FAMOUS FACES, CLASSIC STEREOTYPES: FEMALE REPRESENTATION IN THE
CELEBRITY GOSSIP MAGAZINE

by

LAUREN MICHELE REILLY

(Under the Direction of Nathaniel H. Kohn)

ABSTRACT

Celebrity gossip has increased exponentially in recent years, and so has the number of magazines reporting it. There is a lack of work that provides a close examination of celebrity gossip magazines. This study uses a textual analysis, informed by the conceptual framework of cultural studies and feminist media studies, to examine the portrayal of female celebrities in these magazines. Findings indicate that a few emerging themes in the magazine show a regressive, stereotypical portrayal of women. These themes include the scrutiny and monitoring of female bodies, including body weight and pregnancy; and an emphasis on gender norms and stereotypes, especially regarding marriage and family. This study discusses how the magazine participates in meaning-making and how it presents women through a lens of dominant ideologies.

INDEX WORDS: Celebrity, *InTouch, Life&Style*, Feminist Media Studies, Cultural Studies, Women’s Magazines, Celebrity Culture, Femininity, Gender, Stereotypes, Representation, Ideology
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Tabloids and celebrity gossip magazines are by no means a new phenomenon, but they have been going through a period of growth and metamorphosis in recent years, presumably in response to a variety of changes in the landscape of popular culture – changes that have lead to an increase in gossip-worthy celebrities. No longer is the focus primarily on movie stars, seasoned pop icons, and the royal family.

One possible cause for this change may be the proliferation of ‘bubble gum pop’ in the landscape of popular music. Grunge and alternative, the edgy, experimental, and lyrically thoughtful genres that swept the early nineties gave way to the ‘boy bands’ and ‘pop princesses’ that topped the charts in the latter part of the decade and through the early years of the 21st century. Because image-making is crucial to the success of acts such as ‘nSync and Britney Spears, they are highly public figures, lending to a heightened interest in their off-stage activities. Another new development in the area of celebrity is the rapid increase in reality television, which quickly turns ‘everyday people’ into heavily scrutinized public figures.¹ Reality television also gave birth to the newest celebrity – the ‘celebutante’ – daughters of the rich and famous, whose appearance in television programs (such as hotel heiress Paris Hilton and singer Lionel Ritchie’s daughter Nicole Ritchie in The Simple Life) and excessive high-profile partying and dating earned them fame and recognition outside of the standard forms of achieving celebrity status.

¹ In Celebrity Sells, Hamish Pringle similarly states, “The phenomenon of reality of TV, which makes celebrities out of ordinary people and also gives faded celebrities the opportunity to redeem themselves, is a global one.” Pringle, Hamish, Celebrity Sells (Chinchester: John Wiley & Sons, 2004), 8.
The history of the two magazines of interest in this study, *Life&Style* and *InTouch* is a fascinating one. Prior to their existence, there was a grouping of newsstand and supermarket check-out line regulars that ranged from the absurd and extremely low-brow *Star* and *National Enquirer* with their newsprint-style paper, to the glossier and more fashion-oriented *US Weekly*, to *People*, whose variety in coverage (news, celebrities, human interest, etc.) made it seem less ‘tabloid’-like and more like a category in and of itself. These discrepancies among such magazines narrowed after the initial success of *InTouch*, whose glossy paper and authentic-looking celebrity photos put it in the class of *US Weekly* and *People*, while the focus on the personal lives of celebrities and paparazzi photos were more similar to *Star* and *National Enquirer*.

The other magazines, seeing the rapid success of *InTouch*, scrambled to alter their images. *US Weekly* started to focus on getting exclusive stories about the private lives of celebrities, whereas *Star* turned itself into a glossy, more ‘respectable’ looking celebrity gossip magazine. Even *People*, despite its success and reputation, started generating more cover stories about celebrities, a change from their higher frequency of human interest stories involving ‘everyday’ people and popular news stories. Bauer publications, the creator of *InTouch*, also responded to the rapid success by releasing *Life&Style*, a publication very similar to *InTouch*, but with an extra emphasis on celebrity fashion. Despite their slightly different approaches, the two sister publications have a tendency to have matching cover stories each week – if one focuses on the break-up of a high profile celebrity couple, for instance, it is highly likely the other will focus on the same story.

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3 www.baueradsales.com
To better illuminate the popularity of these two magazines, we need to look at the readership demographics. According to the Bauer Publications advertising sales media kit, *InTouch’s* audience of 3,030,000 is 87% female and split nearly half between single and married readers. The median household income is $64,727, and 64.3% of readers have had some college education. The median reader age is 29.6 years of age, but the age breakdown indicates that a variety of age groups read the magazine – the 18-24, 25-34, and 35-49 age groupings all hover closely around 1,000,000 readers – and nearly all readers are employed. *Life&Style’s* readership demographics are nearly identical, with a slight drop in the percentage of readers 35-49. This difference could possibly be attributed to the aspects of *Life&Style* that focus on young and trendy fashion.

An additional purpose of pointing out the demographics is to add validity to my choice of this particular research topic. The term ‘gossip’ is often referred to with a dismissive, negative connotation, and is primarily indicated as a female activity. It is no surprise, then, that newsstand gossip magazines and tabloids have traditionally focused their content on the female demographic, primarily undereducated and un/underemployed women. With the demographics of *InTouch* and *Life&Style* reflecting an extremely large, college-educated, and gainfully employed readership from a variety of age brackets, the elitist myth that intelligent, successful women do not participate in the consumption of celebrity gossip magazines can no longer be asserted. This expansion of readership makes this a worthy topic of study – with so many

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6 “The demo of tabs has remained relatively static over the years. The typical reader of the *Enquirer* and *Star*, according to Mediamark Research, Inc. (MRI), remains a grocery shopping mom in her late 30’s to early 40’s with a high school education and household income in the upper 30’s to mid 40’s.” Case, Tony, “Check-Point Bonnie,” *American Demographics*, 1 October, 2003.
women reading these magazines, what kinds of messages does it send to women of the 21st century? What kind of feminine ideals do they reinforce and project to this vast audience?

**LITERATURE REVIEW**

Scholarly work on these specific titles has not yet been conducted. There is also very little research on the genre of gossip magazines and tabloids. In addition, when compared to other forms of media, studies on women’s magazines are rare. Therefore, this literature review is broken down into three sections that best relate to this topic: mainstream articles about celebrity gossip magazines, scholarly work on celebrity culture, and scholarly work on women’s magazines.

**Mainstream Media Coverage**

Most mainstream articles about celebrity gossip magazines are concerned with their rapid economic growth in recent years, changes in the structure of the traditional tabloid format, and the audiences they cater to. In a September 23rd, 2005 article for the *Washington Post*, staff writer Ariana Eunjung Cha remarks how coverage of anything related to the demise of the marriage between celebrities Jennifer Aniston and Brad Pitt “qualified as a major event…a type of news once relegated to cheap tabloids but now reshaping the media industry.”

She goes on to explain that the celebrity gossip magazines “have soared in popularity, even as the circulations of newspapers, business weeklies, and practically every other print

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publication have been failing.”

In her interviews with editors from such publications, there is an emphasis on ‘doing the right thing’ in terms of obtaining photographs and stories, as well as correcting false information. She implies that this appears to be an attempt at seeming more reputable, fighting the general stigma attached to gossip magazines and tabloids.

In describing the editor of *Us Weekly*, she refers to her subject as “a petite, 5-foot-2 fashionista with endless energy…educated at Columbia University.” Cha cites this description as what the editor calls the “cool girl” – the target demographic for such magazines – “someone who is 31, well-educated, and makes $85,000 or more a year.”

In a Slate.com article that discusses the authenticity of coverage of the relationship between celebrities Tom Cruise and Katie Holmes, author Jack Schafer describes depictions of celebrity life in these magazines as “a limited and predictable set of story lines.”

He discusses these story lines as a formulaic process and that it prevails because “1) it speaks to basic human obsessions 2) because the breeding-age "stars" the magazines showcase benefit professionally from all the publicity, and 3) because the stories follow a predictable, steady pattern as comforting to the reader as a soft rain on the rooftop at night.”

Such a description of the storylines is important to this study because of the aspects of everyday life that the celebrity gossip magazines replicate, and, more importantly, how, in doing so, they also replicate prescribed notions of the female role in society.

In her January 1st, 2006 article, Melissa Fletcher Stoeltje discusses the celebrity gossip magazine phenomenon with two university professors and a magazine editor, looking for

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8 Ibid.
9 Ibid.
10 Ibid.
12 Ibid.
answers as to where this boom in celebrity fascination stems from. Upon consulting Samir Husni of the University of Mississippi, the following speculations are asserted:

Husni says the explosion in celebrity magazines is linked to an explosion in another media – namely, television, with its countless cable channels and rash of celebrity-oriented programming...our appetite gets whetted on the small screen, then the magazines step in...given the glut and America’s tiny attention span...the shelf life of celebrity is much shorter...13

Further speculation concludes that despite the fact that the magazines are “incredibly redundant...the same faces grace the same covers at the same time,” we still consume them because with “the increased familiarity, the celebrities have become like brothers and sisters to us.” It is also stated that regularly catching up on celebrity news “links us as a people...provides us with a sense of community in our increasingly disjointed, post-9/11 times.” The article also discusses the use of these magazines as an escape, as well as a replacement for fictional narratives – the rise in reality television being a possible cause for this replacement.14

A 2003 USA Today article by Ann Oldenburg discusses the recent upsurge in celebrity magazines, and discusses the change from the stigmatized ‘trashy’ tabloid to the new current forms that InTouch and Life&Style more closely represent. It discusses Bonnie Fuller, former US Weekly editor and current editorial director of American Media Inc., purveyors of both Star and the National Enquirer. It breaks down the changes in three of InTouch’s competitors (this article is pre-Life&Style) and also describes InTouch’s approach:

The ripple effect

• People magazine (circulation: 3.6 million), once the reigning ruler of celebrity coverage, found itself facing stiff competition this year. And so editor Martha Nelson ordered a redesign, cutting back on the real-people stories and beefing up the star packages.
• Us, under Min (circulation: 1.1 million), has kept to Fuller’s winning photo-driven, info-bite focus, making only a few “tweaks,” as she has put it.

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14 Ibid.
• *In Touch*, which launched in October 2002 with a circulation of 250,000, just about doubled its sales in a year. Its mission: highlighting reality stars and tackling broader cover concepts such as plastic surgery and diet "secrets" of the stars.

• *Star* (circulation: 1.3 million) evolved through the second half of the year under Fuller, who made it much slicker. She added more fashion and beauty to its reports. Fuller's prediction for the magazine when she took the job: *Star* will be "stronger than ever."^{15}

Another article from *USA Today.com* reports on the introduction of the British celebrity gossip magazine, *OK!* into the American market. Magazines that have been doing well for some time by reporting celebrity gossip in England have been attempting to capitalize on the burgeoning US market, and this article goes on to describe how this particular magazine operates, as well as how it has altered itself to be more appealing to American readers. The chart on the following page is very useful in that it describes both the huge circulation numbers of these magazines, as well as their individual approaches to celebrity gossip. It also provides a very handy side-by-side comparison of August 2005 cover-stories for each one.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source: Audit Bureau of Circulation, figures for July-December 2004&lt;sup&gt;16&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
<th>'OK!'</th>
<th>'People'</th>
<th>'Us Weekly'</th>
<th>'Star'</th>
<th>'Celebrity Living'</th>
<th>'In Touch'</th>
<th>'Life &amp; Style'</th>
<th>'Inside TV'</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Weekly circulation</td>
<td>1.3 million</td>
<td>3.6 million</td>
<td>1.5 million</td>
<td>1.3 million</td>
<td>Not yet measured; rate base of 150,000</td>
<td>1 million</td>
<td>500,000 (estimate)</td>
<td>400,000 rate base</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Editor</td>
<td>Sarah Ivens</td>
<td>Martha Nelson</td>
<td>Janice Min</td>
<td>Joe Dolce</td>
<td>Kelli Delaney</td>
<td>Richard Spencer</td>
<td>Sheryl Berk</td>
<td>Steve LeGrice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current cover story</td>
<td>Exclusive interview and photo shoot with pop star Jessica Simpson</td>
<td>&quot;Just Married! Sandra Bullock weds TV tough guy Jesse James in a surprise ceremony&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;Vanity Fair bombshell! Jen tells all!&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;Angelina's shocking weight loss!&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;Battle of the Hot Bodies!&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;Did she (Jessica Simpson) have plastic surgery?&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;Happier Alone!&quot; (about Jennifer Aniston and Jessica Simpson)</td>
<td>&quot;Best, worst and barely dressed&quot;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Featured attraction | First issue was unavailable for review, but editors provided highlights of the cover story. Simpson says that while kids are not in the picture now, "I definitely want to adopt, no ifs, ands or buts."
| Scoop:|

"Star Tracks," "Style Watch"
| Scoop: |

"Stars — They're just like us!"
"Fashion police," "The Red Carpet"
| Scoop: |

"Couples News: Who's making up, breaking up and hooking up in Hollywood this week"
| Scoop: |

"10 Trends $20 & Under,"
"Two-Faced Star," "Star Obsession"
| Scoop: |

"Is it true? The Real Story Behind the Hottest Gossip"
| Scoop: |

"Is it Real or Faux?"
"Does the Show Fit?"
| Scoop: |

"How Much Did They Spend?"

"This Just In," "Who's Wearing What"

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<sup>16</sup> Soriano, Cesar G., “British Mag Makes Scene,” *USA Today.com*, 2 August, 2005
As mentioned earlier, the bulk of mainstream press coverage of celebrity gossip magazines deal with the shifts and changes in the industry, as well as a search for explanations for not only these changes, but the apparent surge in popularity of these magazines. Conclusions such as that of finding solace and community in a post 9-11 world, and, as I would add, an increasingly globalized world, are compelling insights into this increased popularity. For the most part, thought, mainstream coverage favors the business side of the industry, citing circulation numbers, shifting editorial directions, and an increase in the quality of the product. Their main contribution to this study, therefore, is a justification for an interest in this topic (the sheer quantity of both the magazines and popular press coverage of them), and also in providing descriptions of the magazines, their markets, and their current format.

**Celebrity Culture**

In the public sphere, a cluster of individuals are given greater presence and a wider scope of activity and agency than are those who make up the rest of the population. They are allowed to move on the public stage while the rest of us watch. They are allowed to express themselves quite individually and idiosyncratically while the rest of the members of the population are constructed as demographic aggregates. We tend to call these overtly public individuals *celebrities*.

In his study of celebrities in modern culture, P. David Marshall documents three different ‘types’ of celebrities and the kind of coverage they receive. *Celebrity and Power: Fame in Contemporary Culture* uses a combination of semiotics (celebrity as ‘sign’) and cultural studies to explore the landscape of celebrity coverage in the media. His use of cultural studies and his explanation of its importance in a study on celebrity culture is pertinent to this study. Cultural

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studies allows him to explore the negotiation between the production side of celebrity culture and the audience consumption and interpretation of what is presented:

Cultural studies offers the current project a useful understanding of the collective and its role in the formation of such cultural images as celebrities. The concept of negotiation and struggle provides a metaphor that can aid in the deconstruction of the ideologies around leaders and celebrities. The celebrity is a negotiated “terrain” of significance. To a great degree, the celebrity is a production of the dominant culture. It is produced by a commodity system of cultural production and is produced with the intentions of leading and/or representing. Nevertheless, the celebrity’s meaning is constructed by the audience…Audience members actively work on the presentation of the celebrity in order to make it fit into their everyday experiences. ¹⁸

Particularly important to this study is the concept of audience use of celebrity news and information to make sense of everyday life and experiences. Marshall’s study, conducted in 1997, predates the more recent shift in celebrity magazines, where the everyday life of the celebrity is blatantly presented, leaving the audience with less responsibility to ‘actively work’ on coverage of celebrity news, making the connection to their everyday lives already spelled out for them. Celebrity news blurs the line between fictional world they operate in (films, television, music, high fashion) and reality – a negotiation is needed to make sense of this breakdown of boundaries, especially as celebrity coverage has become increasingly banal and ordinary. According to Marshall:

The celebrity sign effectively contains this tension between authentic and false cultural value. In its simultaneous embodiment of media construction, audience construction, and the real, living and breathing human being, the celebrity sign negotiates the competing and contradictory definitions of its own significance. ¹⁹

Also of importance in Marshall’s study on celebrity is his emphasis on celebrity coverage acting as a normative mechanism for the audience to apply to their own lives. Citing the work of Fransesco Alberoini, he states that stars, because of “their apparent accessibility and openness to

¹⁸ Ibid, 47.
¹⁹ Ibid, xi.
the larger community” they are, “in part, a transitional phenomenon that identifies the need of the general community for an avenue through which to discuss issues of morality…that are insufficiently or ineffectively handled in the rational sphere of evaluating political power elites.”

Because the private lives of politically powerful individuals are kept relatively private, the celebrities become representatives of the modern ideals of proper behavior. We therefore see two sides of the star, that which “is granted economic power to fabricate a lifestyle of wealth and leisure through the income earned from film releases” and that which is “chronicled to demonstrate the star’s relationship to the normative center of society.”

This chronicling of an individual’s life for moral lessons is further exacerbated by the editorial side of documenting their every move – it becomes much easier to paint over generalized, black and white story themes to get the moral messages across. This becomes an easy task for those writing narratives about stars’ personal lives, because the “interchangeability of celebrities means that no celebrity possesses any meaning of consequence.” This lack of meaning allows meaning to be tagged onto the name of the celebrity, with little regard for the complexity of the actual individual. This is where Marshall’s use of semiotics directly relates with some of the issues under analysis in this study:

Several significant consequences arise from relabeling the celebrity as sign. First, as a sign, the celebrity sheds its own subjectivity and individuality and becomes an organizing structure for conventionalized meaning. Like the sign, the celebrity represents something other than itself. The material reality of the celebrity sign – that is, the actual person who is at the core of the representation – disappears into a cultural formation of meaning. Celebrity signs represent personalities – more specifically, personalities that are given heightened cultural significance within the social world.

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20 Ibid, 5.
21 Ibid.
22 Ibid, 118.
23 Ibid, 11.
24 Ibid, 57.
What Marshall refers to as the ‘celebrity sign’ is a hyperbolized and simplified set of descriptions and personality traits of a particular celebrity. It will be later argued in this study that the use of such generalized representations of particular celebrities are emphasize normative behavioral expectations, especially with regards to female celebrities featured in celebrity magazines.

One ‘type’ of celebrity that Marshall analyzes is the “teen idol.” According to Marshall, “music has often been less central to these individual’s profitability as celebrities than have other products.” Less is a musical product being offered, but a highly calculated image cultivated through a variety of media outlets. On top of this, the focus of a medium such as celebrity magazines furthers this image because of its predominantly female audience and the types of celebrities that are assumed to be of importance to women. This creates a divide between the musical artists that are featured in the magazines and those who are not. According to Marshall:

Rock music in general also functions as a masculinized discourse that in its self-criticism often tries to purge the feminized love song from the lexicon of what constitutes good popular music. Derogatory terms such as bubblegum and teenybopper music are used to separate the female-constructed popular music audience from the mainstream of male rock culture.26

Music celebrities featured in InTouch and Life&Style generally fall into this ‘female-constructed’ popular music genre. The featuring of ‘teen idol’ types in the celebrity magazine is then a result of three items: these celebrities need their images emblazoned everywhere, and are therefore more public figures to begin with; they tend to cater to a female audience, just as the magazines

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26 Ibid, 179.
do; and their recent resurfacing onto the popular music landscape nearly parallels the recent proliferation of and changes in celebrity gossip magazines.\(^{27}\)

Unlike some ‘teen idols’ from the past (and the example featured in Marshall’s book), many of those who exploded onto the music scene in the late 1990’s have managed to remain in the limelight into their early and mid-twenties, and are featured as often (and sometimes more often) than film stars and other celebrities. This creates a sort of ‘new breed’ of teen idol – those that are of concern to adults and teenagers alike. What also differs in the nine years after Celebrity and Power’s publication are the previously documented changes in the quantity, quality, layout, and editorial content of celebrity gossip magazines.

Marshall discusses, for instance, the discrepancies in the way film star Tom Cruise is covered in People and US in contrast with National Enquirer. The former provided interview-style coverage that attempts to “ensure the compliance of the stars on whom they produce feature articles” by providing a tour of his home and by attempting to “determine the validity of rumors and gossip that have circulated about the star, as a function of the more respectable entertainment magazines is to operate as more legitimate sources of knowledge than the supermarket tabloids.”\(^{28}\)

The National Enquirer story is said to be “more uncensored, less controlled by the star himself.” He argues that this and other ‘supermarket tabloids’ use secondhand information and unsolicited photos that are generally of a lesser quality than, say, the “glossy US feature.”

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\(^{27}\) Marshall’s study, conducted in 1997, came before this ‘resurfacing’; the ‘teen idols’ under discussion in his book are the New Kids on the Block, a popular music act in the late 80’s- very early 90’s. In the years following their disappearance from the popular music landscape, music was more focused on rock and hip-hop; after the publication of Marshall’s book, the ‘teen idol’ began to resurface in exponential numbers – ‘boy bands’ and ‘pop princesses’ such as ‘NSync, Backstreet Boys, Britney Spears, Christina Aguilera, Jessica Simpson, etc. This started in the late nineties and continues, though to a slightly lesser extent, today.

\(^{28}\) Marshall, 109.
Therefore, according to Marshall, the “Enquirer photos allow us entry into the private world of Cruise.”

Such discrepancies between these two ‘types’ of gossip magazines have blurred substantially, and will presumably continue to do so (as the new editor for Star and National Enquirer has done for Star and has implied a similar plan for National Enquirer).

Magazines such as InTouch and Life&Style have created a sort of hybrid between the two – they provide candid, unsolicited shots and secondhand information, but also try to ensure the accuracy of such information as much as possible (as mentioned earlier). Nearly all photographs are glossy and professional looking, and at least one sort of ‘star at home’ article where an interview with the actual star takes place is provided. Writing about celebrity gossip magazines, therefore, slightly less than a decade after Marshall’s book was printed marks an altered and ever-changing terrain with regards to celebrity culture.

S. Elizabeth Bird’s For Enquiring Minds: A Cultural Study of Supermarket Tabloids assesses the popularity of supermarket tabloids in the 1980’s. Though the magazines she covers are markedly different than the current manifestations of this genre, much of her insight is still highly relevant to a study of today’s celebrity gossip magazines. She documents the history of the tabloid, and traces its roots back to the seventeenth century, where, in Europe and America, “broadside ballads and newsbooks flourished, packed with tales of strange and wonderful happenings – murders, natural disasters, unusual births, and omens.” She follows the development of the tabloid throughout the centuries, citing its relationship with the penny press

29 Ibid.
30 Ibid.
and yellow journalism, eventually leading up to the development of the most famous of tabloids, the *National Enquirer*.

She goes on to examine the content of the tabloid, the production of the tabloid, and the consumption of the tabloid. The consumption chapter is also supplemented by a chapter entitled “Gendered Readings,” which is of particular interest in this study. The main difference between the way men and women read tabloid stories is that men read for information, whereas women read them “more personally…empathizing with the subjects…using the stories to discuss values and problems.”

Bird assesses that this difference is most evident in the reading of celebrity stories. Most men that she interviewed found celebrity stories to be the most dismissive, and even if they are not being completely truthful when they claim they do not read these particular stories, “to discuss it is just not ‘done.’” In contrast, women readers seemed very interested in celebrities, and “become very involved with them, relating to them at a personal level.” This interaction is deemed a result of the intertextuality of a celebrity, where “the images of celebrities are constructed not only through the many layers of narrative about their professional and personal lives – narratives constructed in the media and in interpersonal gossip.” These magazines also participate in information dissemination that operates on a more emotional level than, say, the *New York Times*; they “appeal to a private, narrowly bounded world that is the experience of women more than men.” Their focus values family, the home, and personal relationships, and emphasizes that “stars need love and family too, and that money does not buy happiness.”

Bird concludes her study with the idea that tabloids, despite their reputation, “cast themselves as guardians of a particular kind of moral code that sits well with their regular

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32 Ibid, 147.
33 Ibid, 152-153.
34 Ibid, 160.
readers.” They retell formulaic stories that appeal to their readers, and this is what keeps them selling week after week. Unlike other forms of media, tabloids “are relatively independent of large advertisers, who see their readers as undesirable targets…there is, therefore, an unusually close fit between the world view portrayed in the papers and that of their readers.”

 Though the relationship between content and a reader’s worldview are so close, Bird believes that readers interpret the texts more actively than tabloid readers are generally given credit for, and feels that they serve a unique purpose – “the tabloid charms its readers and beckons them into a world where life is dangerous and exciting…when the journey is done, it soothes them with assurance that, be it ever so humble, there really is no place like home.”

 In an article entitled “Class and the Feminine Excess: The Strange Case of Anna Nicole Smith,” Jeffrey A. Brown analyzes media coverage and criticism of small-town-exotic-dancer-turned-
*Playboy*-playmate-of-the-year-turned-supermodel-turned-wealthy-heiress-turned-reality-
TV-star Anna Nicole Smith. He analyzes the portrayal of Smith in terms of both class and body, and how these inadvertently tie together in the coverage of this celebrity to emphasize normative gender behavior and appearance. He describes Smith as being “repeatedly portrayed as an uneducated, Southern, small-town, unwed mother whose only marketable skill is taking off her clothes,” and indicates that despite the accuracy of such depictions, she is “publicly marked as a symbol of all things undesirable or threatening to dominant norms.”

 According to Brown, the main focus of media attention on Smith was her alleged ‘gold-digger’ mentality (she married an elderly millionaire and subsequently fought in a court battle over his estate after his death) and her voluptuous figure that made her a successful centerfold

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36 Ibid, 209.
and jeans model. Brown cites Foucault’s notion of the body as “a primary cite of social control”38 in the scrutiny of Smith’s weight gains and losses. Towing the line between physical perfection and total imperfection is an inevitable task for most female celebrities, especially those considered ‘curvy’ or ‘well-endowed.’ Smith was able to “masquerade as the classic, bourgeois body,” but as her public image increased it became apparent to audiences that there “was already a hint of another body lurking just below the surface, a body threatening to transcend the boundaries of slender self-containment, of becoming more corporeal than ethereal.” Her size, which garnered her initial success, “veered away from the petite ideals of womanliness,”39 and put her at risk of veering far away enough to represent the antithesis of the ideal female body.

As a result, any weight struggles that Smith experienced (presumably as a result of greater scrutiny of her size) were highly publicized, and came to assist in ‘categorizing’ her into whatever personality type most suitably matched her appearance. Verbs used to describe the figure that initially made her famous reflected the consensus “that her status as an ideal was slightly off-center from the very start.”40 In the media, the super-skinny models stood “perilously close to the ‘too skinny’ border of the physical ideal,” and Smith “ventured threateningly close to the ‘too fat’ border.”41 The slim (but not too slim) body ideal represents self-control and class standing. Therefore, Smith’s overall portrayal shifted depending on her ability to maintain what Brown refers to as the “socially acceptable body” that she “first became

38 Ibid.
39 Ibid, 80.
40 Ibid.
41 Ibid.
The link between class and adherence to physical norms is implied in the coverage of Smith’s past:

When she was thin her background was characterized as sweetly Southern and small town. Her success was the beauty industry equivalent of a Horatio Alger story whereby she overcame poverty and an early pregnancy to ascend the heights of the modeling world. After Smith ‘came out’ as fat, and by implication lazy, careless and self-indulgent, that same background was used as evidence against her. She was now depicted as a slutty hick who dropped out of school because she was too stupid to be good at anything but sex. Her earlier career as a stripper was repeatedly brought up in media accounts of her life, as was her arrest for drunk and disorderly behavior years earlier in Houston.*

This selective use of factual information is a key component of today’s celebrity gossip magazine. The emphasis on obtaining ‘factual’ information means that stories have to avoid embellishment and focus on using certifiable ‘sources’ during the gossip-gathering process. However, it is a very selective and careful use of such information that can illustrate whether the star in question is to be portrayed as a model of behavior or a cautionary tale. Also used in celebrity gossip magazines is the side-by-side comparison pictures, namely, the ‘before’ and ‘after’ pictures. Brown cites these as “clear examples for readers of which feminine body should be scorned and which should be emulated.”

Brown’s case study of Anna Nicole Smith is highly pertinent to additional celebrity examples later on in this study, and many of the themes such as body-size maintenance and shifting notions of ‘acceptable’ behavior as a way to neatly categorize the female celebrity will be extensively discussed.

With a less critical, more practical approach, *Celebrity Sells*, by Hamish Pringle discusses celebrity as a guide for advertisers to understand the highly profitable world of celebrity endorsements, though the first section gives a fairly useful account of celebrity culture as it relates to everyday life. In attempting to understand the appeal of the celebrity, Pringle states

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42 Ibid, 79.
43 Ibid, 83.
44 p. 87
that as “celebrities change their hairstyle, their mode of dress, their partners, their houses, and have their children, they are in a sense acting out a parallel life to which people can relate, aspire, and imitate.”

This could perhaps account for some celebrity magazines’ focus on these specific, more banal aspects of celebrity life that ordinary citizens can adapt and take on more easily and acceptably than some of the more outlandish celebrity behavior.

It is also noted by Pringle that the proliferation of celebrity coverage may simply have to do with mere access. He states that the “increased opportunities to glimpse into their private lives via intrusive media, means that people can get even closer to their idols and spend considerable sums of money doing so.” This increased access to even the smallest minutiae of a celebrity’s life can be utilized by the media however they see fit:

- On the way up the media lionize them, discover everything about them and present it to the public for their scrutiny and approbation. On the way down, the same relentless process is at work, but this time all the foibles, weaknesses, indiscretions, and even illegal acts are produced on a plate and spotlighted for the same public to devour.

This can be seen in the aforementioned case of Anna Nicole Smith, where the details of her past became increasingly negative based on the unfavorable change in her public image through weight gain. Change in physical appearance is not the only way the media illuminates the negative details of the celebrity’s life, and their divulgence of negative details can sometimes contribute a celebrity’s downfall, making the process a rather vicious cycle for some celebrities.

The body of literature on celebrity culture surveyed here all attempt to negotiate the space between the celebrity and the consumer of celebrity culture. They all, though in different ways, attempt to find the ways in which information about celebrities provides meaning and importance in the daily lives of ‘ordinary’ people. What we see is the way celebrities are

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46 Ibid, 5.
essentially ‘blank canvases’ onto which ideologies, concepts, and sentiments are painted, and the ways in which these generated images are used to sell magazines, individual celebrities, and an overly-generalized reconciliation between popular culture and everyday life.

**Women’s Magazines**

In comparison to the long history of female centered magazines, as well as the enormity of titles that focus specifically on women, there is little research on the women’s magazine. According to a Sammye Johnson’s chapter in *Women in Mass Communication: 2nd Edition*, academic research “about magazines, whether involving magazine journalism or the magazine publishing industry, has been scanty” and that “magazine research simply has lagged far behind the work being done on other aspects of the mass media by mass communication researchers.”

Beyond the limited body of work in mass media research on magazines, according to Johnson, is the even further limited examination of magazines specific to women and gender, “despite the pivotal role of gender in editorial positions and advertising prospects for magazines in general”. In other words, as Johnson summarizes this issue, “compounding the lack of magazine research has been a neglect of gender roles.”

Such observations are a little more than surprising. In the seminal piece that many cite as having sparked the second wave feminist revolution of the late sixties and early seventies – *The Feminine Mystique* – Betty Friedan sharply criticizes and places much of the blame “the problem that has no name” experienced by the housewives she observes onto the magazine industry.

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49 Ibid, p. 147.
Friedan, a former magazine writer herself, points out the dramatic shift from career-woman laden fictional stories from the thirties and forties to housewife-oriented nonfiction of the fifties. She concludes of the latter publications:

The image of woman that emerges from this big, pretty magazine is young and frivolous, almost childlike; fluffy and feminine; passive; gaily content in a world of bedroom and kitchen, sex, babies, and home...the only goal a woman is permitted is the pursuit of a man. It is crammed full of food, clothing, cosmetics, furniture, and the physical bodies of young women...in the magazine image, women do no work except housework and work to keep their bodies beautiful and to get and keep a man.\footnote{Friedan, Betty, \textit{The Feminine Mystique} (New York: Dell, 1963), 30.}

Friedan goes on to discuss the whirlwind of major current events taking place at the time she was writing this book that were never even mentioned in a popular women’s magazine. She cites this despite the fact that, of the millions of American women reading this magazine, “almost all of whom have been through high school and nearly half to college.”\footnote{Ibid, 31.}

Particularly important to this study is when Friedan discusses what she refers to as the “one ‘career woman’ who was always welcome in the pages of women’s magazines,” the actress.\footnote{Ibid, 46.} Just as the image of the American woman in the women’s magazines shifted after the second World War, so did that of the Hollywood starlet – “from a complex individual of fiery temper, inner depth, and a mysterious blend of spirit and sexuality, to a sexual object, a babyface bride, or a housewife.”\footnote{Ibid, 47.} Though one would suspect that the average reader would want to learn about the exciting lifestyle and rewarding career of a Hollywood celebrity, they were often instead portrayed as homemakers. The magazines “never showed her doing or enjoying her work as an actress, unless she eventually paid for it by losing her husband or her child, or
otherwise admitting failure as a woman.” Similar observations about Life & Style and InTouch in will be discussed in the analysis portion of this study.

In closing her discussion of the magazine industry’s shift of female image production through the 1950’s, Friedan summarizes:

I helped create this image. I have watched American women for fifteen years try to conform to it. But I can no loner deny my own knowledge of its terrible implications. It is not a harmless image. There may be no psychological terms for the harm it is doing. But what happens when women try to live according to an image that makes them deny their minds? What happens when women grow up in an image that makes them deny the reality of the changing world? Such strong implications about one form of media from one of the most influential feminist books in history would presumably influence later generations to monitor the gender messages being put forth by this particular form of media. Instead, scholarly work on television and other forms of mass communication are far more prevalent and more likely to be discussed when studying gender and the media. Though obviously dated, Friedan’s work contributed greatly to this research on women’s magazines, by delving deeply into the meaning production of the women’s magazine industry, and can be used to point to the industry’s current flaws regarding the portrayal of women.

Two other seminal analyses of women’s magazines come from Angela McRobbie’s Feminism and Youth Culture. Though McRobbie focuses exclusively on magazines for teenaged girls, much of her analysis can be easily applied to women’s magazines as a whole, especially because the reading of magazines in the teenage years both socializes women into their female roles and facilitates certain expectations for magazine content as they become interested in more adult-oriented magazines. McRobbie’s goal in studying the British teen magazine, Jackie, was to “mount a systematic critique of Jackie as a system of messages, a signifying system and a

56 Ibid, 47.
57 Ibid, 59.
bearer of a certain ideology…which deals with the construction of teen femininity."\textsuperscript{58} This is done through the use of semiology, examining not the content of the magazines on a surface level, but the ways in which the content represents a larger system of signs and codes.

For the sake of analysis, McRobbie breaks down her analysis of these codes into four categories, the “code of romance, the code of personal/domestic life, the code of fashion and beauty, and the code of pop music.” The codes are then analyzed in both their literal and deeper levels of meaning. The latter, of course, is “of greater interest to the semiologist” because of its relationship to the larger sociological and ideological realm in which the magazine operates.\textsuperscript{59}

Though the codes are discussed separately in this piece, they all contributed to (and in many times in the exact same way) the world of the feminine that women are to be socialized into. The magazine and its four codes “mark out the limits of the girl’s feminine sphere.”\textsuperscript{60}

Ten years after the publication of the piece on \textit{Jackie}, McRobbie revisits the teen magazine in “\textit{Jackie} and \textit{Just Seventeen}: Girls’ Comics and Magazines in the 1980’s.” She discovers many changes in the market, include a more reader-focused attempt through market research, and a greater emphasis on consumerism and choice. She also highlights a lot of postfeminist changes in the magazines, especially in her observation that the focus on romance and impressing boys has been replaced by the focus on the self.

Photos and biographical information of male pop stars have come to replace the fictional boys in the romance narratives, allowing a reader to “weave her own story around the facts with which she is so generously provided.”\textsuperscript{61} McRobbie concludes that the magazines appeal to a

\textsuperscript{58} McRobbie, Angela, “\textit{Jackie} Magazine: Romantic Individualism and the Teenage Girl,” in \textit{Feminism and Youth Culture} (Cambridge, MA: Unwin Hyman, Inc., 1991), 81.
\textsuperscript{59} Ibid, 93.
\textsuperscript{60} Ibid, 131.
“well-informed, intelligent and socially concerned young consumer” and raises the concern that perhaps this result of modern notions of female equality have caused the magazines to place a greater emphasis on consumer culture. She does note, however, that “this relentless logic of capital should not blind us to the changing messages found inside the magazines.”

Her overall assessment of these changes in teen magazines for girls seems to be a positive one, and her call to action for researchers is a better understanding of the production side, studying those who may be actively trying to revert dominant, patriarchal messages of femininity in theses magazines.

Marjorie Ferguson’s *Forever Feminine: Women’s Magazines and the Cult of Femininity* is a sociological study that utilizes content analysis through both the text and interviews with members of the production side of the magazine. She compares the concept of femininity to Durkheim’s theory of what constitutes a cult. Her discussion of the constant reinforcement of a social reality and the need for a constant process of ‘working at’ being a woman is crucial to this study on gossip magazines. Along the same lines of importance that Friedan gave to women’s magazines in shaping images of women, Ferguson states that in addition to major institutions and other types of media, women’s magazines “contribute to the wider cultural processes which define the position of women in a given society at a given point in time.” In conjunction with these other social structures, they “help to shape both a woman’s view of herself and society’s view of her.”

She argues that despite the category ‘women’ as an audience as being very general, these magazines treat the female experience as a specialized experience – as “a state, a condition, a craft, and an art form which comprise a set of practices and beliefs.”

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62 Ibid, 186.
64 Ibid, 1.
The mere existence of these magazines say something about the status of women in society, sectioning them off into a world all their own. Granted, Ferguson’s book was published before the increase in men’s magazine that focused on the ‘male experience’ more than its predecessors (i.e. *Maxim* and *FHM*, which are far more focused on men and less on the general interest subject matter of *Playboy*), but there are still far fewer of these and they have a much more specific demographic than simply ‘men.’ Other media, Ferguson argues, generally “concern themselves with general audiences of both sexes.” In addition, an added factor that makes women’s magazines such a specialized medium is their long history – “magazines published periodically and specifically for women have existed since the late seventeenth century in Britain, preceding the post-war trend to increased specialization within consumer periodicals by almost three centuries.”

What is most pervasive of the women’s magazine is the way they act as “agents of socialization, and the remarkable degree to which they deal in and promulgate values and attitudes.” Ferguson notes the depth and breadth of how the magazines conduct this process of socializing women into the world of the feminine. It is not merely domestic instruction – “knitting or contraception or cooking” – but a much broader socially constructed idea of a woman’s world. The magazines “tell women what to think and do about themselves, their lovers, husbands, parents, children, colleagues, neighbors, or bosses.” She argues, therefore, that it is not merely the “existence” of prevailing normative ideas being constructed in these magazines, but their “scope” that is “truly remarkable.”

Compounding upon this, according to Ferguson, is the world of advertising, the end result being a tool for “steering female attitudes, behavior, and buying along a particular path of

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65 Ibid, 2.
66 Ibid, 3.
67 Ibid.
femininity, and a particular female world view of the desirable, the possible, and the purchasable.  

The difference between the more modern magazines under her study and the mid-twentieth century magazines criticized by Friedan is the postfeminist concept of ‘choice.’ This presents a sort of contradictory, dualistic version of femininity not offered in the more housewife-oriented periodicals of the 1950’s. On the one hand, women are presented with a strong, individualistic self and on the other, as an emotionally fulfilled caring wife and mother. Because of this, “these conflicting messages are overlaid with a seductive wrapping: every woman can choose the ‘kind’ of woman she wishes to be. They imply her choice is constrained only by her preferences from amongst the range of images offered to her.”

It is obviously worth examining what these offerings are and how inclusive such ‘choices’ represent a woman’s individuality.

One of Ferguson’s points most pertinent to an analysis of the celebrity gossip magazine is the reproduction of dominant, normative themes that exist throughout the genre of women’s magazines. The repackaging of such themes is a common device used in magazines whose intended or majority audience is women:

Each time a classic theme such as triumph over tragedy, or a proven sales winning subject like slimming, is reproduced, it is re-angled, re-titled, and revitalized. Skillfully, ingeniously, and sometimes brilliantly, the old becomes new. Much of what is repeated concerns the rites, sacrifices, and rewards associated with female rituals. These suggest a form of sacred observance through their repetition: being ‘good’ at being a woman involves doing womanly things at regular appointed times. The rituals attached to beautification, child-rearing, housework and cooking attest to this symbolic order.

Despite the fact that today’s celebrity gossip magazine’s primary goal is to report on the happenings in the star’s everyday life, a lot of this repackaging of dominant themes is used in framing news about famous individuals. This will be further examined later in the study.

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68 Ibid.
69 Ibid, 189.
70 Ibid, 7.
An article that articulates the dualistic and contradictory function of contemporary fashion magazines in women’s lives after the second wave feminist movement is Leslie W. Rabine’s “A Woman’s Two Bodies: Fashion Magazines, Consumerism, and Feminism.” She argues that one change that reinforces contradiction in messages sent to the reader is the way the magazine fosters a “new self-reflexivity” that:

...reflects endlessly upon the reader, upon who she is, what she does, what she wants, and what she thinks, but also invites the reader to be more self-reflexive about her relation to fashion, cosmetics, and beauty, and to reflect upon her body in a new, detailed way – as object of her own creativity and control, as instrument of her own social power, and, at the same time, as target of men’s violence and oppression in a society where gender is still a very lopsided power structure.\footnote{Rabine, Leslie W. “A Woman’s Two Bodies: Fashion Magazines, Consumerism, and Feminism” in On Fashion Shari Benstock and Suzanne Ferriss (eds.) (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1994), 61.}

This contradictory message of perceived social power versus real violence and oppression is lucidly expressed by Rabine through the example of a 1989 rape case where the woman lost because the jury had decided she was ‘asking for it’ through her outward appearance. She cites that these messages make “the feminine body into an ensemble of signifiers articulated with two different systems of signifieds” and that they “suggest that the two codes are not symmetrical.”\footnote{Ibid p. 62.} The magazines’ portrayal of fashion and the use of the body as a powerful, sexually liberating canvas of free expression are in direct contrast to the “meanings that the dominant culture assigns to the feminine body.”\footnote{Ibid p. 63.}

Rabine argues that in fashion magazines, the reader’s “desire for identity” is elicited by the “three new elements in post-1970 magazines – heightened self-reflexivity, a more blatantly sexy look, and the voice of progressive social movements.”\footnote{Ibid, p. 63.} In addition, we can see the fantasy
world of fashion magazines as actually being “acted out by readers on their own bodies.” This, according to Rabine, breaks down the wall between fantasy and reality because the images seen in fashion magazines can be (to an extent) replicated by the reader.

Thus, it “turns inside out the commonly accepted opposition between fantasy as internal, unreal, private, and reality as external.” On could argue, then, that the celebrity gossip magazine exacerbates this blurring of lines between reality and fantasy by showing celebrities in designer clothes living out a fantasy life but also doing things ‘just like’ the reader does in her own life – caring for children, trying to find and keep a mate, going grocery shopping, etc. As such, the reader can even further try to parallel her life to that of the one shown on the pages of the magazine, not just through fashion, as Rabine notes, but through almost all aspects of everyday life.

Literature on women’s magazines places a heavy emphasis on the way such magazines serve as tools of socialization and instruction into the separate, highly generalized sphere of ‘womanhood.’ Images of women in these magazines provide a stylized version of the ‘ideal woman’ and what can be done to obtain this ideal. Even in a postfeminist era, these ideals tend to be implicit, though are also intertwined with notions of female empowerment, making the magazines rife with contradiction.

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75 Ibid, 63.
76 Ibid.
CHAPTER 2: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

For the purposes of analyzing *InTouch* and *Life&Style*, I will be utilizing both cultural studies and feminist media studies. There are various interlocking and overlapping sites for both cultural studies and feminist media studies, especially in terms of ideology, but as the following descriptions and debates surrounding both will highlight, ambiguity and complexity prevent them from fully merging. Therefore, the following conceptual framework will be set up as follows – a description and brief historical overview of cultural studies, followed by a sub-heading that delineates where and how the study of women and feminism fall under the umbrella of cultural studies, and concluding with an overview of feminist media studies.

CULTURAL STUDIES

In all its variations, this intellectual movement distinguishes itself by seeing culture as an activity, a set of values and practices, undertaken by particular people who live particular lives in particular settings and try to make sense of them, to reach particular goals, solve particular problems, express particular sentiments. For the field of cultural studies to fail to see itself through the same lens would be myopic. Cultural studies is itself a sort of culture performed by people who live particular lives in particular settings, trying to solve, or surpass, or transform particular problems.\(^77\)

The field of cultural studies is a complex, multi-disciplinary approach to cultural practices and artifacts. At the time of its establishment, and today as well, it can be (and often is) as much a political and ideological forum as it is an academic one. It concerns itself with

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difficult issues and concepts such as defining culture, analyzing cultural artifacts through a multi-
faceted ‘circuit of culture’ (to be discussed further), hegemony, class, and power structures.

The first established center of cultural studies was the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) at the University of Birmingham in the early 1960’s, spearheaded by the likes of Richard Hoggart, Stuart Hall, and Raymond Williams. Their work was primarily influenced by scholars from a variety of disciplines and philosophies, including the work of Althusser, Lacan, and Foucault. Some of the ideas and works of the CCCS scholars fell in line with those of The Frankfurt School as well as Marxist theorists, however they differed from Adorno and others of the Frankfurt School because they steered clear of praising ‘high culture’ and shunning ‘mass culture.’ The work being done at the CCCS differed from the Marxist tradition as well, in that Marxist scholars saw culture as merely by-product of capitalism. As DuGay states:

> In contrast to economic and political processes, for example, which were routinely assumed to alter material conditions in the ‘real’ world – how people thought and acted – in ways which could be clearly identified and described, and hence to provide ‘hard’ knowledge of the social world, cultural processes were deemed rather ephemeral and superficial. Because cultural processes dealt with seemingly less tangible things – signs, images, language, beliefs – they were often assumed, particularly by Marxist theorists, to be ‘superstructural’, being both dependent upon and reflective of the primary status of the material base and thus unlikely to provide social scientists with valid, ‘real’ knowledge.  

The purpose of establishing the center was to develop an alternative to the heavy emphasis on the social-scientific, positivist methods of inquiry that many fields utilized in assessing human activities and conditions. According to American cultural studies pioneer James Carey:

> Cultural studies on my reading and on the American side of the Atlantic, then, was first, and by necessity, a critique of positivism and the behavioral sciences – a critique that had less to do with scoring epistemological and methodological points than with loosening

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the grip of those sciences, along with the general positivistic outlook, on the culture as a whole. 79

This ‘grip’ of the aforementioned sciences has been and often still is the dominant paradigm in a variety of disciplines, including sociology, psychology, and, more important to this study, mass communication studies. Those who do cultural studies find human activity to be far too complex and multi-dimensional to quantify the same way one would quantify the results of a laboratory experiment – therefore cultural studies offers a more broad, open-ended approach to researching various aspects of society and culture.

What is Culture?

One of the most difficult endeavors in discussing cultural studies is finding a definition of culture that is as all-inclusive as the field dictates. Establishing a fixed definition of culture is not necessarily a goal of cultural studies, but there have been attempts to come up with a sort of ‘best fit’ description of culture. As Hall states in “Cultural Studies: Two Paradigms:”

The fact is that no single, unproblematic definition of ‘culture’ is to be found here. The concept remains a complex one – a site of convergent interests, rather than a logically or conceptually clarified idea. This ‘richness’ is an area of continuing tension and difficulty in the field. It might be useful, therefore, briefly to resume the characteristic stresses and emphases through which the concept has arrived at its present state of (in)-determinacy. 80

Hall goes on to discuss some of Raymond Williams’s attempts at defining culture as a concept, a necessary evil when trying to embark on a lucid answer to the question, ‘what is cultural studies?’:


Two rather different ways of conceptualizing ‘culture’ can be drawn out of the many suggestive formulations in Raymond Williams’s *Long Revolution*. The first relates ‘culture’ to the sum of the available descriptions through which societies make sense of and reflect their common experiences...the conception of ‘culture’ is itself democratized and socialized. It no longer consists of the sum of the ‘best that has been thought and said’, regarded as the summits of an achieved civilization – that ideal of perfection to which, in earlier usage, all aspired. Even ‘art’ – assigned in the earlier framework as a privileged position, as touchstone of the highest values of civilization – is now redefined as only one, special, form of a general social process: the giving and taking of meanings, and the slow development of ‘common’ meanings – a common culture: ‘culture’, in this special sense, ‘is ordinary’ (to borrow the title of one of Williams’s earliest attempts to make his general position more widely accessible).\(^\text{81}\)

He then goes on, again building upon Williams, to try to further refine what cultural studies scholars mean when they say they study ‘culture’:

It is in *this* context that the ‘theory of culture’ is defined as ‘the study of relationships between elements in a whole way of life’. ‘Culture’ is not a practice; nor is it simply the descriptive sum of the ‘mores and folkways’ of societies – as it tended to become in certain kinds of anthropology. It is threaded through *all* social practices, and is the sum of their inter-relationship. The question of what, then, is studied, and how, resolves itself. The ‘culture’ is those patterns of organization, those characteristic forms of human energy which can be discovered as revealing themselves – in ‘unexpected identities and correspondences’ as well as in ‘discontinuities of an unexpected kind’ (p.63) – within or underlying *all* social practices. The analysis of culture is, then, ‘the attempt to discover the nature of the organization which is the complex of these relationships...the purpose of the analysis is to grasp how the interactions between these practices and patterns are lived and experienced as a whole, in any particular period.\(^\text{82}\)

The rather lengthy quotations above are just two examples of the broad and nearly undefinable use of the term ‘culture’ in cultural studies. To fully outline the myriad attempts to define culture is beyond the scope of this study – yet it is important to note that culture is extremely broad in the realm of cultural studies.

This breadth also points to one of the major defining characteristics of cultural studies – the break in the divide between ‘high’ and ‘low’ culture. In breaking this divide, it also becomes a “project whose aims were to analyze and force recognition of working class and other

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\(^{81}\) Ibid.
\(^{82}\) Ibid, 34.
subordinated cultures” and to “reveal also the ways in which that ‘culture’ which does command recognition and respect in our society masks the class and political service it renders.”  

The elitist term ‘mass culture’ is replaced by ‘popular culture,’ and allows space for meaning to be made not strictly through the cultural artifacts themselves, but through the readings and interpretations of those consuming it.

It turns ‘culture’ into a much more inclusive concept than that which is strictly reserved for places like theaters and symphony halls – “culture becomes not only ordinary, but also ubiquitous. Like the air we breathe, culture is everywhere: in our eating habits, our dress, our conversational gambits, as well as on our walls at home and in museums.”

**American Cultural Studies**

American institutions of higher education have not produced as much work in the field of cultural studies as the British cultural studies camp has. As Norma Schulman notes in her historical piece on the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, the “United States version of cultural studies has evaded the issues of social structure, class, dominance, and power and, as a consequence of divesting itself of such proto-Marxist concerns, tends to appear innocuous and indistinct beside its British counterpart.”

Although there may be scholars performing innovative and refreshing work in cultural studies in the states, social-scientific approaches still seem to dominate the academy.

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84 Ibid, xv-xvi.
In James Carey’s “Reflections on the Project of (American) Cultural Studies,” he notes that the heavy emphasis on and blind faith in scientific methods in America has created a ‘union’ between science and state. As he states:

This union, and the displacement it occasioned, had more than academic consequences in the United States, for it created a formidable coalition, implicitly uniting commerce, the state, and the academy in a project of social reconstruction. The task of cultural studies was, then, simultaneously intellectual and political: to contest a body of theoretical and empirical work carried forward in the name of positive science and to contest the project of social reconstruction carried forward, implicitly or otherwise, in the name of positive knowledge.86

A communication scholar, Carey called for a unity among scholars from across disciplines to, especially those from the humanities with those from social science, to create “something of a wedge discipline: a body of work that had sufficient weight and reach to clear a space…for work that was, broadly, historical, critical, interpretive and empirical.”87 This call to action took place around the same time the CCCS was forming, but would prove to be more difficult in the American academy, where the aforementioned union with science was dominant. Whereas the Birmingham group “had to wedge their way into the academy through literary studies,” the did not “confront the overwhelming dominance of the behavioral sciences.”88 Despite the obstacles those trying to do cultural studies in the states had to face, Carey also discussed the negative effects of ‘borrowing’ British cultural studies to gain insight on American culture:

The worst possible outcome of the transatlantic influence and borrowing would be a diversionary contest over the shape of a universal theory of culture, as if everything had to be settled in order to agree on something. That contest, however futile and divisive, has been a major consequence of cultural studies. But, on my reading, cultural studies is necessarily plural, for such studies emerge within diverse conditions and must speak to the pulse, pace, and texture of the cultures they seek to explain. Any attempt to dissolve

86 Carey, “Reflections…”, 3.
87 Ibid, 3.
88 Ibid, 5.
cultures in the acid of culture would forfeit the capacity to form coalitions both within and without the academy. You cannot address a culture for which you lack the terms of conversation.\textsuperscript{89}

According to Carey, cultural studies at the present can be loosely divided into two camps: “one that draws primarily on continental sources and regularly invokes names like Althusser, Derrida, Foucault, Delueze and Guttari” and another that “draws primarily on American sources” like “Dewey, James, Rorty, and Geertz.”\textsuperscript{90} The founding fathers of British cultural studies are almost universally cited, but as Carey notes, “different groups draw quite variant lessons from them.”\textsuperscript{91} The expansive, stretched-out field of cultural studies is a “loose, shifting, and occasional coalition of scholars, particularly in communications,” and can therefore such divergent ‘camps’ cannot ever be firmly recognized. The problem with cultural studies today is its lack of true establishment in the academy:

While British cultural studies had an identifiable locus at Birmingham with Richard Hoggart and Stuart Hall for a couple of decades, cultural studies today is pretty much a nowhere college, a pattern of cross-reference and mutual citations spanning a couple of continents but hardly intellectually dominating on any campus.\textsuperscript{92}

Despite his relatively gloomy outlook on the use of cultural studies in communication scholarship, even over thirty years after attempts to establish it as a legitimate alternative to the social scientific method, Carey’s “A Cultural Approach to Communication” was an extremely influential work in the field of communication studies. The basic premise of this piece was to establish an alternative to the ‘transmission model’ that dominated communication research at the time. It was a shift away from the idea that messages were directly received from a medium to a consumer, with little or no outside influences. Even Lazarsfeld’s dominant ‘limited effects’ model – though it disputed direct transmission and instead argued that ‘opinion leaders’ filtered

\textsuperscript{89} Ibid, 5.
\textsuperscript{90} Ibid, 2.
\textsuperscript{91} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{92} Ibid.
information to the rest of the general public – took little more into account than the message delivery and its effects on those receiving it.

The dominance of the transmission view of communication is highly compatible with the American emphasis on science and reason. Also, as Carey notes, we “have not explored the ritual view of communication because the concept of culture is such a weak and evanescent notion in American social thought.” A consequence of this, then, is that if one chooses to explore the “central role of culture and a ritual view of communication,” one must turn to European sources.

The transmission view is “formed off a metaphor of geography or transportation” and is linked to terms like “impacting, sending, transmitting, or giving information to others” whereas the ritual view conjures “sharing, participation, association, fellowship, and the possession of a common faith.” The focus of the ritual view, then, is less on the act of information transmission itself and more on the social and cultural context within which it operates. To further clarify, we can utilize Carey’s example of reading a newspaper, and how the transmission and ritual views differ greatly when approaching a media text.

Through the transmission view, one “sees the medium as an instrument for disseminating news and knowledge, sometimes divertissement, in larger and larger packages over great distances.” The ritual view, however, will see “reading a newspaper less as sending or gaining information and more like attending a mass: a situation in which nothing new is learned but in which a particular view of the world is portrayed and confirmed.” Through Carey’s ritual

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94 Ibid.
95 Ibid, 3.
96 Ibid, 5-6.
97 Ibid, 7.
98 Ibid, 8.
view, then, news “is not information but drama;” \textsuperscript{99} it is a sharing of social commonalities and basic assumptions made by an individual living a particular cultural experience. This approach, then, imparts on a larger and more substantial project than the traditional methods – “to give us a way in which to rebuild a model of and for communication of some restorative value in reshaping our common culture.” \textsuperscript{100}

\textit{Feminism and Cultural Studies}

The relationship between feminism and cultural studies has, at times been a site of contention, especially in the earlier days of the CCCS. Angela McRobbie, one of the first women who conducted some of the earlier research on women and popular culture “called attention to the large number of patriarchal assumptions inherent in Birmingham research protocols of the 1970s and noted that only four articles out of the 10 issues of \textit{Working Papers in Cultural Studies} addressed women’s concerns.” \textsuperscript{101} Such assumptions “skewed the results of any attempt at cultural analysis or inquiry, helping to relegate the female half of the human race to relative obscurity.” \textsuperscript{102}

McRobbie and a group of other women started the Women’s Studies group at the CCCS and embarked on the project of “dismantling this opposition between ‘women’s culture’ and commercial cultures of femininity….implicit in the whole cultural studies project, with its positive valorization of ‘working class culture’ as at once hegemonized, yet containing within

\textsuperscript{99} Ibid, 9.
\textsuperscript{100} Ibid, 21.
\textsuperscript{101} Schulman.
\textsuperscript{102} Ibid.
itself elements of ‘good sense’ and of class resistance.”¹⁰³ Projects like McRobbie’s audience analysis of the magazine Jackie – whose focus was on working class teenage girls – allowed for the possibility of alternative and oppositional readings and set out “to study, qualitatively, how female audiences responded to mass media content and what social and personal needs it fulfilled.”¹⁰⁴

The works of the Women’s Studies group at the CCCS helped foster a larger focus on race and gender issues in cultural studies, and also moved the field into an arena that was “less arcane and esoteric during a period when much of it tended toward theoreticism.”¹⁰⁵

FEMINIST MEDIA STUDIES

The field of feminist media research is as (if not more so) complex, broad, and multi-faceted as the field of cultural studies with which it often overlaps. Attempts to classify and categorize the various aspects of feminist media studies vary, as the field itself consists of overlapping and interwoven theories and approaches. The following are three examples of attempts to recognize and summarize the feminist media studies as a whole, though all three authors recognize that such classifications are tentative, shifting, and by no means all-inclusive.

Liesbet van Zoonen’s Feminist Media Studies uses a cultural studies framework to historicize and analyze the various approaches to studying media through a feminist lens. She notes, for the sake of brevity in explanation, that “gender and power…although very much in

¹⁰³ Lovell, xxi.
¹⁰⁴ Schulman.
¹⁰⁵ Ibid.
debate, form the constituents of feminist theory.” Feminist studies and cultural studies “having grown out of Marxist theory and left politics” deal not only within the academy but have an outside link to progressive politics.

Both fields have “abandoned the unmitigated belief in the relevance and potentiality of academic knowledge to feminist and other progressive political projects” and attempt to negotiate between the ‘real world’ and the academy in new ways. An example van Zoonen cites is in the field of feminist media studies, where there has been a focus on “the ‘politics of pleasure,’ in particular on the meaning of popular genres like soap operas…women’s and gossip magazines, or romances for the emancipation or liberation of women.” An example she cites is Ien Ang’s study on the 1980’s primetime soap opera, *Dallas*. Ang observed and analyzed not just the messages sent to women viewers of the program, but how they negotiated these messages and the pleasure obtained from watching such shows.

Recognizing the vastness of the field, she cites some “perennial themes and issues in feminist media theory and research taken up within and outside a cultural studies paradigm” listing examples such as advertising, pornography, media effects, and female researcher/female consumer relationships. She notes that it is a “challenge to review all this material while at the same time anchoring it satisfactorily in a coherent analytical framework.” Zoonen chooses three general feminist typologies to classify feminist media studies: liberal, radical, and socialist feminism. She argues that liberal feminism generally deals with stereotypes and gender socialization, radical feminism is predominantly concerned with pornography and its effects, and

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107 Ibid, 6.
108 Ibid.
109 Ibid.
110 Ibid, 7.
111 Ibid, 7.
socialist feminism uses its Marxist underpinnings to explore ideology, including psychoanalytic analyses and the intersection of class, gender, and ideology. She is quick to remind the reader, though, that “liberal, radical, and socialist feminism have…undergone considerable change and encompass a range of theoretical developments and a huge diversity of positions.”

Also noted is that by using such typologies of feminist thought that “are constructed out of general feminist thinking” and “then applied to feminist media studies imposing a more or less extraneous and not always relevant order on the field.” An example would be, for instance, the aforementioned link between liberal feminism and research on gender stereotypes, where the researcher does not affiliate herself as a liberal feminist and thus finds herself and her work “misrepresented.” With the use of such feminist thought typologies to be problematic, it becomes helpful, then, that in the twenty years prior to the publication of Feminist Media Studies, “feminist media critique has moved from outside to inside the academic disciplines of communication, media, and cultural studies.” This allows anyone attempting an overview of feminist media studies to step back and look at what has been done specifically in the field of communications and media studies. In tracing feminist media studies within the media discipline itself, Zoonen can pinpoint some of the more dominant themes regarding women:

In spite of the marginal position of feminist media studies in the discipline as a whole, there are at least two themes taken up and/or revitalized by feminist communication scholars which have gained a more habitual importance: stereotypes and gender socialization, and ideology, the latter of course erstwhile prominent in critical studies.

In tracing the roots of feminist media studies, Zoonen found that the bulk of the research was on media stereotypes and the effects on those consuming media stereotypes. She notes that,
Despite entering a field where much of the research was dominated by the patriarchal social-scientific methodology, those conducting this earlier research “did not yet address the biases of communication research itself and seemed rather optimistic about the flexibility of the discipline.”\textsuperscript{117} One of such earlier scholars to introduce feminist thought into the field of communication was Gaye Tuchman, whose analysis concluded that the media reinforced and presented the dominant, patriarchal order by either not including women at all or representing them in a stereotypical manner. The bulk of this type of research (which was generally quantitative in nature and used methods such as content analysis) concluded that women who appeared in media tended to be “young and conventionally pretty, defined in relation to their husband, father, son, boss, or another man, and portrayed as passive, indecisive, submissive, dependent, etc.”\textsuperscript{118}

Research on pornography, another major topic in feminist media studies, has been a major site of contention, and has elicited a variety of debates about violence, censorship, and sexual freedom. Feminist researchers are rather divided about whether pornography is harmful to women, and whether or not regulation of this genre would set a precedent of censorship and a denial of free sexual expression. As Zoonen notes, many argue that radical feminists mistake the representation of women in pornography for a social reality. This argument, though, she warns, “ignores the point that representation is a social practice in which current beliefs and myths about women and sexuality are (re)constructed, and that the act of consuming these representations is more than a private pleasure, but also embedded in gendered social and cultural formations that have defined women’s bodies as sexual objects.”\textsuperscript{119}

\textsuperscript{117} Ibid, 16.  
\textsuperscript{118} Ibid, 17.  
\textsuperscript{119} Ibid, 21.
Ideology, which Zoonen loosely links with socialist feminism, is one of the most complex analytical approaches in feminist media studies, drawing from and reinterpreting a variety of disciplines. According to Zoonen, the focus on ideology falls into the ‘critical’ domain in communication and cultural studies. One of the theoretical underpinnings is Marxism, because if its analysis of historical and social conditions resulting in specific human types. Such an analysis, however, is not sufficient for fully informing socialist feminist thought, because Marxism’s ‘human types’ only include the capitalist or the worker, and do not take into account issues such as gender. Another field informing socialist feminist thought is psychoanalysis, particularly the work of Jaques Lacan, who, unlike Freud, associates human development (i.e. separate with the mother) not in relation to the penis in the literal sense, but in relation to the phallus, the linguistic and cultural symbol that represents the penis.

The use of psychoanalysis, according to Zoonen, has been “instrumental to socialist feminist thought through locating the reproduction of gender and patriarchal relations at the level of ideology, as theorized in particular by neo-Marxists like Althusser and Gramsci.”\textsuperscript{120} The works of Althusser and Gramsci both deal heavily with the notion of dominant ideologies. Althusser developed the concept of the ‘ideological state apparatus’ – the various institutions (church, media, etc.) that function separately from the state but tend to favor dominant ideology, despite their differences and conflicts with one another.

Gramsci’s work deals with hegemony, and argues that “dominant ideology becomes invisible because it is translated into ‘common sense,’ appearing as the natural, unpolitical state of things accepted by each and everyone.”\textsuperscript{121} Both conceptualizations relate directly to the role of media, being that “the media are the contemporary mediators of hegemony” and that in

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{120} Ibid, 23.
\bibitem{121} Ibid, 24.
\end{thebibliography}
feminist media studies, the question becomes “how, and to whose avail, particular ideological constructs of femininity are produced in media content.”

A good example of an ideological study, according to Zoonen, is McRobbie’s work on the magazine *Jackie*. Though the *Jackie* study recognizes that working class youth can find ways to “subvert hegemony by reappropriating cultural products and incorporating them into oppositional and subcultural styles of their own,” it can be a more difficult process for girls, “since the cultural forms available to girls are limited and their use…is primarily confined to the personal sphere.” The heavy emphasis *Jackie* places on romance and physical beauty (and the upkeep involved in achieving it) paints a picture for its young female readers that these are the items central to their lives. Zoonen argues that McRobbie’s focus on “the ideological operations of media texts produced within a capitalist system leaving the impression of an all pervasive hegemonic process from which there is no escape” makes this study an well-illustrated example of an ideological analysis of a media text.

The topics highlighted by Zoonen as the three main topics of feminist media studies – stereotypes and socialization, pornography, and ideology – all share “similar assumptions on the role of the media in the construction of gender” and that they are “perceived as the main instruments in conveying stereotypical, patriarchal, and hegemonic values about women and femininity.” That being said, however, Zoonen notes the importance of avoiding the ‘transmission view’ of communication when conducting feminist media research, because of its “limited conceptualization of gender and communication.” The transmission view implies that

122 Ibid.
123 Ibid, 25.
125 Ibid, 27.
126 Ibid, 40.
the media distort reality, assuming that there is any sort of tangible, ‘real,’ notion of gender. As an alternative, Zoonen recommends viewing gender as a discourse, whereas media:

can thus be seen as (social) technologies of gender, accommodating, modifying, reconstructing, and producing disciplining and contradictory cultural outlooks of sexual difference. The relation between gender and communication is therefore primarily a cultural one, a negotiation over meanings and values that inform whole ways of life. 41

In “Theorizing the Bachelorette: ‘Waves’ of Feminist Media Studies,” Lynn Spigel creates a genealogy of feminist media studies that breaks the forms it has taken into seven groups: “(1) advice, (2) criticism (3) manifesto, (4) theory, (5) history, (6) autobiography, and (7) ethnography.” She starts her analytical overview of feminist media studies by first observing a shift away from the feminist movement’s earlier, predominately scathing critiques of the media in general:

Feminist critics…challenged the early women’s movement’s often downright hostile attitude toward popular culture by showing how prior feminists had overlooked the possibly utopian, or at least contradictory dimensions of everyday life and media culture. Importantly, however, even while feminist media critics wanted to take women’s genres seriously, they also maintained a negative critique of patriarchy and the female isolation/alienation that popular culture often maintains and encourages.127

At the same time, however, Spigel is not quick to neatly categorize the earlier animosity towards popular culture as distinctly ‘second’ wave, nor does she find an embrace of popular culture to be distinctly ‘third’ wave. She remarks that the use of citing any sort of feminist media history using the ever popular theoretical classification of the ‘first,’ ‘second,’ and ‘third’ waves of feminism to be “an unfortunate revision of the feminist past” and a “slippery historical construction” in both the academic world and the realm of popular culture itself.128 The alternative that she proposes for feminist media studies is the categories mentioned above, which she deems as “a variety of discursive practices” that is “informed by “popular” feminisms in the

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128 Ibid, 1211.
broader sphere of culture.”¹²⁹ In other words, instead of avoiding popular culture appropriations of feminist thought, these discursive forms found in the realm of popular culture can be highly useful in informing the ‘types’ of approaches in doing feminist media studies.

The first category, ‘advice’ has a long history, stemming from the advice given to housewives in the postwar era in the women’s magazines. It saw a shift with Helen Gurley Brown’s Sex and the Single Girl, which advised women away from their traditional roles and informed them as to how to live a rewarding and successful single life. Powerful media figures like Brown (who was the longtime editor of Cosmopolitan magazine) still function in the role of informed advice givers, as well as “Grrl Power’s investment in cultural styles”¹³⁰ an example being “Net Chick” A Smart-Girl Guide to the Wired World by Carla Sinclair. Spigel cites the use of the advice mode in terms of feminist media studies through the feminist scholar who “thinks she knows how other women should do something,” especially with regards to “how women should read cultural texts.” Such scholars try to “transform women into feminist readers by giving them interpretive tips.”¹³¹

In describing the ‘criticism’ mode, Spigel cites The Feminine Mystique, to which she refers to as an “early example of feminist media criticism” that turned the “magazine discourse of advice inside out through the rhetoric of criticism.”¹³² The criticism mode also flourished in the academy throughout the 1970’s, with social-scientific research being conducted to assess images of women in popular culture. Outside of the social-scientific realm, there were researchers like Tania Modleski, whose “essays on daytime television moved away from image

¹²⁹ Ibid, 1212.
¹³⁰ Ibid, 1213.
¹³¹ Ibid.
¹³² Ibid, 1214.
analysis per se toward issues of everyday life and female experience” and focused on “questions of female narrative pleasure imported from the then-burgeoning work in feminist film theory.”¹³³

Spigel claims that the ‘manifesto’ mode has “been central to many modern avant-garde movements.”¹³⁴ She cites the book Manifesta, by Jennifer Baumgardner and Amy Richards as a good example of this. The authors write what appears to be a celebration of the second wave feminists, but with a third wave separation from the earlier activists through “their more immersive relationship with popular media of all sorts, which they consider coextensive with (as opposed to antithetical to) feminist activism.”¹³⁵

Theory, a common thread in almost any aspect of feminist research, is also a mode that Spigel links most closely with “the rise of feminist film studies” such as Laura Mulvey’s psychoanalytical film analyses and the ‘male gaze.’ The theory mode “signifies a particular set of problematics and a particular mode of inquiry.”¹³⁶ In contrast, feminist film and television history is often cited as a reaction to “a crisis in feminist film theory – or at least a reaction to the universalizing tendencies in gaze theory,”¹³⁷ though this is not often the case.

Autobiography and ethnography, according to Spiegel, “can be traced, respectively, to the memoirs of media workers and audience/leisure studies of the first half of the twentieth century.”¹³⁸ Since then, though, these modes have been taken up as a more exploratory approach – what Spigel refers to as “part of the “fragmented” mode of feminist media scholarship in which the category “woman” becomes profoundly problematic”¹³⁹ and increasingly resistant to definitions.

¹³³ Ibid.
¹³⁴ Ibid.
¹³⁵ Ibid, 1215.
¹³⁶ Ibid.
¹³⁷ Ibid.
¹³⁸ Ibid, 1216.
¹³⁹ Ibid.
The discursive practices in feminist media studies that Spigel highlights are by no means an exhaustive list, but “out of all the possible statements one could make about media and sex and gender, these are the limited groups of statements that are spoken at a specific historical moment and that circulate among feminist media critics.” In contrast to the rigid, chronological notion of the ‘waves’ theory, these modes of discourse “limit our knowledge and expectations about what will be said in the future,” making them more fluid and a better recognition of how ‘ways of knowing’ can shift and change.

In “The State of the Art in Feminist Scholarship in Communication,” Bonnie Dow and Celeste Condit provide us with an updated account of the work being done in feminist media studies today, as well as a categorization of feminist research “by its focus and function, rather than by its content area.” They argue that feminist research in media studies follows a “similar historical trajectory to that of feminist visibility in the culture at large.” They link feminist scholarship in the field of communication research with the emergence of the second wave of feminism. This early work consisted of studying the “low level of female representation as well as the prevalence of sex-role stereotypes in that representation,” especially in studies on television.

The categories that Dow and Condit use to map out the current state of feminist media research are as follows: (a) analysis of the public communication of women and feminists; (b) analysis of the role of sex/gender as a variable in communication practices; (c) analysis of the role of communication practices in the dissemination of gender ideology; (d) analysis of

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140 Ibid, 1216.
141 Ibid.
143 Ibid, 448.
144 Ibid.
communication practices that function to combat gender injustice and provide models for progressive communication practices; and (e) construction of feminist theoretical frameworks.145

For the sake of brevity, only two of these categories will be discussed here, as some of the categories deal more with the area of public communication and rhetoric, not necessarily media studies. The first category of research to highlight is the ‘analysis of the role of sex/gender as a variable in communication practices. One of the problems with the current state of this research focus is the lack of exploring the “cultural differences in what counts as femininity or masculinity and the ways in which various traits are assigned to different sexes in different cultures.”146 This aspect, according to Dow and Condit, is “highly underresearched and underoperationalized.”147 It is noted that there have been some “exciting” advances in this area of feminist communication research, and a predicted problem is the ability of the researchers to outline and explain the often difficult and complex material of sex/gender analyses “to their nonfeminist colleagues.”148

The next category to be highlighted here is the analysis of the role of communication practices in the dissemination of gender ideology. This particular study on celebrity gossip magazines more closely matches this category, so it will receive a bit more attention. According to Dow and Condit:

Researchers in this area generally work from the assumption that the communication of gender ideology is a central function of cultural messages, and they employ diverse analytical techniques to examine the variety of forms in which this ideology is manifested and through which its effects are produced.149

145 Ibid, 450.
146 Ibid, 455.
147 Ibid.
148 Ibid.
149 Ibid, 456.
Research in this area varies in content and methodology, but is usually approached through quantitative analyses of media effects, qualitative analyses of audience reception, or textual analysis with a critical approach.

Critical textual analysis, which is the chosen method for this study on gossip magazines, leans toward negative assessments, and tends to argue that “strategies for reinforcing regressive ideas about men, women, and their relationships dominate cultural messages.”150 This negativity, according to Dow and Condit, “does not necessarily reflect a lack of imagination in scholarship,” but often simply points to the notion that “as feminist ideas continue to circulate in contemporary culture, strategies for maintaining hegemonic notions of gender are constantly shifting and morphing, requiring critical vigilance.”151

In addition to the aforementioned categories, the current state of the field of feminist media studies has advanced in other ways. Most notable of these advancements is the increase in work that highlights issues of race, class, and ethnicity, and that “understandings of gender vary culturally.”152 The recent developments in recognizing the varied role of gender separates it from earlier feminist work in the academy, where there was a “tendency for feminist scholars to use “woman” when their operationalization of the term clearly meant “white women” or “heterosexual women” or “U.S. women” or some combination of these characteristics.”153

According to this assessment of the ‘state of feminist communication scholarship, the increased number of studies and the “surety and sophistication”154 of recent work are healthy signs of an expanding field of study. No longer does a study’s introduction need to include “ritualistic justifications of the study of women or gender or feminism” and feminist media

150 Ibid, 459.
151 Ibid.
152 Ibid, 467.
153 Ibid.
154 Ibid, 468.
studies has developed a “history and a literature to draw upon both inside and outside the field” that is “increasingly theoretically complex.”\textsuperscript{155}
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study seeks to answer the following questions about *InTouch* and *Life&Style*:

- What do these magazines say about the female celebrities they cover?
- What dominant ideological messages about women do they reinforce or resist?

CHOOSING THE TEXT

As noted earlier, there are a variety of celebrity gossip magazines on the market. I was drawn to these two titles, though, for several reasons. First, they are relatively new magazines that either initiated or were created to capitalize on the shift in celebrity gossip from niche-market tabloids to a more mainstream, glossy approach. Also, because they are new, they haven’t experienced the sort of ‘overhaul’ that other weeklies underwent during this shift. Lastly, upon seeing these two magazines at the supermarket check-out week after week, I found it quite remarkable that their covers always looked so similar and generally carried the same lead story. When I later discovered that they were also both owned by the same publisher, I decided that both titles should be used for a more thorough analysis.
TEXTUAL ANALYSIS

In conducting a textual analysis, one must understand that text is not simply ‘text,’ but a site of ideologically inscribed messages. Textual analysis, therefore, looks to delve beneath the surface of a text to understand the meaning-making process. Stuart Hall recommends an initial process of textual analysis that he refers to as a “preliminary soak”\textsuperscript{156} – an initial immersion that allows the research to familiarize oneself with the text, and explore emerging themes within the text. My examination of the celebrity gossip magazines \textit{InTouch} and \textit{Life&Style} started in August of 2005, and continued until the completion of this study. Not only did I examine the two magazines under analysis here, but I also immersed myself in the world of celebrity culture as a whole – reading other celebrity gossip titles, watching television programs that focused on celebrity lifestyle, and reading popular press articles about both celebrities and celebrity gossip magazines.

The second stage of the textual analysis requires a closer reading of the text, and for this I narrowed my period of analysis to five months, collecting an adequate sample of the magazines from friends and colleagues, as well as in places like beauty salons and doctor’s offices. I also purchased a few copies myself during the preliminary soak period. For this closer reading, I analyzed sixteen issues total – ten issues of \textit{InTouch} and six issues of \textit{Life&Style}. During this period of analysis, I expanded upon themes that I took note of in the preliminary soak period, and discovered other emerging themes that I had not previously discovered.

REPRESENTATION

I chose to conduct a textual analysis of *InTouch* and *Life&Style* because I was most interested in how they portrayed their female subjects – the point of ‘representation’ on the circuit of culture. It also seems to be the most appropriate starting point in the circuit for this particular medium, as well as for a feminist reading of it. According to Zoonen:

…representation has always been an important battleground for contemporary feminism. The women’s movement is not only engaged in a material struggle about equal rights and opportunities for women, but also in a symbolic conflict about definitions of femininity (and by omission masculinity).\(^{157}\)

It is the prescribed notions of femininity and the female role in society that I found to be most notable during the preliminary soak period of analysis, and I wanted to explore these concepts more fully in my analysis.

In cultural studies, a text is approached as part of the larger social context, as opposed to mass communication research that uses the transmission model of communication, which has a “limited conceptualization of gender and communication.”\(^{158}\) The transmission model can be especially problematic when studying a text from a feminist perspective, as “the problem lies mainly in the observation that media distort the ‘true’ nature of gender, assuming a stable and easily identifiable distinction between women and men.”\(^{159}\)

Media texts are polysemic, and can have a variety of meanings – some of these multiple meanings come from conflicting ideas among the producers of the text, and many are available when a consumer provides their own reading of the text. Therefore, there will be no claim made

\(^{157}\) Zoonen, 12
\(^{158}\) Ibid, 40.
\(^{159}\) Ibid.
in this study that the following analysis is any sort of ‘definitive’ reading of InTouch and Life&Style. However, as Zoonen notes:

While the concept of polysemy thus assumes audiences to be producers of meaning as well – as opposed to being confronted with meaning only, as in a transmission model – the range of meanings a text offers is not infinite, despite its essential ambiguity…most texts do offer a ‘preferred reading or meaning,’ which, given the economic and ideological location of most media, will tend to reconstruct dominant values.”160

It is this reconstruction of dominant values that is of most importance in this study. These magazines are produced in a capitalist, patriarchal system where messages that convey dominant ideologies tend to dominate the media industry, and therefore the textual analysis conducted here is a reading that focuses closely on how dominant ideologies are presented (or resisted) in these magazines.

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160 Ibid, 42.
CHAPTER 4: ANALYSIS

The celebrity is simultaneously a construction of the dominant culture and a construction of the subordinate audiences of the culture. It embodies two forms of rationalization of the culture that are elements of the working hegemony. For members of the dominant culture, the segment of society that controls most of the forms of cultural production, the celebrity rationalizes both their production (by providing a clear embodiment of cultural power) and their conceptions of their audience. For members of the subordinate class, who constitute the audience of celebrity, the celebrity rationalizes their comprehension of the general culture by providing a bridge of meaning between the powerless and the powerful.\textsuperscript{161}

If celebrities do, in fact, provide a ‘bridge of meaning’ between the powerless and the powerful, what kinds of meaning are presented, especially with regards to women? This analysis is broken down into the main emerging themes of femininity and the female role in society that developed through the textual analysis of \textit{InTouch} and \textit{Life\&Style}. These themes represent the bulk of the magazines’ coverage of female celebrities, and are just as telling in what aspects of celebrity life they choose to focus on as they are in what they say about them.

WOMEN’S BODIES

\textit{InTouch} and \textit{Life\&Style} spend a significant amount of time providing its readers with relentless details about female celebrity bodies. Weight gain, weight loss, breast size, and pregnancy – these aspects of the female celebrity’s life are under constant scrutiny. A picture taken from a certain angle that makes the star look different than how she normally appears in pictures will set off a barrage of questions, including whether or not she is pregnant, whether or not she has become too fat or skinny, and whether or not she has recently undergone plastic surgery. The ideal of the perfect body, which most female celebrities appear to maintain, is

\textsuperscript{161} Marshall, 49.
hyperbolized in the constant assessments and re-assessments of these bodies that already represent the ideal.

**Pregnancy**

Pregnancy is something of an obsession in the celebrity gossip magazines. Whether or not someone is pregnant, wants to be pregnant, and what they do with their pregnant body is a constant in almost every issue. A constant phrase used is to determine whether or not someone is pregnant is the sign of a ‘telltale bump’ – an enlarged belly that presumably had not been that way before. Pictures of stars with what appear to be pregnant bellies, as well as full-length photos of stars who are confirmed pregnant, appear often in the pages of both magazines. Oftentimes these photos seem to be strategically taken to emphasize the stage of pregnancy – they are either a full-frontal shot or a sideways shot that draws the eye to the stars’ abdominal region.

This extremely prevalent topic is oftentimes used as a descriptive adjective before a female celebrity’s name. For example, instead of simply “Britney Spears,” she is referred to as “pregnant Britney Spears.” A small insert showing actress Jennifer Garner refers to her as “mom-to-be Jennifer Gardner” and a photograph of actress Sienna Miller bears the caption: “The actress, who is rumored to be pregnant…” Therefore, if a star is pregnant or thought to be pregnant, it becomes as associated with her as her own name.

Full-length articles, oftentimes cover stories, dedicate themselves to the “is she pregnant?” question. For instance, in a cover story for *InTouch*, an ‘exclusive photo’ showed a

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163 *InTouch*, Sept. 5, 2005 p. 7
164 *InTouch*, September. 5, 2005 p. 87.
picture of actress Angelina Jolie standing, slightly slouched, in a form-fitting dress. Whether it was simply the way her stomach was situated, the material on the dress, or the early stages of pregnancy, the photograph was published twice in the issue – once on the cover, with the phrase ‘tell tale bump!’ written across her abdomen, and the other within the article, with the phrase ‘baby bump?’ written, again, across her abdomen, with an arrow pointed to the area in question. The article is a mixture of quotes from ‘insiders’ and ‘friends’ – “she ‘is planning to take a year off from making movies to concentrate on her growing family’ (she already has two adopted children) and “it wouldn’t be a surprise to some insiders, who say she…wanted to conceive a child…” It also highlights her relationship with actor Brad Pitt, discussing the rate with which their romance has accelerated – “they have certainly morphed into a family.”

Another cover story for InTouch – “Breaking News: Who’s Pregnant?: The real story behind J.Lo & Jessica’s baby rumors” – features six celebrities and whether or not they are pregnant. For instance, it tracks the way Jessica Simpson is “shielding her belly” and that “Hollywood’s hottest body has been covering up…instead of the figure-revealing clothes she used to favor.” It also monitors her public alcohol consumption to determine if she might be avoiding it as a result of pregnancy. It also reports that actress J.Lo was spotted “lovingly cradling her belly” and that actress Sienna Miller’s “closest friends are certain she’s hiding a pregnancy.” Generally, the articles neither confirm nor deny the pregnancy. It appears, however, that they utilize every opportunity to attach pregnancy rumors to as many female stars as they can.

The magazines also become watchdogs for the potential mother-to-be’s health (and, by proxy, the health of the unborn child). As mentioned regarding the pregnancy debate circulating

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165 “‘Ready for Brad’s Baby,’’ InTouch, October 10th, 2005 p. 16-17.
pop star Jessica Simpson, alcohol consumption becomes a key player in whether or not a star might be pregnant. If a pregnancy is confirmed, like in the case of Britney Spears, the alcohol-intake monitoring increases dramatically. In a cover story entitled “Why is Britney Drinking?” *InTouch* responds to an incident at a restaurant where the eight months pregnant pop star consumes three drinks of alcohol:

“Shortly after sitting down to dinner with her parents, sister, and cousin at Santa Monica’s Houston’s restaurant on August 17, Britney Spears ordered a glass of white wine. Since the pop star is eight months pregnant, her indulgence caught the attention of onlookers. But Britney’s next request really raised eyebrows. When the waiter took her empty glass, he was overheard asking if she’d like anything else. “I’ll have strawberry daiquiri,” replied Britney, only to be told that the restaurant did not serve blended drinks. The waiter, obviously noting her pregnant belly, suggested she might enjoy a virgin margarita. “No,” Britney, 23 replied. “I want the real thing.” The waiter served her the margarita. And after she finished it, she ordered – and finished – one more, says another onlooker.”  

Amongst this article, which also mentioned Ms. Spears’ usual vigilance for her health and the health of her unborn child – “she’s already hired round-the-clock nurses” and “quit smoking early in her pregnancy” – is an insert highlighting her husband’s smoking habit and its potential health effects, as well as another asking a medical professional “Is the occasional glass safe?” As a result of the magazine’s generally favorable attitude towards this particular pop star (though it generally does not portray her husband in a very good light), this article is relatively even-handed in terms of this ‘controversy’ – in other words, it expresses concern, even perhaps disappointment in her actions, but it does not provide a scathing critique of her actions.

In sharp contrast, the previous page features a smaller article entitled “Controversy: Is Courtney Pregnant?” referring to the infamous widow of the early 1990’s alternative rock star Kurt Cobain. The media, with this magazine being no exception, tends to portray Courtney Love in a much more critical light.

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“It came as little surprise when a judge ordered Courtney Love to rehab for failing a drug test during her probation. The shock came two days later when the rocker claimed she was pregnant.”

Unlike the shock expressed in the news that Ms. Spears may be drinking during her pregnancy, this article exhibits the lack of surprise in Ms. Love’s drug use. Also, stating that she ‘claims to be pregnant’ is an interesting choice of words for a magazine that is very quick to speculate that a star is pregnant, even when the celebrity verbally denies the rumor.

This article implies that Ms. Love is a drug-addicted train-wreck who lies often – “it’s not the first time that the 41-year-old singer has claimed to be pregnant.” Instead of citing ‘insiders’ who have reported the possibility of pregnancy, they look for sources to state the opposite, including how the alleged father “insists he knows nothing about her expecting her second child.” In addition, the magazine makes sure to mention her first child, whom “relatives are caring for” while Ms. Love is in “a California rehab center,” painting the star as a bad mother to her already existing child.

The obsession with pregnancy in contemporary celebrity gossip magazines points to some ideological underpinnings. First off, it seems there is nothing more favorable to the magazine as a celebrity who chooses to have a child (with the exception, of course, with stars like Courtney Love, who are already seen as unfit mothers – this is a relatively rare case, however). Despite the presumably glamorous world of film, music, and television that celebrities occupy, becoming a mother appears to be the apex of success and achievement for the female star. A confirmed pregnancy is an act of wish fulfillment for the magazine – they can finally stop speculating and start monitoring every moment of the celebrity’s pregnancy. This points to a second ideological underpinning – societal control over the pregnant body. If a

woman becomes pregnant, she is no longer considered to have complete autonomy to make decisions for herself, and others can freely monitor and attempt to control the pregnant female body as they see fit.

**Size Matters**

It is by no means new terrain to explore popular cultural representations of the ideal female body. It is often a given that a female celebrity is famous, in part, because she is a physical manifestation of nearly unattainable beauty ideals. What appears to be new, however, in these magazines, is the obsession with total perfection – a five pound weight loss or gain is heavily scrutinized, and debate is ignited as to whether or not the star is too fat, too thin, or, by the magazine’s somewhat contradictory standards, ‘just right.’

One of the more severe approaches to celebrity weight monitoring is the feature article, which will highlight one celebrity, and analyze her weight fluctuations. Most of these articles use drastic photographs that overemphasize either a ‘too skinny’ or ‘too fat’ frame. Attempts are made at political correctness by both avoiding the phrase ‘fat’ or ‘overweight’ and championing what they consider a ‘healthy’ body weight. An excellent example of this is in a cover feature on pop star Jessica Simpson, entitled “Jessica Gains 30 Pounds in 3 Months!” with the sub-heading “Facing a split, a brokenhearted Jess is bingeing on chips and Cheetos. She tells friends, ‘Food is the only comfort I have in my life now.’”168

The article consists of several ‘before’ and ‘after’ pictures that reflect her weight gain. One such pair of pictures lists her weight at two different points in time – “July 22: 105 lbs.” and “Oct. 24: 135 lbs.” Conflicting messages about what her ‘ideal’ weight should be are

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abound in both the text of the article and the captions in the photos. For instance, while in the article it states that “three months ago she was in perfect shape for *The Dukes of Hazzard,*” the caption on a picture of her in a bikini reflects a different sentiment – “on the *Dukes of Hazzard* set…Jess looked scarily skinny at 110 pounds.” Scrawled across this same picture is “Her ribs were showing!” The contrasting ‘after’ picture’s caption says “she filled out her dress at about 125 pounds” with the statement “Now she’s got major curves!” written across it.

Fitness and health ‘experts’ are consulted throughout the article, and their comments generally favor the ‘heavier’ Simpson – “Fitness expert Dr. Gary Brazina says Jess is back to her natural body weight” and “Now she looks more natural.” Despite these celebratory comments about the weight gain, the article uses words with negative connotations, stating that she is “gorging” herself with food and that she has “ballooned” from her previous weight. The article seems to navigate through these mixed messages to come to the conclusion that the weight gain is, in fact, a negative occurrence – the last section, entitled “Can she get her body back?” states:

Getter back in shape could be a challenge. The friend notes that Jess has always had a problem with healthy eating…all of which has her pal worried. “With all her marital problems and career worries, this is not the time to be out of shape,” the friend says…For now, Jess seems to be in denial about her weight gain.169

An issue of *InTouch* from the same week reports the opposite ‘problem’ for another celebrity, reality television star Nicole Richie. Entitled “The Most Shocking Photo of Nicole Ever,” it’s sub-title reads, “Her book was meant to be scandalous, but this ballerina photo is causing an even bigger stir.”170 This refers to a photograph on the back of her recent book, where she stands in a pink ballerina costume in an elongated dance position, looking very thin and, according to the article “very childlike.”

169 Ibid.
There are four photos of Richie used to demonstrate her ‘too thin’ size. Two side by side photos show her in a bikini and an evening gown, with “The photos that first sparked the fears” written across them. The caption for the bikini photo states, “The first glimpse of how much weight Nicole has truly lost…when she donned this teeny bikini” while the evening gown picture states, “…Nicole’s collarbone and ribcage were far to prominent.” Also included is the ‘ballerina’ photo in question, and a ‘before’ picture with the caption, “Nicole has said that her weight gain was due to a stint in rehab, and that previously she had always been very skinny.”

What is interesting about both this caption and photo is that it doesn’t reflect the ‘heavier’ weight shown as being necessarily healthy either. The caption implies that she had ‘gained’ too much weight in the past, and the photo is an unflattering one, where she stands awkwardly and looks to be heavier than most other celebrities featured in the magazines. In other words, there is no ‘happy medium’ displayed in this article, so it becomes rather confusing in terms of what the magazine would deem her ‘ideal’ weight.

Just as pregnancy is reflected favorably in the magazines, so is losing weight quickly after pregnancy. After obsessing over the pregnant bellies of stars for several months, the next phase of obsession is when they will get back their pre-pregnancy figures. Captions of fit stars who have recently given birth will bear phrases such as “Just 4 weeks after giving birth!” or, “Wow! She Just had a Baby!” In the October 31, 2005 issues of InTouch and Life&Style, cover articles featured Britney Spears’ weight loss merely one month after giving birth.

The Life&Style article, entitled “Britney has Her Body Back!” describes Ms. Spears’ appearance after a public outing with her husband. According to the article, she “already seemed

171 “Post-Pregnancy Pressure” InTouch Weekly, September 5, 2005 p. 29.
to be regaining her sexy silhouette” despite the “30-plus pounds of pregnancy weight.” The piece goes on to speculate what kinds of foods she has cut out of her diet to lose weight, as well as a half-page spread of “Britney’s new, improved diet” that illustrates some of her allegedly unhealthy “high-fat faves” and offers more diet-friendly alternatives to them. The article features three photos – two side by side photos assuming a full page, showing Spears “Down to 125 lbs. – and back in her sexy gear!” and a smaller photo inserted between, showing the former “155 lbs. of soon-to-be mama!” A caption for the pregnant picture also states that “Back in August, an expectant Britney was barely recognizable!”

Similarly, the Life&Style article attributed her rapid weight loss to the fact that, “after Sean’s September 14 birth, the pressure was on to lose the weight and Britney is 100 percent focused on that.” This article uses three pictures to illustrate her weight loss – one of her after losing the pregnancy weight, one of her during the pregnancy, and one of her from three years before the pregnancy. They are referred to, respectively, as “now,” “pregnant,” and “at her fittest.” The pregnant picture has the most interesting caption of the three – “‘After I got married, I let myself go,’ says Britney. She gained around 35 pounds during her pregnancy, says her rep.” The link between pregnancy and ‘letting oneself go’ is certainly an interesting one, since it implies that the pregnant photo is an example of her doing so. In the caption for Spears “at her fittest” it states that “She’ll do whatever it takes to get back in shape” – keeping in mind, of course, that the birth happened only one month prior to this article.

The general rule for these magazines, it appears, is that one should be as thin as possible without appearing ‘gaunt,’ ‘sickly,’ or just plain ‘too thin.’ The problem, though, is the way these terms are operationalized. What may appear to the ‘untrained’ eye as ‘too thin’ can be ‘just

173 “Britney has Her Body Back!” InTouch Weekly, October 31, 2005 pp. 36-37.
right’ to the individuals at *InTouch* and *Life&Style*. Also, these definitions shift and morph constantly, and there seem to be different standards of an ‘ideal’ weight for each celebrity. An example of this extremely confusing and contradictory set of messages is *Life&Style’s “Who Wears it Best?”* feature, which shows side by side pictures of two celebrities in the exact same outfit. The percentage of readers polled who chose one of these celebrities over the other is the indicator of who looks better. The trend appears to be that a) if one celebrity is thinner than another, she will be the one chosen and b) if the celebrities are of a nearly identical weight, than the choice will depend on another, often unidentifiable factor. However, if the star fits the rather ambiguous category of ‘too thin,’ her contender will most likely be the chosen wearer (so long as she is thin enough). Regardless of what appears to be an obvious preference for thinner celebrities, the captions will emphasize factors like accessories to explain why one star looks better than the other.

The most telling example of this preference for thinness comes from the October 31 2005 issue of *Life&Style*, where in the three examples given, the thinner celebrity was always the individual who ‘wears it best.’ The first example is a blue dress worn by both celebrity hotel heiress Paris Hilton and celebrity girlfriend Terri Seymour. Ms. Hilton, appearing much thinner than Ms. Seymour, is said to have gotten a sixty-six percent approval because the “vibrant shade of this slinky dress contrasts nicely with Paris’ blonde locks, and her accessories make it pop.”

In a form-fitting black dress, pop star Victoria Beckham receives an eighty-percent approval over actress Cameron Diaz, allegedly because “Cam’s ribbon-tied Jimmy Choo shoes are gorgeous

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175 Some issues of *Life&Style* simply state “% prefer” with no indication of who this percentage is that prefers one celebrity’s look over another. In addition, nowhere in the magazine or on the website does it indicate how such reader polls are conducted.

but a little too busy with the Roland Mouret dress. Posh’s pumps look sleeker.” However, it is blandly apparent that Ms. Beckham is much thinner than Ms. Diaz.

What is likely to be the most obvious preferential treatment for thin female bodies is the final side by side, where rock-star daughter Kelly Osbourne is pitted against the very thin actress Brittany Murphy. Ms. Murphy got a one-hundred percent approval rating, and the caption read “It was unanimous! Our judges liked the shorter look of Brittany’s Vivienne Westwood dress and her Christian Louboutin platforms for their leg-lengthening effect.” Ms. Osbourne, by Hollywood standards, is quite a bit ‘overweight,’ and therefore does not get a single vote. Instead of merely stating this, however, the caption is kind enough to say that her shoes simply did not ‘lengthen’ her legs enough!\(^\text{177}\) The monitoring and control over the female celebrity body is thus persistent in these magazines through both pregnancy and weight management. Conflicting messages are consistently transferred back and forth throughout each issue, and sometimes even within the same article. A celebrity who looks pregnant will experience constant monitoring to determine whether she actually is expecting, and will receive the same, if not more, monitoring if it is confirmed that she is – both in terms of the pregnancy’s progression and her personal health maintenance. She will also be monitored after giving birth, to determine if she is getting ‘back in shape’ fast enough. A celebrity who is not pregnant or rumored to be pregnant will receive similar monitoring through her weight losses and gains – every pound counts in the celebrity gossip magazine, and what is considered an ‘ideal’ weight will fluctuate weekly from issue to issue, as well as from one celebrity to another.

\(^\text{177}\) This is not to say that there are not other factors involved in who ‘wears it best.’ Factors such as a celebrity’s likeability, higher level of familiarity, race, haircolor, etc. could certainly play a role in the decision. However, a common trend apparent through all the issues of *Life&Style* analyzed in this study, a celebrity’s size seems to be the largest determining factor.
EVERYDAY LIFE AND THE FEMALE CELEBRITY

…the cultural productions operate as raw materials for the representations of everyday experiences. What is accepted or rejected in this domain, what is recombined, rearticulated, or re-presented, is done through the activity of consumption.  

McRobbie distinguishes four codes of connotation in Jackie: the code of romance; the code of personal/domestic life; the code of fashion and beauty; the code of pop music. Heterosexual romance is the core theme of Jackie and it comes to the reader in picture stories, on the problem page and in ‘true life’ stories.  

The Marshall quote regarding representations of everyday life in celebrity culture is highly relevant to a study of Life&Style and InTouch – in these magazines, the everyday life of the celebrity is covered on a much more frequent basis than the glamorous, unattainable world of fame and fortune that we usually associate with celebrities. However, this is also quite different from what Marshall notes – the content of these magazines hardly serve as ‘raw materials’ that need to be reconceptualized into everyday life through consumption – the everyday life practices are consistently presented in the magazines, in what appears to be an attempt to highlight how stars ‘are just like us’ or, in the reverse order, how we can actually be ‘just like them.’  

In addition, as in McRobbie’s study of Jackie, the most important attributes of the lives covered in these magazines is the ability to maintain the ideal heterosexual relationship. The celebrities who can neither participate in the ordinary functions of everyday life, which includes maintaining a healthy, normal heterosexual relationship are looked at as pitied failures, uncontrollable party girls, or high-maintenance ‘divas.’  

One such place this is most obvious is in Life&Style’s regular feature, “Diva or Down-to-Earth?” According to this feature, a ‘down-to-earth’ celebrity can participate in the ‘real world’

178 Marshall, 46.
179 Zoonen, p. 25.
successfully without assistance. She “rents a movie,”\textsuperscript{180} “puts up her own Halloween decorations,”\textsuperscript{181} “hits the supermarket,”\textsuperscript{182} “carts her own groceries,”\textsuperscript{183} and “does her own planting.”\textsuperscript{184} In contrast, the ‘diva’ “gets her nails done incognito,”\textsuperscript{185} “has an assistant to keep the sun away,”\textsuperscript{186} and “gets an on-air pedicure.”\textsuperscript{187} The activities performed by the ‘down-to-earth’ celebrities show that they can take care of the daily necessities.

The ‘divas’ on the other hand, are self-indulgent and cannot function in the realm of everyday life because of their celebrity status. It is unclear exactly how this operates in terms of feminism and progressive views of women – on the one hand, it appears that the daily necessities that the ‘down-to-earth’ celebrities are praised for are those that directly relate to the hearth and home, a very traditional take on the female role. It can also be stated, however, that the ‘diva’ is not an independent woman, because she cannot take care of herself. However, this further indicates a sign of selfishness, as opposed to the selflessness that accompanies the traditional role of housewife and caregiver.

An added confusion to analyzing this weekly feature is the inclusion of men in the ‘diva or down-to-earth’ question. However, if a man is a ‘diva,’ he is generally portrayed as emasculated for his inability to perform basic functions, for example “an assistant picks up his newspaper”\textsuperscript{188} or “an assistant wipes his hands.”\textsuperscript{189} The men are also featured much less frequently than woman are, and are almost never shown in a “down-to-earth” moment (which makes one wonder what everyday life functions makes a male celebrity ‘down-to-earth’).

\textsuperscript{180} “Diva or Down-to-Earth?” Life\&Style Weekly, October 31, 2005 p. 95.
\textsuperscript{181} “Diva or Down-to-Earth?” Life\&Style Weekly, October 24, 2005 p. 95.
\textsuperscript{182} “Diva or Down-to-Earth?” Life\&Style Weekly, August 15, 2005 p. 86.
\textsuperscript{183} “Diva or Down-to-Earth?” Life\&Style Weekly, November 21, 2005 p. 78.
\textsuperscript{184} “Diva or Down-to-Earth?” Life\&Style Weekly, September 12, 2005, p. 94.
\textsuperscript{185} “Diva or Down-to-Earth?” Life\&Style Weekly, September 12, 2005 p. 95.
\textsuperscript{186} “Diva or Down-to-Earth?” Life\&Style Weekly, November 21, 2005 p. 78.
\textsuperscript{187} “Diva or Down-to-Earth?” Life\&Style Weekly, August 15, 2005 p. 87.
\textsuperscript{188} “Diva or Down-to-Earth?” Life\&Style Weekly, October 24, 2005 p. 94.
\textsuperscript{189} “Diva or Down-to-Earth?” Life\&Style Weekly Setember 12, 2005 p. 94.
The magazines’ emphasis on heterosexual relationships also seems to represent a mundane, everyday life function. Wild behavior and an extravagant single life are looked down upon, and so is a female star’s inability to ‘find and keep’ a man. Examples of happily married couples, especially those with children, litter the pages of both magazines. Those who have either failed to maintain such a picture of happiness or choose not to participate in such a traditional lifestyle receive a different type of coverage. Two individuals that make excellent case studies of this are the actress Jennifer Aniston and the celebrity heiress Paris Hilton.

Aniston was, for several years, part of Hollywood’s ‘it’ couple – she was married to the extremely successful and much adored actor Brad Pitt. The marriage, however, ended when Pitt was alleged to have picked up and moved on with female co-star, Angelina Jolie.

The celebrity gossip image of Aniston was that of ‘emotional train wreck,’ and each cover story made her appear to be more pathetic than the next: “Jen’s Warning to Angelina: The Tell-all Letter to the Woman Who Stole Her Husband.”190 “What Have I Done: Regrets After the Divorce,”191 “Jen’s Breakdown: Is Brad’s Decision to Quickly Marry Angelina Taking its Toll on a Humiliated Jen?”192 and “Angelina Looks Pregnant!: Is Jen’s Worst Nightmare Finally Coming True?”193 The articles depict her as a highly emotional woman who can’t keep it together:

…for the normally laid-back Jen to be so easily ruffled, something had to be wrong. Her reaction is certainly understandable. All the hurt and resentment of the past few months, the pain of losing her husband and the life they had together, hit Jen like a bolt. As she stood in front of the rented house she’d moved into to avoid the painful memories in the home she’d shared with Brad, the anger Jen had been bottling up finally erupted.194

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192 Life&Style Weekly, September 26, 2005.
After retreating to her Malibu home, says a friend of the family, Jen found herself combing through photos and souvenirs of her relationship of more than six years with Brad. But when she came across a book of Shakespeare’s love poems and sonnets that Brad had given her, Jen, 36, broke down.\textsuperscript{195}

Children are clearly still a sore spot for Jennifer Aniston, who burst into tears during her infamous \textit{Vanity Fair} interview when the subject of Angelina being pregnant was raised. It’s not surprising she’s still upset. As early rumors pointed to her not wanting to have kids as the reason for her split with Brad, it’s particularly humiliating for Jen, 36, to see her ex now play at being a family man with Angelina.\textsuperscript{196}

The alleged success that the new woman has achieved with Aniston’s ex-husband at having the gossip magazine ideal – a successful heterosexual relationship and children – is depicted as too much for her to bear. Even when it appears that she has moved on and started dating someone else, the magazines disapprove, under the auspice that he cannot give her the ideal life either, because he is a difficult ‘bad boy’ who most likely won’t settle down:

She’s still emotionally wounded, maybe too much to rush into another romance – especially with a guy like Vince. “In Chicago, he goes out partying almost every night,” says an insider. “He’s been seen leaving bars with a lady or two. Being a party animal is one thing, but I wonder if Jen knows he’s a player.” While Vince has helped to ease some of the pain in Jen’s heart, it’s clear that the former \textit{Friends} star is looking for someone to make a new life with.\textsuperscript{197}

Despite Brad’s pending divorce from Jen and his fast-moving relationship with Angelina Jolie, the idea of a Vince/Jennifer hookup troubles him. Having spent time with Vince on the set of \textit{Mr. and Mrs. Smith}, Brad knows just how charming and fun Vince can be. Though he is aware that he had hurt Jen himself by falling for Angelina, Brad still cares for Jen. And he doesn’t want to see her in emotional pain again.\textsuperscript{198}

Though she and her ex-husband Brad Pitt reportedly clashed over his desire to have kids right away, friends say Jen has changed her tune since hooking up with Vince – and many fear she’s headed for heartbreak...indeed, friends are worried about the intentions of Jen’s new man – who has developed a reputation as a partying playboy and hardly fits the image of the ideal father.\textsuperscript{199}

\begin{footnotes}
\item[195]“New Crisis: Jen in Tears!” \textit{Life&Style Weekly}, September 12, 2005 pp. 32-35.
\item[196]“Ready for Brad’s Baby.” \textit{InTouch Weekly}, October 10, 2005 pp. 16-19.
\item[197]“Are they More than Friends?” \textit{InTouch Weekly}, September 12, 2005 pp. 18-19.
\item[198]“Is Brad Upset with Vince?” \textit{InTouch Weekly}, September 19, 2005 pp. 24-25.
\end{footnotes}
The emphasis on Aniston’s alleged failure to conduct her relationship right the first time (i.e. start a family with Brad Pitt) is something the magazines seem to hold against her consistently. There is a slight ‘too little, too late’ undercurrent here, and she is taken even less seriously in her ‘second effort’ for the ideal family life by choosing the ‘wrong’ man. In contrast, coverage of her ex-husband and Jolie is highly favorable, most likely because not only is Jolie rumored to be pregnant, but they are portrayed as already being the perfect family unit due to Pitt’s alleged father-like relationship with her adopted children. Aniston is both pitied for her failed marriage and blamed for not being able to have a perfect life by making poor choices (i.e. not wanting to have children with Pitt and choosing a new man who is not husband material).

Hotel heiress Paris Hilton, unlike Aniston, is alleged to have no desire to have a husband and family. Despite the fact that she is significantly younger than Aniston, she is still portrayed as a self-involved ‘party girls’ who not only has short lived relationships with men, but cannot sustain healthy relationships with female friends either. She is depicted as being notoriously single, and even while engaged, there was constant speculation that she did not take the commitment seriously:

The heiress has been flaunting her closeness to record producer Scott Storch for all to see...Paris, 24, and Scott, 31, have been almost inseparable, and while her rep insists that they are just friends, they appear to be more than that...at an MTV Video Music Awards pre-show party on August 27, “Paris was sitting on Scott’s lap and he was kissing on the back of her neck,” an eyewitness tells InTouch.

She’s constantly hanging out with another man, but Paris Hilton insists that she and her fiancé, Paris Latsis, are an item. “I’m still so in love with him,” she tells InTouch in an exclusive interview. And Paris, 24, says talk that she is getting it on with her record producer Scott Storch behind her fiancé’s back is “ridiculous.” “We are completely just friends,” she says of the man who was seen nibbling at her neck during a party for the MTV Video Music Awards and is regularly by her side.

200 “Paris is Making her Many Jealous!” InTouch Weekly, October 3, 2005 pp. 22-23.
201 “We’re Still Together, Says Paris.” InTouch Weekly, October 10, 2005 p. 28.
Life&Style even reported that, because she was considered such an unfit potential bride, her fiancé’s parents gave her money to keep away from him and “gave Paris permission to claim that the split was her idea.” The article implies that she is using the alleged money to party “up a storm” and is “making a spectacle of herself.” They also stated that she was “openly kissing” someone else in public and that she “stood on a chair and danced while he stood on the floor between her legs with his hands up her skirt.” It is even implied that she may have stolen this man from another female celebrity. In an article entitled “Paris is Out of Control!” InTouch states:

She’s been turning against many people who love and care about her, leaving behind a trail of broken hearts and former friends…”Paris is becoming a social outcast,” a former friend tells InTouch. “No one wants to hang out with her anymore.” Even her sister, Nicky, is concerned. “She is embarrassed by Paris’ behavior,” says an insider.

Two weeks later, Life&Style reported in an article entitled, “Paris Shunned:”

Paris, 24, stole her new boyfriend…right out from under onetime friend Mary-Kate Olsen…and as Paris further isolates herself from her friends, she’s pushing to get more serious with Starvos, 20 – who, says an insider, is now beginning to question the future of their relationship. He recently told Paris, “My parents would never permit me to marry you.”

Hilton, clearly depicted here as the kind of woman who is not marriage material, is punished for her wild behavior and inability (or perhaps lack of interest) to ‘keep’ a man. She is thought to be ‘out of control’ and it is hinted that she will end up alone, without friends or a man, if she doesn’t get herself straightened out.

The two celebrities featured as case studies are just two of the many who, while they make profitable cover stories, are also the exact ‘types’ of women who may never achieve the ultimate happiness of marriage and family life. They may receive more coverage, but the

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203 “Paris is Out of Control!” InTouch Weekly, November 7, 2005 pp. 90-91
favorable coverage is left to the women with seemingly happy, functional relationships, children, and an overall ‘ideal’ domestic life. In terms of female behavior, the stories of celebrity women serve as cautionary tales or blissful fairy tales, exerting a moral lesson that women who look for marriage and family are those who will be rewarded and accepted in society. Everyday life, therefore, for the celebrity gossip magazine, is very much the same in the celebrity world as it is the ‘real world’ – in other words, we, as women, should all want the same universal ‘happy ending.’

As cited from Dow and Condit’s article earlier, “critical textual analysis…is generally negative in assessment, arguing that strategies for reinforcing regressive ideas about men, women, and their relationships dominate cultural messages.” This analysis of celebrity gossip magazines is no different. One could argue that if searched for long enough, it can be easy to manipulate findings in a study of media to argue the presence of dominant ideologies. However, for an analysis InTouch and Life&Style, no such manipulation was needed. It may even be argued that these magazines can be even more regressive than other media that depict women in stereotypical gender roles – there is a 1950’s “happy housewife” element to the way married women, especially those with children, are portrayed in these magazines. Single women tend to be labeled as social pariahs – if not outwardly, than at least in the descriptive language used to portray them, or in the lack of coverage they receive in contrast with those who either have children or have expressed an interest in having children.

Women’s bodies, which are already used as a sight of social control, are taken to a new level of social control, with the magazines constantly monitoring weight loss and gain, as well as how a woman cares for her pregnant body. These messages are by no means the only messages in the magazines – they cover fashion, film, music, male celebrities, and other aspects of popular

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205 Dow and Condit, 459.
culture – but for the most part, they are dominated by messages of heterosexual relationships, marriage, and children – and how women fulfill these societal requirements. It is almost impossible to look at this media text through the textual analysis process and not find these emerging themes of traditional female roles. The question that one must now ask, however, is what do women do with these messages?

A site for further research is most certainly an audience analysis of celebrity gossip magazine consumption. What kind of resistance exists in an alternative to the ‘preferred reading?’ How women consume these magazines, and also, the reasons why they consume them are all very important questions to ask. In addition, a further means of analysis might be to understand the production side – who are the alleged ‘insiders’ and ‘friends’ that the magazine cites to get its information on celebrity lives? Is there an awareness on the part of the editors that they’re framing celebrity narratives in a highly traditional way regarding women and gender? Also, what do these magazines say about the cultural context within which they exist? What do they say about gender in terms of race, class, and ethnicity? These, as key components of the circuit of culture, are all crucial in conducting a full cultural study on celebrity gossip magazines. The rapidity with which these magazines and their readership are growing make them an important site for meaning-making, and it is in the hope that further research on *InTouch* and *Life&Style*, or other celebrity gossip magazines will be conducted.
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