them. So, not only do they put themselves out there via interviews, etc., they are strangers to you, and therefore their feelings cannot be theoretically hurt.

**Researcher:** Who else reads celebrity magazines in your opinion? Who would you imagine the demographic to be?

**Subject 7:** Housewives and college students. Oh, and probably gay men.

**Researcher:** Would you let your children read celebrity news?

**Subject 7:** I don't have children, but when I do, I won't care if they read them, but I hope I would have children who are interested in reading real books and not magazines.

**Interview 8. Subject 8. 52 years old. Housewife. Washington, D.C.**

**Researcher:** Where do you purchase celebrity magazines?

**Subject 8:** *Subscription, and grocery store*

**Researcher:** Where do you usually read them?

**Subject 8:** Home, beach, on vacation

**Researcher:** What time of day do you usually read them?

**Subject 8:** Home – evening, vacation, beach - daytime

**Researcher:** About how long does it take to read one issue?

**Subject 8:** 2 days

**Researcher:** When do you remember celebrity news becoming more prominent?

**Subject 8:** Princess Diana's death

**Researcher:** how much time a week do you spend reading or watching celebrity news?

**Subject 8:** 6 hours

**Researcher:** What is it about the style, format, and articles or features that you find attractive?

**Subject 8:** I like short articles, but do not like sources not listed.

**Researcher;:** What other media do you use?

**Subject 8:** Television, radio and Internet

**Researcher:** Why is celebrity news important?

**Subject 8:** I find it a distraction of things going on in our world

**Researcher:** How do you feel as you read magazines like *Us weekly*?

**Subject 8:** complacent

**Researcher:** What sections do you read enjoy most?

**Subject 8:** Fashion, lifestyle

**Researcher:** How do you feel about the portrayal of women?

**Subject 8:** Definite gender bias portrayed in all media

**Researcher:** Do you use the magazine for fashion advice?

**Subject 8:** Yes

**Researcher:** Or use it for diet advice?

**Subject 8:** Not necessarily advise but interest

**Researcher:** Who else you know reads it?

**Subject 8:** 2 daughters, Mother

**Researcher:** On average, how much time do you spend talking about celebrity news per day?

**Subject 8:** 10 minutes, unless in a group setting, friends on the beach, much longer

**Researcher:** What do you talk about?

**Subject 8:** Young woman and what appears to be poor life choices

**Researcher:** Who else reads celebrity magazines in your opinion? Who would you imagine the demographic to be?

**Subject 8:** I think it's a very broad demographic that crosses, race, economic as well as age however not gender.

**Interview 9. Subject 9. 25-year-old single woman. Casting associate.  
Single. Los Angeles.**

**Researcher:** Where do you purchase celebrity magazines?

**Subject 9:** Target, grocery stores, bookstores

**Researcher:** Where do you usually read them?

**Subject 9:** At home, at the airport

**Researcher:** What time of day do you usually read them?

**Subject:** Evening

**Researcher:** About how long does it take to read one issue?

**Subject 9:** 20-30 min.

**Researcher:** When do you remember celebrity news becoming more prominent?

**Subject 9:** Paris Hilton sex tape

**Researcher:** What do you remember about the emergence of magazines like *US Weekly*?

**Subject 9:** I remember it was monthly before- it had more of *Vanity Fair* feeling to it then... less gossip. When it turned weekly it became a little more tabloid-esque.

**Researcher:** What is it about the style, format, and articles or features that you find attractive?

**Subject 9:** Pictures – I really only look at the pictures. The articles often feel too subjective.

**Researcher:** Do you consider celebrity news journalism?

**Subject 9:** Seems more like gossip than journalism. Although – not to discount the people who write the articles – I know that they have to fight for those stories like any other journalist and confirm with sources, etc. the stories just don't feel “newsworthy” and I think that's what colors my opinion of it.

**Researcher:** What other media do you use?

**Subject 9:** NPR, news websites, newspaper

**Researcher:** How do you feel as you read magazines like *Us weekly*?

**Subject 9:** Like I'm indulging in something light to take my mind off of other things.

**Researcher:** What sections do you read enjoy most?

**Subject 9:** Differs week to week

**Researcher:** How do you feel about the portrayal of women?

**Subject 9:** Depends on who they're portraying Britney, Paris? Ugh.  
Embarrassing to women.

**Researcher 9:** How do you feel towards the celebrities in the magazine?

**Subject 9:** A little bad for them but at the same time, it's the price that comes with their fame and their paychecks

**Researcher:** How do you think the role of women is portrayed in the magazine?

**Subject 9:** It's usually only about their bodies and what they're wearing and the men they're dating. It'd be nice to hear more about why they go after certain roles, what they do when they're not acting, etc.

**Researcher:** Do use it for diet and exercise advice?

**Subject 9:** No, I'm too lazy

**Researcher:** Do your friends and family also read celebrity news?

**Subject 9:** Yes – my sister reads it incessantly. My mom only very sporadically.  
A bunch of my girlfriends love to read it, too.

**Researcher:** If you discuss celebrity news- what do you usually talk about? And  
Who?

**Subject 9:** Just the latest “scandal” – talk about it with my co-workers

**Researcher:** Who else reads celebrity magazines in your opinion?

Who would you imagine the demographic to be?

**Subject 9:** I don’t know – I think the demographic could range all over the  
place. It’s a guilty pleasure for a lot of people.

**Interview 10. Subject 10. 29-year-old single woman. Entertainment lawyer. New York City.**

**Researcher:** Where do you purchase celebrity news?

**Subject 10:** Drugstore, bookstore

**Researcher:** Where do you read celebrity news?

**Subject 10:** Gym, getting a manicure/pedicure

**Researcher:** What time of day do you read celebrity news?

**Subject 10:** morning or evening, usually while I'm doing something else at the same time

**Researcher:** How long do you read celebrity news?

**Subject 10:** 1 hour

**Researcher:** When do you remember celebrity news becoming more prominent?

**Subject 10:** The past 5 years

**Researcher:** What do you remember about the emergence of magazines like *Us Weekly*?

**Subject 10:** it started off taboo, now it seems like everyone reads them. It also seems like it started off as a source of entertainment for 12-15 year olds, and the market expanded to older people who are interested in celebrity culture.

**Researcher:** On average, how much time a week do you spend reading or watching celebrity news?

**Subject 10:** 3

**Researcher:** Recall an instance in your childhood of someone reading any type of celebrity news magazines.

**Subject 10:** I remember mainly that they were considered “trashy” magazines, like in line at a grocery store. My Dad always told me I couldn’t read *People* because it was “useless” and “trash”

**Researcher:** What is it about the style, format, and articles or features that you find attractive?

**Subject 10:** I find the photos and fashion the most interesting. Now that there are more paparazzi companies and photographers, there are a lot more opportunities to see celebrities—and the pictures seem higher quality.

**Researcher:** Do you consider celebrity news journalism?

**Subject 10** I think there is a place for it in our current culture. I think it goes too far in terms of privacy invasion—but yet, it does in politics too. And I wouldn’t consider politics to not be journalism.

**Researcher:** Why is celebrity news important?

**Subject 10:** For me, it is a way to relax and tune out the day-to-day stresses. It glamorizes a side of life that someone like myself experiences infrequently.

**Researcher:** How do you feel as you read *Us Weekly*?

**Subject 10:** Like it is updating me on trends and fashion. It gives me ideas of clothes I’d like to buy, so I feel like I’m shopping and getting good ideas.

**Researcher:** What sections do you read *Us Weekly* for?

**Subject 10:** Who wore it best, buzz worthy

**Researcher:** What are your favorites?

**Subject 10:** I like when they give suggestions for restaurants and spas

**Researcher:** How do you feel about the magazine’s coverage? Is it fair? What do you like? What don’t you like?



**Subject 10:** I think it is skewed in terms of the editor's agenda. I get the feeling that if they do not have a good relationship with a celebrity, that celebrity receives harsher treatment.

**Researcher:** How do you feel about the portrayal of men? Women?

**Subject 10:** I just flipped through the latest copy and I think US Weekly mainly focuses on young white women—and their relationships. At least it did in this issue.

**Researcher:** How do you feel after reading celebrity news?

**Subject 10:** Like I was entertained, but probably just wasted an hour.

**Researcher:** How do you feel about being a celebrity news consumer?

**Subject 10:** I think it is part of our culture today. I actually learn a lot of things that are useful to my job, and the blogs break a lot of information about upcoming concerts and records.

**Researcher:** How do you feel towards the celebrities in the magazine? Name some feelings. For instance, jealous... ..

**Subject 10:** Sometimes I feel sorry for them and the constant attention, other times I feel admiration that they are successful and are able to harness media to their benefit. The people who like they are having fun—Cameron Diaz or Drew Barrymore---are able to use the magazine as publicity. Others—such as Jessica Simpson or some of the younger stars---seemed to get victimized and they never come out looking good or successful.

**Researcher:** How do you think the role of women is portrayed in the magazine?

**Subject 10:** For the most part, that they are strong and independent—a lot of times the articles I read are about a celebrity's new project or business venture. I

think sometimes though the mag cuts down women, criticizes their weight or tries to overemphasize the importance of having a celebrity boyfriend

**Researcher:** Do you relate or take solace in identification with the celebrities and parallels to your own life?

**Subject 10:** Yes. I think everyone wants to be the best at what they do, they all hate seeing their exes with someone else, and they all want to find the best places to eat, drink and shop at.

**Researcher:** Do your friends and family also read magazines like *Us weekly*?

**Subject 10:** My friends do, not family

**Researcher:** Which friends? What family members?

**Subject 10:** High school, college, law school, city friends—most people I know.

**Researcher:** Where do you keep it around?

**Subject 10:** coffee table, then recycle it.

**Researcher:** On average, how much time do you spend talking about celebrity news per day?

**Subject 10:** 15 minutes on my own—hours and hours for my “job”

**Researcher:** When you discuss celebrity news- what do you usually talk about?

**Subject 10:** It is a topic at the office, just wasting time chatting. We often talk about upcoming movies or TV shows, and it comes up in marketing meetings as a way to cross-market certain musicians.

**Researcher:** How do you feel about the assessment of celebrity news as ‘low brow?’

**Subject10:** I think that’s accurate in the sense that it is not really adding to ones knowledge, but it is a guilty pleasure that a lot of people like

**Researcher:** What ‘high brow’ (if any) texts and arts do you enjoy?

**Subject 10:** I try to always be reading a novel and/or biography. I also like *The economist* and *The wall St. journal*. Going to a museum or an exhibit with friends is always more fun than reading websites or magazines...

**Researcher:** How does gossiping about celebrities differ from gossiping about people you know?

**Subject 10:** for some reason, it feels nicer to gossip about celebrities—it is more “removed”

**Researcher:** Who else reads *US weekly* in your opinion?

**Subject 10:** I think women age 15-40 would be the biggest demographic. Not sure though? I’ve had boyfriends that just happen to pick it up if they’re “bored”. It freaks me out though if they later reference some bit of info in the magazine. I kind of think they should not read it

**Interview 11. Subject 11. Divorced white woman. 54 years old. Works at lobbyist firm. Washington, D.C.**

**Researcher:** Where do you buy them?

**Subject 11:** Convenience stores:

**Researcher:** Where do you read them?

**Subject 11:** At home in the evenings.

**Researcher:** How long does it take?

**Subject 11:** 2, 2-1/2 hours.

**Researcher:** When do you remember celebrity news becoming more prominent?

**Subject 11:** Princess Diana

**Researcher:** What do you remember about the emergence of magazines like *US Weekly*?

**Subject 11:** Seemed to be based in news much more than *National Enquirer* or *Star*

Therefore more trustworthy -- no aliens impregnating people stores

**Researcher:** On average, how much time a week do you spend reading or watching celebrity news?

**Subject 11:** Two-three hours

**Researcher:** Recall an instance in your childhood of someone reading any type of celebrity news magazines.

**Subject 11:** My Mother reading *National Enquirer*

**Researcher:** What is it about the style, format, and articles or features that you find attractive?

**Subject 11:** Easiest to read – most direct

**Researcher:** Do you consider celebrity news journalism? Why or Why not?

**Subject 11:** Yes. Telling a story. The journalist still has to research and write the story.

**Researcher:** What other media do you use?

**Subject 11:** TV; internet; newspaper, other types of magazines

**Researcher:** What sections do you read enjoy most?

**Subject 11:** Best/worst dressed

**Researcher:** How do you feel if you miss an issue?

**Subject 11:** Like I need to get it somewhere. Don't like to miss an issue.

**Researcher:** How do you feel towards the celebrities in the magazine?

List any feelings. For instance, jealousy, admiration...

**Subject 11:** Admiration, amazement, pity, envy

**Researcher:** Would you like to emulate the celebrities?

**Subject 11:** Maybe they're lifestyles but not them personally

**Researcher:** Would you describe yourself as an average reader of *Us Weekly*?

**Subject 11:** Yes. But I don't subscribe and I don't read every issue—I think there are someone people that are obsessed with doing so.

**Researcher:** If you discuss celebrity news- who do you usually talk about it with?

**Subject 11:** Events of the day with co-workers

**Researcher:** Do you think celebrity news is a trend?

**Subject 11:** Past trend; bigger than a trend

**Researcher:** How does gossiping about celebrities differ from gossiping about people you know?

Subject 11: Not much – it is as if we know the celebrities

**Subject 12. Single Hispanic woman. 51 years old. Commercial Real Estate Broker. New York City.**

**Researcher:** Where do you purchase celebrity magazines?

**Subject 12:** Either at the supermarket or newsstand in my office building.

**Researcher:** Where do you usually read them?

**Subject 12:** At home.

**Researcher:** What time of day do you usually read them?

**Subject 12:** Depends on what day it is – if it is during the week, in the evening. If on weekends, then anytime really.

**Researcher:** About how long does it take to read one issue?

**Subject 12:** About one hour

**Researcher:** What is it about the style, format, and articles or features that you find attractive?

**Subject 12:** It's not so much that I find them attractive – I just find them fun to read – let's face it half of what is written isn't true.

**Researcher:** Do you consider celebrity news journalism?

**Subject 12:** There is no value in what is printed. How someone dresses or who someone does, does not affect my life in the least.

**Researcher:** How do you feel as you read magazines like Us weekly?

**Subject 12:** Entertained

**Researcher:** What sections do you read enjoy most?

**Subject 12:** Who wore it best?

**Researcher:** How do you feel towards the celebrities in the magazine?

**Subject 12:** I feel that some of them like being in these magazines and they do it for the publicity. Maybe not all but some.

**Researcher:** Do you use the magazine for fashion advice?

**Subject 12:** Advice no – I could never be one of those in the magazines no matter how much they say you can really do this yourself. If I see something I like I will try it, however I am my own fashion consultant.

**Researcher:** Or do use it for diet and exercise advice?

**Subject 12:** Never works

**Researcher:** What do you do after you've finished reading the magazine? Do you throw it away? Do you pass it on?

**Subject 12:** Sometimes throw away and sometimes pass it on

**Researcher:** How long do you keep the magazine around?

**Subject 12:** One week

**Researcher:** Where do you keep it around?

**Subject 12:** On my coffee table

**Researcher:** On average, how much time do you spend talking about celebrity news per day?

**Subject 12:** One hour, usually at work.

**Researcher:** If you discuss celebrity news- what do you usually talk about?

**Subject 12:** Who they are dating what they were wearing

**Researcher:** How does gossiping about celebrities differ from gossiping about people you know?

**Subject 12:** I don't know any celebrities



**Researcher:** Who else reads celebrity magazines in your opinion? Who would you imagine the demographic to be?

**Subject 12:** I think that the demographics would surprise just about everyone – I believe it's not only the cashier at the supermarket or the mom's waiting on line I think you might just get a few h level female executives who read it for fun.

**INTERVIEW 13. SUBJECT 13. 26 YEAR OLD WHITE WOMAN.**

**SINGLE. CELEBRITY PR. NEW YORK CITY.**

**SUBJECT 14. 26 YEARS OLD WHITE WOMAN. SINGLE. FASHION PR. NEW YORK CITY.**

**Researcher:** What magazines do you read?

**Subject 13:** *People Magazine* for sure. *Us weekly*. I read all of them. *Life and Style*. In touch. Okay. I get them at work.

**Subject 14:** *People* and *Us*. I have subscriptions. Comes to apartment. I had a subscription to *US weekly* for four years but I didn't renew it so I read it probably every other week.

**Researcher:** you read yours at work?

**Subject 13:** At work, we get multiple subscriptions. We're in corporate branding. We get 2 on the corporate side. And two on the marketing.

**Researcher:** Explain what you do.

**Subject 13:** I work at a PR agency. Half the office is in direct celebrity corporations. TV. Music. Film. We have a division in LA. We call it corporate entertainment. I do product placement. We gift a lot of celebrities. We do a lot of celebrity campaigns.

**Researcher:** Why do you have the magazines at work?

**Subject 13:** The celebrity side needs to read them every week. Tag their clients. It's an FYI. For the most part, it depends on the client which magazines they'll work with. Many are turning against *US weekly*. Often times, the celebrity aspect ...It just depends who they like. Avril Lavigne works with only *People* and *Ok*. For

her, US weekly has gotten really gossipy. I don't know if agree with *US Weekly* is getting gossipy. I think they all are. People do have a little bit more of journalistic integrity. 150 pages of gossip. The Other 50 pages are of actual articles. And they work with good writers. *In style* and people are published the same company, so they share material. *Life and Style* though is in a downward spiral. Very rarely do you have a client that's willing to work with them.

**Subject 14:** I agree. Life and Style said Angelina and Brad spilt. At my work, I get more fashion magazines. We only get it if we are in the magazines.

**Researcher:** When did you get into celebrity news?

**Subject 13:** Before college. I was filling out my applications and m y father said this is real interesting. I don't know what you are going to do with your life when all you do is read people and TV guide. He's like I would love to know...But hey, I got the perfect job. It's a cellular problem but it's my business. The celebrities complain but it's like stop calling the magazines and they'll stop doing trash. Ok gave Jamie Lynn 5 million dollars for 3 baby covers. The money's out there. The interest is out there.

**Researcher:** How did you get in to PR?

**Subject 13:** An internship was required for my major. I told my guidance counselor that I don't know what to do. I thought about law school but She said what about PR. For the first time, it's integration of fashion, beauty, entertainment and this consumer industry. I had never really thought about. I did the internship and then was hired. And never looked back.

**Subject 14:** It's been a long. I always bought *People* magazine when I was traveling when I was little. I didn't get into *US weekly* into early college. In

Europe, I stalked the newsstands. Write home to my parents that I wanted the magazines. And I would buy it even if it was three weeks old. My mother gave *People* to me for a housewarming gift.

**Researcher:** What's an early memory of celebrity news?

**Subject 14:** I remember an early one...or a vivid one... summer and I was woke us up at a cabin in Michigan to told that Princess Di had died.

**Subject 13:** I remember the downward spiral of Michael Jackson. I remember that being played out a lot. He used to always be on the covers all the time. Then he had those kids. And Lisa Marie.

**Subject 14:** Another big one for me was Tonya Harding and Nancy Kerrigan. That's so random. But part of our pop culture. I just read the article in last week's *People* about Tonya Harding.

**Researcher:** Do you read blogs?

**Subject 13:** I read people.com. I also read Perez. D listed.

**Subject 14:** I hit people twice a week on my lunch break. Perez twice a week.

**Researcher:** What other media do you use?

**Subject 14:** I watch Today show if I have time when I get ready. I try to hit CNN.com.

**Subject 13:** Page six. I read the Post. I read the celebrity weekly type part.

**Researcher:** How do you feel about being a celebrity newsreader?

**Subject 13:** I mean, I was always so obsessed that I am used to teasing. And now it's my job.

**Researcher:** What percentage of your circle reads celebrity news?

**Subject 14:** I would say almost all are in the know. I would say at least 70% read a weekly.

**Subject 13:** About the same. Except everyone has to at work.

**Researcher:** Any Guys?

**Subject 14:** They won't buy them but I will see them reading them around the house. I have a huge stack of magazines and they'll gravitate toward them.

**Researcher:** What sections do you like?

**Subject 13:** I love this week's pics. Doesn't get better.

**Subject 14:** The beginning part. Whatever it's called. The Fashion. I read that part but I don't look at it as a fashion magazine. I read so many other fashion magazines so I don't like pay so much attention like I do to *Vogue*.

Oh, I look at the restaurants. If something pops up a bunch, I think we should go here if I haven't been.

**Subject 13:** I do like at the styles. *Us weekly* has done a good job beefing theirs up quite a bit.

**Researcher:** What about the service elements? The diet and exercise part?

**Subject 13:** I absolutely read it. The entire menu. What they eat for 12 days. But that doesn't translate into results.

**Subject 14:** I've read a few random things that I have picked up. I think that's how I started eating almonds. I mean did anyone eat almonds before the celebrities?

**Researcher:** Do you ever feel bad about how women are portrayed?

**Subject 13:** I actually have a huge problem with Jamie Lynn Spears. I think it glorified pregnancy. She bought this house with the tabloid money. It makes it

look easy. It's a completely different experience for someone that doesn't have her money or access. And the gaining weight thing. The Tyra thing.

**Subject 14:** They are definitely more harsh on women, which is strange because I assumed its women readers. Why is it never 'the other man? Always the other women?

**Researcher:** What about the paparazzi?

**Subject 14:** I think it comes with the territory. If I had cameras following me though, I would flip out. And I would have a different feeling so I feel bad if they have kids.

**Subject 13:** It's the job.

**Researcher:** What emotions you associate with reading it.

**Subject 13:** I am not feeling. Mindless entertainment.

**Subject 14:** It is mindless entertainment. I get jealous sometimes about all the money they have but never really the celebrity. I mean, I am lucky and fortunate, but their lives are absurd.

**Researcher:** Do your families read celebrity news?

**Subject 13:** My mother's obsessed. My dad would bring it home from the doctor's office and I would fit with her for it.

**Subject 14:** My mother always got people, now she's getting *US Weekly* in the last year. She like sent the card in and now gets *Us Weekly* in the mail.

**Researcher:** What do you do with the magazines?

**Subject 14:** Nothing. I don't keep them unless there's something I really wanted -like a hair color.

**Researcher:** Do you pass them on?

**Subject 14:** Maybe on vacation, I'll share. It's funny I just went on a 6 hour plane ride. I read five magazines. I kid you not. I could've gotten a book and gotten a lot smarter. It's kind of sad. Not as much fun though to read a book

**Researcher:** Do you feel gossiping about celebrities is different?

Subject 14: Yes, you are harsher in general when it's someone you don't know.

**Researcher:** Do you relate at all?

**Subject 14:** I compare age. I can't believe we're the same age. Like people my age. That's what she looks like. That's what she's wearing. Wow.

**Researcher:** Would you let children read the magazines?

**Subject 14:** It's so candid. She slept with so and so. She did this. She did that.

But that said, probably but I'll make sure they read books. Like for Christmas, I'll buy them books.

**Researcher:** Do you think celebrity news will increase?

**Subject 13:** I think it will calm down. But I think it will increase more. I don't foresee it ending any time in the near future.

**Subject 14:** Maybe I'll have less time in the future. If I have kids. I mean, it's summer. There's nothing on TV. I have a spare hour. Why not? But when I have kids, I mean, I still read it but they'll be less time.

**Subject 13:** So I read at the gym. I bring it in my bag to appointments. It's like an accessory. I carry it around. I look at the same issue.

**Interview 14.**

**Subject 15. 19-year-old single woman. College student. New York City.**

**Researcher:** How often do you read celebrity magazines?

**Subject 15:** Twice a week.

**Researcher:** Which ones do you read?

**Subject 15:** *Us weekly. Star. People.*

**Researcher:** How long do you spend per magazine?

**Subject 15:** 15 minutes per magazine.

**Researcher:** How long have you been reading them for?

**Subject 15:** About 4-5 years?

**Researcher:** Do you have subscriptions?

**Subject 15:** *People*, yes. But all the others, I just buy. It's terrible.

I buy them and then I give them to others.

**Researcher:** Do or did your parents read them?

**Subject 15:** No.

**Researcher:** Do you read blogs?

**Subject 15:** No. But entertainment news. I watch that.

**Researcher:** Do you read the articles?

**Subject 15:** I read the articles but it depends how much time I have. I always look at the pictures first.

**Researcher:** Do you look do it for fashion advice?

**Subject 15t:** Sometimes there's tips I like. Or look at trends. I won't buy the stuff because it's too out there for my scene. I mainly just stalk celebrities. It's fun to



also go I have that. I've been there since I grew up in New York. I mean, I don't actually stalk them, but I like to see the places that I've been too.

**Researcher:** How do you feel when you read them?

**Subject 15:** Oh, I love it. It makes me happy. I love it.

**Researcher:** Do you read it with friends?

**Subject 15:** I'll keep it and give it to friends. But I hate when people read over my shoulder. I am like, let me do this and I'll give it to you later.

**Researcher:** Do you ever feel bad for the celebrities?

**Subject 15:** I don't feel bad unless they have kids. But after I am done reading, I don't really think about it.

**Researcher:** Do you think it's a current trend?

**Subject 15:** I think it's current but I don't think it'll tone down. I think it'll escalate. Think about Jamie Lynn Spears. That's great because it was real and no one thought that it was real. And she's young and I am young. There's a link. And I was actually in an article about her. We went to her house and they said we were her friends visiting but really we just drove to her house to see it. It shows how they can lie.

**Researcher:** Do you remember anyone growing up reading it?

**Subject 15:** *People*. I liked to see what they were wearing. Their haircuts like the Jennifer Anniston. Eventually, I was like, I'll read this one and then I'd pick up that ay. Then I was like I'll get this one too. Now it's a 25-dollar habit.

**Researcher:** Is there anything else you find interesting?

**Subject 15:** I think its cool how to word different things because I want to do journalism. And how they make up a name like Brangelina.

**Researcher:** What other media do you read?

**Subject 15:** I don't read the newspaper. Go online. Read cnn.com. I am pretty out of it though.

**Researcher:** Do you consider celebrity news journalism?

**Subject 15:** Yes and No. I think that there's some truth but a lot of it's sensationalized. Oh, I also read *Vogue* and *Cosmo*. *Cosmo* is fun to read. Polls and stories. *Vogue* is too many advisements and articles. The print is like tiny. *US weekly* is approachable. It's a visual thing. And they are always saying like 'this issue is only 99 cents' so I think oh, I'll get every single one.

**Subject 15. 30-year-old white woman. Married. Advertising executive.**  
**New York City.**

**Researcher** How long have you read *Us weekly*?

**Subject 16:** Four years. I forgot to renew it. So I just buy it now.

**Researcher :** Where do you pick up the magazine?

**Subject 16:** I have to pick it up at the newsstands. Airports.

**Researcher:** How long does it take you?

**Subject 16:** I breeze through them. I just like the pictures of the celebrities and their kids.

**Researcher:** What do you do with them?

**Subject 16:** I have an obsession. I keep them around. I have a hard time throwing them away.

**Researcher:** Where do you read them?

**Subject 16:** Work. The train. Airport.

**Researcher:** Do you read any celebrities new online?

**Subject 16:** Yahoo. I click on entertainment. At work when Angelina and Brad had the babies, everyone started screaming. At *Shape*, we stated putting celebrities on cover two years ago. *Women's Health. Fitness* don't do that. At *Shape*, they have to be positive role models. No Lindsay Lohan. Current and young. It's hard. Some celebrities think they are 'too good' for shape. It's funny. Our editor came in and was like who do you want? Who's that Who's that? We almost put Misha Barton on...We just trashed her. So she didn't put her on it. She was going to talk about how she changed her life but people don't look beyond the

cover. And we all really just knew what we had read about her. We like assume we actually know. Maybe she has really changed her life? But we were all tainted.

**Researcher:** What's your favorite part of celebrity magazine?

**Subject 16:** The beginning parts. Restaurants. *US weekly*. Where they were sighted. Like they feature the hot spots. So and so was at Pastis. And I've been there a bunch so it's fun... Since I live in NY, it's fun. Sometimes I think Oh; I'd like to go there. And I do.

**Researcher:** What other media do you use?

**Subject 16:** *Access Hollywood. Extra*. More entertainment. I have to read all my competitors. Women's magazines etc. Sports illustrated online. My commute is 10 minutes. Today, I read *Elle* in 10 minutes and threw it out. If something catches my eye, I'll read it. Other than it it's just work. Flip through look at the advertisers. *Us weekly* is really my only magazine I read for me.

**Researcher:** Will your husband read US Weekly?

**Subject 16:** Heidi and Spencer. He likes them. He'll see it and look at it but other than that, no.

**Researcher:** What about your friends and family?

**Subject 16:** Everyone at work. But my friends that pregnant, I don't think she reads it. My best friend from home loves it and we'll talk about it on the phone. Did you see that? Or did you see Access Hollywood?

**Researcher:** Were you into as a child?

**Subject 16:** I am more into it now. Today, they are like in everyday life. The access I have totally different these days.

**Researcher:** Do you remember any celebrity instance from when you were younger?

**Subject 16:** The only thing I can think of is when Nikki Taylor's sister died. I remember buying the magazines about that. But it's not like it's today. My husband's 8-year-old cousins are into it. It's a totally new terrain.

**Researcher:** How do you feel about how women are portrayed? Do you wish to emulate?

**Subject 16:** I think they look really good. At shape, we combat that because we trying to really profile how they get that body. We try to make it inspirational. What's on the play list? What they are eating. What's their favorite products. It's funny because it will fly off the shelves. IF a celebrity mentions a product, then the advertisers will be so much more willing to work with us. It's probably the most popular feature. Celebrity profiles: What are their workouts. How they get healthy. The same with *US weekly*. They feature the hot places to go. Who's seen where and then those places become so hot. I am might go check out but I am not going to wait in line for two hours. Some friends that's all they want to do. They want to see NY as it is in the magazines. I live here, so I am used to it. But that's all they want to do when they get here. That's absolutely what they want to do.

**Researcher:** How do you feel if you get behind in celebrity news?

**Subject 16:** After my honeymoon, I came back and felt a little bit out of it. We didn't have internet or anything. But it felt good too. At work, it's a competition. There's a girl who is really into all of it. She blogs about where's she gone, what celebrity's she's seen, what products she uses. It's too much. There's other girl

who doesn't watch TV and you put a celebrity on the cover and it's like who's that? And that's different too. There's a happy medium. You got to find it.

**Researcher:** What else do you like about celebrity news?

**Subject 16:** What I find It's interesting is the celebrities that are my age. That I grew up with. Britney. I like to see what's she doing. I notice myself comparing ages.

Reese Witherspoon, she's my age too.

**Researcher:** Do you think your interest will wean?

**Subject 16:** Oh yeah. When I have kids, will I really have time for it? Even with my wedding, I kind of got burned out. The last thing I want to see now is a wedding magazine. Maybe it will hit a saturation point. And if I stop working, I imagine I won't constantly be as checked in. But then again, maybe I will. It's easy. I mean like know you can update on your phone and on your blackberry. It's everywhere. If you want text messages sent to you when Britney has a breakdown, you can do it. Great. I don't want that but it's out there.

**Researcher:** How do you feel about the celebrities and the paparazzi?

**Subject 16:** It's invasion of privacy but it comes with the territory. You have no idea if it's true or false but you talk about them like you know them. We're much harsher on them because you only know what you read.

**Researcher:** Would you let your kids read it?

**Subject:** I feel like the more you restrict it. The more they want it. Some can be role models. Or examples. Like Britney made bad choices. If I don't do show it to them, they'll just get it other places.

**Researcher:** Why did you get in?

**Subject 16:** Wedding shower got a subscription .I got a subscription because I didn't know anything about celebrity news and when everyone was talking about it, I'd get so engrossed. I'd go to a friend's place and see all these magazines and look at them for 30 minutes, reading and studying pictures.

**Researcher:** When do you read it?

**Subject 16:** Sometimes it comes Thursday night. Sometimes Friday. Always in my apartment. I had it today so I read it when I was getting my hair.

**Researcher:** Does your husband read it?

**Subject 16:** No. He thinks its funny that I read. Actually, he's the one who renewed my subscriptions. I didn't want to do it. He thinks it's a big joke. I guess I was embarrassed but one day he went to work and did it. Every once and while he'll look at it.

**Subject 16. 30 single white woman. Married. Make-Up Company Exec.**  
**New York City.**

**Researcher:** How often do you read it?

**Subject 117:** I read every week. Unless I am out of town, then I'll read it later.

**Researcher:** Did you follow it as a child?

**Subject 17:** 2 years. No. Never.

**Researcher:** Anyone in your family read it?

**Subject 17:** No, uh, uh. It was until I moved to NYC and all my friends were into and then I got interested.

**Researcher:** How long does it take to read an issue?

**Subject 17:** That's a good question. I break it up into pieces to enjoy it. So total it is 2 hours because I take my time and look the pictures

**Researcher:** What do you do for your job?

**Subject 17:** We do all the celebrity perfumes. We get email updates on what's happening with our celebrities. Jay Z. Britney. Any one we have is on the cover. Events and Educations follow all the blogs and stuff like that and recap it in an email. Like Britney, for a while, we would get daily information.

**Researcher:** Do you get good and bad information?

**Subject 17:** Yes. They want us to be knowledgably about it because their names are on our products.

**Researcher:** Does bad press hurt perfume sales?

**Subject 17:** With Britney. It didn't hurt or help. If someone is doing well, like Jay Z, it helps. Anything that happens with him, it increases our sales. Hilary



Duff isn't as popular, so press doesn't help or hurt as much. Britney has 14-24, which is a very large age group. Usually you only have 5 years.

**Researcher:** Have you ever met the celebrities?

**Subject 17:** No.

**Researcher:** What sections do you like best?

**Subject 17:** I like the pictures in the beginning when they show all the people. I think the pictures are probably the best.

**Researcher:** Why?

**Subject 17:** Just to see what the people are wearing.

**Researcher:** Do you ever use any of the advice?

**Subject 17:** I use hair advice. Since I am in the beauty industry, I just use our products. But I read the hair advice. The stars are wearing this and you can get it for cheaper, I look at that and sometimes get it.

**Researcher:** Why do you like celebrity news?

**Subject 17:** I consider the magazine eye candy. By the time Friday comes long. It used to be that I'd go out or go to dinner with friends, now I read it. It's such easy reading. It's eye candy. It's easy, relaxing reading.

**Researcher:** Do you feel bad for the celebrities?

**Subject 17:** Sometimes. Britney. Britney is on the cover all the time. Jessica Simpson. But it's part of the business. Your reputation is going to be torn to shreds whether you do it or not. I like to see the restaurants and scenes but I don't believe everything I read. I turn my brain off.

**Researcher:** How do you feel about its portrayal of women?

**Subject 17:** It covers more women aimed information. They do have some information about men, but I just read it without thinking about that stuff. I will tell you at my job. There's a lot of people. Because of my industry that are up on the news. If we ever get in conversation, people know it. On Mondays, I bring *Us weekly* to my manager because she doesn't have a subscription. Then she gives it to another women.

**Researcher:** Which of your friends read it?

**Subject 17:**All of my friends like it. Yes, all of my friends. I don't have one of those families that are that into celebrity news.

**Researcher:** What other types of media?

**Subject 17:** I read the newspaper online. *New York Times*. I read the subway newspaper. Then I watch the news before I go to bed.

**Researcher:** Local news?

**Subject 17:** Was local. Now I watch *the Today show* when I work out in the mornings.

**Researcher:** Do you ever read magazines at the gym?

**Subject 17:** No. I don't. I generally use my workout time to zone out.

**Researcher:** Do you think after a while you'll lose interest?

**Subject 17:** I think so. It depends on how much time you have. I am working now. I don't have to study at night. I don't have to go to the library. My job does somewhat require I have to be up on that stuff. But really everyone likes it whether you actively buy it or not. A girl I work with it was going to Bahamas. I just gave it to her. She was like, "sweet, I will read it on the plane."

**Researcher:** When do you talk about it?

**Subject 17:** Depends on the audience. With guy friends never. AT dinner with girlfriends, destiny because I know that they'd be interested and that they follow it. I wouldn't bring it up that often though.

**Researcher:** How do you feel about being a celebrity newsreader?

**Subject 17:** I don't have any problem with it. I might encourage them to go to the library and read other stuff.

**Researcher:** Does it ever make you feel bad at yourself?

**Subject 17:** No. These people are paid lots of money to work out 3 hours a day, have personal trainers. It's not normal. You are dedicating your entire life to looking good. Having people pick out every outfit. It's not normal. I have really gorgeous friends and they don't look that. Unless you are dedicating your whole life. It's not possible. I have gone to the gym every day of life. I think these girls are doing dangerous things. I think they have surgery. I mean if you smoke cigarettes, do drugs, and drink caffeine's, all day, yes you'll be skinny. Do you know how many people actually make it to the top? Of all the thousands of people that move to LA every day. It's the .1% that makes it. It's the only perfect people that makes it. It's also genes. This guy I know. It's perfect genes. He's got great teeth. Great hair. He maintains but he came with a lot of it.

## APPENDIX II

### INTERVIEW PARTICIPANT SURVEY

Gender  
 Male  Female

Age: \_\_\_\_\_

Primary Residence.....

Marital Status  
 Married  
 Divorced  
 Single  
 Separated  
 Widowed  
 Roommate  
 Other

Education \_\_\_\_\_

-----High School  
----- College  
-----Graduate School  
-----Postgraduate School

Profession:-----

Employment Status  
 Retired/Disabled  
 Full-time (over 30 hours per week)  
 Part-time (under 30 hours per week)  
 Unemployed

Ethnic Group  
*Check all that apply*  
 White  
 Black  
 Asian  
 Pacific Islander  
 American Indian  
 Hispanic  
 Other/I don't know

Which celebrity magazines do you subscribe to?  
*Check all that apply*  
 People  
 Us Weekly  
 In Touch  
 Life and Style  
 OK!

Which celebrity magazines do you buy/read regularly?  
*Check all that apply*  
 People  
 Us Weekly  
 In Touch  
 Life and Style  
 OK!

Do you read any celebrity blogs?  
*Please List*

### **APPENDIX III: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS:**

#### **History of Celebrity Use and Details on Celebrity Use Practice.**

When do you remember celebrity news becoming more prominent?

What do you remember about the emergence of magazines like *US Weekly*?

Recall an instance in your childhood of someone reading any type of gossip magazines?

Where do you purchase celebrity magazines? Or do you subscribe?

Where do you read celebrity magazines?

What time of day do you read celebrity magazines?

How long do you read celebrity magazines for?

What other celebrity news publications do you read? Any online programs? Any TV shows?

What is it about the style, format, and articles or features that you find attractive?

Do you consider it journalism? Why or Why not?

#### **Hard News Vs. Soft News**

What other media do you use?

Would you consider yourself current on US events?

Would you consider yourself current on World Events?

Do you think being involved with celebrity news makes you less informed about other news?

Why is celebrity news important?

Do you think engagement in celebrity news as a leisure activity?

Do you think it's a wasteful practice?

### **Feelings Associated about reading *Us Weekly* and about the text**

How do you feel as you read celebrity news?

What sections do you read celebrity news for? What are your favorites?

How do you feel about the magazine's coverage? Is it fair?

How do you feel about the portrayal of men? Women? Class? Race?

How do you feel after reading celebrity news?

How do you feel if you miss an issue?

How do you feel about being a celebrity news consumer?

How do you feel towards the celebrities in the magazine?

Name some feelings. For instance, jealousy, admiration...

Do you identify with the celebrities?

Do you use the magazine for fashion advice?

Diet advice?

Would you like to emulate the celebrities?

Do you relate or take solace in identification with the celebrities and parallels to your own life?

### **Uses of Celebrity News Information**

Do your friends and family also read celebrity news?

Which friends? What family members?

Do you ever cutout articles or pictures from the magazine? If so, why?

What do you do after you've finished reading the magazine? Do you throw it away? Do you pass it on?

How long do you keep the magazine around?

Where do you keep it around?

On average, how much time do you spend talking about celebrity news per day?

When you discuss celebrity news, what do you usually talk about?

**Questions related to class**

How do you feel about the assessment of celebrity news as 'low brow'?

Do you think celebrity news is a trend?

**Other questions:**

Do you gossip in your day-to-day life?

How does gossiping about celebrities differ from gossiping about people you know?

Who else reads *celebrity* news your opinion? What would you imagine the demographic to be?

Would you describe yourself as an average reader of celebrity news?

Do you let your children (if you have any) read celebrity news?

#### APPENDIX IV: PARTICPANT DEMOGRAPHIC

SUBJECT NUMBER	PROFESSION	AGE	EDUCATION	MARTIAL STATUS	PRIMARY RESIDENCE	RACE
1	SALES	25	GRADUATE	SINGLE	WASHINGTON DC	CAUCASIAN
2	TEACHER	29	GRADUATE	SINGLE	NYC	CAUCASIAN
3	TEACHER	28	GRADUATE	SINGLE	NYC	CAUCASIAN
4	---	29	GRADUATE	SINGLE	NYC	CAUCASIAN
5	REAL ESTATE LAWYER	29	GRADUATE	SINGLE	NYC	CAUCASIAN
6	HOUSEWIFE	58	GRADUATE	MARRIED	NYC	CAUCASIAN
7	ARCHITECT	30	GRADUATE	MARRIED	BOSTON	CAUCASIAN
8	HOUSEWIFE	52	COLLEGE	MARRIED	DC	CAUCASIAN
9	CASTING AGENT	25	COLLEGE	SINGLE	LA	CAUCASIAN
10	ENTERTAINMENT LAWYER	29	GRADUATE	SINGLE	NYC	CAUCASIAN
11	LOBBYIST FIRM	54	COLLEGE	DIVORCED	WASHINGTON DC	CAUCASIAN
12	COMMERCIAL REAL ESTATE	51	COLLEGE	SINGLE	NYC	HISPANIC
13	CELEBRITY PR	26	COLLEGE	SINGLE	NYC	CAUCASIAN
14	FASHION PR	26	COLLEGE	SINGLE	NYC	CAUCASIAN
15	STUDENT	19	SOME COLLEGE	SINGLE	NYC	CAUCASIAN
16	MAGAZINE AD EXEC	30	COLLEGE	MARRIED	NYC	CAUCASIAN
17	COSMETIC EXEC	30	COLLEGE	MARRIED	NYC	CAUCASIAN