

I Know What Lindsay Lohan Did Last Night: Celebrity Gossip and its use of Disciplinary
Power over Women

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Introduction: Celebrity Lives - Our Lives

Kelly: Jim! Oh my God I have so much to tell you!

Jim: Really?

Kelly: Yes! Tom Cruise and Katie Holmes, they had a baby, and they named it Suri, and then Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie, they had a baby too, and they named it Shiloh. And both babies are amazing!

Jim: Great. So what's new with you?

*Kelly: [blank stare] I just told you. –“The Merger,” from *The Office*¹*

While intended to garner laughs from the audience, the above dialogue between Mindy Kaling, playing Kelly Kapoor, and John Krasinski, playing Jim Halpert, on the hit American television show, *The Office*, is not far from everyday dialogue in American culture today. Between television, magazines, and the Internet, it is quite possible that a person could spend their entire day consumed by/with celebrity culture. Celebrity images endorse products in commercials and advertisements. They appear in movies, sing songs, star in television shows, and give interviews. They are photographed walking their dogs, at political rallies and eating at major celebrity hang outs in California and New York. The public has become engrossed with images of celebrities, and each celebrity image conveys a particular set of messages to the public about what is both normal and ideal. Celebrities have even begun to replace models as the “it” girls and boys to advertise and

¹ “The Merger,” *The Office*. Season no. 3 Episode no. 7, first broadcast 16 November 2006 by NBC. Directed by Ken Whittingham and written by Brent Forrester.

sell designer clothing, as models are often viewed as lacking a persona, image, life-style and/or story that helps to sell products. Celebrity images fill that void and help the public relate to products more than models can/do.² The image of a celebrity is carefully calculated and intended to draw people into wanting to know more about the celebrity, but at the same time admire the unattainability of this seemingly superhuman figure. Celebrity images have long been used to sell products but a more recent development has come from celebrity imagery selling a life-style that is heralded as being the ultimate goal of every American; this life style is what makes us normal, and yet ultimately is one that is unattainable and thus keeps the public striving to reach it. Through the public's continuing attempts to obtain celebrity gossip's standard of normality the gossip industry is able to reinforce socially conservative ideology, capitalist values and control women's bodies.

Celebrity gossip has aided in the reiteration of neoconservative norms by collapsing the distinction between private and public lives through submitting all parts of celebrities' lives to public scrutiny. The breakdown, inside celebrity gossip, of the public and private dichotomy is indicative of neoliberalism's most spectacular site of the public/private disintegration in modern society. The lack of privacy that celebrities experience thanks to paparazzi journalism and other gossip industry developments increases the parts of a celebrity's image that can be dissected and used to propagate norms. Each celebrity image is held up as an ideal either because it shows how "perfect" life can be when people adhere to the neoconservative and neoliberal capitalist norms

² "The Cult of Celebrity: Its impact on how women shop is increasing," *Cotton Incorporated*, 13 April 2000, available from <http://www.cottoninc.com/lsmarticles/?articleID=206>, accessed 24 November 2008.

they are sold or because they represent the epitome of how disastrous a life can become when those norms are not adhered to. Gossip creates a world where the reading public feels as if they are a part of celebrities' lives. The more invested the public has become in these celebrity images the easier it becomes to manipulate, control and exert power over the public. Gossip's seemingly benign role in society, as a simple form of low-brow popular culture, enables it to convey its conservative and capitalist ideologies more covertly than through other forms of disciplinary power.

Consumerism has been a part of American culture since the inception of the "celebrity." Celebrity imagery has long been attached to the selling and buying of products. Celebrity endorsements are valuable to manufacturers, but what are even more valuable are celebrities claiming that they invented certain products attached to their name. Instead of attempting to simulate celebrity images the public can now buy that image alone not just through what the celebrity endorses by being in commercials for a product but also what paparazzi catch celebrities wearing, eating and buying in their everyday lives. The increase of celebrity imagery in the market place shows the reliance capitalism places on celebrity imagery. Through celebrity gossip the public gets supposedly exclusive looks into the lives of celebrities including what they are buying. While there has recently been an intensification in neoliberal capitalist ideology in celebrity gossip, it is certainly not a new phenomenon but its presence allowed for the insertion of another neoconservative ideology into gossip reinforcing norms and ideals intended to control not only how celebrities act and think but the public as well.

For the past several decades, neoconservative politics have taken center stage in America. Abstinence-only education, a focus on religion as central to governing, the

control over women's reproductive rights are a few of the many neoconservative agenda items that have become commonplace in America. Neoconservative values' prevalence and/or power in American society may be one of the many reasons for how it found its way into popular culture and, ironically because of the perceived liberal leanings of celebrities, celebrity gossip has been one of neoconservatism's biggest advocates. While the mere existence of celebrity gossip coupled with neoconservative values does not automatically mean it has influence, the fact that both neoconservatism and the gossip industry have become such a large part of the public's everyday life indicates that they have the potential for substantial influence over the thoughts and actions of the masses. There are moments when that potential is enacted, such as when gossip readers engage the gossip by commenting in the same neoconservative thinking that is promoted by the gossip writing. Despite the large number of celebrities who are socially and politically liberal, the way their images are manipulated and controlled by the gossip media supports a neoconservative agenda as not just normal but ideal.

Many of the norms and ideals that celebrity gossip reinforces are norms that surround women's bodies. Those female celebrities who fail to meet the standards set by neoconservative morality are made into examples of how not adhering to conservative norms can cause women's lives to cave in around them. Ultimately, celebrity gossip's concentrated focus on women, their love lives, and their bodies has enabled neoconservative values to become the norm for all women, and because of all women's failure to perfectly adhere to norms that are unattainable neoconservative values are able to control women's bodies and lives.

Neoconservative rhetoric has long focused on family values, intending to narrow the rights of women. Their rhetoric regarding the sanctity of life and the value of motherhood has found a new home inside the world of celebrity gossip. A supposed celebrity baby boom, from 2006 onward, has allowed the promotion of new female celebrity imagery around the importance of being a good mother. This ideal of the 1950's housewife taking care of her children and lavishing gifts upon them has appeared time and time again in imagery of celebrity families and their newly born children. The rhetoric surrounding pregnancy combines the ideological basis of controlling female sexuality with the hyper consumerism of contemporary capitalism. The image of celebrities falling so clearly in-line with neoliberal capitalism and neoconservative ideology is a strong indicator to the public, which is supposed to adore these celebrities, that they should follow the celebrities' lead and join the rank and file of these dominant power structures. Those who do not follow the celebrities' lead or the few celebrities who do not adhere to these established norms are framed as societal outcasts, as dangerous sluts who will encounter a life-time of sadness. Idealized norms are strengthened by celebrity imagery both through positive and negative reinforcement to the public. Celebrity images become one of the central locations for unquestioned establishment of idealized norms. Celebrity gossip, through the disciplinary power exercised through the manipulation of celebrity imagery, helps neoconservative neoliberal capitalist ideology exert control over the female body.

Chapter One: Media Theory and Star Power

While many of the theories analyzing the importance of celebrity focus on celebrity imagery's ability to prop up the capitalist system there are some who see celebrity gossip as a way to break down the capitalist structure from inside. Some theorists believe that this attempt to assert power over celebrities would allow the general public to have more control in their own domination by hand picking the celebrities they liked and disliked. This would allow the public to poke fun at and possibly even dismantle the capitalist system by rejecting the idolization of celebrity, and the capitalist system that idolization supports. The public searches for a way to make "stars" less superhuman and more mortal. For instance, the desire to know: *What is Angelina Jolie really like?* The desire to find this reality is culminated in gossip magazines.³ Attempts to humanize the superhuman figures of celebrities are often viewed as attempts by the public to diminish the power of these mythical figures but the reality of celebrity life often can lead to the breaking down of capitalist imagery. The "upper class" celebrities are vilified and seen as objects of ridicule inside the glossy pages of celebrity gossip magazines. The lower and middle classes of the American public are mocking

³ Marshall, David P. Celebrity and Power: Fame in Contemporary Culture, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1997), 17.

capitalisms' ideal citizens when they view celebrities as "normal" or "just like us" or even, in the case of drug addicted and troubled stars, beneath us. Many people watched on in glee as Britney Spears' world crumbled around her in 2006 through early 2008. The privileged celebrities are unable to keep up a perfect image in front of the public anymore, raising questions about the success of the capitalist system. While compelling, celebrity gossip's potential to undermine the capitalist system is little more than conjecture. The amount of money made off of celebrity imagery alone is enough to reinforce the capitalist system that houses the gossip industry. This, coupled with the idolization that gossip places on the majority of celebrities, is indicative of gossip's love of celebrity and the capitalist system that brought them to fame. The celebrities who do fall from gossip's, and therefore the public's, graces can be tied back to their inability to follow the rules and norms established by the neoconservative and neoliberal capitalist system.

The fascination the gossip industry and their reading public have with celebrity is not a new phenomenon. This type of celebrity worship has been around since the beginning of Hollywood. Studies of celebrity and media culture previously focused on why there is such a fascination with celebrity iconography and what that fascination has meant since the inception of radio personalities. As more people began to own radios in the 1920s studies developed to find out what kind of influence radio and radio celebrities had on the masses. Some considered the radio and those transmitting messages across it as indoctrinating people into believing whatever the speaker was saying or conducting mass hypnosis.⁴ The public was not only receiving ideas and opinions via the media but

⁴ Marshall, Celebrity and Power, 40.

they were also told how to behave as consumers. The media was presented as a form of entertainment but was also a new means by which to encourage people to buy products. Each new form of media allowed companies to selectively target their audience by the type of people who were listening to specific shows or reading certain magazines. David Marshall, in *Celebrity and Power*, writes that audiences were constructed by the types of programming and magazines offered, and these same audiences were then subjected to advertisements targeted specifically for their demographic. This created highly specialized advertising and was intended to increase the amount of people consuming products in the market place.⁵

The reasons why individuals were so fascinated by the radio and other forms of media still remains vague, with most researchers asserting that the consumption of media satisfies a basic need of belonging for the masses.⁶ The notion of belonging is replicated in more recent studies about why people read tabloids. Not only does knowing about their lives give the public a connection to the celebrities but it gives the public something to talk about with others.⁷ Fascination with celebrities has also been explained by the masses' desire to escape from their everyday lives. Escapism has been a leading explanation for the success of entertainment media. Movies and television are seen as a way for people to embrace fantasy and avoid the realities of their troubled every day lives. The same is said for celebrity gossip.⁸ Embracing the idealized lives of extraordinary people is used to distract the public from their own worries. This type of escapism is experienced by the men and women who read celebrity gossip. Much in the

⁵ Marshall, *Celebrity and Power*, 63.

⁶ Marshall, *Celebrity and Power*, 41.

⁷ Turner, Graeme. *Understanding Celebrity*. (London: Sage Publications, 2004), 23.

⁸ Turner, *Understanding Celebrity*, 24.

way people escape into the world of fantasy films and romantic comedies, people use celebrities' lives as a way to live vicariously through the rich and famous.⁹

Capitalism has clearly then been a driving factor in the development of "Stars" and celebrities with the advancement of film and television. Early in Hollywood's development the big names were movie production companies. "Stars" soon developed as people became more interested in seeing one movie over another because of the actor's presence. As stars developed teams of people set out to control their image because of the selling power that image possessed. During Hollywood's "golden years" celebrity images were tightly controlled, to the point that some celebrities felt that their image and their sense of self were at odds; in Cary Grant's famous words "everyone wants to be Cary Grant. I want to be Cary Grant!"¹⁰ Capitalism created Cary Grant the image; Cary Grant the man was entirely different but seemingly inseparable from his created image to the public. The development of a celebrity image can then be bought and sold as a commodity on the market, making those who possess it (usually not just the celebrities themselves) millions.

Celebrities today have become even more a part of the capitalist system than in the past through increased branding and synergy. Many celebrities have their own perfumes, clothing lines, or calendars, among the many other products. The public is expected not only to desire the image of the celebrity but also long to be the celebrity so much so that they will purchase any item a celebrity produces or endorses through their image. Judith Butler, in *Gender Trouble*, notes that the capitalist system designates norms

⁹ Turner, *Understanding Celebrity*, 24.

¹⁰ Evans, Jessica and David Hesmondhalgh. *Understanding Media: Inside Celebrity*. (New York: Open University Press, 2005), 18.

through continuous consumption: the more invested in the capitalist system you are the more likely that you will be dubbed normal.¹¹ Through the celebrity production machine the masses are told that the way to be normal or even, ironically, exceptional is to embrace and mimic the celebrities, as indicative of capitalist success and as embodiments of the normative values of gender and citizenship.

Several theorists have begun to debate the phenomenon of the widening definition of celebrity to include anyone of public interest. Celebrities like Paris Hilton, Kim Kardashian and numerous reality television “stars” have become famous for what many see as nothing. These new types of celebrities have garnered much media/gossip attention as well as academic investigation into their rise in popularity and will seemingly continue into the near future as more and more reality shows and *YouTube* videos become instant sensations.

Jake Halpern’s recent work, *Fame Junkies*, tackles the issue of celebrity obsession. Halpern’s look into the life of celebrities of yester-year and ultimate fans embraces the notion that everyone wants to be a celebrity or at least come as close to one as they can in order to become part of the idolized lifestyle.¹² Those who have even achieved some fame seek to find more because the ideal lifestyle that fame supposedly brings is not real or permanent.¹³ Celebrities and the public both desire fame and once they have had a taste of the limelight it is incredibly hard to give up. *Fame Junkies* equates the desire to become famous with the desire to take drugs. Many individuals have

¹¹ Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, (London: Routledge, 1990), 21.

¹² Halpern, Jake. *Fame Junkies: The Hidden Truths Behind America’s Favorite Addiction*, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2007), xxxii.

¹³ Halpern, *Fame Junkies*, 129.

become addicted to fame because there is a taste of the “perfect life” even though that perfect life will never be perfect. Nevertheless, adolescents increasingly say that when they grow up they want to be ‘famous.’¹⁴ The development of reality TV has been a contributing factor to the rise in the desire to become famous. The fascination with people being filmed reacting to “real world” situations draws in millions of viewers to hundreds of different shows across networks. Adolescents and adults alike watch these shows and invariably are left with the thought that if the person they are watching could be on TV then why not themselves?

Graeme Turner, in *Understanding Celebrity*, notes that democracy is not just part of political dialogue; it is also a central theme in the debates about celebrity. The world of reality television has created “Do It Yourself” celebrities, and tabloids have become referendums on which celebrities the public approves of and embraces.¹⁵ Democracy and the will of the people are central components to what makes someone a celebrity today. Studio executives no longer tell the public who they will idolize. Instead the masses now decide which celebrities they idolize with the help of the celebrity gossip industry’s seemingly neutral stance on celebrities. Referendums, through gossip blogs and magazines, are held to determine who is worthy of fame, and the idolization that comes with it, along with who is not worthy.

Two celebrity theorists that greatly influenced our understanding of the function of celebrity are Richard Dyer and David Marshall. Dyer’s work catalyzed the discussion of our contemporary obsession not just with the media, but also specifically with “star power.” The personas and characters that stars represented to the American public were

¹⁴ Halpern, *Fame Junkies*, 12.

¹⁵ Turner, *Understanding Celebrity*, 78.

important for not only the development of the American cinema but also how audiences related to movies. Dyer contends that the development of stars and star power is a highly controlled act that requires many people to produce and contain the personality and image of the star.¹⁶ The media helped the development of stars by placing them outside of their silver screen roles into everyday lives and making them more relatable while still being seen as mysterious and untouchable, creating both a sense of normalcy inside celebrity imagery and an ideal lifestyle. This juxtaposition of ideal and normal enables celebrities to appear human and superhuman at the same time. This same act led to the seeming accessibility of these stars which led to stalkers, obsessive fans, and a destruction of the superhuman quality many of the stars were seen as possessing.¹⁷ Dyer also analyzes the often ignored female celebrity and, with the help of Laura Mulvey's work, notes common occurrences of the media treating female stars as spectacles. Mulvey contends that the paradigmatic spectator of celebrity imagery, in her writing she refers to filmic images, is male, which creates the female in the film as the object to be looked at.¹⁸ The pleasure gained from looking at this docile body, one which is manipulated and controlled for male enjoyment, is visual, visceral, dominant and violent.¹⁹ The objectification of the female celebrity as nothing more than her body is commonplace in magazines and articles about her as well as in her movies.²⁰ An overriding theme in *Stars* is the notion that celebrities are not the people who embody them but instead represent idolized norms in our society. These norms are simultaneously

¹⁶ Dyer, Richard and Paul McDonald. *Stars*, (London: BFI Publishing, 1998),20.

¹⁷ Dyer and McDonald, *Stars*, 39.

¹⁸ Mulvey, Laura. "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," *The Feminism and Visual Culture Reader* eds. Amelia Jones, (London: Routledge, 2003), 48.

¹⁹ Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," *The Feminism and Visual Culture Reader*, 52.

²⁰ Dyer and McDonald, *Stars*, 51.

glorified and unreachable; their inaccessibility and desirability explain their continuing circulation. The stars themselves cannot maintain and often times cannot even achieve these standards because the norms are based upon unrealistic and unyielding ideals along with an eternal consumption of products that cannot be sustained. The inability of celebrities to meet the standards that they are supposed to represent speaks to the futility and the never-ending power that these norms have on the masses and celebrities alike. The inability to reach celebrity status and continual reach for it are what make stars images so powerful over the masses.

David Marshall's recent work on the development of the celebrity commodity compliments Dyer's work in many ways. Here the notion of stars is abandoned for the more modern term of celebrity that encompasses several levels of "stardom" and several different genres of famous people (Dyer's use of stars was specific to American cinema). This is not to say that Dyer's arguments about "stars" are outdated. Marshall uses the notion of the charismatic celebrity, Foucault's ideas on biopolitical control, and Butler's work on creating unrealistic norms to support his argument that celebrities are made to control and subdue the masses into becoming consumptive citizens in a way that is most beneficial for those in control.²¹ The charm of a celebrity and their general mass appeal is used to reiterate norms and subconsciously coerce people into falling in line with whatever norms are idealized by the gossip industry and its neoconservative ideological slant. This, Marshall says, subdues the masses so that they do not revolt against the current structure.²² Marshall contends that celebrities have power over the masses but that it is manipulated by the celebrity gossip industry into not being used or used for ends that

²¹ Marshall, Celebrity and Power, xi.

²² Marshall, Celebrity and Power, 244.

are to the benefit of dominant power structures, such as neoliberal capitalism and neoconservatism. Celebrity power does not exist in a vacuum and is, instead, controlled and manipulated by outside forces.²³ Marshall's analysis falls short here. He neglects to mention what/who these outside forces are, what they have invested in celebrity power, and what invariably the masses are controlled into doing by the celebrities. Celebrity power is undeniable. One only has to look at Beatle-mania to see the effects that celebrities can have on the public. But to what end is this power currently being used and who is using it remains unanswered by Marshall. It appears that the dominant class and their normative order are using celebrity imagery to disperse their ideology to the masses and create docile bodies for the neoliberal capitalist order.²⁴

The New Wave of Celebrity Media

While celebrity theorists have looked at several aspects of celebrity and tabloid media, little work has been done on the specific messages these media outlets send and what kind of effect that has on the masses. Through examples like *The New Kids on the Block* and Oprah Winfrey, Marshall contends that celebrity imagery has the ability to make people buy specific items and believe in certain ideals indexes about the biopolitical control that celebrity imagery possess to control the public. The idealization of celebrity, wealth, and fame instructs Americans subliminally, and sometimes directly, how to behave as consumers. The more a celebrity is desired or makes a trend popular the

²³ Marshall, Celebrity and Power, 245.

²⁴ Foucault, Michel. Society Must Be Defended: Lectures at the College de France 1975-1976, (New York: Picador, 2003), 29.

more an item endorsed by that celebrity will sell, increasing consumerism and making sure capitalism is well supported. Lauren Conrad, star of the television show *The Hills*, is known for being fashionably dressed. She has used her supposed fashion sense to start a clothing line of simple but incredibly expensive clothes. Her clothing line, based in Bloomingdale's, sells out in a matter of days.²⁵ These garments are marketed as “her style” and “her design,” and without her attachment it is likely that these dresses would not be as expensive or sell out in record time. Her clothes deemed “uninspired” and “overrated” by some, have sold out because of their connection to gender and idolized norms.²⁶ Each dress is named after one of her friends and indicates what is feminine and beautiful to wear. Not only do the clothes reinforce gender norms but the price tag and her association, since she comes from a wealthy background, reinforce notions that the norm is wealthy and that in order to become ideal you must be able to afford items like hers.

Marshall emphasizes the power of celebrity over the masses but one thing he references only in passing is that celebrities are mediated to the public through various sources and that increasing the number of times a celebrity is seen, heard and commented on recreates the “truth: they represent. He claims: “these secondary sources are primary for deepening the meaning of the celebrity sign and thereby providing the connecting fibers to the culture.”²⁷ Many view tabloids and celebrity journalism in a similar way; celebrity news filters celebrities by showing how their lives entangle with our culture's

²⁵ “Lauren Conrad Has Best-Selling Celebrity Line”, *JustJared*. 23 September 2008, available from <http://justjared.buzznet.com/2008/09/23/lauren-conrad-bloomindales-clothing-line/>; accessed 24 September 2008.

²⁶ “Lauren Conrad's Clothing Line, Appearance in Toronto”, *Oh No They Didn't!*, 01 May 2008, available from <http://community.livejournal.com/ohnotheydidnt/23042769.html>; accessed 21 October 2008.

²⁷ Marshall, *Celebrity and power*, 58

values. This places the power of celebrity news squarely in the hand of the producers of celebrity discourse. Yet, as Dyer mentions in *Stars* celebrities have never had complete control over their own image. Studios' initially controlled celebrities, then their agents and spokes people, and now the media have bypassed all of those sources and sought to control celebrity imagery for the dominant class' own gain. Not only do gossip magazines reinforce notions of consumerism and capitalism but they reinforce neoconservative values, especially in how they portray the female body. This hyper-normative role for gossip has created disciplinary and direct power instructing the public how and what to consume. Direct advertisements, segments on how to get celebrities' looks 'for less', where the celebrities shop for their unborn children, and how much celebrity life-styles cost are just some of the many ways in which readers of celebrity gossip are inundated with messages to spend their money. The American public becomes more active consumers because of a desire to catch up or be equal to celebrities who are praised as active and special members of our society because of their power as consumers. Judith Butler states that in order to be valued in our society one has to abide by the norms that are given.²⁸ In this case, society will only recognize you as long as you are living up to your role as a good consumer by following Celebrities' lead in both consumer performance and personal life experience. Lauren Berlant describes how caricature, like that seen in Celebrity gossip magazines, of American political values can help construct norms: "The politics of caricature can have profound effects: on the ways people perceive their own social values and the social values of 'Others'; on the ways they live daily life and see their futures and on mainstream political discourse, which

²⁸ Butler, Judith. Undoing Gender, (New York: Routledge, 2004), 2.

exploits the national identity crises it foments to claim a popular mandate for radical shifts in norms of ideology and political practice.”²⁹

While imperatives to consume are rampant, more covert messages are being sent in the headlines or the pictures which portray celebrities; all are deliberately chosen in order to convey a certain message about that celebrity’s looks and actions. Judgments are made not by the readers but instead the people seeking to make a profit on the celebrities’ images (the magazine owners and editors) and every judgment is made in hopes of conveying moral and ethical opinions to the readers. Women are admonished for not adhering to strict roles of motherhood and criticized if they make even one comment about their job being as fulfilling as their roles as mothers. In 2007, Angelina Jolie made a comment about the way Shiloh, her youngest child at the time, looked compared to her other adopted children. She used the word “outcast” and for this the gossip industry called her a bad parent. Her inability to speak “like a mother” about her biological children lead the gossip industry to view her as unfit to parent and as if she did not love her biological child as much as her adopted children.³⁰ Another example of the judgment celebrity gossip insiders place on celebrities is gossip blogger Perez Hilton’s hatred of teen star, Miley Cyrus. As strange as it sounds, this adult male makes fun of and ridicules a sixteen year old girl. He calls her “slutty” and declares everything she does sexual and

²⁹ Berlant, *Queen of American Goes to Washington City: Essays on Sex and Citizenship*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), 2.

³⁰“Angelina Call’s Blue-eyed Shiloh an ‘Outcast’” *Exposay: Entertainment & Fashion*, 11 December 2007, available from <http://www.exposay.com/angelina-calls-blue-eyed-shiloh-an-outcast/v/15721/>; accessed 10 November 2008.

attention seeking.³¹ The judgments that the celebrity gossip industry places on celebrities is indicative of a larger trend in morals and values: neoconservatism.

Celebrity gossip's endorsement of neoconservative values relating to women and capitalism are not obvious bedfellows but the more one looks at the development of neoliberalism the connections become more apparent. Popular culture has become a transmitter for societal values and ideals in which the masses are instructed to embrace neoconservatism, strict gender roles and neoliberal capitalism without knowing it. The advertisements situated next the celebrity gossip and the direct references for how to buy a similar version of a celebrity's outfit constitute the direct connection between gossip, women's roles and capitalism. Displaying wealthy families with their newborn children, wedding pictures of two high-profile celebrities, and looking at what kind of celebrities endorse what products are some of the more discrete references of neoconservatism and capitalist power inside celebrity imagery. Today with over five weekly magazines, and hundreds of websites devoted to the procurement and dissemination of "truths" about celebrities it is no surprise that this has become a for profit game with messages and targets.³²

The rise in neoliberalism and of neoconservative values is often over looked or obscured in the new developments in celebrity culture. Perhaps this is because popular culture is often seen as devoid from the world politics, of public policy and economics. Pop culture has investors, product placements and endorsements each contributing hundreds of thousands to the American economic system. Popular culture is not just a

³¹ "How do We Say This Delicately??" *PerezHilton.com*, 18 November 2008, available from <http://perezhilton.com/2008-11-18-how-do-we-say-this-delicately-109>; accessed 18 November 2008.

³² Although this will be talked about later in the paper it should be noted that truth is in quotes because celebrity gossip is sometimes true and other times complete fabrication.

way for the masses to leave behind their daily lives and invest in entertainment; popular culture is instructing the public on what to buy and how to live. When family values are preached alongside consumerism a connection equating neoconservative values with financial market stability is made. David Harvey, in *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, contends that this connection is not a coincidence but instead a direct and purposeful connection of two seemingly opposed entities. The rise of neoliberalism in America during the 1970s and 1980s was prompted by the neoconservatives inside American politics. The mobilization of the Republican Party's base through worries of economic loss and threats to their way of life by the 'liberal' agenda was one of the central ways in which neoconservatives and neoliberal capitalists joined forces to increase support for their politics. Through denouncing the cultural implications of liberals but embracing neoliberalism economically, neoconservatives attempted to dissuade the American public from noticing the economic and cultural problems that were created by vast consumerism.³³ The presidency of Ronald Reagan cemented the consolidation of neoliberal economics and neoconservative values into what it has become today. Families are the focus of the economic and cultural elite and thus rightwing family values are intimately tied with increasing consumerism and the number of people able to consume in our society. Consumption and contributing the economy has become proof of a good and normal family structure and "proper" citizenship.

Celebrity gossip is one logical extreme of this kind of values based consumerism. Respected and "moral" celebrities sell products and make more money; one needs to only look at the financial backing Angelina Jolie had once she became a mother to note the

³³ Harvey, David. *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 50.

ties “morality” has to economics. The obsession with how celebrities meet or exceed private “family” values has become a marker for how society should behave. Issues of sexuality, the female body, and pregnancy are no longer issues of private individuals; they are now issues that effect how American’s are viewed as citizens.³⁴ The political public sphere has become intimate in ways that many of us could not have foreseen.³⁵ The American government, prompted by neoconservatives, has begun to debate, regulate and make illegal issues that were once seen as private. Abortion rights, same-sex marriage, and sodomy laws are a few among many private issues now on the national stage. Women and men now have to justify their private lives to public figures and convince them that they live the lives of good citizens. Yet, if we look at a quintessentially American ideology, The American Dream, remnants of its private/public values become apparent and readily applied to the world seen today. Celebrity life-style embodies the American dream. Hard work has paid off in wealth and happiness. The American Dream is a powerful part of America’s mythology and this is perhaps the reason why many American’s admire and are fascinated by celebrities and what they possess. The capitalist ideals of the American Dream can be fulfilled in minor ways by consuming what those who embody the Dream consume. Private lives and politics, revolving around gendered norms established by neoconservative ideology, have become intertwined in the American Dream.³⁶ Modern celebrity-life is full of intrusions into the celebrity’s every day life by people attempting to make money off of the private lives of public figures. The collapse of the public/private through the celebrity gossip industry

³⁴ Berlant, Queen of America goes to Washington, 1.

³⁵ Berlant, Queen of America goes to Washington, 4.

³⁶ Ibid.

allows neoconservative “family values” to instruct the public what the appropriate way to live their lives are. Judgments are placed on celebrities and the public for how they conduct their private lives in accordance with very public politics. These judgments determine who is an appropriate citizen, who is normal, who is ideal, and who is an outcast.

Women are often the target audience of celebrity gossip. One way this can be seen in celebrity gossip magazine and blog advertisements for typically feminine products. General reactions to the tabloid media have men frequently denying they read it. Celebrity gossip is seen as being somehow acutely feminine. While news about politics and the world is seen as having value and being fundamentally true, news about the world of entertainment is seen as fickle and false, often containing an air of salaciousness. Arbitrary definitions of what is considered “news” and “entertainment” mark the divide between masculine/true news and feminine/false news and their target audiences. Masculine news appeals to facts while tabloid news, seen as feminine, appeals to emotions and thoughts of “what if?” These gendered stereotypes may be one of the contributing factors to why women are targeted more specifically by the tabloid media. Despite tabloids’ focusing on women, studies conducted have rarely focused on the effects this reading material has on women. Berlant contends the tabloids’ images of the female body and reproductive capacity, in ways that adhere to neoconservative values, constructs a limiting view of women and seeks to dominate women by connecting their sole purpose in life to motherhood. These norms are then disseminated throughout society, regulating not only the way women behave but also the way they think about

other women and the way they consume.³⁷ The biopolitical management of feminine norms and social positioning creates an oppressive structure, which discretely coerces women into following assigned roles of motherhood.

It is not only the females who read the gossip that are being disciplined by these norms but the celebrities who have these “truths” written about them are also being manipulated. Much like Dyer’s and Mulvey’s notion that women are spectacles in movies, female celebrities have become doubly spectacles. Celebrity women are objects of desire inside their respective industries (inside their movies, in their music videos/on stage, and in their television shows) but because of celebrity gossip these women have become objects for us to consume and desire in the private lives. their bodies and their lives are put on display as they go to restaurants, clubs or friends’ homes. While it may sometimes appear that female celebrities are in on the paparazzi media’s game; often times the control the world sees is nothing more than a façade. Women have been the subject of capitalist control since its inception, and yet celebrity women appear to break free of the notion that men make the household, bring in the income, and are the center of the neoliberal capitalist structure. It’s an easy enough reality to accept because woman so often wish the glass ceiling of wealth could be broken for them and through their own hard work. Sadly, where celebrity women appear to succeed in the game of capitalism the new system of neoliberal moral capitalism puts them back in their place of being nothing more than a fancy object to be looked at. With the constant hounding into their everyday private lives female stars are surrounded by cameras and men yelling at them in hopes of getting some kind of reaction. These women are then scrutinized and judged by the

³⁷ Berlant, Queen of America Goes to Washington, 2.

tabloid editors, writers and eventually the American public. Any perceived wrong move can send a celebrity's career into a tailspin. These female celebrities are taught that fame and wealth come at a steep price. Male celebrities rarely find themselves in the same position; although they may receive some media focus, unless they are attached to a female celebrity the likelihood of being hounded by the paparazzi is minimal. Female celebrities are biopolitically managed, just as much as their adoring audience is, by the tabloid media in service to neoliberal capitalism and neoconservative values. Through the representations of female celebrities' bodies and their reproductive functions, in the tabloid media, the neoconservative and neoliberal dominant class espouses values that socially control women.

Tabloids

American culture has become so consumed by celebrity gossip that it has become very difficult to differentiate between celebrity gossip, the tabloid media, and the news. Celebrity gossip is sometimes divided into two groups: entertainment news and tabloids. "Entertainment" news can be found in mainstream newspapers and on twenty-four hour cable news television channels. Tabloids are found on magazine racks, on the internet and on specialized celebrity gossip shows. Separation of celebrity news into these two categories is usually done by mainstream media in order to report on celebrities (who are of public interest) while still claiming credibility over so-called tabloid journalism, but the separation of celebrity news versus celebrity gossip has become antiquated. Publicists and Celebrities have been known to deny or obfuscate the truth for months or years

before it is finally confirmed in order to protect their client's privacy. This makes the truth incredibly difficult to determine and contributes to the fallacious distinction between the two types of celebrity reporting. Between gossip magazines becoming more mainstream, anonymous sources and celebrities denying facts, the truth is hard to find. Tabloid magazines now have an air of fact inside all of their stories; this appearance of believability has made it near impossible to differentiate a salacious non-fact from something that is true. The divide has dwindled even further as mainstream news outlets report on celebrity news that is unconfirmed or unsubstantiated and gossip magazines have interviews with celebrities or well researched exposes. In order to get a complete sense of what kind of celebrity news exists, it is important not to attempt to differentiate between "entertainment" and "tabloid" news. All celebrity reporting is referred to in this paper as "gossip" because of the near impossibility to divorce the factual from the sensationalized and/or fabricated. Truth is irrelevant to the discussion of how celebrity imagery (true or false) contributes to reinforcing norms in our society.

Some academics have argued that celebrity gossip and other similar forms of entertainment are some how lowbrow culture and therefore inane or silly. Much of the negative attitude toward celebrity gossip comes from it being emotive, and assumption based instead of relying on cold, hard facts.³⁸ As it has been mentioned before celebrity gossip consists of true claims, false accusations and every variation in between. While the truth factor to tabloids' articles may seem important to those thinking about the implications of celebrity gossip, the simple fact is that truth is incredibly relative in the world of celebrity news. Occasionally contradictory cover stories will have people

³⁸ Hesmondhalgh, David. The Cultural Industries, (London: Sage Publications 2002), 247.

laughing or a story is so blatantly false that the industry receives some criticism but overall the point of celebrity gossip is not to gain factual information on your favorite celebrity. Readers invest their time in celebrity gossip for the same reasons they invest time in watching the celebrities on films, for entertainment.³⁹ Celebrity gossip, as a social activity, may not rely upon truth but that does not mean that gossip writers/investigators do not desire to have their stories seen as true or at least truthful. Stories are scattered with anonymous sources and enough direct quotes to lend an air of credibility to each story that is published. The question then remains: if celebrity gossip is solely a guilty pleasure or used for entertainment why would the appearance of credibility be important? An answer lies in the connection between celebrity gossip and the establishment of norms. While story-telling for entertainment does not require facts or truth, in order to create and establish norms there needs to be some sort of believability portrayed so that the masses understand and accept what they are viewing as normal, essential and appropriate.⁴⁰ Michel Foucault wrote that power needs to deploy truth in order to exist. Without the reliance on the masses looking for truth and the assumption that those in power are telling us the truth; those in power would have no backing for their agenda's if they were not steeped in the appearance of truth.⁴¹ The appearance of truth coupled with the subliminal establishment of norms inside celebrity gossip, which is viewed as entertainment, can have truly dire consequences for the way women view their own bodies and others. Through celebrity gossip women read, hear, and think about their

³⁹ Eds. Holmes, Su and Sean Redmond. Framing Celebrity: New Directions in Celebrity Culture, (London: Routledge, 2006), 7.

⁴⁰ Foucault, Society must be Defended, 24.

⁴¹ Foucault, Society must be Defended, 25.

bodies through neoconservative values creating internal controls over what women say and do.

In what follows, two types of celebrity gossip media will be examined: tabloid magazines, and websites. While television gossip and reality show programming are on the rise with new shows like TMZ and The E! Channel's "The Daily Ten," gossip television as celebrity news will not be examined because its content is generally first reported on the internet or in magazines. If there is breaking celebrity gossip first reported on television, it is also reported and repeatedly analyzed both online and in magazines. Magazines and online sources also contain stories that other media organizations may not report on because the stories lack sources or there is contradictory evidence. While these websites and magazines are intended to give me the broadest range of gossip while also covering the most popular stories there is the potential that there are biases located within the media being used.

It is possible that there is a race, class and gender bias among the readership of these magazines and websites. Celebrity gossip targets middle-class white women through their advertising and stories. There are a few websites and magazines that cater to racial minorities and there are the occasional stories that revolve around male or racial minority celebrities but on the whole these are not cover stories in the mainstream magazines and websites. This bias is cited upfront not just because of its effect on the sample but because it supports my contention that tabloid journalism seeks to assert norms for society. Celebrity gossip writers target a specific demographic: white, upper/middle-class women. Not only are these women their target demographic but they are what tabloids reiterate as the norm for women. Gossip magazines will have the

occasional story about a celebrities of color, or celebrities who do not make very much money (such as reality television stars) but in actuality the celebrities that grace the tabloids most frequently will be wealthy, white and women. This image of the female celebrity reinforces the desired norm and establishes a target audience. That audience then reads some or all of the celebrity gossip websites and magazines and takes in the messages of what makes a good woman. Through this process norms are reinforced and attitudes are shaped.

The specific websites examined are *PerezHilton.com*, one of the most talked about and read gossip sites on the internet, and *Oh No They Didn't!*, a livejournal.com community where everyday people find gossip from all over the internet, television or some personal experience and bring it all to one place. These two websites are intended to give a broad perspective of what gossip is being reported along with the most read and talked about pieces. Internet sites for celebrity gossip are an important part of the interactive and social aspects of celebrity gossip. Through these sites not only are people receiving, and writing about celebrity news they are also commenting with their own opinions about each event. *Oh No They Didn't* has over 50,000 people from around the world as active members of the community while several thousand more read the website and comment without direct interaction. Each opinion on *Oh No They Didn't* and *Perez Hilton.com* is unedited, with the public's real thoughts on celebrity imagery on display. Just as the gossip itself, and how its characterized by those that distribute it, the readers' comments provide insight into the successes and failures the bloggers and writers have in persuading the public to act and think about women and consumption. Overall, their

comments represent celebrity gossip's effectiveness in convincing their readers of the ideal norms their articles and images are intended to represent.

Celebrity gossip magazines have existed since the Hollywood golden age. Today there are many more magazines and a popular culture that embrace these magazines as newsworthy and entertainment worthy reads. I will examine the covers, and several articles from current American gossip magazines: *US*, *In-Touch*, *OK*, *Star*, *People*, and the *National Enquirer*. Each of these magazines publish their own weekly cover stories and tidbits they hope readers find interesting enough to pick up the magazine and buy it. *People* is considered the tamest of gossip magazines because of its reliance on celebrity confirmation for its stories. The *National Enquirer* is considered one of the most outlandish tabloids.⁴² The other magazines publish seemingly a well rounded batch of true and false stories. Although the Internet gossip sites are on the rise in popularity, magazines are more likely to get exclusive stories (such as first glimpses at celebrities' babies) and have large readerships. Magazines also give access to parts of the public who may not use the internet as a source of entertainment or specifically for celebrity gossip.

Through the use of the female celebrity's image (either positive or negative) the media asserts control over the masses and, simultaneously, through the rigid gender constructions of the female body, contains the female celebrities as docile entities incapable of fighting against the patriarchal system of capitalism that sustains and destroys them. Through images of the female body, the scathing comments that accompany them, and moral judgments passed by the writers of the gossip, women are subjected to a form of disciplinary power because of the power of normativity that

⁴² Although recently the *National Enquirer* has been redeeming itself with several well investigated stories such as Patrick Swayze's cancer battle and Rep. John Edwards' affair.

insures their complacency with the system and their willingness to engage in its practices. Women in our society feel as if their bodies are constantly being surveyed and judged by those around them. It is entirely likely that this is true because of the emphasis our society puts on body image. Tabloid magazines certainly do not alleviate that stress and even add to it by constantly objectifying and scrutinizing the bodies of celebrities who are supposed to be normal and perfect.

Pregnancy has recently become the new focus of the tabloid media and the world. Celebrity gossip's new focus has been enabled by women's bodies taking center stage in the public arena and in politics.⁴³ The obsession with the pregnant body, mothers and everything surrounding childbirth is a new wave of control over the female body through celebrity gossip. Tabloids have taken on pregnancy as their fad du jour. It is hard to find a tabloid without a baby story inside. Celebrity women have even less control over their body or their reproductive rights than women in the masses because of their high-profile and public image. Celebrity women's, and to some extent all women, reproductive labor is extremely important to capitalism because of its representation of productivity, and a happy life. The value of reproductive labor to capitalism and power is not a new phenomenon that celebrity gossip magazines have invented to increase profit. In some instances, the growth of capitalism relied upon women giving birth in order to survive; because of this necessity women's roles were defined by their pregnant bodies.⁴⁴ Women's reproductive labor may not be a new means of increasing the number of citizens under capitalism but it is a new focus in the world of female representations in

⁴³ Berlant, The Queen of America Goes to Washington, 7.

⁴⁴ Morgan, Jennifer L. Laboring Women: Reproduction and Gender in New World Slavery, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 4.

the media. Tabloids make it apparent to their readers that they should be thinking not just about their body but also what that body can do and thus contribute to society.

Mediated Women – Images of Celebrity Women

Celebrity gossip has reduced women to symbols and ciphers of dominant values and norms. Each celebrity has become a caricature of a woman. Interviews are turned into sound bites, and seemingly minor personality traits, or characters they have played transform a complete person into a stereotypical, one-dimensional, and incredibly gendered object for the public consumption. Female sexuality and embodiment are the cornerstones for controlling females, including celebrity women, within the dominant paradigm, particularly within mass media. Defining women by their bodies serves several goals of the dominant class: it makes women objects, and passive citizens; it divides women based upon their sexuality, and creates an unreachable ideal oppressing all women. The more women are divided and turned into objects the longer the dominant ideology can remain in power uncontested. “Sex sells” and the female body as object are not just for advertising but also for the gossip industry. Jean Kilborne’s “Killing Us Softly 3” shows how advertising images demonstrate how society should view women. Women are passive, sexual, objects intended for male desire and consumption.⁴⁵ In celebrity gossip, as in advertising, females continue to be defined by their bodies and ultimately their sexuality. Representations of female celebrities within gossip media reinforce normative standards for women and their bodies. Highly scrutinized by

⁴⁵ Kilborne, Jean. “Killing Us Softly 3” Media Education Foundation Video, 1999.

tabloids, celebrities feel the direct force of society's idealized normality while the women reading gossip internalize the attitudes and perceptions of the gossip industry and exact those attitudes onto their own body and the bodies of others. The classic triumvirate of female sexuality "virgin/whore/mother" plays on the tabloid center stage. Conservative views linking sexuality with amorality are central components in the celebrity rumor mill. Gossip websites are incredibly interactive and allow readers to leave comments about the gossip they read and because of gossip's social aspect many readers talk about celebrity gossip with their friends and co-workers. It is the participation of women in their own oppression that marks celebrity gossip's success as a form of control over women. Dividing celebrity women into categories of good girls who embody sexual morality and bad girls, whose sexuality is demonized succeeds in presenting an active and developing story with a moral. This moral message disciplines women into judging other women based upon how they use their sexuality.

The tripartite of virgin, whore and mother plays a central role in how celebrity gossip helps advance neoconservative gender norms disciplining women into becoming docile bodies while simultaneously becoming active consumers. In this remainder of this paper each of these stereotyped female personas will be explored and their effects on celebrity women and the masses will be uncovered. The first image being covered is the "virginal" starlet. The gossip industry uses the image of the "good-girl" celebrity as their ideal: admiring her strong morals, appearance of chastity, desire for privacy, and her body. "Good-girls" are sexy while simultaneously demure. Virginal good girls are about an absence of sexuality but they are also about an absence of excess. Good-girls can fall

from grace by playing into excesses of sexuality or drugs but especially weight gain. Becoming physically “un-fit” is one of the cardinal sins that a “good-girl” can make.

The second stereotype to be examined is “the whore.” Women labeled as whores face the majority of criticism in the celebrity world as they are public examples of what kind of women the public should not respect. The celebrities who maintain a sexually open image are disgraced and made undesirable by the “whore label” and by the way gossip industries criticize their lifestyle. The two main ways that the gossip industry attempts to control sexually open women are through criticizing their weight, this time for being too skinny and by sexually objectifying them through humiliating photography.

The Mother is the most recent image to be used by the celebrity gossip industry to control women. The mothering image dictates not only how women should behave to be good mothers but also dictates that the inevitable and normal role for all women is motherhood. More than any other category, “the mother” emphasizes consumerism as important for a normal life. This section examines the gender norms surrounding what an ideal mother is and what happens when celebrities fail to meet those standards. Each of these categories are assigned to celebrity women (sometimes the same celebrity will occupy each role during her time in gossip’s spotlight), and each of these categories controls the way women act and think about their bodies, their sexuality and their lives.

Chapter Two: The Virgin - Images of Chastity and Body Politics

Tabloids rarely have their cover-stories revolve around virginal good-girls. These girls are routinely included inside tabloids but more often they receive smaller stories on the inside of the magazine. This is perhaps because sexuality is more tempting and sells more magazines but it also sends a clear message about sexuality and morality. Kilborne says advertising often depicts women as seen and not heard. Silence and being demure are seen as good values in women. Respect is given by readers to women who rarely appear in the tabloids because their lives are not controversial, because they remain silent, because they are good girls.⁴⁶ When gossip does turn its focus to the supposed good girls they are not scrutinized but empathized with. These women and young girls are intended to be the ideal and what should be normal for women. Yet, if a “normal” girl does break with her virginal image all hell breaks loose. The image of purity and not actual virginity is especially important for teens.⁴⁷ The image of celebrity teenagers such as Miley Cyrus, Selena Gomez, Vanessa Hudgens, and Jamie Lyn Spears are the most prone to have their virginity become a matter of concern for the gossip media. Teenage sexuality and sex out of wedlock are seen as dangerous and in need of control through

⁴⁶ Kilborne, “Killing Us Softly 3”

⁴⁷ Vallenti, Jessica. Full Frontal Feminism, (Emeryville: Seal Press, 2007), 50.

neoconservative, Christian values. Jessica Vallenti writes, in Full Frontal Feminism, “this kind of faux concern about teenage girls and sexual activity has nothing to do with keeping girls safe. It’s about legislating morality and ensuring that someone - whether it be a parent, husband, or the state – is making decisions for young women.”⁴⁸ Teen celebrities are a particularly symbolic set because of their supposed innocence, making her loss of innocence all the more shocking for the public. Yet, despite the presumed virginal nature of teen celebrities the media sexualizes these young girls. Lolita images are common in celebrity teen imagery. Inevitably teens, including the majority of these celebrities, will fail to meet the normative standard set by society. The tabloid media during the 1990s capitalized on a young Britney Spears’ innocence and image of purity and trafficked in her sexualization. Despite her ex-boyfriend admitting they had sexual intercourse she was still seen as America’s darling because of her sweet wholesome image and also because her image was the antithesis of Christina Aguilera’s hyper-sexuality. The image of virginity and wholesomeness is what the media capitalizes on. Vallenti states that “the logic is pretty simple: Girls aren’t supposed to like sex, especially teenage girls. So if you’re having sex, either you’re a slut or you’re a victim who’s being taken advantage of. Neither are particularly attractive options.”⁴⁹ More recently, Miley Cyrus, the fifteen year old star of Disney’s *Hannah Montana*, had sexually provocative pictures of her clothed in a wet t-shirt in her shower (supposedly taken for her boyfriend) leaked onto the internet and has had her virginity constantly questioned by tabloid readers

⁴⁸ Vallenti, Full Frontal Feminism, 29.

⁴⁹ Vallenti, Full Frontal Feminism, 26.

every time her name appears.⁵⁰ Miley's image has evolved from an ideal teen star into a teenage slut. This is not uncommon as insults and scare tactics are common measures to insure teenage girls stay virginal or at least maintain the image of virginity.⁵¹ The morality of her decision to take risqué pictures of herself is constantly called into question by tabloids and readers.

Readers questioned Miley's virginity and constantly make reference to her loose morals in regards to sexuality. When the readers begin to interact with the media by leaving comments or discussing the gossip with friends, and judge the celebrities through neoconservative language and ideas, the process of indoctrination into the dominant system is complete. Each rejection by the masses of Miley and others like her signals the advancement of neoconservative ideology and values.

Although "chastity" is idealized in teens the near impossibility of having female adult celebrities remain chaste is dealt with by dividing sexuality into private and public displays of sexuality. Celebrities often have their sexuality on display in movies and have significant others. Kate Bosworth and Katherine Heigl both straddle the line between their sexuality and their good-girl images. Bosworth and Heigl's sexualities both on and off-screen are hard to question with films like *Knocked-Up* (Heigl) and romances with stars like Orlando Bloom (Bosworth); sexuality is present in their lives but they maintain their good-girl images. They maintain this image by displaying demure characteristics through the way they dress and interact with the media. This hinders gossip's ability to display sexuality in a completely negative light. Women are classified as "whores" or

⁵⁰ "Miley Almost Naked" *PerezHilton.com*, 12 July 2008, available from <http://perez Hilton.com/2008-07-12-miley-almost-naked>; accessed 13 July 2008.

⁵¹ Vallenti, *Full Frontal Feminism*, 27.

viewed negatively if they display their sexuality prominently in their everyday lives. The embodiment and visibility of sexuality are what are seen as negative more than the act itself. As long as a woman can appear in public as if sex is not important to them they can be viewed as “respectable.” Good girls are always smiling on their cover pictures, words such as “princess,” “hope,” and “love” surround their stories and regardless of any negative stigma her subdued sexuality allows her to seem chaste. Marriage, divorce, two children and a new love affair with sex symbol Jake Gyllenhaal does not corrupt Reese Witherspoon’s image as a good girl. She keeps quiet on her relationships, is rarely seen in public and dresses demurely; these aspects of her life are a guideline for how good girls should behave. “Love” is the explanation that the tabloids give for good girls having many relationships. As long as sexuality is kept on in private, a good girl’s image can be maintained regardless of what she does. Jennifer Aniston, much like Reese Witherspoon, has endeared America with her bubbly persona, lost love, and now finds herself in a whirlwind of publicity around her failed marriage and her new relationship. Tabloids constantly proclaim that marriage, love and children are in Aniston’s immediate future.⁵² The message that the tabloids send about these women and about how all pure women should act is that sexuality should be suppressed because only through being positive and non-sexual in appearance can you overcome tragedy to find “love.”

Body of Work

While good-girls are not cover-story material they often find themselves inside the gossip media at the center of weight gain criticism. Celebrity gossip’s hold on women

⁵² “Tabloid Cover Wednesday,” *Oh No They Didn’t!*, 29 October 2008, available from <http://community.livejournal.com/ohnotheydidnt/29252894.html>; accessed 1 December 2008.

and their bodies goes far beyond the stereotypical good-girl persona above. The gossip media controls good-girls just as much as bad-girls, mostly by focusing on their weight (which is a distressing issue for many women). By focusing on women's bodies, gossip creates an idealized norm of what the female body ought to look like. Physical beauty has become one of the main focuses of the industry, which heightens every imperfection, gushes over every gown and celebrates the idealized beauty that celebrities supposedly possess. Kilborne contends that the displays of idealized beauty are intended not only to get us to consume products to make us adhere to unreachable standards but also to demoralize women when they do not meet those standards, creating a never ending cycle of consumption.⁵³ Celebrity gossip doubly reinforces this message through representations of female celebrity appearance (both good and bad) and advertising. While capitalism benefits from the bodies of women and what they reproduce, it is necessary to control women so that the power of their reproductive labor can be harnessed into supporting capitalism.⁵⁴ Women are controlled and subordinated through the violation of their bodies: rape, prostitution, and claims of female mental and physical inferiority. The more hopeless a subject feels the less likely they will fight back. This is why it is so important for capitalism not only to control the masses but also celebrities. Celebrity women are seen as powerful because of their wealth and status; these women pose a direct threat to capitalism that needs women to be subordinate and disempowered. Silvia Federici, in *Caliban and the Witch*, describes the evolution of capitalism. Capitalism valued production and devalued reproduction. This was essential in order to

⁵³ Kilborne. "Killing Us Softly 3"

⁵⁴ Federici, Silvia. Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body, and Primitive Accumulation, (Brooklyn: Autonomedia, 2004), 88.

create more workers. If reproductive labor was seen as having a high value in society the masses could then control the system as opposed to the elite. In order to control women's power, and therefore reproduction, witch-hunts were initiated to show the dangers of women having power.⁵⁵ Calling a woman a witch could lead to her alienation from society. The same is true today for women labeled whores, or bad mothers. Gossip about celebrity women and their bodies subordinates the masses by sending out a message that women should be self-conscious of their bodies and controls celebrities by scrutinizing every detail of their lives and bodies. Women are taught that their bodies are constantly imperfect and need discipline.

Celebrities also feel the burden of having imperfect bodies through the burden of attempting to sustain their perfect bodies. Self confidence in women about their bodies remains incredibly low. Gossip prays on imperfections by heightening them. Women are taught, through gossip, to find flaws in their bodies and realize that if even the "perfect" celebrities are not always ideal than we can never be.

"Kiss My Fat Ass"

During the 1960s, the acceptable and ideal female body changed from curvy to slender. This societal transformation into idealizing waif-thin bodies has only helped to serve capitalism. The fashion and celebrity gossip industries create unrealistic body ideals and capitalism helps support these ideals by encouraging women to buy products and diets that would supposedly help them meet the goal of the ideal slim body. Susan Bordo has analyzed society's growing fetish over the slender framed female form in "Never Just

⁵⁵ Federici, Caliban and the Witch, 71.

Pictures.” In the 1990s and 2000s the slim body ideal has become a fever-pitch in American popular culture, with “fat” being viewed as the devil.⁵⁶ Feminists have criticized the images of thin celebrities for being unrealistic, contributing to low self-esteem among girls and women, and encouraging unhealthy behavior such as anorexia and bulimia.⁵⁷ “Our ideas about what constitutes a body in need of a diet have become more and more pathologically trained on the slightest hint of excess,” says Susan Bordo.⁵⁸ The pathology comes from the glamorization of slender framed models and actresses.⁵⁹ These thin bodies are not negative just because of their effects on women’s bodies but also because of the implications they have on the character of these thin women. The skinny body is idolized because it represents sexual passivity, naivety, and instability.⁶⁰ These personality traits that go along with the thin frames are seen as easily manipulated and controllable by the dominant power structures. Bordo stated that celebrity gossip magazines were some of the biggest perpetrators of this flawed body imagery: “There hasn’t been a tabloid cover in the past few years that didn’t boast of an inside scoop on some star’s diet regime, a “fabulous” success story of weight loss, or a tragic relapse.”⁶¹ These criticisms have gone relatively unaddressed by the gossip industry that capitalizes on the fears and insecurities of women by showing them what are supposed to be and telling them how celebrities fixed their previously “out of control” bodies.

⁵⁶ Bordo, Susan. “Never Just Pictures,” The Feminism and Visual Culture Reader eds. Amelia Jones, (London: Routledge, 2003), 454.

⁵⁷ Kilborne, “Killing Us Softly 3”

⁵⁸ Bordo “Never Just Pictures,” The Feminist and Visual Culture Reader, 455.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Bordo “Never Just Pictures,” The Feminist and Visual Culture Reader, 459.

⁶¹ Bordo “Never Just Pictures,” The Feminist and Visual Culture Reader, 454.

“55 Best and Worst Beach Bodies” was *Star* magazine’s cover story for the week of May 21, 2008.⁶² During that same week there were five other dieting and weight related cover stories in a variety of different gossip magazines.⁶³ It is fairly safe to say that the societal obsession with weight is a major part of the celebrity gossip industry. *Star*’s cover exemplifies this obsession with being “heavy.” Here women who seemingly have perfect bodies on the red carpet are shown as flabby, or wrinkled, or riddled with cellulite in a bikini. The message that some women are imperfect and should try harder to be ideal is clear. These “worst” bodies are juxtaposed against the “best” bodies that are perfectly toned. This compare and contrast method is quite common and lets the reader know that their body is being compared not only to the celebrity bodies but also to the women standing next to them. Women are told that they are constantly being judged and that any imperfection will be pointed out and mocked by others. Celebrities are judged for the way they maintain their bodies as opposed to their talents as singers and actresses. Reese Witherspoon’s inclusion on the *Star* cover, as a “worst” body, shows that not even winning an Oscar, or maintaining a good-girl image cannot prevent your body from being overly examined.

These imperfect and perfect bodies are juxtaposed with pages advertising diet pills, diets, liposuction, and gym memberships. Celebrity gossip imagery tells the reader that women are judged on their bodies and if your body is imperfect, which it most likely is since not even all celebrities are perfect, there are many different things you can buy to make yourself perfect. The reality is that many of these products do not work, do not

⁶² “55 Best and Worst Beach Bodies!,” *Star Magazine*, 21 May 2008, available from <http://community.livejournal.com/ohnotheydidnt/23707465.html>; accessed 12 November 2008.

⁶³ Ibid.

work very long, require trainers, require massive amounts of free time and or cost a substantial amount of money, which means that women of the masses will never be able to fully reach capitalism's thin ideal. Kilborne states that not only is the celebrity thin body unreachable but that it is genetic, only ten percent of the population has it and it is usually surgically enhanced. These perfect bodies are not attainable and not "natural."⁶⁴ Even if the "perfect" body is attainable there will inevitably be an imperfection that can be pointed out. Capitalism thrives on having women continually feeling inferior and searching for products to make them perfect. The world of Photoshop has made the ideal body even harder to obtain and subjects women to even more unreal standards.⁶⁵ Celebrity gossip magazines often use Photoshop to make the women on their cover stories appear flawless. So women are now comparing themselves to digital enhancements. The celebrities themselves are mandated to live up to this same unattainable photoshopped standard of themselves and sometimes there is backlash, in which celebrities attempt to take back control of their bodies from the media.

While celebrity gossip magazines use Photoshop and the best angles to obtain images of perfect women, Photoshop is also used to create abnormal and imperfect images of celebrities. Several celebrities allege with the click of a computer mouse or the snap of a photo in bad lighting the celebrity gossip industry has turned their bodies into overweight bodies for the sale of magazines and photos.⁶⁶ Mischa Barton, one of the stars of Fox's popular television show *The O.C.*, cried foul when she was displayed as having

⁶⁴ Kilborne, "Killing Us Softly 3"

⁶⁵ Kilborne, "Killing Us Softly 3"

⁶⁶ While this of course could be true it is also worth mentioning that celebrities want to continue their image of having the perfect body because it is part of what makes them desirable and a star.

a slender body with large cellulite thighs.⁶⁷ Her publicist claims that she was given the thighs of an “80 year old woman.”⁶⁸ Mischa’s thigh speaks to the lengths the gossip industry will go to convey the message that all women’s bodies are imperfect and that imperfection should be mocked and ridiculed.

Television star Jennifer Love Hewitt was similarly ridiculed about her weight gain. Tabloids and gossip blogs took pictures of her on the beach right after her engagement and mocked her for looking “fat” in a bikini. The hurtful remarks caused her to release a statement saying she loves her body and that a “size 2 is not fat!”⁶⁹ This implies, of course, that she is a size two and some how the pictures are misleading or that society has unrealistic expectations of what a female body looks like. Shockingly, *People* magazine posted this article above three advertisements for how to lose weight and one on how to make your teeth whiter. The imagery of Jennifer Love Hewitt and her weight shows that despite the actual body image or size of a woman, she will be criticized for her weight if it is deemed to be un-ideal and un-sexy by the dominant culture. Jennifer Love Hewitt’s backlash was demure compared to the way some celebrities react when they feel personally or professionally attacked for their inability to meet society’s unrealistic body ideals.

Super models, even more than movie and television stars, have the potential of losing everything when they are seen as overweight. In late 2006, Tyra Banks, retired super model and television personality, was photographed in a swimsuit. While this

⁶⁷ “Mischa Mad As Hell: Bitch, Please,” *Oh No They Didn’t!*, 9 May 2008, available from <http://community.livejournal.com/ohnotheydidnt/23293029.html>; accessed 5 November 2008.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ “Jennifer Love Hewitt: ‘A Size 2 Is Not Fat!’” *People Magazine*, 2 December 2007, available from <http://www.people.com/people/article/0,,20163862,00.html>; accessed 5 November 2008.

would normally appear to be harmless the tabloid fury that arose from her size was immense. She was called “Thigh-ra Banks,” “America’s Next Top Waddle,” and “Tyra Pork Chops” by gossip news outlets and readers.⁷⁰ These derogatory names about her supposedly substantial weight gain are reminiscent of kindergarten bullying and intended to demean her and all women who relate to her size into becoming smaller. Tyra responded to tabloid coverage by blogging, wearing the infamous swimsuit on television and launching a phrase that is now in the television history books, telling the tabloids to: “kiss my fat ass.”⁷¹ Tyra’s supposed heroics left the crowd applauding and sent shockwaves through the gossip community.

Fights back against the gossip industry like Banks and Love Hewitt made are not uncommon but they are fleeting. Backlashes by individuals and groups are common inside capitalism, the goal is to make sure those events are short lived and that the individuals are returned to their status as docile bodies once again – in celebrity gossip this often plays out through the desire to be accepted. The triumphs these celebrities had in speaking out against the system that oppresses them and the public that supports that system, were short lived. Both Jennifer Love Hewitt and Tyra Banks went on to lose weight and once again were back in the limelight, this time garnering favorable comments about their beauty and weight.

Gossip and celebrity imagery enhance the grip of disciplinary power over the female body; through continually reinforcing the ideology that women need to lose weight and that their bodies are imperfect, capitalism can guarantee women will continue

⁷⁰ “A Message from ‘America’s Next Top Waddle,’” *Oh No They Didn’t!*, 29 January 2007, available from <http://community.livejournal.com/ohnotheydidnt/10582025.html>; accessed 5 November 2008.

⁷¹ Ibid.

to be docile consumers in order to “improve” themselves. The actual size of a woman is actually irrelevant both for the gossip industry and the capitalist power structures that control it. Weight just happens to be one of many effective means to control women. The issue is not weight but power. What is important is making all women feel inferior about their bodies, insecure about their looks, and above all abnormal. Once women feel abnormal the dominant power structures use disciplinary power to make women cogs in the capitalist machinery. The irrelevance of body size can be seen in the new trend of attacking the idealized thin body. These attacks show that there is no ideal weight and that these criticisms of the female form are a power play. The image of the “virgin” relies on young celebrities exuding a sense of chastity and making sure that their private lives stay private. Unfortunately, even Hollywood’s “good-girls” find themselves subjugated to scrutiny based upon their weight. The virginal Hollywood girls have to maintain a difficult image of sexy yet chaste and part of that regiment is keeping their bodies’ “perfect.” Private sexuality is glorified while weight gain, overt sexuality and rail-thin bodies are criticized in support of sexual and body norms.

Chapter Three: The Whore - Amplified Sexuality and Dangerous Lifestyles

Sex may sell magazines and celebrities are supposed to be sexy but women are simultaneously commanded not to be sexual. Herein lays the rub. Gossip often emphasizes the controversial and overtly sexual celebrities, who also happen to be sexy. These women are not intended to gain admiration from the public; instead they are demonized by the gossip industry. This sexy versus sexual conundrum reminds us of the unattainable nature of society's norms. Women's ideal role is impossible for any woman to meet especially because once a woman embraces the "sexy" ideal a slippery-slope is created towards becoming a whore: in which there are short steps from sexy to sexual to whore.

Sex is active, while women are intended to be passive. When celebrity women enact or speak openly about their sex lives they are branded as a "whore" because of their denial of assigned gender roles. The message is conveyed to the audience that these women are unsavory and nothing to aspire to through hordes of negative press about their bodies and their personal lives. Overt sexuality enacted through skimpy clothing, talking about sexuality or even being viewed as "hot" can cause celebrity women, and by extension non-celebrity women, to be viewed as whores. Each step that a person takes to

claim her sexuality as her own, or to assert it as a positive is met with resistance, name calling, and negative press. Angelina Jolie continues to garner negative press on a variety of issues: weight, cheating, and risqué modeling photos from her teens among others, because of her openness on her sexuality and history of bad girl antics. Celebrity gossip attempts to create the norm that women who are sexually active or sexually open (in multiple senses) will never find happiness in life. Suppression of female sexuality is viewed as a positive and moral decision. Paris Hilton's life-style of sex tapes, drug use and constant partying is categorized as the epitome of the bad girl lifestyle by celebrity gossip. Anything Paris Hilton does is labeled as negative and is related back to her sexuality. When she does attempt to do something that could be viewed positively by society it is circumscribed by sarcasm and discarded as attention seeking. Several readers of the gossip blog *Oh No They Didn't!* labeled Paris an "attention whore" because cameras took pictures of her in a club.⁷² Women are defined by their sexuality through celebrity gossip which constantly reinforces negative views of sexuality in women's every day lives.

Skinny Minis

While older or good-girl celebrities are often the target of weight gain imagery, young Hollywood starlets and "bad-girls" are impacted by the imagery of being "too skinny." Unsurprisingly this follows how bodies develop during the life cycle with most individuals being slender during their teens and twenties and gaining weight in late

⁷² "Katie Price and Paris Hilton.. together at a club: The night Paris met Jordan... and guess who was wearing frilly knickers and ripped tights?", *Oh No They Didn't!*, 23 October 2008, available from <http://community.livejournal.com/ohnotheydidnt/29081256.html>; accessed 23 October 2008.

adulthood. The recent public backlash against the super skinny imagery that the media force-feeds the masses is unsurprising considering how strongly people campaigned against these potentially unhealthy images and practices. Unfortunately, the backlash that has happened has had minimal effect on changing the way women view their bodies. The feminist movements' goal of loving one's body and the mantra that women come in all shapes and sizes has become co-opted by capitalist and neoconservative agendas in order to confuse and subordinate women. Capitalism has altered its strategy of controlling women from showing only rail-thin unattainable bodies to including bodies of "larger" sizes in an attempt to befriend female consumers. While the incredibly thin body is still idealized, women are now told that their bodies can be too thin and that larger, although only slightly larger, sizes can be "good." This new distinction is incredibly important. Capitalism has begun disguising itself as progressive by embracing women of all sizes, but this new "inclusive" mentality is nothing more than a way to make every woman look at their body as not right, as either too fat or too skinny. While there are now supposedly a multitude of acceptable, normal and ideal body types for women in actuality there are very few attainable ones. The recent admonishment of thin celebrities shows that all women are at risk for feeling that they are not a part of what society considers normal.

Young celebrities like Nicole Richie find themselves in the middle of a media hailstorm when they go from being seen as overweight to incredibly thin. Rumors and unkind comments circulated that she was anorexic or bulimic, and used drugs to get her ultra thin frame.⁷³ This is not uncommon as many thin women or women who lose weight

⁷³"Ok! Magazine Nicole Richie Exclusive Interview," *Oh No They Didn't!*, 22 March 2007, available from <http://community.livejournal.com/ohnotheydidnt/11504198.html>; accessed 8 November 2008.

are made to justify their new figures. The ideal body of the super skinny model has become a reality for many people through diet, exercise, eating disorders, drugs or being born naturally thin. Yet, the message to women who are skinny reads loud and clear on the cover of gossip magazines. If a woman has reached this skinny ideal then it is unhealthy, abnormal, their own fault, and they need immediate help to gain weight.⁷⁴ Readers and bloggers who comment on the celebrity gossip stories often direct thin celebs to “eat a sandwich” or “fatten up.”⁷⁵ The girls viewed as too thin are often women who fall under the “bad-girl” category. Angelina Jolie faced magazine covers that claimed she was refusing to eat while pregnant, and that she was starving herself after the death of her mother. Nicole Richie’s slender body was shown as proof and the consequence of her excessive life-style.

Women can be greatly affected by the media’s control over body normalcy and body image; celebrities are even further affected by these endeavors. Accusations of eating disorders and drug use can permanently damage a celebrity’s career along with their body image. Kiera Knightly continually fights back rumors of her eating disorder. *PerezHilton.com* seems unable to believe the star’s claim that she is naturally tall and slender. An interview with her in *Allure* magazine is positioned below the headline “Eating is not in Fashion” and pictures of Kiera with the words “help” and “feed me” written next to her face.⁷⁶ Much like Banks and Love Hewitt, Knightly fought back

⁷⁴ “Rehab for Angie: As Angelina wastes away Brad begs: Get Help Now!” *Star Magazine*, 1 August 2007, available from <http://community.livejournal.com/ohnotheydidnt/14313381.html>; accessed 17 September 2008.

⁷⁵ “The World Through the eyes of straight men: 10 skinny-ass ladies that used to be hot” *Oh No They Didn’t!*, 8 April 2008, available from <http://community.livejournal.com/ohnotheydidnt/22231968.html>; accessed 3 November 2008.

⁷⁶ Perez Hilton, “Eating is Not in Fashion,” *Perezhilton.com*, 8 September 2008, available from <http://perezhilton.com/2008-09-08-eating-is-not-in-fashion>; accessed 8 September 2008.

against *The Daily Mail*, a British Tabloid that claimed she was lying about not having an eating disorder and that images of her encouraged young women to starve themselves to death.⁷⁷ The lawsuit represents the high stakes game that tabloids play with celebrities' lives. What goes unnoticed is the game it plays with the masses; *The Daily Mail's* story, despite the objections by Kiera Knightly, is one of hundreds of examples of imagery depicting "inappropriate" weight, leaving the public to feel confused and ashamed about their own bodies.

The accusations of a girl being too skinny have a controlling effect on the population. Exerting biopower over young women, the gossip industry indicates that there is a correct amount of food to consume and an arbitrary weight that is acceptable. This vague and unachievable standard controls women's bodies and psyches by making sure they continue attempting to achieve unrealistic standards. Noticeably absent is the gossip industry commenting on a perfect body. What is a good body to one magazine is a pregnant body, bloated belly, or anorexic model to another.

While size in relation to health and sex appeal are some of the most common topics that celebrity gossip magazines use to send negative messages to women, another form of control has begun to spiral out of celebrities' sex appeal and the abundance of paparazzi photography that has developed in the past several years: unintended and uninvited snapshots of celebrity private parts.

⁷⁷ "Kiera Knightly Sues Over Anorexia Claims," *People Magazine*, 23 January 2007, available from <http://www.people.com/people/article/0,,20009389,00.html>; accessed 8 September 2008.

Paparazzi Peeks

Up-skirt photographs, close ups of women's crotches in skin tight pants, and shots of women's breasts when their dress strap falls down sound like photographs you would find on internet porn sites. While internet pornography sites do carry photos similar to the ones I am referencing, these photographs are considered newsworthy if the private parts being photographed belong to a female celebrity. Paparazzi journalists have increased along with America's desire to consume more celebrity gossip. Paparazzi are photographers who capture candid, non-staged photographs of celebrities, usually the celebrities going about their daily lives. Yet, Paparazzi have discovered that there are certain types of celebrity photographs that make thousands more than photos of celebrities grocery shopping.

A Paparazzo can make thousands of dollars from one good picture picked up by one or more celebrity gossip outlets. Embarrassing, scandalous, or breaking news photographs are what can catapult a paparazzo to a full-time job, lots of money and the potential for their own notoriety, because these shots are extremely lucrative for the celebrity gossip magazines and blogs. One example can be found in the tragic death of Heath Ledger. Paparazzi waited outside the studio apartment where Ledger died for hours in hopes to get a photograph of his body. A live streaming broadcast at *TMZ.com*, a celebrity gossip blog, overheard some of *TMZ.com*'s paparazzi speaking of how much money they could make if they got a photograph of the recently deceased Ledger being

removed from the building.⁷⁸ Around the most popular celebrities there are hordes of paparazzi taking pictures every few seconds. Starting with Tara Reid's accidental exposure of her nipple on a red carpet the gossip industry has begun to focus their attention on the bodies of young celebrities and attempting to get sneak peeks at their private areas. While every day photographs of celebrities may be paparazzi bread and butter the intimate shots of female celebrities' bodies are icing on the cake. The more salacious the photo and the more popular the star the more money the paparazzo and the gossip industry make off of the exploited image of female celebrities. More often than not the women are blamed for these salacious photographs existence, as if to say they wanted it.⁷⁹

The relationship that celebrity women have to paparazzi journalism is not unlike that of the pornographer to the willing or unwilling porn-star or the killer and victim in a horror movie. There is a definite imagery of the paparazzi as dominant, all powerful and masculine and in these cases sexual aggressor. Carol Clover writes, in *Men, Women and Chain Saws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film*, "on the face of it, the relationship between the sexes in slasher films could hardly be clearer. The killer is with few exceptions recognizably human and distinctly male; his fury is unmistakably sexual in both roots and expression; his victims are mostly women, often sexually free and always young and beautiful."⁸⁰ Those celebrities caught bare-chested or with their genitals exposed are often female, young, beautiful, and characterized as "sluts" by the celebrity

⁷⁸ Comments section page 46, "Updating Post on Heath," *Oh No They Didn't!*, 22 January 2008, available from <http://community.livejournal.com/ohnotheydidnt/19614168.html?page=38>; accessed 22 January 2008.

⁷⁹ It is incredibly unclear whether these women were actually doing this for attention or whether this was the work of the paparazzo's prying lenses.

⁸⁰ Clover, Carol J. *Men, Women and Chain Saws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 42.

gossip industry. The photographer/paparazzo is frequently male and often instigates these photographs to capitalize on the female celebrity's sexuality. Similarly, the world of pornography and film both objectify women as sexual objects both the porn stars and actresses are usually the same ones who capture the paparazzo's interest. Through the objectification of the female form by severing her body parts through cropped photographs or close up snap-shots the gaze of the viewer becomes masculine and she becomes an object to consume for our own gratification.⁸¹ The control of the female form in this highly explicit manner is not just to possess her image, or to receive sexual gratification; at its core it is a capitalist venture and reduction of women to sexual objects.

Hollywood bad girls like Lindsay, Britney, Paris and Tara are the most frequent targets of this kind of celebrity exposé. During 2006 there was a rash of pictures that made their rounds on internet gossip sites like *OhNoTheyDidn't!* and *PerezHilton.com* of Paris', Lindsay's and Britney's genitals. Each picture was usually captured with an up-skirt camera pointed at their crotch while the women were entering or leaving a vehicle while they were not wearing underwear.⁸² Each is accompanied with comments about their inability to wear underwear or derogatory references to these women's sex lives.⁸³ Not only are their sex lives commented on but their personal hygiene and how aesthetically pleasing their anatomy looks is debated.⁸⁴ Another favorite photograph that gossip uses to objectify and degrade the female body is "camel toe" photographs. This

⁸¹ Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," *The Feminism and Visual Culture Reader*, 50.

⁸² "Wanna See Britney's Vagina (Again)," *PerezHilton.com*, 11 September 2007, available from <http://perezhilton.com/2007-09-11-wanna-see-britneys-vagina-again>; accessed 25 October 2008.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Comments Section. "She's Bringin' Slutty Back," *Oh No They Didn't!*, 28 November 2006, available from <http://community.livejournal.com/ohnotheydidnt/9708549.html?page=1#comments>; accessed 10 November 2008.

repellent phrase implies that the anatomy of female genitals when placed inside tight pants resembles an animal's hoof. Here women are objectified as sexual objects but also animals. During practice for the television dancing show *Dancing with the Stars*, Kim Kardashian was photographed in some "unflattering" leggings.⁸⁵ *PerezHilton.com* published the candid shots of Kardashian along with various comments that reflect how these types of photographs and other objectifying photographs are viewed by the gossip industry. According to Perez Hilton, Kardashian's camel toe was "sexy," "juicy," "a good one," and the blog entry had extreme "close up" photographs that emphasize the tightness of the leggings and the separation of the outer labia.⁸⁶ These pictures only further objectify her as a sexual object while simultaneously humiliating her. While Perez Hilton's words may appear on face as a compliment he is known for making sarcastic and snide comments about celebrities. Even if his attentions were good the photograph itself is intended to be humiliating because having a camel toe is considered one of the cardinal sins of fashion. Vaginas are supposed to be hidden and covered-up completely.

Good girls do not encounter the same kind of criticism about their wardrobe choice. The subdued sexuality of good girls focuses the discussion on their love lives, not on their bodies and sexuality. This is not to say that the paparazzi do not catch photographs of good-girls' naked bodies. The comments on these "accidental" photos usually revolve around blaming the stylist, needing to check a mirror before they go out,

⁸⁵ Unflattering is being used based upon societal standards. Camel toes are considered disgusting or offensive because of the prominence the vagina.

⁸⁶ "Guess that Camel toe," *PerezHilton.com*, 23 September 2008, available from <http://perezhilton.com/2008-09-23-guess-that-camel-toe>; accessed 23 September 2008.

or hoping they are not headed down the same road as the bad girls.⁸⁷ One needs only look at PerezHilton.com once again and compare his comments on Kim Kardashian to Michelle Obama.⁸⁸ The kind of celebrity is very important when it comes to the framing of these issues but even more important than the kind of celebrity is what persona the media has assigned to the celebrity: are they good or bad? Kim's photograph is up close and sexualized. The photo of Michelle was a full body shot, non-focused on her anatomy, and says "it happens to all of us," "have someone take a picture of you before you leave the house."⁸⁹ No blame is placed on Michelle and there are no sexual references on the entire blog entry. Bad clothes or misplaced clothes can happen to good people but girls who have a bad reputation, as dictated by the dominant structure, have their bodies exposed on purpose because of their presumed sexuality.

While paparazzi sometimes go to extremes to catch sight of private parts of the female anatomy, the stars often get the blame for the pictures being taken.⁹⁰ Fashion is an important part of objectification of the female body imagery in celebrity gossip. If the outfit is tight, or a woman is not covered up as much as she "should" be she is likely to be blamed for the photo. If the outfit is just poorly fitted then blame is placed on the stylist. These style questions are part of the larger disciplining of female sexuality. Whether deserved or not, women who embody more overt sexuality will be controlled through the media and the public making derogatory comments about these women and having the women receive blame for having their bodies exposed. Fault is placed on the woman

⁸⁷ "Camel Toe Alert," *PerezHilton.com*, 2 November 2008, available from <http://perezhilton.com/2008-11-02-camel-toe-alert>; accessed 2 November 2008.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ "Pervy Pap Creeps Up Paris' Skirt," *Oh No They Didn't!*, 17 August 2007, available from <http://community.livejournal.com/ohnotheydidnt/14719136.html>; accessed 2 November 2008.

when she is displayed by the gossip industry as hypersexual. Because of the timeline of the “no panty” shots of then friends Britney Spears, Paris Hilton, and Lindsay Lohan it was assumed that these bad girls were using their sexuality to gain attention. They could play off their panty-less escapades as accidents while still making media headlines and displaying their sex appeal. While it was never discovered whether or not these photographs were staged or invited, it remains clear that the gossip industry wants us to believe that “bad-girls” invite or desire these types of photographs and this specific type of attention.

Exposed celebrity photographs and their accompanying commentary send direct messages to women about how they should behave, what they should wear and their place in society. Women are taught to be ashamed of their bodies, to cover up or risk being treated like sexual objects for male gratification. The gossip industry insinuates that the more often a celebrity’s body is exposed by the paparazzi the less respect the public should give that woman. Capitalism uses these women’s bare bodies to show the “ugliness” and “shamefulness” of women’s bodies. Britney Spears’ repeatedly exposed vagina and C-section scar are meant to disgust women and men alike. Despite the naturalness of the vagina, women are supposed to feel shame about their own bodies and desire to conceal them whenever possible.

These pictures attempt to shame women but they are also intended to sexualize them and make them appear as nothing more than a sexual object. Not showing a woman’s full body and only looking at her sexual organs is one of the earliest forms of objectification and sexualization in the media.⁹¹ Focus on a single part of the female

⁹¹ Kilborne “Killing Us Softly 3”

anatomy creates that part as an object instead of part of a whole person. In this way the extreme close-ups of female celebrities' anatomy become objects for our admiration, disgust or sexual desires. The sexualization of female anatomy is not uncommon and when the body of a highly attractive celebrity intentionally or accidentally becomes exposed the image is intended to, at least in part, heighten desires and sexual feelings. These emotions and hormonal reactions induced by these sexualized celebrity images are intended for us to desire and thus buy whatever is associated with the celebrity life-style and thus increase our consumerism and desire to be a part of that idealized normality that is conveyed by the celebrity gossip industry.

The commentary surrounding this “news” is reminiscent of societal opinions of sexual assault victims, and if these photographs are uninvited this is not far from assault. Women are sexualized by the media and then deemed “sluts” because of what they were wearing or were not wearing, how they got out of the car, or how they did not make sure they were covered up. Blame is placed squarely on the women exposed. The neoconservative mentality of blaming the victim is reinforced and commonly used when talking about female celebrities who were exposed by the paparazzi. It was their fault for getting out of the car that way, they should not have worn revealing clothing, they wanted the picture to be taken, and/or they were sloppy-drunk so it was their fault. It sounds all too familiar to how people blame women who have been sexually assaulted. The paparazzi are not blamed for taking pictures of women without underwear and taking money for the dissemination of those images. Instead the women are blamed for not wearing underwear and labeled whores. The prying eye of the camera lens takes these pornographic images for the public to consume and judge. There is a clear warning of

what can happen if you are not modest and discreet every time one of these pictures is shown and every time they are mentioned. The reinforcing image of the woman who should be private and in the home rears its head into the world of celebrity gossip.

Female anatomy has been shamed, assaulted, sexualized, objectified and animalized through out the celebrity gossip industry. This form of objectification takes a giant leap toward pornography and sexual assault. While this is a grave cause for concern for the way capitalism and neoconservative culture displays and treats women, even more startling is that the vagina and the female body is taking on an even bigger role in the world of celebrity gossip as the focus is changing from sex to giving birth. Celebrity gossip has been focusing on the female sexual anatomy to objectify women for many years but recently birthing imagery, the pregnant female body and subsequently motherhood as taken center stage inside celebrity gossip.

Chapter Four: The Mother - Gender Conformity and Idolization

While the images of virgin and whore are two of the more longstanding images in our society's classification of women through celebrity imagery, one role has gone largely though not entirely overlooked by celebrity media until recently: the discourse of pregnancy and motherhood. Motherhood and pregnancy are revered by the heteronormative power structure that uses celebrity gossip to disseminate its messages about normalcy. "Normal" women become mothers, love their babies and devote their lives to caring for their children.

Body once again plays a central role in the constructed imagery of pregnancy. Once in a dedicated relationship, ideally marriage, women are investigated for the slightest sight of a stomach. "Baby bump" watches have become common place and emphasize society's expectation that women should become mothers. The body and the body's reproductive labor are the only things of value in women. Through gossip, our society demands that women fulfill their biological destiny in order to become good citizens by fulfilling their assigned societal roles. The discourse of celebrity gossip indicates that the type of mother you are determines your standing in society, but society will not forgive previous violations of its norms just because you are a mother. Through

conditional redemption of a woman's past wrongs, celebrity gossip and through it neoconservative and capitalist values, disciplines women into becoming mothers in hopes of becoming normal or even ideal.

Pregnancy is displayed as a mental/attitudinal change as well as a physical change. Women should be happy and fulfilled because of their pregnancy. Angelina Jolie's bad girl image was transformed into one of light and hope once she gave birth to her child Shiloh, although this transformation was short-lived. Gossip magazine covers usually portray the maternal Angelina (as opposed to her bad girl image) as smiling and radiant regardless of the caption.⁹² Her motherly "glow" is displayed in every single picture of her where she is seen with a radiant smile or surrounded by her children. She always looking incredibly put together. While women are supposed to be maternal they are not to forget they are women and have an obligation to be beautiful, this is intended to pressure young women to maintain their connection to the capitalistic beauty industry while they are mothers. Bad mothers are seen as women who let themselves go out without make up or do not care about their appearance. Angelina's transformation to mother from "bad-girl" was characterized by her motherhood and by her beautiful smile.

Angelina isn't allowed to fully make the transformation to good-mom/woman because of her past. Kissing her brother after she accepted her Oscar, her obsession with knives and other "odd" behavior clouds her image as a mother. Articles refer to her relationship with actor Brad Pitt as constantly in turmoil, they insinuate she does not eat, and even have gone so far as to claim she had post-partum depression after the birth of

⁹² "Angelina 'I'm Scared': Her True Feelings and Fears about the Twins" *Star Magazine*, 18 June 2008, available from <http://community.livejournal.com/ohnotheydidnt/24712015.html>; accessed on 10 November 2008.

her twins.⁹³ Pregnancy and becoming a mother had, for a short time, quelled some of the gossip about Angelina's behavior but pregnancy is now the focus of any negative gossip. The message that women with scandalous pasts can never fully shed themselves of negativity is apparent. Once you have been labeled a whore there is little redemption and the only possibility for it comes in the hands of giving birth to children and being a good mother. Having her own children may not have made Angelina Jolie the idealized norm of the good girl but did go a long way to domesticating her image and thus making her more worthy of idolization and emulation by the public.

Domestication is one of the only ways in which a woman can potentially redeem her previous bad-girl antics. This redemption is conditional and can be taken away at any moment that she falters from her role as good mother and domesticated woman. Here women are controlled into fulfilling their "proper" role out of fear that they will never be normal if they do not give birth. Angelina Jolie is not the only celebrity to have her role as mother transform her public image, even if only slightly. Christina Aguilera and Britney Spears similarly encountered a role reversal when they became pregnant and after giving birth to their children. While Britney and Christina were seen as opposite ends of the virgin/whore spectrum their roles were reversed when both became mothers. "Bad-girl" Christina received her conditional redemption and became a domesticated and motherly figure while "good-girl" Britney spiraled out of control.

Christina Aguilera never embraced innocence in an attempt to become America's sweetheart. She built her image around being controversial; this is what got her labeled a

⁹³"Doctors Fear that Angelina is Now Battling Post-Partum" *In-Touch Weekly*, 3 September 2008, available from <http://community.livejournal.com/ohnotheydidnt/27460720.html>; accessed 10 November 2008.

whore. She embraced her sexuality in her songs, appearance, and was never afraid to talk about sex. Her identification as a whore subsided slightly with the birth of her son, Max, after which she was seen as a beautiful and doting mother. *People* magazine's exclusive first photos show a serene Christina among a lavish nursery and family photos⁹⁴

Christina's role as a good mother is intended to correlate with pictures of her expensive home and dramatic nursery. The more expensive and luxurious the nursery has a direct equation to the more beautiful the mother looks and the happier the family looks. Spending a fortune on a baby is not only normal, it is ideal and essential for a happy family and in order to be a good mother. During the time of her pregnancy and soon after the birth, Christina was admired for her beauty, ability to get back in shape and devotion to her family.⁹⁵ Yet, the harmful gossip did not stop.

Negative attacks on Christina Aguilera rarely reference her mothering skills, because the media categorizes her as Britney Spears' polar opposite and if Britney is a bad mother Christina is a good one. The attacks by the gossip industry and the public usually go back to her partying and her physical image (too much make up and too revealing clothing).⁹⁶ Although she is a good mother, she is still haunted by her past, as a "whore." She is now more glamorous in appearance but remains unable to completely shed her past. Gossip is giving a warning to women. At any point, if you do something society finds unacceptable or abnormal you will never again be in the complete good graces of society. You will become unforgivable and untouchable, but if you have a child

⁹⁴ "People Photo Exclusive: Christina Aguilera and Baby" *People Magazine*, 13 September 2008, available from <http://www.people.com/people/article/0,,20177837,00.html>; accessed 15 November 2008.

⁹⁵ "Christina Exclusive: How I Gpt My Body Back," *Us Weekly*, 21 May 2008, available from <http://community.livejournal.com/ohnotheydidnt/23707465.html>; accessed 21 May 2008.

⁹⁶ Comments section "Christina Aguilera on Larry King Wednesday," *Oh No They Didn't!*, 23 June 2008, available from <http://community.livejournal.com/ohnotheydidnt/24898393.html>; accessed 12 November 2008.

your life will have some meaning. Christina, like Angelina, reiterates that a baby should make a woman a better person, as long as you are a good mother, while you will still retain pieces of your bad girl persona. While being a mother can soften some of the negative attitudes towards women who were branded as whores, it can also destroy women who appeared as if they were the embodiment of normalcy if they failed at being a good mother.

Britney Spears' image as America's sweetheart appeared, for many years, to be permanent, despite the occasional bad publicity regarding her tumultuous love-life. Much of this was because she was controllable as a teen-age girl, but after her teen-age years it was clear that Britney was on the verge of spiraling out of control. She was able to maintain pieces of her good-girl image until the dissolution of her second marriage. Images of Britney from 2006 to early 2008 show her as erratic, lost and a danger to her own children. Gossip writers and readers alike continue to scold her for smoking near the children and having her children fetch her cigarettes for her.⁹⁷ Eventually she lost custody of her children and only retained minor visitation rights.⁹⁸ This only furthered her downward spiral in the eyes of media consumers which was reinforced by gossip media. She was officially a bad mother and received incredible amounts of negative press because of her status as a "bad mom."⁹⁹ Gossip depicted her life as crumbling around her and this all culminated in the events that were reported on January 8th, 2008. Gossip outlets reported that Britney refused to let her children leave her house and that she had in

⁹⁷ "It Seems like Britney's kids really need help" *Oh No They Didn't!*, 31 July 2007, available from <http://community.livejournal.com/ohnotheydidnt/14306634.html>; accessed 31 October 2008.

⁹⁸"Britney Spears Rushed in Ambulance to Cedars-Sinai Medical Center, Remains Under Observation," *Us Weekly*, 4 January 2008, available from http://www.usmagazine.com/police_called_as_britney_spears_refuses_to_turn_over_kids; accessed 5 January 2008.

⁹⁹ Ibid

fact kidnapped them. Readers declared her “psychotic” and claimed she was on suicide watch and harmed herself in front of her sons.¹⁰⁰ All these images of an unstable mother indicate that the American dream can be gone in a flash if you are not a perfect mother.

Britney Spears officially lost her good girl image. She was no longer the media’s or America’s darling because she did not adhere to the norms of what a mother should be. Motherhood is intended, by society, to be the fulfillment of women’s lives. When women find joy in other things, or cannot handle being a mother, or simply do not parent the way normative images indicates they should these women are ostracized by the public. Gossip magazines ignore that all women are not the same and assume that they all embrace parenting norms of how to conduct themselves as mothers (or even that they want to be mothers). Through the representations of pregnant and mother stars idealized norms that are unreachable and sometimes undesired are reinforced for the general audience and the stars themselves.

Motherhood and pregnancy are roles that capitalism and neoconservatism have embraced in an attempt to further constrain the lives of women. Celebrity gossips’ focus on these ideals, and the virgin/whore dichotomy, has narrowed the roles of women to revolve around their presumed heteronormative sexuality. Through these roles readers of gossip are taught the proper and improper ways to be a woman.

Babies on the Brain

Celebrity gossip has babies on the brain. The top selling gossip magazine editions are those that display first looks at celebrity babies or exclusive announcements of

¹⁰⁰ Ibid

pregnancy. Celebrities and their offspring fascinate the public. They are seen as ideal people mating and giving birth to babies who are somehow more special, more magical, cuter and more perfect than other children. Celebrity mothers receive substantial focus from paparazzi and celebrity news outlets. Every aspect of birth is explored and analyzed in gossip: the growing baby, the birth, the first trip home and subsequent motherhood. Hardly a single part of the pregnancy and motherhood are left unexplored. How it is displayed and the few things that are left out show the public exactly what is normal and ideal in the world of reproduction.

Because of America's neoconservative "family values" and celebration of a "culture of life," which focuses on heteronormative reproduction, gossip magazines attempt to be the first to report on a celebrity pregnancy. In doing so the media attempts to make the reader feel included in the celebrity's life, and therefore more willing to invest time and money into the celebrity as product and the products the media is attempting to make one consume. The personal declaration of "I'm pregnant" is taken out of the hands of the celebrity mother and placed squarely in the control of gossip. The gossip industry and its values have taken control over this intimate and personal act as well as the women who would be making the statement. The intent is to make the reader feel as if they are a part of the celebrity's inner circle and also to exert control over the female celebrity.

The baby bump watch takes up a great deal of time in celebrity gossip. The hunt for the next pregnant celebrity appears to be never ending. Each time a female celebrity steps outside of a restaurant, changes her physical appearance, or becomes engaged and/or married it is announced by the gossip media that the woman is or soon will be

expecting a child. This is indicative of society's expected standards for women: "Why would she gain weight unless she is pregnant?" "People get married so they can have children." "Her stomach looks slightly distended, she must be pregnant!" Despite having successful careers and strong relationships with their partners it is assumed celebrity women, and all women for that matter, desire only to become mothers and give birth to children. The idea that women could somehow be happy in their career and life without having children seems foreign and absurd, reflecting neoconservative notions about women's place in society. Women are biologically capable of becoming mothers and according to "tradition" women's primary job should be giving birth and raising children. While advertisements are intended to sell you products to make your life more normal/ideal, gossip's imagery of celebrity pregnancy is intended to show you what kind of life is most normal and ideal.

Eva Longoria's bump watch started in late summer of 2008 and continued for what seemed like endless weeks. She was photographed for tabloids when wearing lose-fitting clothes, not eating sushi, drinking only water at Las Vegas nightclubs and gaining weight. In Perez Hilton's words "all signs point to spermination."¹⁰¹ Gossip agencies continued to speculate on her status as would-be-mother. Her committed and happily married life seemed to only further belief that she had to be pregnant. Eventually Longoria said, "I'm not pregnant. I'm just fat."¹⁰² Which she later corrected to say that

¹⁰¹ "Signs Point to Spermination," *PerezHilton.com*, 2 September 2008, available from <http://perezhilton.com/2008-09-02-signs-point-to-spermination>; accessed 2 September 2008.

¹⁰² "Eva Longoria: I'm Not Pregnant 'I'm Just fat'," *Us Weekly*, 10 September 2008, available from <http://www.usmagazine.com/news/eva-longoria-im-not-pregnant-im-just-fat>; accessed 13 October 2008.

she is still a “size zero.”¹⁰³ While Longoria’s supposed pregnancy has yet to come to fruition, she now has to fight back celebrity gossip’s attacks on women gaining weight. It was an acceptable weight gain when it was assumed she was pregnant but once that was discovered to be false she faced ridicule for it. She was called a “moron” and “delusional” for claiming she was not pregnant but fat, but actually a size zero, despite the body-pressure that produces her “belief” and need to make these statements.¹⁰⁴ Eva Longoria is held as an example of what women should not be like. Women should desire to be pregnant and seek to become pregnant but if they are not pregnant they should never put on extra weight. Recent representations of Eva Longoria teach women that gaining weight unless for a pregnancy is unacceptable.

Katherine Hiegl received focus similar to Longoria this year, after she was photographed several times without her standard cigarette in hand. Several news agencies suspected pregnancy but when she never appeared to gain weight it was reported that she and her husband, musician Josh Kelley, were looking into adoption.¹⁰⁵ Katherine Hiegl has been torn apart by media outlets criticizing her smoking. While many people smoke, Hiegl is particularly vulnerable to anti-smoking criticism and attempts to control her actions because it contradicts the good-girl image she portrays in both her hit television show, *Grey’s Anatomy*, and in her box office hit films. Quitting smoking and motherhood are associated with one another not just because of the potential health risks associated with mothers smoking but also because of the image of female betterment. Having

¹⁰³ “Eva Longoria isn’t Pregnant She’s fat but not really Fat because She’s Still a Size 0,” *PerezHilton.com*, 13 October 2008, available from <http://perezhilton.com/2008-10-13-eva-langoria-isnt-pregnant-shes-just-fat-but-not-really-fat-because-shes-still-a-size-0>; accessed 13 October 2008.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁵ “Heigl to Adopt,” *PerezHilton.com*, 21 October 2008, available from <http://perezhilton.com/2008-10-21-heigl-to-adopt>; accessed 21 October 2008.

children is seen as a way of bettering one's self; women become less selfish and give themselves over to another being. All women are criticized for smoking because it is viewed as unacceptable behavior in today's society. Yet, when a celebrity quits smoking it is only seen as remarkable and important because it is a potential indicator of pregnancy or desire for children.

Although speculations about Longoria and Heigl have turned out to be nothing more than that, singer Ashlee Simpson-Wentz and her husband, musician Pete Wentz's story was slightly different. Denials by friends, family and the couple themselves turned out to be fabrication to dissuade the media. Very shortly after announcing their engagement, media outlets declared Simpson pregnant.¹⁰⁶ Denials of the *US Magazine* "exclusive" began immediately. Pete Wentz was quoted as saying "There is a witch hunt for people to be pregnant whenever they get engaged in Hollywood. This is all news to me."¹⁰⁷ While this witch-hunt is an incredibly real phenomenon, when it came to light that he was lying to the public, the gossip media felt vindicated in their witch-hunt and was able to continue to maintain credibility in all their future stories about the birth of the Simpson-Wentz child. The denial of the pregnancy also hurt Wentz and Simpson's image. While it is not uncommon for non-celebrities to wait to announce their pregnancies until after the first trimester, because the threat of miscarriage decreases drastically after that time period, celebrities are expected to have their private lives on permanent display for the public to see. Denial of a pregnancy is seen by the celebrity

¹⁰⁶ "Exclusive: Ashlee Simpson is Pregnant," *Us Weekly*, 14 April 2008, available from <http://www.usmagazine.com/ashlee-simpson-is-pregnant>; accessed 21 October 2008.

¹⁰⁷ Carlson, Erin. "Pregnant Celebrities Face an Army of Tattletales," *Associated Press*, 6 June 2008, available from http://www.signonsandiego.com/uniontrib/20080606/news_1c06pregnant.html; accessed 6 June 2008.

gossip media as a potential to view that pregnancy as unwanted or that a celebrity does not “love” their fans and want to include them like family in their lives. Celebrity gossip normalizes pregnancy and makes it appear as if it is and always must be wanted and joyous news. Any deviation in the projection of joy at the conception of a child transforms that person into abnormal.

Passing judgment on people based upon their reaction to pregnancy is only where it begins. When a person is assumed to be pregnant the gossip media indicates that their entire life-style should change. The imagery of Angelina Jolie depicts her as the anti-thesis of a good biological mother because of her refusal to let her children change her life. Gossip magazines continually dispense the story that Jolie and Brad Pitt will marry soon.¹⁰⁸ While they have yet to marry the fact that they have biological children indicates that they should marry by society’s standards of normal. Neoconservative values placing emphasis on two-parent, married homes are evident every time the cover story proclaims impending marriage for the Jolie-Pitts. Marriage is the presumed standard for couples who have children, because of the presumed benefit a two-parent married home provides for children.

Another presumed standard is a mother sacrificing her life for that of her children. Angelina Jolie came under gossip fire when she traveled to Iraq as part of her role as a United Nations Goodwill Ambassador while pregnant with her twins.¹⁰⁹ The announcement of her pregnancy had not come yet but it had been presumed for some

¹⁰⁸ “Brad & Angelina: Wedding of the Century,” *In-Touch Weekly*, 26 April 2008, available from <http://community.livejournal.com/ohnotheydidnt/21846050.html>; accessed 2 October 2008.

¹⁰⁹ Comments Section “More of Angelina in Iraq. Definitely Pregnant imo (in my opinion),” *Oh No They Didn’t!*, 7 February 2008, available from <http://community.livejournal.com/ohnotheydidnt/20169654.html#comments>; accessed 2 October 2008.

time that she was pregnant. That Jolie was photographed with extra bulletproof padding around her stomach gave an even further indication that she was pregnant. She refused to answer reporters' questions on the pregnancy stating that she was there on a humanitarian mission to Iraq and not to talk about her personal life.¹¹⁰ Debates raged on gossip sites about her judgment as a mother because of her decision to visit such a "dangerous" place while pregnant.¹¹¹ Women are supposed to take various precautions while pregnant and Angelina Jolie violated the norm by seeking to help others even at risk to her self and her children.

The violations of norms that Angelina Jolie and many other women make are seen as unacceptable, yet some norm violations, while unacceptable, can be redeemed if the "correct" thing is done. Jamie Lynn Spears, the teenage sister of pop superstar Britney Spears, revealed exclusively to *OK! Magazine* she was pregnant and soon to become a teenage mother.¹¹² Premarital and especially teenage sexual intercourse are some of the most basic violations of neoconservative ideology. The normal and ideal teenager does not engage in sexual intercourse until they are in a committed, monogamous, and married relationship later in their adult life. While Jamie Lynn Spears violated this rule she redeemed herself by having the child and embracing motherhood and couple norms. It should not be taken as a coincidence that celebrity gossip has never reported a high profile celebrity having an abortion. Abortion is a topic of conversation in the *OK!* article but it is conveyed as a choice she had but not one she would have ever made. *OK!* writes:

¹¹⁰ "Angie in Iraq," *PerezHilton.com*, 2 February 2008, available from <http://perezhilton.com/2008-02-07-angie-in-iraq>; accessed 2 October 2008.

¹¹¹ Comments section "More of Angelina in Iraq." *Oh No They Didn't*, available online.

¹¹² "World Exclusive: Jamie Lynn Spears – 'I'm Pregnant'," *Ok! Magazine*, 18 December 2007, available from <http://www.ok-magazine.com/news/view/3425>; accessed 14 November 2008.

As for her decision to keep the baby, the *Zoey 101* star explains, "I think my whole life I would have to live with knowing what I did or what I didn't do." And Jamie Lynn, who intends on raising the child in her home state of Louisiana, also tells *OK!* that she intends to face up to the life-changing choice she's made. "I'm the one who has to live with it for the rest of my life," she says. "I put myself in this position, an adult position, so I have to act like an adult and take responsibility for what I did."¹¹³

Jamie Lynn and *OK!* make sure to make abortion look like a choice someone should never make and also state that no teenager should ever put themselves in her situation. Jamie Lynn Spears has become celebrity gossip's poster child for neoconservative anti-sex and anti-choice values. Women are taught to look at Jamie Lynn as a sad little girl, as indicated by the *OK!* cover photo in which she looks appropriately somber. Yet, her strength to become a teenage mother is supposed to be admired by all and mirrored by those in her same situation.

Neoconservative values on women's place in the home, their status as mothers, and their sexual virtues are all at play in celebrity gossip. Each celebrity is intended to embody those values or the consequences of not adhering to those values. The female body has become the center of focus for the gossip industry and its attempt to use disciplinary power to control women. More than creating a standard for what is normal and what is unacceptable, celebrity pregnancy gossip has created a wave of idealization that is unparalleled in most forms of subliminal messaging.

Celebrity gossip attempts to make celebrities not just the standard of normal but also to embody a level of exceptionalism that every person should strive to achieve. Because celebrities are ideal people everything they do must be just a little bit better than what the masses do. So, "normal" women give birth to babies while celebrities seem to

¹¹³ Ibid.

be supposed to have twins. This is probably one of the strangest and most readily apparent forms of exceptionalism that celebrity gossip deploys. Celebrities appear to have super fertility that is indicative of their ideal human status. Celebrities are usually good looking and talented and embody the American dream. All of these perfect qualities are things the dominant culture would like to see in future generations, so rumors and news of celebrities having multiple babies reaffirm these qualities' ideal status. Celebrities are seen as special and having twins is seen as a double blessing and incredibly special. Gossip equates the specialness of the celebrity with the ability to have twins because twins are seen as a rare development in birth. Having twins does not depend on how attractive, wealthy or famous a celebrity is; the birth of twins is all based upon genetics. Despite the gossip industry having no verification celebrities have a genetic predisposition to twins, the majority of pregnant celebrities have been announced as being pregnant with twins. The more that we are supposed to admire a celebrity or be fascinated by them the more likely gossip will say that they are having twins. Jessica Alba was rumored to be pregnant with twins before the birth of her daughter.¹¹⁴ Ashlee Simpson's husband Pete Wentz created a stir when he referred to the baby as "them."¹¹⁵ Despite his verbal confirmation Wentz claims he was attempting to be vague since they did not know the sex of the baby nor want the media in on their private business.

¹¹⁴ "Jessica Alba Pregnant with Twins," *Oh No They Didn't!*, 21 February 2008, available from <http://community.livejournal.com/ohnotheydidnt/20668511.html>; accessed 10 November 2008.

¹¹⁵ "Ashlee and Pete expecting Twins," *Oh No They Didn't!*, 7 September 2008, available from <http://community.livejournal.com/ohnotheydidnt/27596868.html>; accessed 7 September 2008.

Simpson gave birth to a baby boy in late November of 2008 but regardless of the outcome the twins frenzy surrounding them elevated them to a new level of idolization.¹¹⁶

Sometimes the gossip industry's "twin fever" is accurate. *Star* magazine began the speculation on Angelina and Brad's second pregnancy and declared that they were having twins even before the announcement of pregnancy.¹¹⁷ Seven months later she did give birth to twins but not with out much speculation and gossip by the media for the entirety of her pregnancy. Jennifer Lopez encountered the same kind of rumors early on in her pregnancy, long before she gave birth to her twins.¹¹⁸ The birth of the Jolie-Pitt twins and the Lopez Anthony twins give credence to the idea that celebrities have exceptional babies and are exceptional human beings. Even better for the gossip industry than knowing a celebrity is giving birth to twins is having the ability to display the public's first look at a celebrity's child.

The headline given to the first pictures of a celebrity baby taken by a celebrity gossip outlet are entitled "first looks," or "first pictures," as if to claim these are the first anyone has seen or taken pictures of these children. In actuality it is the first time these pictures have been taken for capitalist gain and for exploitation of celebrity child imagery in order to propagate gender norms and conservative family values to the public. Similar to the inclusion the reader is to feel when they hear a celebrity is pregnant first, the first pictures of a star couple's child, or children, creates a sense of consumer intimacy. Just like the baby bump watch the first look pictures are intended to reinforce heteronormative

¹¹⁶ "Asslee in Labor 2" *PerezHilton.com*, 21 November 2008, available from <http://perezhilton.com/2008-11-21-asslee-in-labor-2>; accessed 21 November 2008.

¹¹⁷ "Exclusive: Angelina Pregnant With Twins," *Star Magazine*, 24 January 2008, available from <http://www.starmagazine.com/news/13791>; accessed 6 November 2008.

¹¹⁸ "That Pregnancy Glow," *PerezHilton.com*, 25 September 2008, available from <http://perezhilton.com/2007-09-25-that-pregnancy-glow>; accessed 25 September 2008.

and neoliberal values. “Pregnancy is a big game in the celeb[rity] news business, as indicated by the millions of dollars that *People* magazine has paid for exclusive photos of the children of Jennifer Lopez (reportedly \$6 million), Angelina Jolie (\$4 million for photos of baby Shiloh, now 2) and Christina Aguilera (\$1.5 million).”¹¹⁹ The celebrity news industry spends millions of dollars on first photos; in 2008 *People* magazine spent \$10 million on photos of Angelina Jolie’s twins, because of the amount of money the magazine will make in sales and also because of the substantial message and ad revenue that comes along with these posed photos. How families should look, behave and what new parents should think and say about their children are examples of the kinds of disciplinary imagery that is passed on to the public.

Christina Aguilera’s “first look” at baby Max has been discussed earlier in how it changed her image from a bad girl image to a good girl, but it had a much more substantial effect than that. Photographed with her husband Jordan, baby Max and their two dogs, this photo embodies what an American family should look like: cozied up on a couch, being well behaved and smiling. Christina, as with the majority of celebrity mothers in first look photos, is put together, air brushed, looks wide awake and rested, made-up, and in luxurious dresses and robes.¹²⁰ Aguilera maintains a sexually alluring though appropriate image while holding her infant son. Women are to maintain their sex appeal and good looks, despite giving birth to an infant only weeks earlier. Crying, lack of sleep, marital stress, and post-partum depression are non-existent for celebrity mothers, according to the celebrity gossip, and thus should be for all mothers.

¹¹⁹ Carlson. “Pregnant Celebrities Face an Army of Tattletales,” available online.

¹²⁰ “People Photo Exclusive: Christina Aguilera and Baby” *People Magazine*, available online.

Jennifer Lopez and Marc Anthony's family portrait of their twins took the ideal and normalized imagery of the American family to a new extreme. While Christina Aguilera wore jeans and husband Jordan wore sneakers, imagery of Lopez and Anthony showed the world that to be the perfect parents' everyday wardrobe, animals, and one baby were fine but not ideal. The imagery of new parents Jennifer Lopez and Marc Anthony are intended to create an ideal look at parenthood. Lopez created an elaborate nursery but unlike Aguilera this nursery is classic and not at all childlike. Silk and fur line the cribs and an elaborate crystal chandelier hangs above the babies' cribs. Lopez and Anthony are wearing designer dresses and suits. She wears heels while pushing a buggy.¹²¹ The elaborate home and outfits indicate that children should not interrupt your consumerism and should actually be another outlet for it. The luxurious imagery should also inspire the reader to buy the objects the Anthony family possesses; the best mother should have a cashmere lined crib, manage her babies' needs and her obligation to be beautiful with ease. The imagery of the Lopez Anthony home is the kind of unattainable ideal normalcy that keeps the masses actively in search of the next object that will make their lives more comparably normal/ideal.

While Lopez and Anthony appear to have it all, there are some things that have gone missing from their family photographs. Anthony has three children from two previous relationships. Despite being a mixed family these children are not included in any photographs in the *People* magazine spread of the family. While the other children do not appear to be slighted in Lopez and Anthony's real life the depiction here is of a single family all from the same genes and with out any half or step brothers and sisters.

¹²¹ "Ok! Magazine scans – Jennifer Lopez and her Twins," *Oh No They Didn't!*, 25 March 2008, available from <http://community.livejournal.com/ohnotheydidnt/21813247.html>; accessed 25 March 2008.

This unitary family image reminds us of the neoconservative values that are at play in celebrity gossip. The two parent and their only children dynamic coupled with 1940's and 1950's home decorative accents and vintage clothing harkens back to the "simpler" and more ideal time when the mother stayed home, the father worked, and divorce was unthinkable. The pictures of Jennifer Lopez and Marc Anthony's twins create imagery of consumerism, capitalism, and neoconservatism all through the guise of these famous celebrities in an attempt to draw in all Americans into the neoconservative capitalist American dream.

All other celebrity families fail to meet the level of interest that the gossip industry and public have for the Jolie-Pitt family. The Jolie-Pitt's, Hollywood's first bad while simultaneously good family, sell magazine covers, much like the bad-girls who receive a substantial amount of the celebrity gossip's attention. Angelina Jolie and Brad Pitt were two big stars having their first biological child when baby Shiloh was born in 2006. The pictures of her were the most coveted of all the celebrity babies of that year. When her twins were born two years later the price skyrocketed. The *People* cover photo is reminiscent of the other types of first look baby photographs: adoring parents with loving and proud smiles, and innocent calm newborn children. The photographs inside reflect the different worldview of the Jolie-Pitts who never seem to abide by the rules of celebrity imagery. Where Lopez and Anthony ignore their extended family, Jolie and Pitt embrace their other children, even their adopted ones, with each child featured prominently in at least one photo with a parent and twin.¹²² Jolie opts for a white loose-fitting nightgown, simplistic background with no nursery pictures, and minimal make-

¹²² Ibid

up.¹²³ Jolie and Pitt describe their world as chaos and the other children taking on adult roles, such as playing mommy. These photographs of the twins and the accompanying interview are not the norm for the pictures that *People* magazine has used to depict celebrity families. The Jolie-Pitt family is anything but a “normal” family. Jolie, and sometimes Pitt, are characterized as speak about their family indicate a life-style that is not normal, calm or serene. The public is not intended to idolize the Jolie-Pitt family because of Angelina Jolie’s troubled past and their non-normative status. Their life is intended to intrigue people much in the same way a very slow car wreck would with nothing ever being completely perfect. While they seem to revel in their chaotic life-style it is not intended to look productive, normal or ideal. This is not to say that the Jolie-Pitts are not celebrated celebrities. They are idolized to a large extent as one of the most glamorous couples in all of Hollywood, but their lives are characterizes as drama-filled and in many ways unhappy. Celebrity gossip sends the message that life is better as the Lopez Anthony’s than as the Jolie Pitt’s. Gendered norms and parenting norms do not end once a child is born. These norms dictate mother’s lives from before the child was conceived through the child’s development until after their child is fully grown. The past of the woman greatly affects her status as mother. If she is a “good-girl” then she her image will most likely be a “good” mother, but if she was a “bad-girl” she will undoubtedly be given the image of a “bad” mother, a scorned women and/or a lost cause. Gossip’s neoconservative ideology plays a strong role in the judgments gossip media make on women and their children.

¹²³ Ibid

Baby Blues

The birth of a newborn is intended to be a joyous time in a parent's life. Often times it is less than a desirable situation and sometimes it is a nightmare if the woman is suffering from postpartum depression. Postpartum depression continues to be one of the more taboo topics in our society despite its very real and serious effect on the women who have it and their families.

Angelina Jolie may always be viewed as a Hollywood bad girl. Her smoldering looks, uninhibited sexuality and use of the freedom of speech make her a controversial person in the world of celebrity gossip. Jolie's unwillingness to fight back against the most salacious of rumors makes her an ideal target for the gossip industry because they can say whatever they like and characterize her as the badest of bad-girls; she has yet to contradict or sue the gossip magazines or websites. Several sections in this paper have demonstrated the ways in which Angelina Jolie is portrayed to be the antithesis of the ideal woman and that extends into her life as a mother past the birth of her twins. Several magazines during late 2008 declared that Angelina Jolie was suffering from postpartum depression.¹²⁴ She was said to be starving herself, had a negative body image, and irrational violent mood swings. Here Angelina was represented as a danger to herself, her children and her husband. This negative imagery is intended to show the perils of being a bad girl during your young adult life and showing that they spill over into adulthood in very dramatic and volatile ways. Not only that but it shows that these bad girls will never

¹²⁴Castina, "Angelina Jolie Therapy for Post-Partum Depression," *Popcrunch.com*, 1 October 2008, available from <http://www.popcrunch.com/angelina-jolie-therapy-for-post-partum-depression/>; accessed 16 November 2008.

be good mothers and that good mothers do not have postpartum depression. Celebrity media darlings are never suspected to have postpartum depression because they are to be viewed as good mothers.

When talking about celebrity imagery and post-partum depression it is incredibly hard not to mention Brooke Shields and her infamous run-ins with Tom Cruise. Brooke Shields was the first major celebrity to talk about her battle with post-partum depression publicly. Brooke Shields wrote the book *Down Comes the Rain*, which was published in 2005 and voiced her battle with the illness and how the medication Paxil helped her to become the loving mother she is today. The original imagery of Brooke Shield's battle with post-partum depression was intended to convey to women that anyone can go through these struggles and that they are not alone. However, Tom Cruise changed Brooke's image and his own with one interview clip. While Tom Cruise was demonized for his criticism of Brooke Shields, psychiatry and anti-depression medication, his interview with Matt Lauer also enabled the world to view post-partum depression as something different than Shields' characterization. Post-partum depression imagery among celebrities changed from exclusively being focused on as a debilitating illness to being viewed as an illness but also a potential excuse for being a bad mother. Cruise even insinuated that the post-partum "blues" could be solved through vitamins and exercise.¹²⁵ The differing characterizations of females who have post-partum depression equate this disease with vulnerability, ineptitude, trauma, and stupidity. None of which are positive, normal or ideal characteristics for mothers. Despite the supposed well intentions of

¹²⁵ "In Tense Moment, Cruise Calls Lauer 'glib': 'War of the Worlds' Star Assaults Psychiatry, says he's 'really happy'" *MSNBC.com*, 28 June 2005, available from <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/8344309/>, accessed 4 December 2008.

Brooke Shields the imagery that she and her encounter with Tom Cruise created for women with post-partum depression was that of negativity and destruction.

Britney Spears is another celebrity who is viewed as a bad mother and said to have had experienced postpartum depression. When Britney entered Promises rehabilitation center for drug and alcohol abuse in 2007 everyone was convinced that her troubled life would calm down. Celebrity gossip claimed Britney had another opinion about the matter. She felt she had postpartum depression and was not an addict.¹²⁶ Representations of Britney Spears' erratic behavior were intended to capture a woman spiraling out of control from severe mental illness or drug addiction but not from post partum depression; her acts were viewed as manic and not depressive.¹²⁷ Here postpartum depression is seen as an excuse used by Britney to deny getting treatment for substance abuse or to just wish away her problems. Postpartum depression is a serious disease that celebrity gossip attempts to discredit or turn into a way to punish women for not adhering to society's standards of normalcy. The women who suffer from this disease are categorized as outcasts in society and must have done something in their past to be in this situation now.

Gwyneth Paltrow admitted to having what she perceives now as postpartum depression.¹²⁸ Her admission comes two years after the birth of her second child, Moses. Her admission is startling but to be viewed as brave. While several women have had

¹²⁶ "Britney Spears miserable in Rehab," *Us Weekly*, 7 March 2007, available from http://www.usmagazine.com/britney_her_rehab_troubles; accessed 16 November 2008.

¹²⁷ Comments Section "Britney's Post-Partum Struggle," *Oh No They Didn't!*, 27 February 2007, available from <http://community.livejournal.com/ohnotheydidnt/11099942.html>; accessed 16 November 2008.

¹²⁸ "Gwyneth Paltrow: I had Post-Partum Depression," *Us Weekly*, 16 April, 2008, available from <http://www.usmagazine.com/gwyneth-paltrow-i-battled-post-partum-depression>; accessed 16 November 2008.

postpartum depression and are viewed negatively her clarity on the situation, overcoming it on her own and talking about it only after she and her child are more grown is seen as positive. The way Gwyneth's depression is portrayed shows no violent tendencies or erratic behavior and she claims she felt "pessimistic."¹²⁹ This very calm and benign description is the acceptable form of postpartum depression as characterized by celebrity gossips reaction to Gwyneth's description versus the way the media portray Britney or Angelina.

The wave of obsession with celebrity babies and the lifestyle of their mothers is only the latest means of disciplinary power exerted over celebrity women and women of the masses and their bodies. This fascination with babies disguises the power that the dominant structure is exerting through the imagery of cute newborn babies and their mothers. Each star and their offspring is manipulated in a way that makes their image reinstate, either through a positive or negative example, the current heteronormative neoconservative consumerist agenda of the dominant order. Through this all women are taught how to behave, what to buy, what to wear, and how to raise their children, and celebrity women are degraded and dominated by the constant interference by the media into their lives. The control over women's lives through celebrity gossip does not seem to be going away anytime soon and as these children grow up and develop they too will be analyzed, picked apart, and become docile bodies for the sake of capitalism and the neoconservative order.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

Conclusion: Harmless Fun? Grappling with Celebrity Gossip's Values

Many people do and will probably continue to think of celebrity gossip is just a harmless piece of lowbrow American culture. In spite of or maybe because of this viewpoint celebrity gossip has begun to dominate American culture. *OhNoTheyDidn't!* has around 50,000 contributors (not counting the people who just read the gossip on the website), *PerezHilton.com* had over 228 million page views in October 2008 alone.¹³⁰ The *People* magazine that contained photographs of Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie's twins was the fourth highest seller in the magazine's history, selling 2.6 million copies.¹³¹ The profitability of celebrity gossip gives it the potential to have a dramatic effect on the way people live their lives.

As Americans continue to invest their time and money into the celebrity gossip industry its potential power only increases. In fact, for many teenage girls the power that celebrity gossip has is already taking a toll on their self-esteem, body image and their physical bodies. In record numbers teenagers are admitting to dieting, having eating disorders and low self-esteem. Many girls attribute their desire to have the perfect body

¹³⁰ "Thank You," *PerezHilton.com*, 3 November 2008, available from <http://perezhilton.com/2008-11-03-thank-you-7>, accessed 7 December 2008.

¹³¹ Women's Wear Daily Staff, "Brangelina's Sales," *Women's Wear Daily.com*, 22 August 2008, available from <http://www.wwd.com/media-news/fashion-memopad/brangelinas-sales-heading-to-the-conventions-tc-travel-closes-1722702>, accessed 7 December 2008.

to wishing to look like their favorite celebrity.¹³² The fashion world, celebrity gossip and the rest of the entertainment industry send out these messages of what body types are acceptable and not acceptable for young women. Women are told they need to control their unruly bodies in order to become beautiful and accepted. Celebrities feel the brunt of this as well because they are monitored by celebrity gossip almost every hour of every day. The more recent trend of celebrity gossip outlets focusing on the pregnant body enables the conservative ideology that has plagued women for years to control another aspect of their lives and bodies. Women are told they must have babies and how to become good mothers. Any deviation is met with much hostility by the gossip industry that disguises their messages as normal thoughts. The more normal and/or ideal it appears to have a two parent married household, biological children, a mother who has never had post-partum depression the more likely women will attempt to have that life in order to fit into society. Celebrity gossip infuses these norms into the entertainment industry making these values appear to be the only way to be accepted by society. Those expectations require the sacrifice of your whole life and body to those in control in an attempt to fit in; inevitably everyone will fail to become normal or ideal because the standards have been set at unreachable levels.

The way that celebrity images are used by the gossip industry and the dominant powers that control it are not just to effect women's perceptions of their bodies or the celebrities' activities. The articles, interviews, pictures and the advertisements that surround them are all indicating to women, and to some extent men, how they should behave in order to be considered a normal/productive/ideal member of our society. Much

¹³² Kilborne, "Killing Us Softly 3"

like the focus on celebrity babies, celebrity weddings are big money for the gossip industry. When super-star Beyonce married rap artist and mogul Jay-Z their wedding pictures were cover story material for only one gossip magazine with the others mentioning it only in passing.¹³³ The focus, by the gossip industry, on white women of privilege sets the standard for what is an ideal member of our society. High levels of consumerism, the image of “chastity,” and the idolization of strict gender roles are dictated as the norm, according to gossip. These ideals are impossible for most people to sustain, which is why gossip can reiterate them time and time again. Aspects of people’s private lives determine how normal or ideal they are. These same aspects of their private lives indicate how good of an American citizen they are. Neoconservative and neoliberal ideology combines the private and public to create standards of normality and citizenship that they control and that the public strives to meet. As society attempts to meet these unrealistic standards and fails the desire to meet those standards rises and the oppressive ideology that formulated them remains in power.

Celebrities are supposed to be the ideal that we, the masses, are intended to live up to; yet, the celebrities themselves are human and therefore not static representations of the ideal. That is why the celebrity as a person has to be separated from the celebrity as image. The gossip industry wants the public to associate with the celebrity image, which the gossip industry helps create, not with the celebrity as a person so that the public will think that imagery is attainable for themselves. The celebrities, as people, are faced with the same demands that they meet these idealized standards. Even more than that the celebrities are told that they are the ideal; this increases the pressure for them to succeed

¹³³“Tabloid Cover Wednesday,” *Oh No They Didn’t!*, 9 April 2008, available from <http://community.livejournal.com/ohnotheydidnt/22276904.html>, accessed 7 December 2008.

and increases the chances that they will fail. The oppressive forces that exert their power over the masses through celebrity gossip are using that same power on the celebrities they claim are perfect to create the standards society is supposed to live by.

The public's fascination with celebrity imagery, and therefore the conservative and capitalist ideology that oppresses both the celebrities and the public, may not be entirely easy to quash. The popularity of the gossip industry will not likely subside anytime soon. The Internet has made the speed of information quicker not just for the news industry but also for the gossip industry. There are hundreds of popular celebrity gossip websites, each with interactive features. Celebrity gossip shows exist on every major news network and celebrity gossip is now considered a newsworthy endeavor for even local news shows. Popularity allows celebrity gossip to continue to spread its idolization of conservative and capitalist values to a wider audience.

Gossip, for the most part, has been able to avoid criticism because of its incorporation of audience participation, its reliance on "sources" to appear neutral, and the use of long embedded stereotypes in order for their criticisms/idolization of certain celebrity imagery to seem commonplace. Gossip's ideology remains incredibly hidden behind its entertainment façade. The more people see gossip as just a fun read, or something to chat about with friends, the more the ideology behind gossip infiltrates the public's thoughts and controls their actions.

Pop culture is not just fluff entertainment. It is not certain if it ever has been. There have for many years, been messages and values transmitted to the public via their fondness for the entertainment that popular culture provides. Popular culture has long been used to sell products and an ideal lifestyle, with its encroachment upon Americans'

every day lives it has the potential to discipline the masses into believing in right-wing ideology that destroys the masses' ability to be individuals and have control over their own bodies. As celebrity gossip spread its wings onto the Internet, it has created a more interactive atmosphere with its readers. This interaction makes masses become a part of their own oppression; this interaction is essential to gossip's ideology being spread covertly and enables disciplinary power to take full effect on the masses.

The obsession with celebrity imagery has enabled celebrity gossip to set the standards for normal and ideal and subsequently make both out of reach of both the masses and the celebrities who supposedly set the standard. Further research needs to be done into how much celebrity gossip changes women's perceptions of themselves and exerts control over women and men to create standards of normality. In the mean time, it is important for readers of celebrity gossip to interrogate what they are reading and how it is making them view themselves and others. Celebrity gossip can be harmless fun as long as the people that read the gossip are aware of how celebrity images are being manipulated to create unrealistic standards that the readers are intended to adhere to. Understanding that popular culture, and especially celebrity gossip, is not devoid of imagery takes away much of the power the gossip industry, and through it the neoliberal and neoconservative ideologies that shape it. Recognizing the values that shape celebrity gossip, coupled with recognizing the separation between celebrity the image (which is constructed by the media and only as real as the public wishes it to be) and celebrity the person who is not a spectacle or perfect. Celebrities are members of the public who just happen to have a camera in their face twenty-four hours a day seven days a week. The

images we seen online and in magazines once those pictures are developed are only as powerful as we let them be.

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