

Leaked Sex and Damaged Goods:
News Media Framing of Illicit and Stolen Celebrity Images

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Abstract

New media technologies are changing the ways that we not only go about our day-to-day lives, but also the ways that we sell and exchange our labor within the capitalist economy. These technologies are shaping how we represent and perceive ourselves and others, as well as the ways in which, as we move about the world, our images are taken and circulated with neither our explicit permission, nor sometimes our knowledge (Dovey, 2000; Toffoletti, 2007). Despite the fact that we can no longer viably opt out of visual or technological culture, there remains a strong rhetoric of personal responsibility when such images are used in ways that are unexpected and sometimes extremely damaging (C. Hall, 2015). The growth in incidences of what Clare McGlynn (2017) calls “image-based sexual violence” cannot be divorced from the economic and cultural shifts that are both challenging and reifying dominant power relations in the early 21st century.

This doctoral thesis examines the economic and social discourses underpinning news reporting on sexual privacy violations in relation to new media technologies and shifting forms of female celebrity. Using empirical methods to collect and sort U.S. and Canadian news articles at a macro level as well as discourse analysis of news reporting at the micro level, I focus on two particular sites wherein new media celebrity, sexual violence/violation, and political economies converge: the celebrity sex tape scandal and the stolen celebrity nude photo. I examine sexuality and privacy violation in an exemplary economic context, looking at how the “leaked” sex tape or image functions in the gendered sexual economy to undermine claims to meritocratic capitalist success. I focus on two moments of crisis: firstly, the pop culture crisis of 2007-2008, coinciding with the global economic recession as well as the growth in new media technology and social media usage, wherein several high-profile female celebrities undergo dramatic and very public

“breakdowns” in proper femininity, ranging from the fairly banal “scandal” surrounding a then-15-year-old Miley Cyrus posing semi-nude for *Vanity Fair* to the more severe and illegal acts of Lindsay Lohan and Paris Hilton (both of whom were arrested for driving under the influence across this time period). Secondly, I examine the moment of crisis signaled by the 2014 iCloud hacking incident wherein hundreds of female celebrities’ personal private nude photos were stolen and circulated online. I analyze the sex “scandals” that are both discursively constructed by, and circulating through, the news at these moments.

The findings point to several notable trends in the contemporary political climate. Firstly, they illuminate the tensions and contradictions in the media’s attempt to reconcile post-feminist sexual “empowerment” narratives with the broader imperatives of neoliberalism, surveillance, and self-commodification. Secondly, this thesis provides a timely analysis of the gendered pathways to success and the gatekeeping that is conducted both within and by the (news) media, which are themselves invested in narratives of meritocracy. Finally, the cynical, meta-commentary circulating in the news reporting on celebrity content – reporting that is increasingly beholden to corporate interests – contributes to the broader erosion of trust in mainstream media. In today’s media environment in particular, studies of heirs-turned-reality stars such as Paris Hilton (whose trajectory is eerily similar to that of U.S. President Donald Trump), are particularly urgent, as are studies that connect the seemingly disparate yet increasingly converging fields of celebrity, journalism, feminism (and sexual violence), and neoliberalism.

Keywords: news analysis, sex tape, nude photos, the Fappening, new media, Disney, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), material feminism, iCloud hack, rape culture.

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Introduction

“The technologies of freedom are turning into the machines of dominance.”
Barbrook and Cameron, 1996, p. 61

I. Context and Interventions

New media technologies are changing the ways that we not only go about our day-to-day lives, but also the ways that we sell and exchange our labor within the capitalist economy. These technologies are shaping the ways we represent and perceive ourselves and others, as well as the ways in which, as we move about the world, our images are taken and circulated with neither our explicit permission, nor sometimes our knowledge (Dovey, 2000; Toffoletti, 2007). Despite the fact that we can no longer viably opt out of visual and technological culture, there remains a strong rhetoric of personal responsibility when such images are used in ways that are unexpected and sometimes extremely damaging (C. Hall, 2015).

Women’s relationships with new technology, economic freedom, and individual autonomy are complex and multi-faceted. Many women use new media technologies in their daily lives, often for a range of both personal and professional purposes. Increasingly, these purposes merge, as more and more elements of our lives become monetized and incorporated into today’s neoliberal capitalist system. At the same time, women (and other marginalized groups) increasingly use new media technologies to express themselves sexually (Amundsen, 2018; Evans and Riley, 2014; Evans, Riley, & Shankar, 2010; Hasinoff, 2015) and this usage cannot always be distinguished from the more “public” domain of labour and exchange.

In fact, women’s sexuality has long been commoditized publicly for the profit of the media industries. The incorporation of new media technologies into that economic system has significant socio-economic consequences as the distinction between product, consumer, and

owner become increasingly hazy. The emergence of female Internet celebrities – bloggers, Instagrammers, vloggers, “Influencers” etcetera – extends but also shifts long-standing connections between gendered labour, sexuality, and “success” in capitalist media. While women have long been “plucked” from obscurity, made-over, filmed, and then celebrated in our culture, those women rarely owned the means of production, nor wielded enough power to decide when or how their images were used. In today’s social media environment, vloggers like make-up tutorialist Michelle Phan potentially challenge those frameworks by *entrepreneurializing* the domains of feminine work: not only by making feminine labour visible, but also marketing that labour as the product itself to be sold (as opposed to merely a routine part of the backstage packaging of the public “star” image, for instance) and reaping the benefits directly as business owners (most often through advertisements and product placements on their social media sites).

This environment, wherein new media technologies afford women a level of visibility and ownership not previously accessible, presents a unique challenge to a patriarchal system in which, to paraphrase Paolo Tabet (1982), women are themselves supposed to be the technology and not the users of it. Women’s use of technology can destabilize their status as appropriated subjects (see also Guillaumin, 1995). When the neoliberal market that rewards certain (entrepreneurial) uses of technology cannot ensure ongoing male supremacy, patriarchal forces step in to remind women of their “proper” role. This has long been effectively accomplished through gendered violence.

As many feminists have argued, sexual violence against women is not an expression of passion or desire, but rather a tool of patriarchal and white-supremacist control and domination (Davis, 1983; P.H. Collins, 2000; Guillaumin, 1995; Harding, 2015; Plaza, 1981). In today’s media environment, that violence is taking a new form, through both the stealing of intimate

images, as well as the circulation of unauthorized or illicit sexual images of women. While the ongoing moral panics around women's and girls' use of technology reflects the prominence of this gendered violence (see, for instance, Cassells and Cramer, 2008; Hasinoff, 2015; Ringrose, Harvey, Gill, & Livingstone, 2013; Salter, 2017), said panics often direct their attention and recommendation to the female victims of said violence rather than the broader structures which normalize and encourage their victimization. It is not, in my view, incidental that most recommendations for women suggest less participation and visibility in online culture, particularly in an age in which online participation and visibility increasingly reap huge economic and social benefits.

Although the policing of public spaces for women occurs across all levels of privilege, the female celebrity is a site of particular visibility in our culture and, thus, functions as a public example of the threat to which all women are subject. As noted by Emilie Buchwald, Pamela Fletcher and Martha Roth (1993), one of the characteristics of rape culture is the constant reminder to women that they are vulnerable to sexual violence: it is not enough in the contemporary environment that the threat of sexual violence exists, women must know that the threat is expounded by new media technologies, and be encouraged to police themselves accordingly, in terms of appearance, content production, and behavior.

This tension – between the growing economic opportunities for (certain) women and the threat of violence used to contain how and when women use those opportunities – is exhibited in the debate currently unfolding in legal and political policy over whether or not instances of “revenge porn” should be viewed as issues of privacy (the body as private property) or as sexual violence (the female body as site of ongoing gendered violence). This thesis aims to examine some of the broader power struggles implicated in these debates: what relations between capital,

the body, and female sexuality might this tension itself be occluding, and how might re-framing such debates reveal new understandings and approaches to addressing such forms of violence?

Female celebrity is an ideal site in which such a tension could be explored. The celebrity has long been at the center of debates over what is and is not public/private property: does the public have the “right” to access a celebrity (take a photo, approach for an autograph) whenever and wherever they like? When a celebrity sells their body, their image, and their sexuality in exchange for massive amounts of visibility, money, and privilege, do they lose all right to privacy? How does the relationship between celebrity, media, and visibility differ for women across varying axes of identity? What might new forms of entrepreneurial celebrity in the neoliberal era reveal about the terms of success, and how are those terms gendered, racialized, and classed?

This thesis explores these questions in relation to the tensions underlying technology use in contemporary patriarchal, neoliberal society. It unites the seemingly disparate fields of cultural studies and industry studies, as well as material feminism and post-structural theory. It makes a critical intervention in the debates over new media technologies and sexual violence by connecting those discussions to debates over celebrity and the gendered terms of success in American society. It also traces a shift in journalism within this same context: how do the media respond to the growing visibility of certain forms of feminism, while also navigating a cultural shift wherein celebrity and politics are no longer distinct public spheres? Despite its seemingly narrow frames for comparison (seven years, spanning 2007-2014), the significant cultural, political, economic, and technological shifts across these eras demonstrate just how rapidly our lives are being transformed in the contemporary climate. Before outlining the chapter structure, I

first, in the next section, define and describe some key terms that I will be using to analyzing these critical issues.

II. Key Terms

This thesis marks a unique intervention that bridges the insights of feminist materialist theory, specifically the relations between gender oppression and capitalist oppression (under an increasingly neoliberal regime), with the post-structural tools of analysis that unpack how discourses operate to preserve such relations of oppression. Thus far, I have been using some terms that are so common in contemporary feminist and cultural studies that they are often taken for granted. Therefore, in this section, I briefly describe my understanding and use of specific analytical terms, as well as briefly describe how these will connect to the frames employed in the analysis (materialist feminism and post-structuralism).

Although I go into more detail in Chapter 2 on both materialist feminism and post-structuralism, this thesis is epistemologically rooted in some key insights offered by theorists across both of these fields. Materialist feminist analysis offers tools for thinking through how material relations (i.e. economic relations) uphold systems of power and oppression, particularly in relation to patriarchal ideology (see, for instance, Delphy, 1984; Guillaumin, 1995). Importantly, such analyses have been enriched by the work of Black feminist thinkers, such as Kimberlé Crenshaw who introduced the concept of intersectionality (2015/1989), to demonstrate that oppression via gender is only one of many possible forms of oppression that operate simultaneously in complex ways. Angela Davis (1983) has operationalized an intersectional framework in her critical work, incorporating an analysis of race, class, and gender in a way that inspires this thesis. Although I will be drawing on post-structuralist thought as well, an

intersectional analytical framework allows researchers to think through how varying forms of identity – even if socially/discursively constructed – are materially impacted by power in differing ways. For instance, when thinking through the privacy violations of female celebrities, an intersectional analysis can help to account for the ways that race (either as constructed in the data or beyond/outside of it) affects who is framed as a “good” victim versus who is a “bad” and therefore inviolable (non-)victim.

Relatedly, the system of neoliberal capitalism helps to justify and erase the violence experienced by various marginalized groups. Although the term “neoliberalism” has broad meanings and usage across disciplines today, it is often tied to a socio-economic shift in Western nations both caused by and reflected in policies implemented by Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher in the U.K. and U.S. President Ronald Reagan in the 1980s (Duggan, 2003; Gill and Scharff, 2011; Littler, 2013). Neoliberalism is characteristically defined as an era “in which traditional codes of morality are in decline,” increasingly replaced by an ethic located within the self/body (Bragg and Buckingham, 2009; Skeggs, 2005); a “winner-take-all” economic system (Negra, 2009, p. 126), favouring privatization and deregulation (Gonick, 2015), as well as an upward (re)distribution of resources (Duggan, 2003); and a state where “individualism [...] has almost entirely replaced notions of the social or political, or any idea of individuals as subject to pressures, constraints or influence from outside themselves” (Gill and Scharff, 2011, p. 7). Further, neoliberalism interpolates its ideal subject¹ as “a market wo/man, or an entrepreneurial,

¹ The invocation of the ideal subject of neoliberalism necessarily invokes its mirrored Other – the failed subject of neoliberalism (Charles, 2012; Hey, 2009; Tyler, 2013). Within this framework it would seem that failed subjects are those who do *not* succeed at being entrepreneurial and autonomous citizens. However, as discussed throughout this thesis, the rules of neoliberalism are unevenly and inconsistently applied. Stars serve an important prescriptive function then in that they can be used to articulate contradictory rules (Dyer, 1979). As noted by Imogen Tyler and Bruce Bennett (2011), “celebrity culture operates to establish ‘social hierarchies and processes of social abjection’ which include both gendered and classed distinctions between ‘proper’ and ‘improper’ personhood” (in Allen 2011, pp. 151-152).

autonomous, and self-sufficient being whose democratic freedoms emerge from participating in competitive free market labour and consumer relations” (Irving, 2014, p. 101).

Neoliberal capitalism differentiates itself from a more generic form capitalism through its emphasis on individualism, deregulation, self-surveillance, and entrepreneurialism (Duggan, 2003). According to neoliberal logic, for instance, it is better to “be your own boss” than to be a low-level worker who is securely employed, unionized, and receiving benefits. Neoliberalism upholds other, identity-based forms of oppression by doubling down on the meritocratic myth that the (economic) playing field is even for all and that “hard work” can lead anyone to “success” (Littler, 2013), a term that is itself centered in and reinforcing economic value(s).

While “success” can mean numerous things to varying groups of people, in a capitalist society and in the capitalist sense (which is of central concern here), the key marker of success, as noted by Pierre Bourdieu (1984) is wealth. In turn, wealth is signified through consumption, rather than production: “This economy demands a social world which judges people by their capacity for consumption, their ‘standard of living,’ their life-style, as much as by their capacity for production” (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 310; see also Littler, 2013; Redmond, 2007). The visibility of consumption as a marker of success becomes key to its operationalization and propagation of capitalist systems: while the poorer classes have long known of, and on some occasions seen firsthand the wealth of the rich (see Pough, 2004, p. 21), industrial capitalist media systems makes such wealth visible and marketable to the masses. Such marketing helps to promote a central tenet of liberal capitalist ideology: that such wealth is accessible to anyone (given they have the right work ethic and talent), and, perhaps more importantly, that it should be the goal of everyone. This is where celebrity plays a key role in legitimizing both the myth of meritocratic accessibility to success, and visible wealth and consumption as measures of success. The famous

person “rises” through their talent and hard work (Littler, 2004), and their glamorous, consumption-based lifestyle is packaged and sold back to us through the mainstream media.

The discursive distinctions between a “star” and a “celebrity” further help to bolster the myth of meritocracy by marking out certain categories of fame as being “worthy” (i.e. rooted in some sort of market-valued skill and recognizable form of labour), and others as being “unworthy” (i.e. those who have gained notoriety through their behavior and/or their previously-established privilege). As noted by Su Holmes and Diane Negra (2011), the difference between stardom and celebrity is commonly held as one of prestige – *stars* are driven by and known through their art and therefore are better, or of more value, than *celebrities* whose fame is based on a knowledge of their private selves, or lack of performance (p. 13).

Despite this common framework, the relations between persona and authenticity are more complex than such often gendered and classed dichotomies allow. The musician, for example, is often expected to incorporate an element of their authentic self (or private life) into their art without necessarily disturbing the star/celebrity hierarchy (see Auslander, 2006; Marshall, 1997; Railton and Watson, 2011). Furthermore, and of concern to this thesis, is the development of new media technologies (i.e. Instagram, Twitter) wherein the divide between the private and public life of the star dissipates and there is increasingly a sense of accessibility (or the right to access) a star (Marwick, 2015). All of which suggests that the star/celebrity hierarchy is based upon socially constructed, and politically valuable binaries of private/public and unique/accessible. In this thesis, I follow scholars who part with the accepted hierarchal distinction between stardom and celebrity (Holmes and Negra, 2011; Weber, 2009) in order to highlight how and why privacy, and the notion of a public/private divide, are used to contain or undermine the public (economic) pursuits of certain women (working in the media industries). I,

therefore, use the terms star and celebrity interchangeably throughout as a way to deconstruct those hierarchical binaries.

The concept of privacy itself is also much more complex than its common usage suggests. Although many trace its contemporary meaning back through the home/work life divide of modern-day capitalism (as will be discussed more in Chapter 2), it is worth noting that sexual privacy has never been either equally granted, or desired. While the private life of the monogamous, reproductive couple is usually valued institutionally, LGBTQ+ activists have long battled the notion that sexuality ought to be private, as it reinforces homophobic attitudes, forcing non-heteronormative sexualities back into the closet (Duggan, 2003). When it comes to women's bodies, American Conservatives who, supposedly following market logic believe that the government ought not to control what people do, suddenly value both the regulation and even criminalization of "deviant" sexuality (Duggan, 2003). Furthermore, as noted by Gwendolyn Pough (2004), the fight to be *publicly visible*, as a raced, classed, queered, or disabled body, has historically often been one goal of social justice activism, as visibility in our society brings with it the potential to critique and speak back to structural power. Privacy, then, is often conceived of in two distinct, sometimes related but sometimes conflicting, forms: the right to autonomy, to independently decide what one will do with their body; and the right to separate, if desired, one's self from the public sphere. Both of these forms reinforce (neo)liberal values of individualism, centering the individual as (ego)rational agent, and both have economic implications. The economic connotations of the words privacy, private, and privatize, are not coincidental and will be of concern in my analysis throughout.

The connection between words and economic, material reality is a recurring frame in my analysis of representations of sexual violence against women. I set out to investigate the ways

that famous women's public actions – especially their uses of new media technologies and their sexuality – affect their status as famous women, thus altering or containing the social, cultural, and economic capital they wield. Women have long been subject to regulatory forces and disciplinary power (Foucault, 2010), but their use of new media technologies, especially to amass wealth and power, inspires new forms (or new versions) of policing and punishment, which include public humiliation and (sexual) violence via digital technologies.

While in general terms, “police” often refers to an authoritative arm of the government connected to the juridical system, policing can and is done by people across all levels of society, including someone policing their own behaviour. As described by Michel Foucault (2010) in his influential work on systems of power, the term “‘police’ [refers to] the ensemble of mechanisms serving to ensure order, the properly channeled growth of wealth and the conditions of preservation of health ‘in general’” (p. 277). Policing, therefore, is a way for power to exert itself across and through people oppressed by and operating within society (i.e. not necessarily only operationalized by those in positions of power). This definition is particularly helpful because it connects the systems of “order” (i.e. the status quo) to both health and wealth, two prominent themes in the reporting on celebrity women. Policing is highly effective when done by the media (i.e. news and gossip sites), as it produces both a public punishment via humiliation of the transgressive subject (the celebrity herself) and sets a broader example for women as to how they ought to behave. My analysis, then, will specifically attend to the ways that the news produce and police norms around women's behaviours such as how to engage with technology, what forms of sexuality are acceptable versus unacceptable, and what forms of “success” are legitimate and worthy of public admiration.

In fact, the public punishment and policing of famous women by the news media runs parallel to the sexual violence they experience when their intimate images are stolen and shared online. These incidents also serve both to humiliate the celebrity herself and remind non-famous women that if they engage with technology in similar ways, they can also be publicly humiliated. This thesis, then, is concerned, not with the images themselves (and this will be elaborated on further in the next section of this chapter), but, rather, how the media industry itself discursively mirrors and even extends the sexual violence of the hackers who steal and post women's images without their consent.

Relatedly, the discursive policing and punishment of women (by news and/or hackers) is legitimized by an understanding of them as transgressing subjects. Here, I follow the dictionary description of transgression to mean “infringement or violation of a law, command, or duty” (Definition of “Transgression”) – and I would extend that to violation of a norm – as reflected in the news media's sense of outrage at an action. This outrage is apparent in various frames employed in the reporting, including the “bad role model” frame, the “too ambitious” star or parent, and the upset and/or disappointed parents/fans. In this reporting, the media is actively constructing wider notions about what is and is not a transgression and not merely reflecting them.

The news media, in turn, use frames of transgression, in combination with their own amplification of punishment, to incite moral panics over the gendered use of new media technologies. In his definitive work on the subject, Stanley Cohen noted the importance of the media in amplifying moral panics, a term that describes a moment(s) when:

A condition, episode, person or group of persons emerges to become defined as a threat to societal values and interests; its nature is presented in a stylized and stereotypical fashion

by the mass media; the moral barricades are manned by editors, bishops, politicians and other right-thinking people; socially accredited experts pronounce their diagnoses and solutions; ways of coping are evolved or (more often) resorted to; the condition then disappears, submerges or deteriorates and becomes more visible. (quoted in Garland, 2008, p. 10)

As noted by Cassell and Cramer (2008), such panics are not restricted to the age of digital media and Internet; they replicate similar panics over the role of first, the telegraph and, then, later, the telephone, in the lives of women and young girls. These communicative technologies provide access – “access to others, access to information, access to opportunity” (Cassell and Cramer, 2008, p. 62) – which, in turn, disturbs the social order by “dissociating physical place from social ‘place’” (Cassell and Cramer, 2008, p. 62). In other words, new communicative technologies produce social, political, and economic threats to the status quo: they allow women to socialize with “undesirable” mates (and the potential for miscegenation was one cause of the earlier moral panics discussed); to commiserate and form solidarity with other women and/or other marginalized groups; and, to access the job/economic market in new and potentially destabilizing ways (see also Tabet, 1982).

Cassell and Cramer (2008) found that the discourses circulating through media moral panics are often less concerned with new technology itself, and instead focused on “the potential sexual agency of young women, parental loss of control, and the specter of women who manifest technological prowess” (p. 70). Such frames will, indeed, be a centering concern in my analysis: how the news media produce moral panics signifying not just a concern with new media technologies, or even transgressive female celebrities, but also the ways that these celebrities

serve as a (bad) influence precisely because they potentially signify sexual agency, loss of patriarchal control, and technological (or media) prowess.

In this section I outlined some of the key terms that ground my analysis of the reporting on stolen and illicit celebrity images, including neoliberalism, success, celebrity, policing, and moral panics. While some of these terms seem more innocuous than others, they are all ideologically loaded, ascribing value to certain forms of labour, privacy, and femininity over others. The next section provides a breakdown of the structure of this thesis, previewing how my analysis of news reporting will further demonstrate the connections between everyday language and the ideological work being done to undermine certain women and their engagements with new media technologies.

III. Chapter Outlines

In the first chapter of this thesis, I briefly review and analyze the relevant literature in two related fields of study: feminist media studies and celebrity studies. I examine recent work that has looked at both consensual sexual imagery and the non-consensual sharing of such imagery. I also summarize relevant debates over women's pleasure and agency in relation to the broader patriarchal structure (and rape culture) that circumscribes women's media production (and consumption). I also look at the relevant literature on celebrity sex scandals as well as new forms of celebrity emerging in the age of social media and other new technologies, particularly as they relate to neoliberal capitalism. My aim with the review is not to be entirely comprehensive – as new studies related to these timely issues are constantly emerging – but rather to bring often disparate topics together in conversation with one another as part of a broader and longstanding economic appropriation of women's bodies and sexuality in Western capitalist democracies.

In Chapter 2 of this thesis I describe the theoretical framework that will guide me in my analysis. I begin by outlining feminist materialist analysis as a framework for understanding gendered labour, gendered labour in the media, and gendered labour in neoliberal capitalist media. I then outline reception studies as a helpful way to think through women's agency in their engagement with media technology. Finally, I summarize a few key theories from post-structuralism that support my methodological approach to discourse analysis and celebrity culture. All of these frameworks help, in particular, to analyze the relation between celebrity women and their engagement with the media industry: celebrity women have a limited amount of agency that is contained by the broader system of media which constitutes their status as celebrity women (i.e. they rely upon media owners to employ them or media workers to promote them and their work).

Chapter 3 builds upon the arguments presented in Chapter 2 and connects them to a methodology. I explain and outline my decision to focus on discourses circulating through mainstream news, as well as how I define "mainstream news" in this thesis. I also conceptualize journalists as audiences, and, therefore, important and visible sites of reception. I then discuss my research design and method. I justify my choice of case studies and specify my research questions. I finish by providing a step-by-step description of my data collection and analysis. Although this study, because of its focus on a site of extreme privilege and visibility, is not intended to be representative of the broader structures policing women's use of technology and capital, it is critical to remain as transparent as possible. As I have collected large amounts of data and do, in fact, detect wider patterns across that data, I reproduce each step of the process in as much detail as possible here.

My analysis then consists of two parts. In the first part, Chapters 4 and 5, I focus on the stolen celebrity nude photo. Although male celebrities can and have been victims of such violations, I argue that the female celebrity photo “hack” is part of a gendered history and economy of sexual violence and that the discourse surrounding these events highlights them as such. I examine two separate eras of the stolen celebrity photo in incidents that spanned seven years. Chapter 4 examines several nude photo “scandals” that centered on Disney (and former Disney) stars across 2007-2008. I analyze the discourses in the reporting on these “scandals” in order to determine where and when sexual transgressions occur: what acts are considered to be transgressive by the news media? What forms of female sexuality are policed and what forms are celebrated? Chapter 4 additionally examines how the figure of the “failed” celebrity (or “trainwreck”) is mobilized in discourses of success vis-à-vis neoliberal, post-feminist society.

Chapter 5 of this thesis then shifts to 2014 and the infamous iCloud photo hack wherein hundreds of female celebrities’ photos were stolen and shared online. The chapter examines the news reporting of this event in relation to three broad themes: (1) as a part of a shifting cultural understanding of, and relationship to, new media and privacy; (2) as an event that directly threatened the profits of technological companies such as Apple, as well as shaping the public understanding of sites comprising the “manosphere” (Ging, 2017) and other spaces where “networked misogyny” flourishes (see Banet-Weiser and Miltner, 2016); (3) as an event that specifically and meaningfully targeted visible, successful women in the form of female celebrities.

In the final part of my analysis, Chapter 6, I turn my attention to the “leaked celebrity sex tape” and how such texts are taken up into discourses about labour, visibility, and economic reward: specifically, the commoditization of female sexuality. Wherein Chapter 4 examined

female stars who are known for having a traditional, media-based “talent,” this chapter looks at stars who threaten the meritocratic myths of the media industry by using non-traditional, but often very neoliberal skills to amass cultural capital and economic reward. The anxieties produced by such shifts often crystallize around a certain kind of female celebrity: one who was born into privilege, leveraged that privilege into a reality television deal, and “exploited” their sexuality in unacceptable ways (as the leaked sex tape is discursively framed as being worse than modelling, acting, and other formats wherein the importance of women’s appearance and sexual appeal is discursively masked through notions of “talent”).

This star takes the form, in my case studies, of Paris Hilton and Kim Kardashian. Hilton, who bears the name of the famous line of hotels founded by her great, great grandfather Conrad Hilton (Newman, 2007*²), started off as a Beverly Hills “socialite” but rose to public prominence after her 2003 sex tape preceded the launch of her Fox reality show *The Simple Life* (2003-2007). The show followed Hilton and best friend Nicole Richie (daughter of singer Lionel Richie) as they toured rural, working-class America, living with numerous families and working various jobs (which they often did with typical, spoiled-girl disdain). Hilton’s DUI arrest in 2007 signaled both the height of her fame, and its decline, and the reporting on this event reflects a point of crisis for the mainstream American news media that, I argue, helped shape the shift to “infotainment”, “post-truth” reporting that has, in turn, contributed to today’s loss of media trust.

On the other hand, the unexpected longevity and visibility of Kim Kardashian sparks an ongoing panic over the media’s role in gatekeeping success and celebrity. Although such panics around female celebrity are not new (see, for instance, Berlanstein, 2004 on Sarah Bernhardt; Hindson, 2011 on Lillie Langtry), they have manifest uniquely around Kardashian, a celebrity

² As will be outlined in Chapter 3, the asterisk indicates primary sources and thus can be found in Reference List 2 at the end of this thesis.

who, if not for her sexuality, might be celebrated as reflecting the possibilities of neoliberal entrepreneurial capitalism. Kardashian is the daughter of former O.J. Simpson friend and attorney, the late Robert Kardashian and had a highly privileged upbringing with her two sisters Khloe and Kourtney in Los Angeles. After briefly working for close friend and fellow “socialite” Paris Hilton, Kim Kardashian was launched into the public spotlight in 2007 after a sex tape of her and then-boyfriend, singer Ray J, was “leaked” online ahead of the debut of her reality show *Keeping Up with the Kardashians*. The reality show portrayed life in the Kardashian family, initially following Kim and her two sisters, ‘momager’ Kris and her second husband and children (Kim’s half-sisters). The show launched as many as five spinoffs and continues to air new episodes on E! television network to date. In addition to the show, Kim has an extremely active social media presence and following. She has over 100 million followers on Instagram, 53 million followers on Twitter, and is active on Snapchat and Facebook. Experts estimate that Kim (and her sisters) earn anywhere from \$75,000 to \$300,000 for one endorsement post across their social media accounts (P. Evans, 2016). Despite these statistics and her longevity, many media commentators even today still discursively link her fame to her sex tape released 12 years ago, thus reinforcing an understanding of her as having “no talent” and being illegitimately in the public eye (even when those reporters are reinforcing her fame through their reporting).

Across all of the analysis chapters I draw on materialist feminist theory to analyze the economic relations underpinning these instances of violence. At a broader, industry level, I examine the relations of ownership that structure the major media companies involved in these incidents, as well as many of the (larger) publications that comprise my dataset. I simultaneously conduct a more micro-level discourse analysis of the news reporting on or about the material relations of production: how are the terms of success operationalized in news discourses? What

messages are sent about failure and merit? What economic relations are hidden from the discourse? How is violence – symbolic and material – mobilized in the reporting on these issues? For instance, does the reporting on these women excuse their privacy violations as a necessary tradeoff of celebrity success, and/or deny the sexual violence they experience, framing it as a necessary tradeoff of the female whose success is dependent upon her sexuality? I look at how the celebrities themselves, through interviews and essays, challenge such frameworks as well as the responses from the media reporting on these dialogues. I do not, however, analyze any of the “original” stolen texts in question, as I consider that to be a re-violation of these women’s bodily autonomy and privacy. Even in the case of the “leaked” sex tape wherein its status as stolen property is often questioned (and perhaps questionable), I choose to accept the claims of the celebrity victims that they are stolen and, therefore, not appropriate (or necessary) to examine in my analysis.

Additionally, it is important to note that these women – in particular the young (then underage) Disney stars – discussed throughout this thesis are often vilified, disparaged, and mocked in the news media coverage of their lives. In reproducing some of that discourse here, I do acknowledge that I run the risk of re-victimizing them. However, by not analyzing the photos or tapes and, instead, scrutinizing the discourse surrounding them, my aim is to, wherever possible, acknowledge women’s agency, talents, and symbolic power, while exposing the structural misogyny that shapes our understanding of them as undeserving or immodest models of feminine success. In the next chapter, I review the work that has been done in relation to these issues, noting that while some studies have examined each side of this equation (sexual/gendered violence mediated through technology and the neoliberal, sexual celebrity), few studies have united them to examine how they operate in conjunction with one another.

Chapter 1 Literature Review

Introduction

As noted in the Introduction, this thesis aims to examine the economic relations circumscribing and containing women's use of media technologies in both their private and public lives. Although feminist media scholars have long been debating the role of women's sexual expression – particularly in relation to media technologies – as well as the sexual violence used to contain and/or undermine women's bodily autonomy, there has been little scholarly focus on the ways that these issues are not only exemplified but also epitomized in the figure of the female celebrity. The privilege inherent in female stardom often marks it as the antithesis of feminism's typical subject. Such a viewpoint often, paradoxically, overemphasizes class status (“how can a celebrity be part of a marginalized population?”) at the expense of a broader consideration of the ways in which economic hierarchies are not only key to upholding other forms of oppression, but also reproduced in and through the celebrity system itself, which operates as both a microcosm and key site of capitalist myth-making.³

In this chapter, then, I review the relevant discussions happening in two, often overlapping spheres – Feminist Media Studies and Celebrity Studies – in order to demonstrate the need for interdisciplinary research that more fully examines the economic relations underpinning the violation and containment of women's sexuality. I break each field into two subsections, all of which deal with a specific issue relevant to this project and review the literature and key debates that have shaped each. The first subsection falls under the domain of Feminist Media Studies and is grouped under the heading “consensual sexual imagery.” I look at current debates over women's use of media technologies with regards to sexual expression. This

³ This point is further elaborated in the theoretical framework.

debate often falls along the lines of what is now commonly referred to as the “Sex Wars,” wherein certain theorists argue that women’s use of media technologies can be pleasurable, empowering, and positive, while others argue that within a white supremacist, capitalist, patriarchal system, women’s use of such technologies will always be constrained by a “male gaze” (Mulvey 1975/2010), even if the terms of that constraint are shifting (Gill, 2007, p. 258). The second subsection under Feminist Media Studies examines “non-consensual sexual imagery.” This builds upon the formerly mentioned side of the Sex Wars discussion in that it assumes that certain mediated sexualities can be pleasurable for women but that they are also often used in violent ways that produce shame and harm. I focus specifically on the context of new media technologies, and discussions highlighting the growth of “revenge porn” and “sextortion.”

Following this, there are two additional subsections devoted to the literature in Celebrity Studies. The first examines the literature dealing with female stars’ sexuality and sex scandals, as scrutinized by the media. Debates over the use of sexuality in the star image echo broader feminist ones over the ways that women – whether complicit in, or in (economic) control of their sexualized image – contribute to their own ongoing subjugation. The scandalous image or video is certainly not a new phenomenon but, embedded in these scandals are other feminist concerns that can sometimes be neglected due to the privilege inherent in celebrity status. I then review the scholarship that does focus on celebrity in the digital age – most specifically those that examine the shifting economic relations of new media celebrity – to demonstrate that such scholarship does not adequately attend to either sexual imagery or sexual scandal⁴ in the

⁴ For now I use the term “scandal” to acknowledge that in the contemporary media environment it is difficult to discern which “leaked” images/videos were consensually released and which were not (and therefore more adequately described as sexual violence or violation). Although this is complex terrain that this thesis will explore – particularly the effects of such discourses on our understanding of working/successful women, rather than the

contemporary celebrity sphere. Finally I examine the literature on my specific chosen case studies – the “sex tape”, Paris Hilton and Kim Kardashian, and, finally, the iCloud hack (“the Fappening”) – to make the case that my project will provide a unique and necessary intervention that unites the concerns of all four subfields discussed; consensual sexual imagery, non-consensual sexual imagery, the celebrity sex scandal, and new media celebrity. I argue that, not only should sexual violence against female celebrities be part of a broader discussion on sexual violence, but also that it is a key site through which economic relations – and thus oppressions – across all levels of privilege are both modeled and reproduced.

I. Feminist Media Studies

a) Consensual Sexual Imagery

The history, and the stigmatization, of the sexualized image of woman extends back far beyond the invention of digital media technologies. Female nudes, when painted by men, were celebrated works of art (Berger, 1973/2010; L. Collins, 2013), but also sites of feminine regulation (Nead, 2010). Only certain kinds of women – feminine-presenting, able-bodied but passive, white – are deemed worthy of eroticized representation catering to a heterosexual male gaze (Gill, 2009; Mulvey, 2010), while non-white, disabled, non-feminine female bodies are fixed in institutionalized medical, surveillant, imperialist gazes (Cartwright, 1995; P.H. Collins, 2003; hooks, 1992; Seibers, 2012). Women who enjoy or capitalize off their own sexual imagery, on the other hand, have long been positioned as deviant, corrupt, or even complicit in patriarchal systems of domination (Brady, 2016; Pullen, 2005; Vares and Jackson, 2015).

veracity of such claims – it is important to state that, as part of my own feminist politics, I think it is important to believe celebrities who claim to be victims of privacy violation. Again, I do not think that produces a conflict of interest here, as this thesis is more concerned with how these incidents are framed publicly (by the media) and what ideological work such framing does, than it is with proving or disproving such claims.

The mostly white, middle-class feminist movement known as Second Wave feminism of the 1970s mobilized around several issues, including the role of sexualized imagery in what is now commonly referred to as the “Sex Wars” (Attwood, 2009; Rubin, 1992; 2010; Vance, 1992). Although this debate is extremely complex and spans multiple years, in the simplest terms it refers to a key disagreement over the role of heterosexuality and sexualized images of women in upholding systems of male supremacy. While some feminists, often drawing on structural conceptions of power, have long argued that there cannot *truly* be free and autonomous sexual expression in a system dominated by men, such as the media (see for instance, Dworkin, 1981/2010, MacKinnon, 1993), others argue that such totalizing paradigms undermine women’s agency and pleasure when engaging with media (Hasinoff, 2015; G. Smith, 2009; Williams, 2008; Vance, 1992), and universalize the experiences of white, able-bodied, heterosexual women (hooks, 1992; Rubin, 1992; Siebers, 2010).

Although the “Sex Wars” of the 1970s may seem to be an archaic way of viewing debates over new media technologies, the ongoing invocation of the “male gaze” in feminist critique points to its continued dominance as a framework for understanding female sexual expression in the media. Concerns over a perceived increase in contemporary sexual imagery – a trend often referred to as “sexualization” or “pornification” – often assert that women’s expressions of sexuality, as represented in and through media technologies, are performed for either a direct male gaze, as is the case for Ariel Levy (2006) in her oft-cited discussion of “raunch culture,” or for an internalized, disciplinary male gaze that celebrates (and polices) conformance to patriarchal beauty and sexuality standards (Holland & Attwood, 2009; see also Dines, 2010, on pornification; Gill, 2009, on sexual subjectification; Munford, 2009, on “girly” feminism).⁵

⁵ These particular arguments will be attended to further in Chapter 2, section 2 of this thesis.

This paradigm has often been transposed from its original analytical frame – narrative Hollywood cinema – onto other media technologies, including social media images (Carah and Dobson, 2016), advertising (Gill, 2009), and cell phone self-portraits or “selfies” (Salter, 2017, p. 100). There remains a framework wherein women’s use of media technologies (and the pleasure and/or agency involved in such usage) is of secondary analytical consideration to their appearance in such media: a “sexualized” look that appeals to a heterosexual “male gaze” (Attwood, 2009; Dines, 2010; Gill, 2009; Levy, 2006; Ponterotto, 2016). The prioritization of the viewer – where the assumed person (man) looking at or buying the image is figured as having power over the person appearing in or selling the image (whether or not they take pleasure in or benefit materially from that image) – mirrors a classic feminist paradigm in which the system of male supremacy inevitably circumscribes female sexual pleasure and agency.

Amy Adele Hasinoff (2015) tackles this tricky terrain in her concise and astute study of underage “sexting.” She is careful to differentiate the pleasure that young people obtain from consensually sharing sexually explicit texts and images with one another, from the violent, non-consensual sharing of such imagery with other people. Hasinoff also points to the dangers in conflating the two. Rikke Amundsen’s (2018) study of women’s sexting practices also demonstrates the ways in which the context of consumption (i.e. whether the sext is privately consumed versus publicly shared) affects users’ understanding and framing of their own images in relation to sexual pleasure and intimacy.

In their powerful collection *Yes Means Yes: Visions of Female Sexual Power and a World without Rape*, Jaclyn Friedman and Jessica Valenti (2008) collect essays that critically examine the pleasures that women get from sexual encounters (including mediated ones) and the ways that denying such pleasures can contribute to “rape culture” – a term that will be explored more

in part (b) of this section. On the other hand, feminist thinkers such as Andy Zeisler (2008) problematize the concept of women's sexual pleasure, setting up a binary between authentically enjoyed sex and sex work/performance (and here I would argue that celebrity sex symbols fall into the latter category): "Liking sex and performing sex are two very different things. And as Levy put it, 'If we're going to have sexual role models, it should be the women who *enjoy* sex the most, not the women who get paid the most to enact it" (p. 138, my emphasis). Such framing excludes the possibility that female sex workers/image-makers could get pleasure from their work and although it is problematic to assert that sex work is uniformly empowering, it is also problematic to assert that women only obtain sexual pleasure outside of economic exchange. How does the positioning of women's sexual expression as being in service of a paying, heterosexual male gaze, whether or not they enjoy/benefit from it (as though this were inconsequential), contribute to myths about women's sexuality? Recent feminist work has made a vital intervention in rape culture by challenging the reductive framework that insists that men are active, sexual, (predatory) agents and women are either passive or instrumental with their sexuality, only able to express agency in the sense of denying or acquiescing to masculine desires and/or capitalist ones (Friedman and Valenti, 2008; Harding, 2015; Hasinoff, 2015).

Perhaps because of these ongoing debates over the ability of women to truly freely choose when and how they will express themselves sexually,⁶ the line between consensual sexual imagery and non-consensual sexual behavior remains a contested one. Suggestions that women protect themselves from sexual violence by refraining from using any media technology in their sexual lives (often the line of action promoted by law enforcement and policy-makers) indicate

⁶ This is certainly not to imply that all women are able to choose when and how they express themselves sexually. Many women are still forced or coerced into sexual situations and relationships. To suggest that all consensual (hetero)sexual activity is sub-consciously (or false-consciously) coerced obfuscates that critical distinction.

that, for many, the distinction is not a worthwhile one to make (Dodge, 2016; Powell, 2010). It also neglects the privacy rights of women whose economic circumstances might force them to sell their sex/sexuality on the market. In the next section, then, I examine debates around the non-consensual sexual image and the ways in which current interventions both address and neglect key distinctions around consent, sexual violence, and rape culture.

b) Non-consensual Sexual Imagery

Although at first glance it might seem that non-consensual sexual imagery is a self-explanatory concept, contemporary critics – particularly feminist critics of the concept of “rape culture” (Nair in Kinnucan, 2014; M. Murphy, 2016) – have noted that consent itself remains a murky concept (Haward and Rahn, 2015). For my purposes, here I follow the position of such feminists as those writing in Carol S. Vance’s classic collection (1992) *Pleasure and Danger: Exploring Female Sexuality* that even within the confines of capitalist patriarchy, there is a significant conceptual and material distinction between consensual sexual acts and images versus non-consensual ones. Further, in the age of digital media where access to image recorders, undetectable devices, and Internet platforms is rampant, the distinctions between consensual imagery and non-consensual imagery is even more compelling.⁷ Digital media scholars, in particular, are becoming more attentive to the issues of hacking, “doxxing,” “revenge porn,” and “sextortion” – issues which are increasingly affecting people across all axes of gender, age, race, and sexual orientation (Citron and Franks, 2014; Hasinoff, 2015; Gauthier, 2017; Salter, 2017). While some scholars debate whether these instances should be treated as privacy violations or sexual violence (see Powell, 2010), feminist scholars are increasingly asserting the importance of

⁷ For instance, a woman cannot consent to a sexual encounter that is being filmed without her knowledge.

considering both; how economic relations underpin privacy violations in today's digital spaces (see, for instance, Gauthier, 2017; Salter, 2017). Yet, for the most part, such considerations continue to neglect the celebrity body as a key site wherein these concerns converge: the figure whose body is framed as public property yet signifies a specific kind of privatization (i.e. capitalist commodification) of the body; who embodies the anxieties/concerns over the public-private duality; and who often is celebrated for exemplifying ideal capitalist citizenship, while castigated for failing to exemplify or, on the other hand, excessively performing capitalist citizenship.

This is not to say that class and other aspects of identity have not been of concern. While many feminist theorists and activists have examined the distinct ways that sexual violence against women of colour, LGBTQ+ women, disabled women or fat women is framed in the media (Harding, 2008; Jiwani, 2006; Razack, 1994), or even propagated by the media's reproduction of images of marginalized groups (Baril, 2018), there has been, understandably, less concern with the specificities of sexual violence against the most visible – and thus highly privileged – women in our society. Furthermore, the scholarship that focuses specifically on sexual violence in the age of new media technologies often focuses on girls and girlhood (Hasinoff, 2015; Ringrose, 2011; Ringrose et al., 2013), and, though often attentive to racial/sexual difference across this demographic (see, for instance, Penney, 2016, on Amanda Todd; Jiwani, 2006; Rajiva and Batacharya, 2010, both on Reena Virk), there is considerably less attentiveness to such violence against famous/highly visible young women just a few years older (i.e. Disney star Vanessa Hudgens was only 19 at the time of having her first nude photo hacked/posted. Hudgens is Filipina).

While the increasing visibility of sexual violence against girls and women in the age of Internet has contributed to a growing scholarly interest in “rape culture” (Friedman and Valenti, 2008; Harding, 2016), there are also, increasingly, feminist theorists for whom the term is vague, at best, and counterproductive, at worst (Nair in Kinnucan, 2016). As defined by Buchwald et al. (1993), rape culture has four key elements: (1) it encourages male sexual aggression and supports violence against women; (2) it refers to a society where violence is seen as sexy and sexuality as violent; (3) women perceive a continuum of threatened violence that ranges from sexual remarks to sexual touching to rape itself; (4) it condones physical and emotional terrorism against women as the norm (p. vii). While each of these elements ought to be identified and deconstructed by feminist thinkers and activists, it is the third point that is most relevant to my discussion. For some, the notion of sexual violence requires physical contact with the body, not merely a violation of bodily autonomy.⁸ Yet the social, and increasingly, economic punishment accrued for sexual imagery suggests that it should be read by feminists – and increasingly *is* being read by feminists – as a form of sexual violence in-and-of-itself (Dodge, 2016; McGlynn, 2017; Hall and Hearn, 2017; Powell, 2010; Salter, 2017). Furthermore, and crucially, a key effect of this form of violence is its reminder to all women, much like unwanted sexual utterances, that their bodies are not theirs to do with as they wish, and are under constant threat of real physical, sexual violence (Guillaumin, 1995, pp. 196-200).

⁸ This debate over the meaning of “rape culture” played out at the University of Ottawa in 2014 after several members of the student association used an online forum to “joke” about sexual violence against then-student federation president Anne-Marie Roy. Much like in the case of Donald Trump after being recorded making similar comments about assaulting women, the young men at the University of Ottawa blamed “locker room” culture for the normalization of discourses of sexual violence against women (Feibel, 2014). While it is important to note the ways that such discourses are normalized more broadly (one of the purposes of this thesis), it is also critical to note the specificities of this violent discourse in relation to Roy’s heightened visibility and power as student federation president. Both elements – the normalization of sexually violent discourse and the visibility of using this discourse against women in positions of power – are central to my use of “rape culture” here.

Sexual violence, as many feminist scholars remind us, is a tool of power and control over women that works on both a physical level and a symbolic one (Davis, 1983; P.H. Collins, 2000; Guillaumin, 1995; Harding, 2015; Plaza, 1981; Projansky, 2001). Its utility as a tool of control is dependent on its ability to exert such a power across all intersecting forms of privilege for women, including economic privilege, and to do so visibly, as a reminder and an example to all women. Thus, examining how such a tool works in relation to the most visible women in our society – women who, from that very visibility, gain economic and social capital, and thus, a form of autonomy and power – is key to deconstructing this element of rape culture and reframing women’s sexuality. How does patriarchal control fight to retain power over the most “successful” women in our society? And what does such an example mean for other women who are not nearly as privileged as them? The next section will demonstrate the importance of examining celebrity culture as a model for, and (implicit) threat to, women more broadly.

II. Celebrity Studies

a) Female Celebrity, Sexuality and Scandal

As noted by feminist scholars of celebrity, the female star has long been a uniquely gendered site of scrutiny, particularly with regards to her sexuality (Dyer, 2004; Holmes and Negra 2011; Negra and Holmes, 2008; Schwartz, 2011; Williamson, 2010). Throughout the history of modern capitalism, white women who transgress the public/private divide⁹ have been marked as sexually deviant, and often discursively linked to prostitution (Berlanstein, 2004;

⁹ As noted by scholars such as Angela Y. Davis (1983) and Patricia Hill Collins (2000), the public/private divide of modern capitalism refers to normative, white gender roles wherein the ideal, feminine, white woman tends to matters of the home (motherhood and wifedom) while the ideal, masculine, white man works for a living wage outside of the home. This normative model is not universal and neglects the lives of, for instance, people of colour, people with disabilities, non-heteronormative relations, etc.

Hindson, 2011; Pullen, 2005). Though in the contemporary context, the notion of a “public woman” seems to be normalized, the gendered discourses surrounding female celebrities betray an ongoing fixation on traditional gender norms and the policing and disciplining of female sexuality (Gamson, 2001; Holmes and Negra, 2011; Negra and Holmes, 2008; Schwartz, 2011).

There are two sites in which such ongoing fixations often manifest in celebrity culture: the sexual(ized) performance and the sex scandal. Work on feminine sexual performance often extends sexual debates in broader feminist communities (see previous section) wherein female stars are imaged as “self-commoditizing” or “exploiting”¹⁰ their sexuality for the benefit of larger capitalist, patriarchal structures (Brady, 2016; Sastre, 2013). Studies such as those on Madonna (see Bordo, 2003; Jarmen-Ivens, 2004), Britney Spears (Lowe, 2003; Watkins Fisher, 2011), and Beyoncé (Duan, 2016; Durham, 2012; Weidhase, 2015) highlight the debates – and anxieties – over the role that sexuality plays in the success of contemporary women. There has also been recent work examining the effects of such imagery on young women and girls (Allen, 2011; Keller and Ringrose, 2015; Projansky, 2014; Vares and Jackson, 2015); yet few works consider how adult women (and/or men) might consume or engage with such media. Work that has examined adult female audiences thus far usually highlighted the gendered genre rather than new media/stars that increasingly blur both generic and format categorizations (see, for instance, Ang 1985 on soap opera; Radway 1984 on romance novels; Weber 2014 on reality television).

Additionally, while some scholars have examined the role of economic relations in stardom (Marshall, 1997; Williamson, 2016), much of that work is historical, rather than contemporary. Scholarly work exists with regards to both the male and female “sex symbol” in

¹⁰ The frequent discursive interchangeability between ‘commodification’ and ‘exploitation’ is crucial to note, as these terms in materialist theory refer to different economic processes. This will be discussed in further detail in the Theoretical Framework, Chapter 2.

Hollywood (see Dyer, 2004; Mercer, 2013, on James Bond actors; Schaberg and Bennett, 2014 on Brad Pitt; Scheibel, 2013 on Marilyn Monroe; Wright, 2016 on Robert Redford), as well as the gendered politics of aging in relation to Hollywood labour contracts in the studio era (Carman, 2012). Other, more contemporary studies have focused on the sexualization of the female star in relation to race (Bachechi, 2015, on Britney Spears and Kevin Federline; Beltrán, 2007, on Jennifer Lopez; Duan, 2016, on Beyoncé; Railton and Watson, 2011, on Christina Aguilera and Beyoncé; Redmond, 2007, on Kate Winslet) gender presentation (Brady, 2016; Lovelock, 2017a, both on Caitlyn Jenner), and class (Patrick, 2017 on Snooki; Sastre, 2013 on the Kardashians; Tyler, 2008 on the “chav mum”). Recent scholarship on bisexuality and lesbian performances in pop culture (Capulet, 2010; Cocarla, 2016) intersects with some of the issues that this thesis will investigate – particularly the notion of women (in this case, femme-presenting bisexual and lesbian celebrities) who perform a deviant, yet inauthentic sexuality for the sake of money and fame.

Other scholarship has attended to differences in the discursive framing of the sexuality of white stars as opposed to racialized ones, for instance, problematizing the argument that racialized stars are *more* dependent on their sexuality/bodies for ongoing success (Beltrán, 2007; Duan, 2016; Weidhase, 2015). At the same time, scholars such as Railton and Watson (2011) have noted that stars who “pass” – whose racial/ethnic background is visually ambiguous – are able to “play up” certain elements of racial identity when it is more beneficial/profitable, often drawing upon sexual stereotypes in order to do so (see also Bachechi, 2014). This “passing” strategy also extends to working-class stars and/or transgender stars, who are able to draw upon stereotypical/universalized expressions of “proper” femininity and female sexuality in order to maximize their appeal, broaden their audience, and, consequently, raise their visibility and star

power. Some scholars such as Su Holmes (2004) have deconstructed the ways that discourses of “talent” and class mobility mask a broader structural relation wherein female celebrities are constrained by, but also maneuver through, expectations and stereotypes around gender (see also Holmes, 2010; Jones and Weber, 2015). However, there have been few substantive examinations of the specificities of female celebrity sexuality – and the punishment of said sexuality – in relation to intersecting forms of privilege, race, and capitalist myths of meritocracy more broadly.

Another key issue in the scholarship is the notion of the celebrity sex scandal, which is invariably gendered female;¹¹ it is the female who “uses” her sexuality, not as an end in-and-of itself (i.e. takes pleasure in sex), but rather to achieve or bolster her renown through relations with men, whether they are more famous than her or not (see Gamson, 2001). As noted by Kristen Pullen (2005), the sex scandal has a long history pre-dating today’s mass media, but the current prevalence of surveillance technology has resulted in a proliferation of celebrity cheating scandals, sex tapes, and illicit imagery. Despite the proliferation of such technologies and the scandals they incur, there has been comparatively little work in Celebrity Studies that examines the specificities of today’s media environment in relation to female sexual scandal. Two notable exceptions to this trend (that will be discussed shortly in an upcoming section), is the burgeoning scholarship on the celebrity “sex tape” as well as the 2014 celebrity iCloud hack, thus demonstrating the timeliness of this thesis. In addition, there is increasing scholarly interest in new media celebrity, as I will outline in the next section.

¹¹ This is not to say that male celebrities are not prone to sex scandals, but that the female sex scandal is most often the one in which “fame” is framed as the/her goal. Male celebrity sex scandals, on the other hand, are often framed in terms of a character flaw (i.e. sexual addiction) that can be overcome and forgiven (see Van Den Bulk and Claessens, 2013, on Tiger Woods). Interestingly, this corresponds to broader myths around male sexuality (active, uncontrollable) and female sexuality (non-existent, women use their sexuality as a means, not an end). Furthermore, the “fame” narrative extends to non-celebrity sex scandals when victims coming forward are often marked out as seeking fame and fortune and therefore discredited.

b) Social Media Celebrity, Neoliberalism, and Sexuality

Within the field of celebrity scholarship, much attention has been paid of late to shifting relations in the age of new media technologies. In particular, there are two forms of new media stardom that are often used as gendered examples of the “democratization” of celebrity (a turn of phrase which often connotes a decline in meritocratic fame, see Holmes and Negra, 2008; Negra and Holmes, 2011): 1) the proliferation of “reality” platforms and; 2) the rise of the Internet star. While the genre of reality programming is not new (in traditional media histories these kinds of shows were more often referred to as “docuseries” or non-fiction programming, see Corner, 2002), the recent growth of reality programming, and the attendant anxieties around that growth (see Holmes, 2010; Weber, 2014) signal critical economic and technological shifts that are of concern to me in this thesis. In addition, there has been growing attentiveness to the role of the Internet – and social media platforms in particular – in not only promoting and circulating celebrity imagery, but also in launching celebrity. However, as media sites proliferate and converge (Jenkins, 2006), it becomes increasingly difficult to approach the study of these media formats as distinct entities, while the cross-platform success of recent figures such as the Kardashians points to an ongoing need to re-conceptualize stardom in the contemporary environment.

As noted above, the genre that is today commonly referred to as reality television is not an entirely new phenomenon yet is often publicly credited with generating new forms of stardom. An important point of departure for this thesis, however, is noted by Richard Kilborn (1994) in his discussion of the roots of reality programming; whereas earlier “docuseries” – and the name here belies its claims to more creditable art/news formats – often focused on

professionalized settings (i.e. *Rescue 911* following the trials and tribulations of first responders), what is now called “reality television” is often centered on revealing private selves; be that private personas, private lives, and/or private emotions (see also Dubrovsky, 2007; Grindstaff, 2002). Today’s generic formatting, therefore, draws upon longstanding gendered divides of public/private spheres to distinguish an inherently gendered form of stardom (Weber, 2014); one that, as will be discussed throughout this thesis, depends disproportionately upon *women* collapsing the public/private divide and “exposing” themselves to the cameras in order to gain a better life (which can be achieved in the genre through a makeover, prize money, or fame itself).

This gendered process, as has been noted by numerous television scholars, is often conceived of as a democratization of fame (see Turner, 2010 on the “demotic turn”; Williamson, 2016); former gatekeeping models of fame – wherein a person must have a recognizable talent, be discovered, and then obtain a “lucky break” – have shifted into a potentially “equalized” playing field where the terms of access are merely/often the possession of an outrageous (affectively expressive) personality. The significance and veracity of this collapse is both lauded and contested. While certainly there is a wider array of “ordinary” people that can obtain media exposure, and this might broaden wider understandings of both success and talent, the rewards of such exposure are still disproportionately reaped by media owners, producers, and networks (Collins, 2008; Turner, 2010; Williamson, 2016) and still favour those who most readily conform to hegemonic modes of gender, sexuality, and capitalist (and, increasingly, neoliberal capitalist) citizenship (Marwick, 2015; Weber, 2009). While appearing on a reality show might garner the participants an immediate surge of fame and visibility, it usually is short-lived and not economically rewarding (Turner, 2010), unless that visibility can be commoditized, which is

itself a skill (Hearn, 2013). One of the most effective methods of commoditizing visibility is through social media platforms.

Social media can be an effective extension of a celebrity's already-established brand, or an effective means to launch celebrity (an *entrepreneurialization* of celebrity, if you will.) While YouTube has become a critical site wherein music stars circulate and promote new music and videos (Marwick, 2015; Vernallis, 2013), social media sites like Twitter, Facebook and Instagram offer a platform where celebrities can combine or collapse promotional and personal/private discourses into one coherent brand identity and star image. Recent scholarship has examined, specifically, the use of Twitter and Instagram as a particular, unidirectional¹² form of communication that works to both strengthen affective and economic star-fan relations by highlighting both the "intimate," mundane sides of celebrity and offering more opportunities for sponsored content (Marshall, 2010; Marwick, 2015; Marwick and Boyd, 2011; Page, 2012). At the same time, such sites also allow fans themselves to become increasingly visible and, therefore, to commoditize fandom (i.e. fan accounts amass followers and then promote the celebrity's products as well as other products as requested), which, in turn, can make them into something of a "micro-celebrity," thus blurring the celebrity-fan-promoter categories even further. Again, however, such destabilizations do not necessarily equate to a more egalitarian or democratic space online (Marwick, 2015).

As outlined by Theresa M. Senft (2008) the term "micro-celebrity" was originally coined to refer to stars who build and maintain their audience¹³ through social media, but now more

¹² Marwick (2015) explains that unidirectional social media sites like Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube allow users to follow or subscribe to other people's feeds without permission or reciprocation, thus reproducing more closely than Facebook the "parasocial" celebrity-fan relation (p. 143; see also Lueck, 2015). This is likely why those sites in particular have received more attention in Celebrity Studies scholarship.

¹³ The term "audience" in these discussions is often used interchangeably with "brand," precisely because massive audiences/followings often turn into branding opportunities; people with high visibility online (large audiences) can be paid to promote products.

colloquially refers to those who have a heightened social media visibility, though this visibility may not translate either to other media formats, nor to the offline environment (see also Marwick and Boyd, 2010). Marwick and Boyd (2011) note that the practices of micro-celebrity – the collapsing of audience into fan base; maintaining online popularity through “ongoing fan management”; constructing a self to be “consumed” by others (p. 140) – are no longer distinct to micro-celebrities and have been adopted by both ordinary people (i.e. those not visible in the mainstream/social media) as well as celebrities whose brands extend beyond social media. Marwick (2015) succinctly summarizes this shift: “In the broadcast era, celebrity was something a person was; in the Internet era, micro-celebrity is something people *do*” (p. 140, emphasis in original). The collapse of the entrepreneurial self and the private self into one online profile mirrors several broader trends across neoliberal capitalism wherein people are no longer workers but now entrepreneurs; leisure time and work time are no longer distinct; and a focus on (improvement of) the self takes precedent over larger (community/political) concerns (Couldry, 2008; Duggan, 2003; K. Fairclough, 2012; Hasinoff, 2008; McRobbie, 2015; Weber, 2009).

Although these increasingly pervasive ties across online self-management, performances of the “real” self, celebrity culture, and neoliberal ideology are under discussion, scholars are struggling to keep up with the intersectional implications of these imperatives. Some highlights of this growing field include Christina Bacareza Balance’s (2012) study of Asian American performers on YouTube; Michael Lovelock (2017b) on homonormativity in LGBTQ “coming out” vlogs; Daniel Smith (2014) on YouTubing national identity in the global marketplace; Alice E. Marwick (2015) on Instagram’s performative/aspirational luxury and consumption; Anne Jerselev and Mette Mortensen (2016) on the commoditization of the celebrity “selfie.” While there is overlap between scholars of new media and feminist inquiries into girls and young

women's use of social media (Keller, Mendes, & Ringrose, 2018; Marwick and Boyd, 2014; Rentschler, 2014; Ringrose et al., 2013; Ringrose and Harvey, 2015), much of these, again, center on (or deconstruct) the protective framework of danger, rape culture, and/or sexuality, without extensive consideration of the *economic* payoffs of media use and visibility (rather than personal ones) for women (rather than girls). Though it is important not to downplay the dangers of being a visible woman in an online environment, it is neither realistic to suggest that women remain offline today, nor is it helpful to assume that such dangers are unrelated to the increasing imperative to have an online presence in order to be successful. In the following section of this chapter, then, I discuss my chosen case studies, which reflect these connections across violence, sexuality, celebrity culture, and neoliberal capitalism, with the aim of demonstrating the need for my particular intervention.

III. Case Study Scholarship

As discussed above, there has been relatively little work that unites the concerns of feminist celebrity scholarship with ongoing discussions about violence against women in an online, neoliberal environment. My chosen case studies, then, serve as useful microcosms in which these issues converge and can be examined. However, this is not to say that no academic work has paid attention to the issues of new media celebrity (as most clearly exemplified through the Kardashian family), the celebrity sex tape, or the hacking and sharing of private celebrity photos. In this section, then, I review the existing and growing literature, first, on Disney stars and sex scandals. I then examine the existing literature on both Paris Hilton and the Kardashian family: particularly to demonstrate the ways in which this work often, in the process of making larger arguments, reifies prominent discourses about the “leaked” sex tape rather than examining

how those discourses are crucial to understanding the Hilton/Kardashian phenomena. I will then move to a broader examination of the current, minimal amount of scholarship that exists centering on the celebrity sex tape/stolen image. Finally, I will summarize the work specifically addressing the iCloud hacking incident, also commonly referred to as “The Fappening,” that occurred in 2014. This exploration aims to demonstrate both the growing concern with these specific case studies, and the need for a broader feminist project uniting them.

The anxieties around contemporary young womanhood are often exemplified through the young Disney star “in crisis,” and is both reflected by but also addressed in the growing scholarship on these women (Meyer, Fallah, & Wood, 2011). As one of the most high-profile Disney celebrities, Miley Cyrus has received much of the scholarly attention with regard to “scandal,” with research examining the reactions to her provocative 2008 *Vanity Fair* photo shoot (Vares and Jackson, 2015) as well as her controversial “transition” into adult female star (Brady, 2016; Mendenhall, 2018). Meanwhile, the media framing of Lindsay Lohan’s struggles with addiction (Tiger, 2013; 2015) and with the law (Smith, Twum, & Gielen, 2009) have been analyzed in relation to broader understandings and norms about addiction.

Paris Hilton, similarly, has been the subject of research in the legal discipline with studies looking at, again, the media framing of her DUI (Smith et al., 2009); her legal punishment for that crime (Montag and Sobek, 2014); as well as the legal status/dispute over her sex tape with Rick Solomon (Siprut, 2005). In fact, Hilton’s sex tape was most often invoked in the academic literature in relation to the law (see also Hayward and Rahn, 2014 in upcoming section), or placed into broader trends of celebrity sex videos in the age of new media technology (Longstaff, 2017).

The Kardashians have had more impact on recent work in cultural studies, likely because of the ways they embody and perform new media stardom in the neoliberal age. The work that has been produced on the Kardashian family thus far has attended to economic concerns; particularly the implications of (self)-branding across new media formats (Schneider McClain, 2014); their functioning within, or in opposition to, capitalist myths of meritocracy and the “American Dream” (Callahan, 2016; Premaggiore and Negra, 2014); the commoditization of self, body, and sexuality (Callahan, 2016; Sastre, 2014); and, on the rare occasion, an example of successful entrepreneurship (Lueck, 2015). Maria Premaggiore and Diane Negra (2014), in particular have provided a useful examination of the implications of, and class anxieties embedded in the Kardashians’ fame specifically in terms of post-feminist neoliberal citizenship: “[shows] such as *Keeping Up with the Kardashians* want to reassure us that the intense commodification of identity and the relentless drive for profits need not threaten family intimacy and solidarity” (p. 93). The family – and its matriarchal/entrepreneurial nature – is a key element across analyses of the show, but the most prominently studied subjects within the family are Kim Kardashian and family matriarch Kris Jenner (with more recent scholarship demonstrating a growing interest in Caitlyn Jenner). While there has been work that acknowledges Kris Jenner’s seemingly paradoxical role of mother and manager, signified through the gendered moniker “Momager” (Jones and Weber, 2015; Lueck, 2015), the academic work that examines either her or Kim most often traces their fame back to Kim’s infamous 2007 sex tape (sometimes even implicating Jenner in its production and circulation), replicating rather than challenging or unpacking this contemporary fame narrative (Jones and Weber, 2015; Sastre, 2014).

Alexandra Sastre’s (2014) work on Kim Kardashian in relation to ethnicity, body, and sexuality provides an excellent starting point for examining the relevance of this particular

iteration of stardom to feminist thought. However, Sastre's work focuses on textual analysis of Kim's body – in the reality show, as well as through sexualized imagery such as the sex tape and sexual/nude photo shoots – rather than providing, as I aim to, a discursive analysis of how her celebrity body is taken up by mainstream news media into larger projects of female body/sex policing. Furthermore, in her analysis and discussion of the sex tape, Sastre accepts and reproduces the discourse that I want to deconstruct: namely, that the sex tape “launched” Kim's – and by extension, her entire family's – career and that, therefore, any violation suggested by the “leak” is neutralized by the visibility and monetary reward that came afterward.

Celebrity sex tapes in general are susceptible to these neutralizing frameworks. Despite important work being done to typify varying levels of consent across differing genres of celebrity sex tapes (see, for instance, Hayward and Rahn, 2014), there remains in the scholarship (as well as the discourse more broadly) a sense that such tapes, particularly for female stars, are inherently beneficial – economically and professionally (Hillyer, 2010; Sastre, 2014) – or that the existence of a sexualized image in other texts/settings de-legitimizes claims to sexual privacy (Hayward and Rahn, 2014). In fact, much like in the case of rape victims who come forward to find their own sexual histories adjudicated (see Harding, 2015), the veracity of claims that celebrity sex tapes were “leaked” or “stolen” are often judged (even in peer-reviewed work) against other sexual images and performances the celebrity has willingly circulated publicly (and here Hayward and Rahn, 2014, problematically reproduce this framework).

Even within these discussions, however, there is an attempt to distinguish between consensual mediated expressions of sexuality and non-consensual sexual imagery. For example, Hayward and Rahn (2014) distinguish between the “personal sex video” which is not intended for public circulation and the “amateur porn production” which draws on the aesthetics of the

personal sex video to suggest a more “authentic” sexual encounter than most depicted in professional mainstream pornography (pp. 49-50; see also Hardy, 2009; Hillyer, 2010). Crucially, this more intimate and authentic aesthetic can also suggest that the footage is illicit: whether or not the participants knowingly and fully consented to being filmed, the footage can generate a sense that they may not know (see also Longstaff, 2017). This project is interested in investigating the broader implications of such viewing (and consuming) pleasures (vis-à-vis our attitudes about women’s sexual privacy).

With regards to celebrity sex videos in particular, Hayward and Rahn do attempt to distinguish between non-consensual extortion/revenge porn videos, on the one hand, and consensual “negotiated” or self-promotion videos on the other (p. 52). Drawing on the work of Salter (2013) and Fahy (2007), they point to a double-appeal in the gendered circulation of illicit celebrity sex videos; firstly, they humiliate and, secondly, that humiliation creates an equalizing force. As Thomas Fahy (2007) argues with regards to the release of Paris Hilton’s sex tape, these videos “erode” economic boundaries through bodily/sexual consumption:

Paris Hilton – at her most glamorous, most erotic, and most embarrassed – provides her audience, particularly those who feel disenfranchised by economic inequality, with an outlet for their fantasies and frustrations. Her eroticized body promises intimate access to the world of celebrity and upper-class privilege. (p. 79)

The fact that the celebrity body doesn’t need to be authentic supports such an assertion. The popularity of the celebrity lookalike video suggests that a key pleasure in consuming the celebrity body through the sex video (thus erasing or undermining economic privilege, as well as the ability to consent) relies upon humiliation. As noted by Hayward and Rahn, the pleasure for these viewers in punishing and humiliating the celebrity body is less about whether or not she

truly *is* punished, but rather producing (either through a lookalike or through the celebrity herself) a symbolic punishment: “enact[ing] various forms of retribution on women who have achieved media prominence and/or various positions of affluence or power by representing them in an unambiguously sexual manner” (p. 57). In this way, as will be noted throughout this thesis, I will be less interested in whether or not the celebrity really *is* punished (or, conversely, whether she truly “profits” from these instances of privacy violation), but the symbolic and discursive effects of sexually punishing women who have achieved prominence, affluence, or power.

Revenge porn is another form of sexual violence increasingly enacted against female celebrities to punish their prominence, affluence, and power. It is important that the literature on celebrity sex tapes continue to connect these issues to larger instances of sexual violence against women and revenge porn. The term “revenge porn” itself has unfortunately, through the word “revenge,” often been conceived of as instances of domestic or relational sexual violence where a partner, former-partner or rebuked wannabe partner posts intimate images of someone (usually female) in order to humiliate them. This is perhaps one of the reasons that law enforcement has been so ineffective in regulating, preventing and penalizing the perpetrators of such imagery. Citron and Franks (2014), have formulated a definition of revenge porn that is more useful to my work, bringing it out of the private, domestic sphere into something that has much larger, often economic and political implications for women’s lives. Revenge porn is “the circulation of intimate photographic and/or video material that shows a recognizable individual in sexually explicit situations in order to cause humiliation to that individual” (quoted in Hayward and Rahn, 2015, p. 53). Law professor Clare McGlynn (2017) suggests using the term “image-based sexual abuse” to more clearly convey the connections between such imagery and broader ongoing patterns of sexual violence. While I recognize the usefulness of McGlynn’s term, as well as the

limitations of “revenge porn,” my interest in the workings of the discourse itself – and how it is most commonly framed – necessitates an ongoing utilization of both of these terms, as appropriate vis-à-vis the media framing of such events (and for the purposes of this thesis, “revenge porn” was not either a used or appropriate term to describe stolen celebrity images, but it is helpful in connecting these instances to other mediated gendered violence, as is done by Marwick, 2017).

One of the most prominent cases of image-based sexual violence in recent years was the iCloud hack of 2014, commonly referred to as “The Fappening.” This landmark case has important implications for debates over rape culture, privacy, crime, and economics (with large Internet corporations implicit or implicated in the issue, including Google, Apple, and Reddit), which is reflected in the growing body of scholarly research around this specific incident. For example, Adrienne Massanari’s (2017) article on The Fappening, #Gamergate¹⁴ and “toxic technocultures” provides helpful insight into “geek masculinity,” which crucially, though predominately white and male, views itself as marginalized. Toxic technoculture can be understood to be “a kind of techno/cyberlibertarian ethos, valuing the notion of a rational, autonomous individual and meritocratic idealism” (Massanari, 2017, p. 332), fostering a sense of entitlement among its members that is often not reflected in offline environments. Though these descriptions are helpful in understanding how certain misogynistic events, including The Fappening and Gamergate, flourish in online environments, I argue that it is important to consider these events in a broader context of economics, privilege, and sexual violence.

¹⁴ In the simplest terms, #Gamergate refers to a 2014 controversy that led to the targeted online harassment of several prominent women in the video game industry.

Toward that end, Massanari's analysis provides some helpful points of departure. She notes the ways in which Reddit itself,¹⁵ through both its design and administration, profits off these instances of celebrity violation – in fact, they only removed the nude images once it was determined a minor was among those whose photos were hacked and dumped (p. 336). Furthermore, the company statement on the issue at the time reflects larger attitudes about this type of illicit imagery and the (un)ethical issues surrounding their consumption: “each man is responsible for his [sic] own soul” (p. 339). This statement also underlines the libertarian ethos that is increasingly being mobilized toward neoliberal ends, and it is important to note how these thrive in online environments where site administrators have to choose between keeping their users safe and allowing the free market to reign (an issue that has long plagued Twitter, for instance).

Furthermore, Massanari's analysis of the focus on the stolen images of Jennifer Lawrence, in particular, is of use to this thesis in that she was simultaneously one of the most admired/idolized female celebrities on the very site that victimized her (p. 339). What is the importance then, of an online community that values libertarianism, autonomy and meritocracy turning against one of the most successful, yet relatable female celebrity/sex symbols of our time? While such a question is certainly worth investigating, this thesis aims to de-contextualize the issue from the toxic technoculture framework – while still remaining attentive to the liberal idealism surrounding new media technologies – and investigate how sexual privacy violations are framed, not by a supposedly marginalized “geek culture,” but in the very mainstream of our culture. How does the news media propagate the notion that “each man [sic] is responsible for

¹⁵ Reddit is a popular online board/forum where users can aggregate, rate, and discuss content, usually related to current events. It is the fifth most popular site the US, with over 200 million users (Alexa.com, 2017).

his [sic] own soul” (Massanari, 2017, p. 339) and that each woman is responsible for her own violation?

Other recent work on this event has examined the discourses circulating through and about Reddit and geek masculinity, as well as the feminist pushback on popular blogging sites (Lawson, 2017; Marwick, 2017). In particular, Catherine Lawson’s (2017) analysis provides an excellent jumping off point for my own research here, as it demonstrates how “new media” news and blogging sites are increasingly drawing upon feminist, anti-rape culture, anti-victim-blaming discourses in their framing of the celebrity photo hack. Most of the scholarly analyses do take a similar stance in naming the event as a specifically gendered form of violence (Lawson, 2017; Marwick, 2017; Massanari, 2017), but these studies are usually limited in scale and time (i.e. to that event and its meaning at that technological/cultural moment). This thesis departs from said studies by examining this instance as part of a longstanding commoditization and violation of famous women’s bodies and contextualizing the event as part of a broader shift in the relations between new media technology, mediated sexuality, and shifting platforms and access to fame. Furthermore, I look specifically at mainstream (i.e. traditional) news coverage of the event, wherein the mainstream news is figured as a site of corporate, patriarchal power and serves a gatekeeping function that often clashes with, rather than celebrates, feminist politics of the body.

In summary, there are two key debates that this PhD project seeks to unite. The first surrounds the distinction between consensual sexual imagery and non-consensual imagery/the non-consensual sharing of sexual imagery. The second centers on the role and agency of women working in the world of media and, increasingly, new media technologies. Celebrity culture is at once a particular and typical site in which these debates converge. Though female celebrities are among the most privileged class of women (and certainly, that privilege is susceptible to

revocation or erasure), celebrity is one site wherein young women have unmatched visibility and symbolic power in contemporary neoliberal society. Examining the discourses around the supposed “successes” allows for a more nuanced understanding of how gender norms are modeled and policed more broadly, as well as what happens to women who challenge gender and sexual hierarchies rooted in economic privilege. Finally, celebrity culture is increasingly difficult to separate from the other spheres of society, including the political sphere; in 2016 America elected as its top official heir, socialite, and (reality) television personality Donald Trump. Although the Kardashians may not be next in line to take over the Oval Office, the rhetoric surrounding them – and female celebrities more broadly – suggests that rich and sexual women might be more offensive to American sensibilities than tax cuts for billionaires, border walls, population bans, and election tampering. Of course, the distaste for the public woman is not new, but what is new is the capacity for and techniques used to humiliate and punish her. In the next Chapter, then, I examine the economic history of working/public women, as well as theories that center the audience and discourse as sites of meaning-making and potential resistance to larger power structures, including the patriarchal structure of the media industry itself.

Chapter 2 Theoretical Framework

Introduction

In this chapter, I examine the connections between economic privilege and gender/sexual oppression, drawing from materialist, reception-based, and post-structuralist theories. In order to do so, I first contextualize materialist feminist analysis in relation to the political economy of celebrity and the star system. I then outline the importance of reception studies, rooted in British Cultural Studies, which provides the opportunity to account for varying audience positions and, increasingly, their participatory practices, in analyzing both the constraints and possibilities of new media technologies. Finally, I shift to a discussion of post-structuralism; in particular, the insights that this framework provides in terms of the agency-structure dialectic, the notion of performativity, and the importance of (news) discourse. Despite often being positioned as oppositional to materialism (see, for instance, Fraser, 1998 on Butler), my thesis will build upon Judith Butler's discussion of material feminism to show that certain, very real (i.e. non-discursive) material relations are dependent upon discursive frameworks that decide whose bodies get to be autonomous, and whose are always violable (i.e. sometimes through the discursive framing of being "public property").

I. Material Feminism

a) Women, Work, and Capitalism

The concept of work has long been used to separate and categorize bodies into various factions of the labour market depending on age, sex/uality, gender, race, class, and ability. At the same time, we are increasingly taught that the work we do is a structuring force in our lives, determining the meaning of our relationships to ourselves and to others and how we measure our

success, particularly in the age of post-industrial, neoliberal, global capitalism (Irving, 2014; Littler, 2013). Yet the terms of reward for our labour are not evenly dispersed: success in the capitalist form of monetary gain and cultural visibility is not only conditionally defined in relation to privilege (gender, racial, sexual, and class), but is also celebrated only if achieved through the “right” or hegemonically acceptable channels.

Throughout the history of capitalism, women in Western nations have had varying and often precarious relations to the means of production, profits, and labour market. Marxist and socialist feminists argue that in capitalist societies, the means of production are “owned by one class (capitalists), while another class (the working class) is excluded from ownership and thus compelled to sell their labour power” (Williamson, 2016, p. 114). The working class, of course, historically has varyingly included ethnic and racial groups, yet often excluded white women, whose labour was not for sale (exempting the poorest class), but instead was channeled into the family and the ability of the man to sell his labour (Williamson, 2016, p. 114; see also D. Smith, 1985).

In much capitalist critique an economic form of exploitation is delineated from a less formal conception of exploitation as “one group tak[ing] unfair advantage of another” (Williamson, 2016, p. 114). David Hesmondhalgh uses Marxist and socialist feminist analyses to distinguish between “oppression” and “exploitation”: in the former, the success or “welfare” of one class (the ruling or dominant class) is based upon the ongoing deprivation of another class, while in the latter, the dominant class not only relies upon the ongoing subjugation of the dominated, but also appropriates their labour; reaping surplus profit from their labour, which is purchased – if it even is purchased¹⁶ – by the dominant class at a much lower wage (summarized

¹⁶ I am drawing on Delphy’s (1984) work to extend this definition of exploitation to include the unpaid work provided by oppressed classes in exploitative relations.

in Williamson, 2016, p. 114; see also Guillaumin, 1995). This key distinction helps to unpack claims with regards to women's selling of their labour (their sexual and/or reproductive labour; labour of fashion, beauty, etc.): exploitation occurring when a woman's labour is appropriated toward the profits of the capitalist/ruling class (owners), while the concept of a woman "self-exploiting" does not speak to capitalist concerns over owner-worker relations (entrepreneurs in capitalism cannot self-exploit in this way). However, the ongoing use of the concept of "self-exploitation" in the more colloquial sense (as unfairly taking advantage of something) can reveal certain anxieties about the "unfair" places/spaces that women occupy in today's public/visible labour market.¹⁷

In the broader relations of capitalism, white women's domestic work also signaled an important shift in notions of public and private service. Dorothy E. Smith (1985) points out that the inception of private property was a key moment in which women were pushed out of the realm of the social (when previously property and work were conceived of in communal terms) and made to be dependent upon male wage earners to support them (pp. 5-6). This dependence did not mean that their work was unnecessary or superfluous to the wage-earners, but rather ensured that white married women were, as Christine Delphy (1980) notes, doubly exploited in capitalist societies: both in terms of the unpaid domestic labour they performed, and in their subordination to men/husbands (and this follows the previously outlined definition of exploitation where one's labour provides surplus profit – in the form of non-paid work – to another, the husband).

¹⁷ In her recent book *Empowered: Popular Feminism and Popular Misogyny*, Sarah Banet-Weiser (2018) draws upon the work of Robyn Weigman to argue that today's market can be described as an economy of visibility. This will be discussed in more detail in part (c) of this section.

Women's labour encompassed not only domestic and/or productive labour, but also sexual and/or reproductive labour (Guillaumin, 1995). Because of this particular subordination and structural dependency, women – unlike men – could not merely improve their skills so that they would be more adequately rewarded by employers/owners: white women's status on the socio-economic ladder could only be improved through a sexual (domestic) partnership (i.e. marrying a richer man) (Delphy, 1980, pp. 34-35). In other words, white women's relations to success in the capitalist sense (wealth, consumption) and, therefore, their *value* was directly tied, not to an employable or productive skill set, but to their sexuality and femininity (their ability to seduce and to keep a husband). Importantly, the more successful they were in their endeavor to land a successful husband, the less physical, domestic (productive) labour they had to do (often at the expense of having racialized, domestic workers take up that exploitative labour, see Davis, 1983; P.H. Collins, 2000), and the more their labour could be directed back into femininity and appropriate (i.e. reproductive) sexuality. In this sense, then, relations can be drawn out between a woman's class status, her race, her ability to perform gendered labour, and her relation to exploitative capitalism; the more she could rely on her white, hetero-sexuality, the further she could get from the more exploitative forms of labour.

Although the work of feminine sexuality, reproduction, and domesticity were viewed as non-productive and, thus, not worthy of payment (but still appropriated and therefore exploited by both husbands and employers), racialized women were forced into differing relations within the production economy. As noted by Angela Y. Davis (1983), Black women in both Canada and the United States were forced into the slave labour pool as equals to Black men. In this way, their labour was directly exploited by white slave-owners who profited from free slave labour, but they were also subject to slave-owners' demands with regards to sexual and reproductive labour.

Black and white women were viewed as the property of white men, whose value was dependent on their ability to provide the domestic labour and offspring necessary to sustain the bourgeois class (white women) or on their ability to produce slave labour (Black women): neither of which warranted payment, yet both of which generated the surplus labour and profit on which capitalism depended. Interestingly, as noted by Patricia Hill Collins (2000), for many African American women, the move from unpaid labour to paid labour – labour that, for Black women, was and remains disproportionately low paying, and often in the service industries – was not often perceived by that community as a move away from exploitation, and when they could, many women chose to dedicate their labour to home and family as an act of resistance against the white supremacist capitalist system (p. 46).

Even as economic relations began to change in the twentieth century, and women began to sell their productive labour in the capitalist market – labour that remained exploitative in the sense of generating profit for the dominant class – sexual labour still delimited women's status in the economy. For instance, the cult of true womanhood positioned a white woman's value as directly tied to her chastity (Crenshaw, 1989, p.157; Collins, 2000, p. 72), as she was seen as the property of, first a father and then, after marriage, a husband who provided for her but also held exclusive right to her sexuality. This also worked to ensure the so-called "purity" of the white race – marrying a virgin ensured the husband's paternity over her children and upheld white lineage (Collins, 2000, p. 133). The desirable woman – the one who will marry successfully (i.e. fulfilling expectations to either equal or heighten her race and class status) – is one whose sexuality can be fully owned and known by her husband. On the other end of the spectrum, or the continuum of "economic-sexual exchange" as Paola Tabet (2016) calls it, is the promiscuous woman, or even more notably, the prostitute who sells her sexual labour on the capitalist market

(both of whom are often described as “whores”). Women’s sexuality, therefore, is often understood across numerous societies as providing them with sexual capital that can be exchanged for economic capital (money), social capital (legitimacy, a desirable “name” or status), and – I would add – cultural/symbolic capital (visibility, renown) (Tabet, 2016). Notably, as will be discussed in the following section, the selling/trading bartering of sexual capital for economic/cultural capital often enabled new forms of female autonomy, yet also further subjugated women economically to others beyond familial relations (i.e. with “pimps”, “madams,” agents, and managers replacing husbands and fathers).

Of course, these hierarchies of value applied to the sexual purity of white women. Women of colour were not only understood to have, but also consciously positioned as having, no such value in order to justify ongoing sexual abuse of their bodies. Popular imagery painted them as either promiscuous and tainted, or asexual (see, for instance, Collins, 2000). Their status as property, unlike that of white women, denied them access to any legal protection of bodily (sexual) autonomy (Crenshaw, 1989, p. 159; see also Smith, 1985). Additionally, women who were unrecognizable to the capitalist system for neither having nor (re-)producing value (profits/labour) were deemed expendable and demeaned (women with disabilities, lesbian or bisexual women, Indigenous women, women too old to work or reproduce, etcetera).

In summary, since its inception, the capitalist system has not only depended upon the subordinate position of the wage-labourer to generate profit for the capitalist owner, but it has also ensured ongoing subordination of marginalized groups in relation to other wage-earners. A Marxist framework allows us to name the unpaid work provided by white women and racialized women and men as “exploitation”: their labour was either directly appropriated (as was the case in slavery) or secondarily supported the wage earners which, in turn, helped to generate surplus

profits for the dominant class. Lack of wages also ensured an ongoing relation of dependency where the exploited depended upon their oppressors to take care of them. All of these relations were and continue to be rooted in a system that has ensured that certain skills have a market value while other skills (i.e. feminized or domestic ones) do not. In the next section I examine the role of the media in categorizing certain skills as valuable, as well as the ways that media work itself values certain, often gendered and racialized skill sets as valuable ones, while negating others that might challenge systems of white supremacist patriarchy. In other words, the capitalist market does not inherently recognize and reward skills that have been gendered masculine over those that are feminine; it is structured that way. Both media form and media discourse (content) play an important role in sustaining that gendered structure.

b) Women and the Media

Although the terms with which women engage in the labour system have shifted over the varying stages of capitalism, there remains a fairly consistent rhetoric about who is and who is not worthy of success within such a system. This rhetoric, often deemed the “myth of meritocracy” suggests that, for a capitalism rooted in democracy and self-advertised as treating everyone equally, anyone who works hard and has talent will be able to “rise,” and *should* be able to rise the socio-economic ladder to success (Littler, 2013). As the paid labour pool expanded to include women/people of colour, the narrative remained, often occluding the differences that constrain one’s likelihood of being able to advance up the socio-economic ladder of capitalism.

In the following section, I examine more specifically the role that the media and celebrity play in perpetuating capitalist myths of equal opportunity, and also unpack some of the ways that

these cultural forces also work to legitimize the role, skills, and labour of certain people over others. I first provide some history over the concerns about “public” women and their role in patriarchal capitalist society. I then shift to more contemporary debates over the celebrity and their relation to hegemonic systems.

These debates illustrate that famous women inhabit a unique and rich site for analysis in relation to systems of domination; particularly the ways that their success illustrates the tensions between capitalism and white supremacist patriarchy. That is, a capitalist system, though structured to favour certain identities (roles) and skills, does provide room in which certain women – who fulfill certain physical and behavioural conventions to be addressed throughout this thesis – can rise to fame and fortune, despite their gender, sexual, or racial identity. This tension hints at broader anxieties over the relations between women (of varying races, ages, and abilities) and their skills, labour, and success above and beyond those working in the media.

As discussed in the introductory chapter, the celebrity system plays a key role in perpetuating this myth of meritocracy (Dyer, 1979; Littler, 2013). Celebrities rise through the system of media production by virtue of what is presented discursively to audiences (through promotion, interviews, biographies) as a unique blend of talent, work ethic, and luck (Holmes, 2004; Littler, 2004; Marshall and Kongsgaard, 2012). Such discourses occlude the structural forces at work, and the roles of those in power in the media that determine who can and cannot have access to media jobs (i.e. producers, directors, casting directors, studio heads). They also occlude the gendered and racialized regulations of media access. Although I focus in this thesis on women who become visible publicly (through their appearance on film, television, and other media screens), it is important to note that those working off-screen, producing, distributing and profiting from media content, are more likely to be white men (Associated Press, 2015; Business

Insider, 2013; Conor, Gill, & Taylor, 2015). Such demographics and their interests affect the promotional discourses that frame certain stars as deserving of fame through having the appropriate forms of talent and displaying the proper modes of wealth and consumption (appropriate, of course, to their perceived gender, race, class and age).

The relations between women, success, and visibility (in/through the media) have long been sites of broader political tension. As early as there have been female stars whose private lives were known, such as the likes of Lillie Langtry and Sarah Bernhardt in the late nineteenth century, and Josephine Baker in the early twentieth century, there has been public concern over shifting relations between sexuality, talent, and success (and the visibility/wealth element of this success is not inconsequential). Historical studies suggest that public discourses reflected both a sense of titillation as well as impropriety in publicly knowing and consuming the details of these famous women's private lives (see Berlanstein, 2004; Hindson, 2011). An 1878 newspaper description of Lillie Langtry, for instance, as being “more famous for beauty than for talent or virtue” (Hindson, 2011, p. 34), hints at a longstanding tension between the public woman and traditional conceptions of rewardable public skills (i.e. women can be beautiful/attractive, but not economically rewarded for it, or, if they are economically rewarded for beauty, it is secondarily, through marriage).

Kirsten Pullen's (2005) thorough history of stage actresses addresses more specifically concerns over public women blurring the distinctions between sex work and “performance” work. Female labour defies categorizations in these terms, as women who sell themselves publicly are often assumed to be selling themselves sexually (either on the stage, as a fantasy, or in the bedroom, as an actual prostitute); at the same time, for many women, femininity is – to varying degrees – a performance that includes the rehearsal and practice of appropriate ways of

styling oneself and behaving (see Butler, 1999; McRobbie, 2009; 2015). These unstable distinctions also point to the ongoing de-stabilization of the public/private divide by famous women, as well as the discursive distinction between masculinized stardom, which maintains the divide, and the feminized term “celebrity,” which collapses it (see Holmes and Negra, 2011; Weber, 2009). Such lines have been long blurred by not only the public (patriarchal) backlash that insists on discursively connecting female stars and their private lives (through, for instance, news reporting on female stars’ love affairs), but also, as shown by Pullen, in many early actresses’ own provocative autobiographies, demonstrating that such confusion was perhaps beneficial to them in ways that a model of male supremacy cannot fully account for, (i.e. financially). It is worth restating here that the patriarchal version of capitalism outlined earlier depends upon a privatization of women’s work and lives (i.e. limited to the private sphere) and that public women are therefore inherently disruptive to such a form of capitalism, even while they profit off that system. How does patriarchal capitalism, then, recuperate these transgressive subjects?

Milly Williamson’s (2016) comprehensive examination of the political economy of stage fame in the nineteenth century suggests that female actresses were encouraged to blur the public/private divide in their lives (and often in actual sexual acts), by the managers and theatre owners of the time, and that they willingly participated in this “‘illusion of intimacy’ in order to increase their fame and popularity” (p. 43). It is important to question, however, the ways that historical narratives that paint actresses as “participants” rather than orchestrators of such illusions not only deny them full agency in their careers (which is something that can never be measured or determined through the public discourses that now serve as historical documents for analysis), but also perpetuate a discursive connection between illusionary (as opposed to

authentic) private selves that are for sale to the highest bidder. Furthermore, such frameworks do not attend to the relations of production that might allow for a conception of exploitation to be occurring: are actresses providing labour in the form of gossip that increases profit for theatre owners, or to increase their own fame, popularity, and, therefore, profit? And what does increasing their own popularity and profit, in turn, provide to theatre owners? Although the specific mechanics of nineteenth century profit-splitting can never be fully known today, the discourses around who profits can serve to perpetuate a construction of the public woman/actress as both a victim (of her theatre/capitalist owner) and as an oppressor (as an exploiter of herself and, by extension/influence, other women). This discursive construct sets up a false economic equivalency where the woman is imagined as getting *as much* out of this relation as the theatre owner, without accounting for the surplus profit generated by her (excessive) sexual labour, or the trade-offs (i.e. reputation, perceived lack of agency, etc.). Such relations will be necessary to consider in an age where the theatre owner (or other media owner) is increasingly sidelined, or even altogether eliminated from the economic relation.

The proliferation of mass media forms at the end of the nineteenth century into the twentieth further entrenched many of the anxieties around the female star: anxieties heralded by the inception of what has come to be known as celebrity in its contemporary form. “Celebrity” as we understand it today in Western societies is not often traced to the stage wherein the publicly performing woman first rose to fame (despite, as discussed earlier, her personal life often being fair fodder for public discourse), but rather, to the emergence of the mass media system in the age of industrial capitalism (S. Collins, 2008; Williamson, 2016). The rise of industrial capitalism coincided with an expansion of two large media spheres at the turn of the twentieth century: the rise of the daily newspapers and the emergence of the Hollywood studio system

(Basinger, 2007; Dyer, 1979; Hindson, 2011; Williamson, 2016). It is this moment – in and through the symbiotic relations between the film industry and the dailies used to promote the films and their stars – that is often cited as the birth of today’s conception of celebrity: a figure that is “famous for their private li[fe] as much as their public achievements” (Williamson, 2016, p. 27).

As noted earlier, however, the distinction between star and celebrity is more often a discursive one – a gendered and classed one at that – than an empirical one. Although the term celebrity is assumed to connote a certain public knowledge of a private life in comparison to the star, whose success is authenticated and legitimized by a performed public talent that is separate from their private, intimate self (see Holmes and Negra, 2011; Weber, 2014), the proliferation of varying, and increasingly converging media platforms troubles such dichotomies. Instagram and Twitter, for instance, allow fans to access stars’ performances of everyday intimate selves, while reality television, on the other hand, allows “ordinary” people to monetize (through media visibility) their ordinariness, thus becoming celebrities (Hearn, 2013; Marwick and Boyd, 2011; Turner, 2010).

The hierarchy between the star who performs and the ordinary person who just “exists,” is tied to gendered conceptions of public and private spheres (Geraghty in Holmes and Negra, 2011, p. 13; Davis, 1983, p.32¹⁸; see also Collins, 2000; Smith, 1985). Furthermore, the distinction between the two terms is often framed in temporal terms of a *decline* from stardom to celebrity (Holmes and Negra, 2011), as the private and public are less and less distinguishable

¹⁸ In her discussion of the gendered relations within industrial capitalism, Angela Davis (1983) points out that prior to such a system (i.e. during pre-industrial capitalism) the home was a feminine domain, but not outside of or in opposition to the public economic system. Women worked not only to provide the reproductive labour necessary to sustain capitalism, but often to produce the goods necessary for the family within the home, working as equals alongside the non-domestic labour of their husbands. Only when the production of such household goods moved to the manufacturing sector did the understanding of women’s domestic work shift to become distinct and separate from economic systems (and therefore having no economic value).

from one another; as though female celebrity today suggests that there is a new kind of fame that is unique and lesser-than in form and function. It is important to consider the implications of such assumptions – that is, what purpose does it serve to suggest that (female) celebrities today are less talented/useful than they/stars once were? Who benefits from upholding a public/private divide, particularly in relation to media success?

Scholars of celebrity have argued that the celebrity system works to legitimize the capitalist necessities of both (1) myths of meritocracy (Dyer, 1979; Littler, 2013), and (2) the separation and differing valuation of public and private spheres and labour. The myth of meritocracy emerges to “mask or displace [the] contradictions” of capitalist ideology (Dyer, 1979, p. 3) that necessitate the success of some at the expense, and labour, of others (see also Halberstam, 2011; Littler, 2013). Those who get ahead have the skill/talent/work ethic/etcetera necessary for capitalist success. Certain skills and work, such as those done, for pay, outside the home, publicly, are simply more rare and in-demand, therefore having more value. Success/wealth becomes earned and, therefore, deserved. At the same time, those who earn money selling their labour on the public market also earn the chance to acquire private property; including, historically, a wife and family (Smith, 1985).

The celebrity system is one site in which the capitalist myth of meritocracy proliferates; through varying formats and narratives, the celebrity emerges as a special person with a unique talent, who worked hard and had a lucky break (Dyer, 1979; Littler, 2004). Each of these elements is key to the myth that applies to capitalist success more broadly: the special factor (the inherent/essentialized trait); the talent (a rare, market-valued skill); and the lucky break (a production owner/investor willing to take them on). However, the media, as argued by many cultural studies theorists, is not just a site in which reality is reflected back to us: it is also

performative, helping to construct that very reality (hooks, 1994; 1996; Projansky, 2001; Rose, 2014). The myth of meritocracy as circulated through the media is not, then, merely a representation of capitalist market relations, but also is generative, justifying through discourses of worth, talent, and skill, the access that some people have to media production, visibility, and extreme wealth, at the expense of others. Media producers and owners have a vested interest in convincing both themselves and their audiences that they are legitimately creative, entertaining, important artists and/or cultural commentators (Cloarec, 2016; Conor et al., 2015). They also sometimes have a vested interest in convincing us that performers (their wage-labourers) are not. In other words, as Barry King (1979) notes, stars are one way that the institutional power of the media can be deflected onto “the realm of personal experience and feelings” (quoted in Dyer, 1979, p. 31). The injustices we experience to varying degrees on a day-to-day basis because of inequality can be taken up by the media into discourses about the merit or non-merit of individual stars, despite the fact that *all* stars need and, therefore, function as a part of the media.

At the same time, almost all media producers rely in some way or another upon stars (or, at the very least, performers), marking them as unique within the systems of a capitalist labour economy; as noted by Dyer, stars are “both labour and the thing that labour produces” (quoted in Williamson, 2016, p. 108). In other words, stars are both labour and product, and their status within this system is not necessarily tied only to their own labour investment, while the profit they generate in either capacity (as product or as labour) is often not owned exclusively by them. Within this system, the female celebrity, whose work provides profit to media owners (as well as to herself), provides additional labour over and above the male celebrity – the work of feminine beauty – but is often not compensated for this labour (Guerrasio, 2017; Wanshel, 2017). Famous women of colour often must take this labour even further, “erasing” signs of their racialization in

order to appeal to mass markets (Gordon, 2015; Thompson, 2009) or, conversely, “playing up” an essentialized racial identity (Hall, 1997). Such excess labour becomes the appropriated labour in the media industries, resulting in what was earlier identified as an exploitative relation.

The term “exploitation” remains, in common sense terms, a problematic one to apply to female stars whose visibility and wealth generates, for them, hugely disproportionate amounts of privilege. However, in applying it in its Marxist sense in the discussion above – as referring to appropriated labour – I hope to illuminate some of the underlying relations that, I argue, are shifting in response to new media technologies (as well as evolving conceptions of ownership and means of production in these new media systems). If we understand “exploitation” to not merely mean oppression (see pages 47-48 in this chapter), but to be about a specific condition of surplus labour and profit, it becomes easier to conceive of the female star as exploited, though not necessarily *oppressed*. Certainly, exploitation does not occur across the board in all circumstances of media employment, thus it becomes crucial to examine the relations of production surrounding specific female stars within specific contexts. When considering, for example, the recent allegations against Harvey Weinstein, a producer with significant structural power in the media industry, both exploitative and oppressive relations can be delineated: he allegedly demanded that women provide sexual labour (i.e. sex itself) in order to access the employment opportunities that men in media access without providing said labour (generally, as there are exceptions to this rule). This sexual labour is not compensated, and therefore marks a form of exploitation that can be escaped by women who operate outside of those structures (even if they are “using” their sexuality to build visibility and capital). This relation is also oppressive, however, producing an entire class of subjects (i.e. women in media) who have less autonomy, mobility, and power than their oppressors and thus – again – the women who operate

successfully (i.e. visibly) outside of this structure escape this particular form of oppression (and perhaps even destabilize that hierarchal relation).

In summary, then, while the star system more broadly performs ideological work in capitalism's favour – in particular, reproducing the myth of meritocracy and legitimizing certain skills as being more valuable than others – the female star is a contradictory site that both serves and undermines that ideological work. The female star has long disturbed the concept of a valuable skill set, the separation of public participation versus a private life, and the model of owner-product-labourer that sustains capitalist economies. She has long been both subject to, and participant in discourses that contain her potential disruption to capitalist myths, hinting at a broader anxiety, not only over what the star is doing within and to media production, but also what examples she might be setting for media consumers. Williamson (2016) argues that these concerns were reflected in early discussions about publicly performing women of nineteenth-century British theatre being a corrupting force: their public participation in arts/entertainment, their earning of a living wage, and their (often) living independently was seen by many to be a bad societal influence, specifically on female spectators who were imagined as being more susceptible to such imagery (see Williamson, 2016, p. 43).

These concerns have endured within more recent media studies discussions. Women in the media are sites in which sexual and other forms of labour converge, as well as where public/private spheres converge; women are participants, but not agents of capitalist success (and the implication that follows: women as beneficiaries, rather than owners of media profit); and women and girls are positioned as being particularly susceptible to harmful messages communicated and/or exemplified by other women who have attained public success. Paradoxically, at the same time, much critique of women's onscreen labour is framed as being in

the service of men (a male viewer or gaze): a framework that often denies women's agency, autonomy, and pleasure attained from both media careers and media consumption. In the next section I examine some of the important theories regarding new media technologies and women's contemporary (sexual) labour, before looking at the ways that neoliberal discourses occlude ongoing inequities that undermine women's media use.

c) Women and Neoliberal Capitalist Media

A thorough discussion of women and media technologies cannot ignore ways that neoliberal capitalism, as a distinct incarnation of capitalism, is shaping socio-economic relations in Canada and the United States today. In this section, I discuss the relations between gender, as well as class and race, in relation to neoliberal systems, drawing upon the important work of Lisa Duggan (2003). I then focus more specifically on public women and pop culture in neoliberal times. Finally, I discuss the specifics of celebrity culture today as both a site of neoliberal potential realized, as well a site where broader anxieties over neoliberalism are articulated and disputed.

The role of women within neoliberal society, just as in capitalist society, is not monolithic, but in fact dependent upon their relations to varying forms of privilege and domination. However, a key strategy within neoliberal ideology is its discursive use of the supposed neutrality of market forces to occlude privilege and structural inequality (Duggan, 2003). Neoliberalism assumes that class or income inequity is a result of the natural workings of a meritocratic system, rather than a result of, say, gender, racial, sexual, or religious identity. At the same time, neoliberalism celebrates (and therefore reproduces privilege through) the figure of the heterosexual, married, white mother who, as beneficiary of liberal feminism's fight for choice, now dutifully chooses to forgo her career in order to "stay at home during [her]

children's early years to build self-esteem and independence in the young" (Duggan, 2003, p. 17). Such a figure, that once again provides unpaid labour to build a "privatized social safety net" but depends upon the paid labour of her husband (Duggan 2003, p. 17), stands in stark contrast to the figure of the often racialized, poor and single mother who has multiple children out of wedlock and depends upon government "handouts" to get by.¹⁹

Lisa Duggan (2003) asserts that a key way that neoliberalism masks such inequality is through discourses of personal responsibility. Whereas more classic liberal ideology sets up a distinction between "class politics" (economic inequality) and "identity politics" (exclusion from national and civic participation based on gender, race, sexuality and/or other facets of identity) (Duggan, 2003, p. 7), neoliberalism merges the two, and subsumes identity politics under the neutral (i.e. equal) rhetoric of free market economics, personal choice, and responsibility. A single mother living in poverty then, has choices, but these choices only exist (are only framed) in economic terms: she can be "responsible" and take a low-paying job, and improve her own situation through "self-esteem and independence" (Duggan, 2003, p. 17), or she can continue to fail on neoliberalism's terms. This economic choice occludes the other obstacles she might face in taking on such employment: gender or racial bias, low-income, lack of childcare, health care coverage, etcetera.

In this way neoliberalism reifies what some social justice activists describe as the difference between equality and equity (Mann, 2014; Sun, 2014). Neoliberal ideology celebrates the notion of equality (and human rights), while undermining those human rights by denying

¹⁹ As noted by Patricia Hill Collins (2000) this figure of the "welfare mother" is not unique to neoliberal capitalism but was heavily invoked by neoliberal policymakers of the 1980s and 1990s in their justification of cuts to social services and criminalization of certain drug usage.

equity.²⁰ Whereas equal treatment denies the ongoing structural challenges that impede access to success for certain groups (Hasinoff, 2008), equity suggests that all groups be given what they specifically need in order to succeed (Mann, 2014). One important way that equality is celebrated, while equity is eroded, is through the discourses that circulate through media and pop culture. For instance, popular post-feminist and post-civil rights discourses suggest that the social justice struggles of the 1960s/1970s were positive, but that they were ultimately successful and now the playing field is equal for all (Hasinoff, 2008; Negra, 2009; McRobbie, 2007; 2009). Feminist media scholar Brenda R. Weber (2009) also notes that the focus in pop culture – and more specifically, through the genre of reality television – on the lives and troubles of the most economically privileged in society (i.e. *The Osbournes*; *Keeping Up with the Kardashians*; the numerous *Real Housewives* series) cultivates empathy for the rich, and consequently, disdain for the poor and for those who refuse to “take responsibility” and put in the work to overcome their obstacles to success, be those race, gender, and/or ability (see also Hasinoff, 2008; Negra, 2009).

Perhaps it is not a coincidence that these key sites of popular neoliberal discourse (post-feminist culture, reality television) are often gendered female (Weber, 2009). As during previous incarnations of capitalism, women continue to provide emotional labour to the neoliberal capitalist system, but in many ways today that labour has been monetized and made visible (McRobbie, 2009, discusses the increased visibility of women today). No longer is emotional labour merely the surplus labour of the service industry,²¹ it is also now itself mediatized and

²⁰ “Equity” is a complex term that can be used in numerous ways, including in neoliberal policy discourses where equity can be associated with property ownership or equalization payments. However, here I follow recent usage in social activist discourse, aimed to distinguish between a policy that views all beneficiaries as equal (equally in need) versus one that examines each group’s structural challenges and addresses those as needed (aiming for equal outcomes).

²¹ In her influential work on this subject, Hochschild (2012/1983) defines emotional labour using the example of the flight attendant, who as a service worker, must also manage her customer’s feelings, in addition to her other tasks: “[emotional labour] requires one to induce or suppress feelings in order to sustain the outward countenance that produces the proper state of mind in others” (p. 7). This definition has been expanded to the emotional labour that

sold to audiences as its own commodity. This is exemplified precisely through the genre of reality television wherein emotion is performed, often by (and implicitly for, the intended audience) women. Although female participants can often earn money from such labour (not usually through wages but rather in the form of cash prizes or through secondary means, i.e. product promotion), there remains a system of exploitation in place, wherein the massive profits generated by unpaid female “performers” is still appropriated by the producers, networks and advertisers of the show, rather than distributed evenly across show creators and participants (see Collins, 2008; Turner, 2010; Williamson, 2016).

As noted earlier in this chapter, the term “exploitation” in economics is more complex than most everyday usages might suggest. Rather than simply referring to the use or manipulation of a group, the Marxist sense of exploitation requires a relation wherein the labour of one group provides surplus profits – above and beyond the wage labour reward – to the capitalist/bourgeois owners. In this sense, then, the use of everyday people in reality television programming is, in many instances, *more* exploitative, in the economic sense, than most performer-producer relations in the media. Whereas performers who are known for a craft – say, for instance, acting – can legitimize higher wages through association with a valued skill, as well as potentially acquire a level of fame that grants them access to the higher level of profits that owners reap (for instance, through profit-sharing deals such as those brokered by Tom Cruise in his career), reality television performers rarely access this same level of profit sharing (see Turner, 2010). In fact, many of them, if wanting to extend their “brand”/visibility beyond the show for which they often receive a paltry appearance salary, must entrepreneurialize

exists outside of the “public” domain of paid work and certainly applies to the ways in which oppressed peoples are often made to manage/contain the feelings of their oppressors (see, for instance, DiAngelo [2011] on white fragility).

themselves, finding ways to tie their brand to other products (i.e. product placement) and/or launch their own products to expand their brand and earning potential (see Hearn, 2008).

Crucially, this entrepreneurialization of self, which mirrors the requirements of neoliberal market participation on a broader scale, has been bolstered in important ways through the developments of social media and other new media technologies. Building on the work of Robyn Weigman, Sarah Banet-Weiser (2018) asserts that such media technologies have allowed for the “politics of visibility” to be replaced with an “economics of visibility” in contemporary Western societies (pp. 20-21). Banet-Weiser explains that the previous conception of the politics of visibility employed by social justice activists asserted that visibility in the media (i.e. representation) was crucial as a means to end oppression: being visible allowed for marginalized groups to then use their visibility to advance a political cause. In the economy of visibility, on the other hand, “visibility becomes an end in itself, what is visible becomes what *is*” (p. 22, emphasis in original). This visibility, particularly in neoliberal times, functions to neutralize feminist politics on behalf of the marginalized (pp. 23-24). Becoming seen is the end goal and becoming seen necessitates being legible and desirable as a certain kind of subject in the economy of visibility; one that often conforms to neoliberal values of independence, responsibility, and (for women) hegemonic performances of femininity that do not threaten or challenge the capitalist status quo.

Yet while the economy of visibility has found ways to monetize, for instance, a palatable form of feminism (“popular feminism,” as outlined by Banet-Weiser, 2018), it also has allowed for women’s labour, and more specifically, the previously unpaid and unseen labour of women, to not only be *visibilized*, but also *monetized* and *profitized*.²² In other words, social media

²² Here I am modifying the word to suit my meaning, as opposed to using the term *profited*, in order to suggest that not only has unpaid labour been monetized (given monetary value on the market), and *visibilized* (made visible), but

affords women a channel through which they can entrepreneurialize feminine labour; earning both salary *and* profits from both emotional labour and, increasingly, from the feminine labour of the self/beautification. Although media owners are not eliminated from this equation (Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube still reap disproportionate economic benefits from these performances²³), the more traditional capitalist economic relations across media (female performer/agent/publicist/producer/owner) have broken down so that now the performer can also be agent, publicist, producer; no longer sharing her profits, or having her labour appropriated in the same way.

An intersectional analysis suggests that, although this economic relation may no longer necessarily be exploitative, it can still be oppressive: that is, such sites of media relation still disproportionately reward the emotional and beautification labour of white, middle-class, able-bodied women (or those who can more easily pass as such), and they rely upon patriarchal definitions of sexuality and sexualization. But even these relations, as noted earlier, are complicated by the fact that such social media, and their stars, are often not making content intended for a male gaze. Make-up and fashion tutorial videos, for instance, imply a female, or female-presenting/identifying audience (though viewers may be learning such tips in order to make themselves appealing to an internalized, male gaze), and thus men's gazes are sidelined or displaced²⁴ from these media (and economic) interactions. In this sense, social media provides in some ways a democratized playing field wherein hegemonically beautiful women no longer need

also allowed for new economic/profit arrangements in which the social media entrepreneur can have a larger "share" or even all of the profit their work generates, as opposed to merely earning a wage.

²³ For example, Mark Zuckerberg, the co-founder and CEO of Facebook, has since 2017 been ranked as the fifth richest billionaire in the world, according to *Forbes* magazine (The World's Billionaires – Wikipedia). Facebook purchased Instagram in 2012 (Rusli, 2012).

²⁴ This is not to say that the "male gaze" has been eliminated from these texts – the existence of the tutorial itself demonstrates the ongoing social and economic importance of constructing one's self in relation to an abstract male gaze and the social/economic rewards that such constructions provide. However, this does not mean that women's pleasures are erased; in fact, those pleasures can arise directly from those social and economic rewards.

worry about sharing profits with their (usually) male producers or agents (the parallel to the theatre owners of the nineteenth century and the studio heads of the early twentieth century), but can now produce their own content, perform beauty and sexuality for audiences of any gender, and retain the profits they earn through product placement or website advertising.²⁵

This produces a tension between the economic opportunity afforded to some women in today's neoliberal, tech-based society, and the ongoing gender oppression needed to maintain capitalist patriarchy. As noted by Paola Tabet (1982), many societies have long relied upon a division of labour wherein technology and tools are the domain of men. The monopolization of technological tools by men in patriarchal societies ensures the ongoing domination of women in several ways: it reinforces the narrative that men are more "skilled" than women, which mutually reinforces the social/economic value of certain technologically-based skillsets that women are discouraged from developing; it ensures that women do not have (widespread) access to tools, which can usually also be weapons and are thus tied to notions of masculinity and virility; it keeps women themselves at the level of tool for the use and betterment of men; it also limits the amount of time that women have to pursue other activities, be they paid or leisure ones (Tabet, 1982).

The ability of women today to monetize feminine labour specifically, through new media technologies (i.e. tools), is a development that is often challenged and undermined by discourses lamenting the increased visibility/success of "untalented," "non-working" women across the media (Holmes and Negra, 2011; Negra and Holmes, 2008). This "concern" is additionally reflected in the discourses surrounding women and girls' use of new media technologies in their

²⁵ From their profits we might also subtract the cost of investing in the image-maintenance required to build an online audience (fashion, surgeries, cosmetics, etc.) However, these same image-management techniques are often used (and invested in) by actresses for whom the profit-sharing models (vis-à-vis producers and studios) are not accessible.

private (sexual) lives (Hasinoff, 2015). Such concerns often center on the controversial issues of “sexting” and “revenge porn” wherein women are imaged as – paradoxically – both naïve victims and as transgressive, over-sexualized manipulators of new media technologies. Often such positioning – victim versus user (“user” in the double sense of both person who uses media technology and person who takes *advantage* of others/systems/technology) – depends on various levels of privilege: Hasinoff (2015) shows, for instance, that LGBTQ women of colour are more likely to be prosecuted than white men for possessing sexual images of young/teen women (see also Penney, 2016, on Amanda Todd as naïve and innocent victim of online “bullying”). Although women are imaged as both perpetrators and victims in these instances of sexting gone wrong, it is worth noting that revenge porn and sextortion have the added repercussion of economic punishment; nude or sexual photos have come to overrule professional achievements/qualifications and victims can be demoted, fired, or forced to resign (see for instance Lori Davidson’s case in Canada, CBC News, 2014).

The recent suggestion that women combat revenge porn by copyrighting their body parts (Fink, 2015) hints at an unexamined connection to capitalist systems in considering these issues around sexuality, violence, and new media technologies. As noted in the Literature Review, current frameworks often position such issues in a binary of either sexual violence or privacy violation (Dodge, 2016; Powell, 2010). While for law and policy makers, each framework might be of use in varying ways, a more comprehensive approach might consider why it is that sexual violence is so closely tied to issues of bodily autonomy and privacy and, in turn, what relations there are between the body as private property and women’s bodies as the property of men/society more broadly (see Guillaumin, 1995). In this instance, celebrity culture becomes an important and under-examined site of analysis. In today’s neoliberal environment, where there is

not only wider access to celebrity and celebrity culture, but also a new media environment in which traditional lines between public and private – for both “ordinary” people and for celebrities – are increasingly blurred, the stolen or leaked celebrity image becomes not only an instance of the convergence of issues of sexuality, sexual violence, privacy and bodily autonomy, but, because of its exemplary status in capitalism, an *ideal* case study.²⁶ The celebrity body is often framed by the media as having no *right* to privacy (their body is public property), while also signifying capitalism at its apex (success – whether merited or unmerited, celebrated or denounced – is held as representational of contemporary values: for example, the success of the Kardashians becomes symptomatic of today’s narcissistic, consumerist society).

What is it about contemporary celebrity culture – which, in many ways, falls into alignment with neoliberal values celebrating independence and entrepreneurialism – that discourses about market neutrality cannot occlude? What does the rise of the new/social media celebrity – the celebrity who does not work in a traditional sense, or who has no traditionally legible rewardable skill – reveal about the fallacies of capitalism and its myths of meritocracy? On what terms are celebrities celebrated as capitalist successes or rejected for their ties to consumerist values? How do gender, race, class and sexuality play into those forms of acceptance and rejection? What might studying the most visible instances of female capitalist success – and the forms of violation, disparagement, or containment they endure – reveal about female labour, sexuality, and success more broadly?

Neoliberalism is an insidious ideology that draws upon discourses of personal responsibility, independence, competition, and limited understandings/models of success to

²⁶ Here I mean to distinguish between the celebrity as an example of these issues (illustrative, or one instance of many) as opposed to – my argument – that the celebrity is exemplary of these issues (the heightened or ideal case study).

collapse structural inequality into the neutral terms of the marketplace in order to justify the upward distribution of wealth (Duggan, 2003). The myth of equality that neoliberalism sells is complicated by both its successes (as formerly non-monetized, non-public skills and labours become profitable for women) and its failures (as neoliberalism still relies upon the ongoing subjugation of populations, including women). The focus on the wealthy in popular culture is not merely a symptom/reflection of neoliberalism's ascendancy (Weber, 2009), but also consolidates it, as those who are visible in the media can reap the rewards of neoliberal policy (usually men) or can serve as sites of debate over such policy (usually women). The visibility of wealth and success is a key pedagogical tool of neoliberalism: certain forms of success (those that can be framed as earned through responsible, independent, hard work) are celebrated while other forms (those centering on unrecognizable skill sets or flaunting nepotistic relations) can be undermined and delegitimized. Furthermore, success as it circulates in and through the economy of visibility, becomes something that anyone can hope for and everyone must aspire to.

As not only examples, but exemplary ideals of neoliberal capitalist success, female celebrities and their bodies serve as critical sites of ideological struggle: the circulation of stolen images of famous women is in many ways akin to revenge porn used against ordinary women in that both practices exert patriarchal power in socially and economically punitive ways. But while legal and educational discourses suggest the private female citizen can choose to: 1) disengage from media technologies (and in today's reality, she cannot really do this); and/or 2) copyright and thus privatize her body (reifying its status as capitalist commodity), the female celebrity can do neither: media engagement defines her as a celebrity and she is unable to contain and control her image (and therefore "leaks" into other media), yet her body is privatized in relation to the investments, work and discipline put into it, and the value such investments generate for

corporations. But that heightened value leads to heightened effects when her images are stolen and circulated with a dual purpose: to both punish her for her public success, and to remind all women that their bodies/sexuality are never theirs, and are always prone to such violence, no matter how “successful” they become.

In this section, I defined neoliberalism as well as outlined women’s particular roles within neoliberal systems. I examined the relations between women and media in neoliberal cultures, with a specific emphasis on gendered audiences of post-feminist texts and reality television as a genre. I also described the ways that new media technologies – and social media in particular – have altered the economic relations of women working in media industries. I explored how those changing relations are often reflected in broader concerns over women’s use of media technologies as tools of sexual expression. Finally, I discussed the ways that female celebrities serve not only as examples of these issues converging, but an ideal site in which these issues reach an apex, playing out publicly in pedagogical ways, teaching important lessons about the acceptable forms of work and success for women today. These economic relations will play a key role in my analysis chapters: examining how news reporting itself justifies and legitimizes current inequalities. In the next section, I focus on a few additional frameworks that will help to unpack some of these power relations more broadly: namely, the work of cultural studies scholars – and Stuart Hall in particular – in approaching media users and technologies in more ways than a male gaze approach allows for and, secondly, the post-structuralist theories of Butler/Foucault that provide a helpful framework for approaching discourse and celebrity.

II. Audience/Reception Studies

Previously, I touched on the ways that new media technologies are altering the relations between media consumers, performers, and producers. Because of these shifting relations, the work of Cultural Studies theorists – and theories of Reception/Audience – are of particular use in considering the participatory and punitive potential of new media. While some longstanding conceptions in communication theories hold media effects to be measurable and monolithic, Cultural Studies offers alternative ways of understanding the media. In particular, Cultural Studies frameworks center the audience, rather than the producer, as the key site of meaning and agency. While producers may have a particular intention or political agenda in mind when creating a text, it is the audience who either accepts or resists such messaging, and it is often, as Stuart Hall (1994) reminds us, a combination of both. In this section I discuss reception theories in relation to, in particular, female stardom/imagery. After outlining a predominant effects framework (the “male gaze”), I draw on the work of Stuart Hall (1994) and Henry Jenkins (2006) to offer an account of media consumption that attends to the specific conditions of new media technologies, without idealizing the amount of agency afforded by such technologies. Finally, I tie in these discussions to a larger project that de-stabilizes the “author” as site of meaning and de-constructs the hierarchies that produce meaning, thus connecting to the elements of post-structuralism that will be brought out in the section to follow.

Cultural Studies theorists offer a broad range of approaches to analyzing media images. For the purposes of this thesis, I will be focusing on the ways that Cultural Studies – with a particular emphasis on audience engagement, or reception theory – provides helpful tools to understand new media technologies. However, it is important to recognize that much of the debate over women’s use and consumption of media is rooted in decades-old paradigms

centering media “effects” and patriarchal containment. Although the notion of the “male gaze”²⁷ (Mulvey, 1979/2010) has been effectively critiqued over the years, this framework still underlies approaches to the more recently identified trends of “pornification” and “sexualization” in the media. It is, therefore, worth outlining Mulvey’s approach as it is often still invoked, particularly in feminist critiques of post-feminist media culture where women are invited to choose to present themselves to the camera and/or world as sexual objects (see Gill, 2007; 2009).

In the simplest terms, Mulvey drew upon psychoanalytic theory to argue that audiences in classical film²⁸ are encouraged, through specific viewing conditions and production techniques, to identify with the predominately male protagonists, from whose point of view the story is told. Women in most of these films are usually present as the “love interest,” and, therefore, play a passive role, the object upon which the male acts and/or projects his desire/fear/love/etcetera. In this way, the women become “objectified” onscreen; presented as having little or no subjectivity of their own and valued in terms of their desirability (usually connoted through conforming to hegemonic beauty norms). This model, as noted by Patricia Hill Collins (2000) is rooted in Western epistemological, binary thinking wherein there is a distinct separation from the knowing self (subject) and the known object, thus producing the objectified “Other” (p. 72). While these models, which again are rooted in masculinized psychoanalytic theories, are both dated and culturally specific, they have continued to inform recent debates over sexualization of women both within and beyond the media.

²⁷ Mulvey’s classic essay is also invoked in recent feminist analysis of news media, highlighting the “male gaze” as a predominant news frame (see, for instance Lumsden and Morgan, 2017, on gendered trolling online; Bock, Pain & Jhang, 2017, on breastfeeding).

²⁸ Classical cinema refers to traditional Hollywood narrative form following a cause-and effect sequence (Bordwell and Thompson, 2001, p. 432).

The term “sexualization,” which is related to “pornification,” derives from the feminist critique of what has commonly come to be known as post-feminist culture. It refers to several notable trends in media representation, and women’s responses and participation in such trends, including:

[A] contemporary preoccupation with sexual values, practices and identities; the public shift to more permissive sexual attitudes; the proliferation of sexual texts; the emergence of new forms of sexual experience; the apparent breakdown of rules, categories and regulations designed to keep the obscene at bay; [and the] fondness the scandals [sic], controversies and panics around sex (Attwood, quoted in Harvey and Gill, 2011, p. 53).

While such developments may seem in line with the sexual freedom long sought by many Western liberal feminists, much of the concern centers on the effects of such trends on young and adolescent girls (Dines, 2009; Durham, 2009; Levy, 2006). Although this thesis is not concerned specifically with adolescents’/girls’ use and consumption of sexual texts (which is not to say that has no effect on women’s relations with such media), there has often been, in much of the literature, a universal application of theories across all ages of women and their media use – the suggestion that all women are subject to the now internalized, disciplinary power of the aforementioned “male gaze” (though not always named as such). For example, feminist critic Rosalind Gill (2007) asserts that in today’s media environment, women are invited “to construct [themselves] as a subject closely resembling the heterosexual male fantasy that is found in pornography” (p. 258). While the woman on the screen may now have the power to choose how to present herself, there is a different kind of power – a disciplinary one rather than an institutional or hegemonic one (Foucault, 2010) – influencing and constraining her choices so that the most socially desirable and economically in-demand woman is the one who appeases the

male gaze, and (therefore) does not threaten it. In this drive to be desired and hired, the woman enacts self-objectification, turning herself into sexual object.

This model of power is connected to the work of Foucault on disciplinary power and the “technologies of self,” wherein individuals are understood as acting, and constrained within certain fields of power (Gill and Orgad, 2015, p. 326).²⁹ Examining these relations within and for women in the media, Hilary Radner coined the term “technologies of sexiness” to note the specific trend, in popular film (thus linking back again to Mulvey’s original framework) of the move from an innocent and (therefore) good heroine/love interest to the “sexy” (or “raunchy”) one (Gill and Orgad, 2015, p. 326; see also Evans et al., 2010). While such a trend is interesting to note, there has been dissension among feminist critiques as to what the female characters onscreen actually *represent* versus what they, in a broader sense, *do*; the representation/performativity paradox that was mentioned earlier (and will be discussed further in the next section of this chapter).

E. Ann Kaplan, for instance, argues that film encompasses numerous gazes, and that the male protagonists’ gaze and the filmmaker’s (director) can diverge (in Bordo, 1993, p. 273). Bell hooks (1992) further breaks down the argument, suggesting that for particular viewers such as women of colour, viewing pleasure is constructed in resistant opposition to the white, male gazes both within and structuring the film. In these critiques, both Kaplan and hooks’ works tie directly to other arguments made by Cultural Studies theorist Stuart Hall (1994) in his essay on “encoding” and “decoding.” Hall posited that the meaning or effects of a media text are not monolithic and cannot be traced to the intention of the media producer (i.e. filmmaker) when they are making or encoding the work. Audiences bring with them their own situated identities

²⁹ This point is developed further in Section III of this chapter on Post-structuralism.

that affect with whom they identify, which messages they resist, and how they negotiate or decode these readings.

These meanings are further affected when the producer-text-audience paradigm breaks down, as it does in what Henry Jenkins (2006) terms “convergence culture.” New media technologies including Internet, social media, and smart phones allow audiences to interact with media texts like never before. Although Jenkins was critiqued for being overly optimistic in his work (see Jenkins, 2014), his model is helpful in getting past traditional conceptions of media messaging to see how audiences are more empowered than ever to “speak back to” mainstream media, produce and circulate their own content, and alter the power dynamics that have long structured mass media (though, of course, this requires a certain level of privilege and technological skill not accessible to all). In this way, the mapping of classic film studies frameworks of textual analysis onto all media formats is limiting (Attwood, 2011, p. 204). Acknowledging the limitations of textual-based analysis also allows for more understanding of women’s pleasures in relation to media production and consumption. This thesis examines specific instances where women used new media technologies to express their sexual selves: whether for fame, profit, “authentic enjoyment,” or a combination of all three.

Reception theory allows me, as a researcher, to be attentive to the benefits that women get out of their media interactions and not only examine the larger structural forces at work disciplining and containing those pleasures. It offers a way to think through the taking up of images into and by other news media. It centers the context of consumption, allowing for a model wherein consensual sexual imagery is analytically distinct from the non-consensual hacking and “leaking” of sexual imagery, rather than approaching all such images as coercive to some extent because they cater to a wider patriarchal definition of sexuality. Finally, it allows for

a conception of female agency; one that does not deny the structural forces containing women's actions, but does examine, in particular, the ways that new media technologies as well as new relations of capital afford a broader range for women to not only express themselves sexually, but also to entrepreneurialize themselves (sexually or not), seizing the proverbial means of (media) production and testing the boundaries of mainstream media.

III. Post-Structuralism

Post-structuralism refers to a broad range of theories about discourse and power, many of which, in some sense, inform my analysis. In this section, I highlight three elements of post-structuralist thought that are most pertinent to my thesis: the agency-structure dialectic, the importance of discourse, and, finally, the ways that this theory is particularly helpful for approaching celebrity texts. Patricia Hill Collins (2000) identifies four interrelated “domains of power”: the structural, the disciplinary, the hegemonic, and the interpersonal (p. 276). She acknowledges the constraints these forces impose on people's actions, but also points to the myriad ways that people exert agency, resisting the system from both within and outside of it (p. 284). While all of these forms of power are of interest to feminist scholars, my thesis highlights popular culture as a site of hegemonic, or ideological power. As described by Collins, “the hegemonic domain acts as a link between social institutions (structural domain), their organizational practices (disciplinary domain), and the level of everyday social interaction (interpersonal domain)” (p. 284). The media serve as a key institution through which power circulates structurally (through its gatekeeping strategies), disciplinarily (by celebrating certain values and denouncing others), and socially (through our own social consumption of and reaction to media messages).

Post-structuralism offers a way to analyze the dynamics of these varying domains of power. Post-structuralism, following social constructivist paradigms rather than positivist ones, rejects the notion of a knowable truth existing outside of human power relations, including the relations structured by language/discourse itself (Morrow and Brown, 1994).³⁰ Post-structural theory further holds that power operates on numerous levels and interrogates the concept of “the real” and the binaries upon which most meanings are based. This framework allows me to interrogate the political value of the binary of the “authentic star” (authentic in terms of talent and work) versus the “celebrity” (who uses her sexuality rather than talent or labour to gain success). It also allows me to examine the limitations of agency and sexual subjectivity as constrained by the operations of white supremacist capitalist patriarchy (hooks, 1994). As noted earlier, one of the aims of this project is to recognize what might be read as transgressive, agentive acts of women’s engagement with media technologies, while at the same time acknowledging the hegemonic powers that are invested in containing such instances of agency and transgression.

a) Agency and Structure

Following the work of Judith Butler (1997) on language, this thesis analyzes the potential for women to partake in consensual (sexual) acts of media production, within the broader field of power relations that comprise white supremacist, capitalist patriarchy. A key avenue through which agency can be mobilized – or constrained – is through discourse³¹; language can be mobilized to entrench or to resist dominant power relations (Butler, 1997; see also Brady and

³⁰ This is not to say that no reality exists outside of language: our everyday experiences of the “laws” of science and nature point to that reality. However, post-structuralism posits that there is no meaning to said laws without language.

³¹ In the next chapter on Methodology, I more fully define and develop “discourse” as I use it in this thesis.

Schirato, 2011). For instance, in perlocutionary speech acts there is a temporal gap between the saying of something and the effects of that speech (Butler, 1997, p. 3). The saying, or the representing, is not the doing, and that gap “begins a theory of linguistic agency” (Butler, 1997, p. 15). This theory of agency is not exclusive to spoken language. In her discussion of MacKinnon’s critique of pornography, Butler (1997) points out that there remains a gap “between representation and conduct” (p. 18), and further, that visual representation in particular creates an even bigger temporal gap in effects (see also Cultural Studies discussion above wherein the effects are contextual rather than monolithic and measurable). Therefore, while speech can command (i.e. “I now pronounce...”), visual imagery can only depict or suggest to its audience:

The imperative “do this” is less delivered than “depicted,” and if what is depicted is a set of compensatory ideals, hyperbolic gender norms, then pornography charts a domain of unrealizable positions that hold sway over the social reality of gender positions, but do not, strictly speaking, constitute that reality; indeed, it is their failure to constitute it that gives the pornographic image the phantasmatic power that it has. (Butler, 1997, p. 68)

However, visual representation necessitates the performance of an act in order for it to be depicted, so that there are various positions to consider here; that of the performer versus that of the audience. This seems to be a point of contention in much of the feminist critique of pornography. A woman who willingly appears in a pornographic film, or who takes a nude photo of herself, acts upon herself (or consents to acts upon herself) in ways that uphold male supremacy. The performance of the act still entails a doing: while there may be a temporal gap between the act and the effects of that action on *other women* (i.e. those in the audience), the doing in the film is the act upon that woman. And yet, this doing can be harmful to the

performer, or it can be an act that gives the female performer pleasure, money, or both. It is here that context becomes important. While a person can film a non-consensual sexual act (and in this case, the violence is in the visual representation and, potentially its effects depending on the viewer) the filming of a consensual sexual act can only *become* violent in the gap afterward: in how that image is then mobilized.³² Hence, a pornographic image intended for private sexual use can be re-appropriated as punishment against a transgressive woman:

To read [...] texts against themselves is to concede that the performativity of the text is not under sovereign control. On the contrary, if the text acts once, it can act again, and possibly against its prior act. This raises the possibility of *resignification* as an alternative reading of performativity and of politics. (Butler, 1997, p. 69, emphasis in original)

These arguments echo the earlier sentiments of Cultural Studies theorists who stress audience reception, or decoding, of media messages as the ideal site of critical inquiry (Hall, 1994). Agency, then, refers to not only the actions of those creating the discourse (visual or linguistic), but also the reception of that discourse: the moments in which audiences accept, reject, internalize, question, or resist those discourses. It is these moments that interest me more than the original “speaking” might, hence, my choice to analyze the reactions to (in the form of news discourse), rather than the original images of, sexualized celebrity.

It is important, however, to acknowledge the structural forces that contain agency and resistance. Butler’s (1997) critique of the “sovereign subject,” while not a “demolition of agency” (p. 15), points to the limitations of those who are acting within domains of power in

³² This position echoes the earlier discussion in the Literature Review necessitating a distinction between consensual and non-consensual visual imagery. I therefore take the position in this thesis that there is an analytical distinction between the two kinds of imagery and the viewing of said imagery; non-consensual imagery produces its own violent effects distinct from a broader consideration of the subjugation of women in media such as (consensual) pornography.

challenging the very relations that constitute them. Butler applies this on a broad scale, using the example of language through which we are all constituted as acting subjects. For this thesis, the exemplary case is the female celebrity, who cannot mount a serious threat to the mainstream media because she gains any power she has (to resist) from that very field that constitutes her celebrity. In other words, the celebrity is constituted as a symbolically powerful subject through the domain of power/language that is the media. For this reason I am not interested in claims about what, for instance, Kim Kardashian *really* did, vis-à-vis her level of participation in the circulation of her sex tape, but rather the ways that the larger domain of power, as represented by news reporting, recuperated and appropriated that transgressive act (for it remains transgressive to be a sexual woman and for women to directly profit from that sexuality). This framework is mobilized in my analysis of the specific language choices of both the celebrity women and the journalists reporting on them: moments where structural power meets individual agency (as exercised through discourse) will be of particular interest to me.

b) Celebrity, Performativity, and Essentialism

This leads into another epistemological issue that post-structuralist thought addresses: the fact that, as a researcher, I can never access the “truth” behind the celebrity image. Even if I were to interview the celebrity herself, I would only have access to a performed identity acting within a mediated field of representation. Methodologically speaking, this suggests a particular attention be paid to claims (i.e. discourses) both about what the celebrity *really* did or didn’t do, and the amount of agency they wield in their public image, as well as the effects of those kinds of claims.

While Butler originally suggested the concept of performativity in relation to gender, Anita Brady’s (2016) work helpfully demonstrates how this understanding of gender can be

applied to celebrity. Because of their visibility, celebrities' performances – particularly as “representatives” of their gender, race, and sexual identity – come with high stakes. They not only “model” desirable (and undesirable) identities, but they help to constitute a broader understanding of those identities. Though, unlike the rules of, say, gender, the consequences are not life-or-death, the imperative on celebrities to maintain a certain image of themselves is most apparent when that image breaks down, as in the case for celebrities whose private nude images are stolen and released. Furthermore, the public shaming of celebrities performs a prescriptive function, warning others who might transgress within the domains of power structuring their own lives that such acts of resistance can always be contained.

Finally, it is important to acknowledge the instability of the category “female celebrity” which structures much of this thesis. While the celebrity identity must constantly be performed and reconsolidated, so too must the female identity in interconnected ways. For instance, female celebrities who do not perform their gender properly, “let themselves go,” gain weight, age inappropriately, have promiscuous/queer sex, or are masculine in appearance are all subject to heightened public scrutiny, humiliation, or loss of status (Morey, 2011; Weber, 2012). In this thesis, my focus is specifically on the female celebrity because she is more likely than the male celebrity to have her sexual privacy violated and, additionally, because patriarchal power relations ensure that such violations will serve as punishment to the woman herself (rather than her male partner, or the men who share and circulate the photos). Female celebrities are also more likely to be framed as successful *because* of their sexual appeal (thus justifying sexual privacy violation), while also vilified for using their sexual appeal to succeed. In saying this, I recognize that the category of “woman” as used throughout this thesis is unstable and contested.

The intention is not to essentialize gender or sexual identity, but rather to illuminate how these discursive categories/constructs are mobilized toward real sexual violence.

Toward that end, and because of these constraints, my texts for analysis will not be ones that originate with the celebrity herself – neither the sex tapes, nor the stolen photos will be obtained, analyzed, or discussed in this project. Not only would that re-victimize those whose privacy was violated, but it also has little bearing on the questions that this research will investigate. Studying those texts might *suggest* certain “truths” about the context in which they were both “produced” and “leaked” to the public but, again, I am not interested in the truths behind those images, or the celebrity herself (i.e. the “real” cause of her fame). What is of more concern is how those texts – because of what they represent, i.e. transgressive female sexuality – are taken up into broader power relations, as signified by the discourse about them. Whether or not the Kardashian sex tape was purposefully leaked or not, the repeated assertion that it was not (by Kim herself and her family), as well as the repeated counter-claims that it was, *both* perform ideological work. Consuming illicit images of women – whether they were complicit or not – produces certain reactions and assumptions in those viewing the imagery, and these reactions can be analyzed in the discourse that circulates around them. It is this form of ideological work that interests me, rather than an ability to represent some form of “reality” behind the image: how is illicit sexual imagery (re-)signified in the mainstream media? I, therefore, analyze news reporting on these violations both because of news’ disciplinary function (mainstream news media have a stake in upholding institutional media power but present themselves as neutral and common-sensical) and the space it affords celebrities to “speak back” to such imagery at a broader level than merely their fanbase communications would allow. In the next chapter, I outline the

research questions, methodologies, and case study parameters I have chosen in order to best examine these critical issues.

Chapter 3 Methodology

Introduction

In this chapter, I outline the specific methodologies and methods I will be using in order to investigate my research questions. As noted in the Introduction, my research aims to examine what contemporary hegemonic discourses reveal about North American expectations toward female celebrities, as well as the effects of new media technologies in shaping discourses about sexual privacy, consent, and public success. In my previous chapter (Theoretical Framework), I noted that as a researcher I can only access and analyze the way that consent operates discursively in my corpus. It is impossible to substantiate any claims about what images and footage “leaked” to the public are done so without the celebrity’s consent. However, I can access and analyze the discourses surrounding those images – both those of the media reporting on the incidents and those of the celebrity herself – and, therefore, see when and how the concept of consent, as well as other key concepts including “talent,” “success,” and “privacy,” are mobilized.

Before delving into the specifics of which terms I will investigate and how, I first build upon the previous chapter’s discussions of reception theory and post-structuralism to justify my use of both news and discourse analysis. I then provide some context that will allow me to narrow the geographic and temporal scope of my research. I specify which particular instances in recent popular culture history will be examined, and then outline my research plan by stating my research questions and the ways that my selected case studies will answer those questions. I then provide my reasoning for choosing to focus my analysis on news media and describe my understanding and use of critical discourse analysis as a research method (which will tie back into the reception theories and post-structuralism discussion in the Theoretical Framework).

Finally, I provide a step-by-step breakdown of how exactly I gathered, organized, and selected my data for analysis.

I. News and Discourse Analysis

a) News and common sense

In my previous chapter, I outlined materialist feminism, reception studies, and post-structuralism as paradigms that inform this thesis. Materialist feminism provides a framework that allows me to examine the gendered discourses about economic inequality, but also the material relations of media production. Post-structuralist theory outlines the importance of discourse in reproducing such material relations and inequalities. It offers tools for thinking about how agency can be enacted within larger structures of power. Relatedly, reception studies also highlight the concept of agency on the part of users and consumers of media. It accounts for the pleasures that some women obtain from their media interactions, including the potential sexual pleasures derived from creating and sharing illicit images with a partner, despite their containment within larger structures of white supremacist capitalist patriarchy. It also recognizes the potential pushback against such imagery from those for whom images of sexual/successful women might, for instance, be perceived as a threat to the male supremacist status quo. Reception studies highlight, then, the context in which media are circulated as being key to their meaning; in this particular case, their status as consensual or non-consensual imagery.

The news media themselves can create non-consensual content, which has, indeed, long been a point of contention between journalism and celebrity culture framed in terms of privacy. With regards to the specific sexualized imagery I study, the news is also a site of significance in constructing public conceptions of consent. While it may be assumed that the acts depicted in the

photos and films are consensual (taking a selfie is necessarily consensual; there has never been a question as to whether Kardashian was having consensual sex in her sex tape), the circulation of these texts is where the issue of consent arises: though one can never know what the women consented to with regards to the circulation of these images, as a scholar I can access the discourse that frames them as having consented to the circulation of these images, or as having consented to prior acts, including fame itself, that put them at risk for, and suggests that they benefit from, having such images circulated. Therefore, it is not the image itself – and/or what it signifies – that is of interest in this thesis, but rather how such images are taken up into existing power relations. Thus, I chose not to conduct a textual analysis – wherein my object of study is the illicit imagery itself, which, as noted earlier, would also re-violate those whose images were circulated without their consent – but rather, to conduct a reception-based analysis of these images.

While many reception-based analyses of celebrity/popular culture center on interviews or focus groups with members of the public at large (see, for instance, the canonical work of Ang, 1985; Gamson, 1994; Radway, 1984), there has been less attention paid to the news media itself as a site of reception. The news media, because of its embedded location within the media landscape, is often figured as being on the producer side of the producer-text-consumer paradigm; the news creates content and messaging of its own that it circulates directly to an audience. But, as pointed out by Richard Dyer (1979), the news also reports on other mediated content – including celebrities and celebrity culture – and in this way, becomes not only a very visible sight of media *consumption*, but also an influential one, shaping “public opinion” about celebrities and popular culture (p. 71; see also K. Fairclough, 2008 on the celebrity blogger). The news is thus a valuable site for locating everyday, common-sensical social scripts about celebrity

which are, in turn, internalized, resisted, and/or re-circulated by audiences as social discourse (important work such as that of Keller and Ringrose, 2015; Vares and Jackson, 2015, demonstrate the ways that young women adopt the language of “media literacy” that often circulates through public discourse critiquing female celebrities, but exhibit less critique in terms of the structural elements of media production).

The news media not only report on but also interpret events, often using cause-and-effect sequencing, selecting one dominant frame over other possible understandings (Bird and Dardenne quoted in Scheiner McClain, 2014, p. 104). Audiences who may never encounter a specific popular culture text (or celebrity) may repeatedly and exclusively consume mediated interpretations of that text (or celebrity) through the news, thus shaping an entire/broader audience understanding around a select few journalists’ decoding processes. In fact, journalism is an individual endeavor. Although the news is a site of structural and, increasingly, corporate power, individual journalists cover, interpret, and write the news, each with their own situated knowledge, experience, and biases, elided through the concept of journalistic objectivity. Furthermore, this conception of objectivity simultaneously grants authority to news discourses while occluding the structural interests of news media owners (Bock et al., 2017, p. 2), many of whom benefit from the entrenchment of white supremacist, capitalist, patriarchal ideologies. Those who work reporting the news may not themselves be rich, white men, but they often are accountable to that specific demographic (who make up most media ownership, see Associated Press, 2015; Business Insider, 2013), while making choices about which stories to report on, which words to use, and which sources to draw from (Bock et al., 2017, p. 5). In this way journalists are also subject to the agency-structure dialectic that affects women more broadly, as well as celebrities (see Chapter 2 of this thesis). Those individual choices perform important

ideological and political work, as they can identify social problems, pass moral judgment, maintain the status quo, as well as influence public opinion and policy (Lumsden and Morgan, 2017, p. 4). Frame analysis – the study of choices made by news makers – is thus a key tool to examine how the (news) media construct social life (Bock et al., 2017; Lumsden and Morgan, 2017).

This power of the news media and the media more broadly to not only reflect but also construct social life has been termed “symbolic power” by sociologists and media researchers (see for instance, Bourdieu, 1984; Hall, 1997). Following Bourdieu’s (1984) use of the term,³³ researchers Lumsden and Morgan define *symbolic power* as the power to “(re)produc[e] and legitimis[e] social categories and beliefs” (p. 5), and *symbolic violence* as a denial to certain groups (i.e. marginalized ones) “the degree of recognition enjoyed by others ... instances where they are devalued or stigmatized” (Crossley quoted in Lumsden and Morgan, 2017, p. 5). While the media at large is a site where this symbolic violence can occur, the news media, with its aforementioned claims to “objectivity” and authority, constitute a site in which symbolic violence is particularly effective in delimiting the discursive possibilities for marginalized groups. It is here that post-structuralism offers a helpful framework for thinking through symbolic violence as well as discursive possibilities and limitations. Although certainly people/subjects exist outside of both the media and language, discourse is one key site through which power circulates, and discourse analysis offers a key tool to analyze power relations and the ideologies that uphold or challenge them.

³³ It is worth noting the ways that the ongoing citation of Bourdieu on symbolic violence erases the important work done on this topic by French feminist thinkers whose writings do not receive equal translation and therefore attention such as Nicole-Claude Mathieu (1990), whose “When Yielding is not Consenting” for instance, forwards critical arguments about the ways in which domination and oppression are legitimized through the “fashioning of the imaginary aspect of reality” by oppressors in order to naturalize such relations (p. 76; see also Cole, 2016; Pagé, 2016 on the feminist politics of translation).

b) Discourse

A key contribution of the broad school of thought labeled post-structuralism, is the notion that power does not necessarily operate as an authority over a subject, but rather circulates through and around everyday life and interactions, knowledge and talk, as well as extending to even our understanding and construction of ourselves as subjects in relation to the world around us (see Butler, 1997; Foucault, 2010). One of the ways that this kind of power emerges is through discursive formations; “a group of statements, objects, and concepts that function and exist in relation to each other” (Foucault, quoted in Pullen, 2005, p. 5). These statements, objects and concepts are socially and historically situated, producing “real” and “analyzable” practices (Foucault, 2010, p. 369) that can be accessed by researchers, who themselves are socially and historically situated in these relations. Foucauldian discourse analysis, then, acknowledges the reality of power relations outside of language, but asserts that they can only be accessed in and through language (Coyle, 2007). According to this approach, social reality is not something that exists outside of discourse or independent of the “objective” researcher (an empiricist claim), but rather is understood as being constructed *through* situated knowledge and discourse.

Because of their importance to this thesis’ methodology, it is worth defining both “knowledge” and “discourse,” despite their innocuous use in everyday language. Drawing on the work of Siegfried Jäger and Florentine Maier (2009), I understand “knowledge” as including “all kinds of contents that make up a human consciousness, or in other words, all kinds of meanings that people use to interpret and shape their environment” (p. 34). This knowledge can be verbally articulated, learned or innate, and can be expressed in a variety of ways. One of the most common conceptions of knowledge – and one that this thesis aims to unpack – is “common sense,” which is often a frame of knowledge invoked by news media (Deacon, Pickering,

Golding & Murdock, 2010; Scheiner McClain, 2014). Cultural theorist Antonio Gramsci (1987) examined the workings of common sense in relation to hegemony, domination, and oppression. He argued that hegemony – the somewhat unstable status quo wherein the ideology of the dominant class rules – relies upon the oppressed adopting the values and logic of the dominant class as “truth” and “common sense,” even though those values are in direct conflict with their own interests (pp.160-1; see also Mathieu, 1990, pp. 63-65, on ideology versus consciousness). Common sense discourses help to invisibilize ideology, masking social values, and positioning domination as the result of “natural” differences between and amongst peoples rather than exposing social values and domination as the cause of differences among peoples (see also Delphy, 1984; Delphy, 2015; Mathieu, 1990). This, in turn, produces an epistemological position that, as noted in the Introduction, underlies this thesis: that both ideologies (the competing systems of values circulating in society) as well as discourses (the ways that ideologies are represented) have “real,” material effects on human relations and can perpetuate oppression.

What exactly is meant, then, by the term “discourse”? Drawing on the definition provided by Donald E. Polkinghorne (1988), I use “discourse” to refer to “an integration of sentences that produces a global meaning that is more than that contained in the sentences viewed independently. There are various kinds of discourses, and each kind links the sentences that compose it according to distinct patterns” (p. 31). Discourses, in other words, extend beyond a single text or narrative (see also Jäger and Maier, 2009; van Leeuwen, 2008). However, there is another dimension to discourse in Foucauldian terms, and that is its relation to ideology and power, therefore connecting to the method of Critical Discourse Analysis, or CDA (Machin and Mayr, 2012, pp. 4-5). Through this framework, the definition of discourse can be expanded to also refer to “an institutionalized way of talking that regulates and reinforces action and thereby

exerts power” (Link, quoted in Jäger and Maier 2009, p. 35, my emphasis). Discourses need not be institutional to exert power, yet the news media is one site in which “institutionalized ways of talking” (and specifically, the above-described “objective,” common sense ways of talking), can be examined to reveal how certain “truths” about the world (i.e. the ideologies of news owners) are regulated and reinforced.

Discourse analysis, following Raymond A. Morrow and David D. Brown (1994), “[incorporates] a wide variety of techniques (e.g. critical hermeneutics, social semiotics, conversation analysis), as well as types of discourse (e.g., scientific, interactional, popular and elite culture)” (p. 265). What bridges discourse analysis with critical theories (including feminist theory), is the concern with the relationship between discourse and ideology, hegemony and domination (Morrow and Brown, 1994, p. 265). Critical Discourse Analysis, as defined by Machin and Mayr (2012), then:

analyse[s] the details of texts to reveal what kinds of discourses are being presented to readers. A discourse may be communicated by reference to specific social actors which will in turn signify kinds of actions, values and ideas without these being specified.
(p. 219)

CDA further incorporates the concept of dispositive analysis, to examine how discourses construct and maintain material realities and recognizes the fact that some knowledges cannot be verbalized (Jäger and Maier, 2009). Dispositives “can be understood as the synthesis of discursive practices (i.e. speaking and thinking on the basis of knowledge), non-discursive practices (i.e. acting on the basis of knowledge) and materializations (i.e. the material products of acting on the basis of knowledge)” (Jäger and Maier, 2009, p. 35). Dispositive analysis combines discourse analysis with non-discursive practices and materializations (including affective

knowledge) and can be done by combining textual analysis with interviews, observations and artefact analysis (Jäger and Maier, 2009, pp. 58-59). Although my main method is discourse analysis, I will also draw on dispositive approaches by examining the corpus with an emphasis on the subjects' (i.e. the celebrities') own words and knowledge as key sites of meaning. When speaking of a star, it is impossible to determine what parts of their dialogue are "authentic" versus "performed."³⁴ However, I seek to include the discourses of famous women to examine how they "perform" agency, consent, and, increasingly, feminism as part of their star image. This emphasis on women's voice and knowledge also contributes to the ongoing feminist political work of viewing women as key sites of meaning, even – and especially – while acknowledging how they are situated within broader socio-economic power structures.

Jäger and Maier's outline of critical discourse analysis (CDA) provides a step-by-step approach to the study of discourse. After choosing a subject to study (illicit celebrity images, in this case), the researcher selects one "plane" of discourse to focus on (the news media), and finally delineates a corpus of data (pp. 109-110). In the next section, I more specifically outline my research parameters, as well as the case studies I have chosen to work with, and the news sources I will draw from. In the final sections of this Chapter, I return to the steps of CDA that occur once the data has been collected for analysis, as outlined by Jäger and Maier (2009), and Machin and Mayr (2012). Before delving into the specifics of my corpus, however, I will first briefly outline the reasoning behind my research design, drawing on the tools of critical theory.

³⁴ I would further argue that this could be a concern of any researcher directly interviewing research subjects – what is being "performed" for the interviewer and what is authentic? Discourse analysis provides a helpful framework where what is said, and how it is said, is of as much, if not more interest than the so-called "truth" of it (i.e. by revealing social scripts and norms).

c) Research Design

I have already noted that news and discourse analysis are my methods of choice, but the methodological approaches underlying critical theory provide a helpful framework to understand my research design. Although the school of “critical theory” encompasses a number of theoretical paradigms under a variety of terminology, there is a shared emphasis on deconstructing oppression and forwarding social justice, as well as a common rejection of empiricist accounts of the world (Morrow and Brown, 1994, p. 132). This is not to say, however, that critical theory methodologies do not use empirical methods, but rather that they do so with a different aim in mind; to examine and reveal the (structural) power relations underneath/behind claims to “truth” rather than to measure and provide re-producible laws about “nature” and/or “humankind” (i.e. critical theory is metatheory) (Morrow and Brown, 1994).

At the methodological level, two specific offshoots of critical theory, as described by Morrow and Brown (1994) are of most use to my thesis; post-structuralism’s agency-structure dialectic (p. 132) and interpretive structuralism’s deconstruction of knowledge (p. 154). The agency-structure dialectic, which has also been discussed in Chapter 2 (Theoretical Framework), refers to researchers’ interest in both the structural forces that “constrain and enable social possibilities” (Morrow and Brown, 1994, p. 154), and the individual agency to act within those constraints and possibilities (Morrow and Brown, 1994, p. 127). To illustrate this dialectic, both Butler and Morrow and Brown use the example of language/discourse: certain rules (structures) contain and constrain the possibilities of what can be spoken and what, in turn, will be understood. However, individuals using the tools of language are not fully determined by those

rules (structures), especially when considering the historic contingency of said rules (i.e. Butler's assertion of subjects' ability to "re-appropriate" language).³⁵

This agency-structure dialectic informs my discursive analysis of news, wherein I recognize the ability of journalists to choose certain words, phrases, frames and interpretations when reporting on the news, but also that the majority of journalists work within the structural confines of advertiser-driven, corporate media. The dialectic also applies to my conception of (female) celebrity, wherein celebrities are constituted as such by the larger media structures in which they appear, as well as the news media reporting on them. Thus, the amount of agency a female celebrity can exert in resistance to news media reporting is constrained by their ongoing reliance on that same media to hire them, promote their products, and maintain their privileged position (from which they are afforded the platform to speak about, say, sexual privacy violations).

Morrow and Brown outline two specific research approaches that address the agency-structure dialectic: *intensive explication* and *comparative generalization* (p. 211). The first of these approaches – intensive explication – refers to the examination of "specific individual actors, mediations, or systems" as read through a case study (p. 212). Depending on whether the focus is on an actor, a mediation, or a system, the explication will be of "the self-identity and social cognitions appropriated by a certain actor," the "social interaction situated within a given mediation," or the "political and economic relations comprising a given system" (p. 212). My chosen case studies allow for all three levels to be attended to in the analysis: the individual actor being the female celebrity being reported on; the mediation being the journalist who interprets,

³⁵ Morrow and Brown further note that a key differential between this position and that of structuralism is the latter's anti-historicism, anti-humanism, and anti-empiricism. In such a view the subject is fully constrained by the structure(s) in which they are constituted at a certain moment in time (Morrow and Brown, 1994, p. 125).

frames and “writes” the celebrity; the system being the broader news media (and other media platforms, i.e. Google, Reddit, Apple) through which these images and discourses circulate.

Comparative generalization approaches complement intensive explication by examining more than one case (be that an actor, a mediation, or a system), in order to identify patterns across a single point in time or developments across time (Morrow and Brown, 1994, p. 212). Because this project takes a materialist approach, it is necessarily historical, examining the shifting economic relations in relation to new media technologies and changing gender roles/dynamics. My analysis will therefore be diachronic, focusing on a smaller set of case studies across a specific period of time (to be discussed in more detail in the next section). In this way, my research follows an intensive, rather than extensive design (Morrow and Brown, 1994, p. 251), focusing on a small number of cases in order, not to make broad generalizations, but rather to consider the multiple implications of an exemplary case. Intensive research designs draw upon case study analysis rather than variable manipulation (common to extensive research design), with the aim of, again, not producing generalizable “laws” or descriptive accounts, but to reflect a more theoretical concern with the “mechanisms involved in meaning and reception” (Morrow and Brown, 1994, p. 249). In this way, my research design draws upon empirical techniques (specifically the tools I use to gather and code my data), not with the goal of measuring or revealing an empirical “truth,” but rather toward revealing patterns of meaning.

In my discourse analysis of news reporting I am mobilizing my materialist feminist framework as outlined in Chapter 2 at two levels: I examine the specific uses of language to represent ideas (or ideologies) around material relations: including how the news media construct messages about labour, profit, ownership, talent, success and failure. I also use a materialist lens to look beyond the specifics of the texts that comprise my analysis: what is left out of or hidden

in the discourse, but also what larger material relations can be uncovered? In the context of my analysis, this means, for instance, examining who owns certain media and news companies, the composition of their audiences or readership, or how much profits are reported. In other words, I also conduct a political economy of the key media companies both comprising and mentioned in my data. Before I outline the step-by-step process used to collect, organize and analyze that data, I first outline the specific parameters of my intensive research design, including my chosen case studies as well as the historical moments across which I aim to measure the (re-)negotiation of women's roles in relation to recent developments in media technology, sexuality, and economics.

II. Research Parameters

a) Context

As noted in my Theoretical Framework, the relations between women, visibility/success, economics and sexuality have long been a concern of feminist political and media analysis. While scholars of celebrity have noted the ways that celebrity culture reflects particular anxieties over shifting socio-economic, political, and cultural relations (Dyer, 1979; Holmes and Negra, 2011; Projansky, 2014; Pullen, 2005), the proliferation of new media technologies has both heightened those anxieties and has allowed for more efficient forms of social policing and punishing. Though the ties between celebrity culture and capitalist ideology have been well-documented in the literature (Dyer, 1979; Littler, 2004; Scheiner McClain, 2014; Turner, 2010; Williamson, 2016), and there has been attention paid to the historical links between the development of industrial capitalism and mass media stardom (Rojek, 2001; Williamson, 2016), there have been less extensive materialist analyses of celebrity culture in contemporary times of economic crisis and rapid technological development.

Furthermore, while researchers increasingly examine the shifts and anxieties in Western societies in response to the global recession of 2007/2008 (Negra and Tasker, 2013; Stephens, 2014; Tyler, 2013), comparatively little attention has been given to this contemporaneous moment in American celebrity culture; a moment which could be described as a “crisis” in ideal hegemonic femininity (young, white, heterosexual, rich). In 2007 several formerly successful young Disney stars experienced very public breakdowns or lapses in image management: Britney Spears was caught on camera shaving her head, and subsequently spent time recovering in a mental health facility; Lindsay Lohan entered into another of several stints in rehabilitation for substance abuse; Vanessa Hudgens was victim in one of the first celebrity nude photo hacking incidents; and perhaps Disney's biggest star at the time, a then fifteen-year-old Miley Cyrus, posed semi-nude for *Vanity Fair* magazine in 2008, spurring outrage across America (Vares and Jackson, 2015).

Socialite and reality star Paris Hilton was arrested that same year and began serving her jail sentence, while Hilton's former assistant and best friend Kim Kardashian and her matriarchal family's reality dynasty launched on E! network.³⁶ In 2008 Lady Gaga's debut album *The Fame* was released, spawning a number of successful songs and accompanying “Gaga feminist” videos and appearances³⁷ and in 2008 Beyoncé's popularity skyrocketed after publicly premiering her alter-ego “Sasha Fierce,” a persona that allowed Beyoncé to experiment with being “aggressive, sexy, and provocative” (Kumari, 2016, p. 407). The rise of the Kardashians, Beyoncé, and Lady

³⁶ I say “dynasty” as the original program, *Keeping Up With the Kardashians*, launched a number of spin-off programs (*Khloe and Lamar* (2011-2012); *Kourtney and Kim Take New York* (2011-); *I Am Cait* (2014-2016)). It is also now one of the longest-running reality shows in American television.

³⁷ Halberstam (2012) identifies “Gaga Feminism” as “a politics that brings together meditations on fame and visibility with a lashing critique of the fixity of roles for males and females” (p. 5). Though Halberstam articulates a hesitation to ascribe ‘Gaga feminism’ to Lady Gaga herself (her image), I would argue that a contextualization of her work within this important cultural moment necessitates recognition of her as a key figure in this formulation of feminism.

Gaga (as well as, potentially, the transformation of Miley Cyrus' Disney image across those years, see Brady, 2016; Mendenhall, 2018) all signaled a shift in popular imagery from an emphasis on blonde, thin, innocent, straight femininity to a non-white, highly sexualized, and often queer aesthetic.³⁸

At the same time, sharp shifts were occurring in media production and consumption. Although media scholars are often wary of technologically deterministic discussions of new media, I argue that, in particular, the development and proliferation of social media has altered the ways in which people of various levels of privilege engage with institutionalized/old media. In 2007 Facebook and Twitter had recently emerged, affecting not only social relations, but also the structures and consumption of celebrity (Marwick and Boyd, 2011). YouTube, launched in 2006, was not only part of a broader shift in television production and consumption, but was also key in altering music consumption, threatening to de-corporatize the music industry, but that threat was eventually mostly recuperated into commodity capitalism (part of which was accomplished via the incorporation of "official" YouTube channels for musicians, and including advertising content directly on music videos). 2007 was the year the iPhone debuted, and though it was neither the first smart phone, nor the first phone with a two-way facing camera,³⁹ it signified a broader shift in everyday communication and participatory culture.

This thesis focuses on this moment of economic and cultural crisis (2007-2008) as a particularly significant time in American pop culture history – America, for its cultural imperialism,⁴⁰ felt particularly heavily across the border here in Canada; this period for not only

³⁸ This thesis aims to be attentive to the ways that the Kardashians differ from hegemonic codes and performances of white femininity and this will be part of the analysis of Chapter 6.

³⁹ In fact, the iPhone was not equipped with a two-way facing camera until the fourth version, released in 2010 (Wolcott, 2014).

⁴⁰ Brenda R. Weber (2009) uses the term "Americannes" to highlight the dislocation of America's cultural products from place, "allowing any culture or nation (or production company) to lay claim to the self-making values that are a part of how 'America' is conceived and manufactured" (p. 28).

its exemplification of hegemonic femininity in crisis, but also for its significance in shifting how we both consume and analyze fan-media relations. Significantly, at this time, interesting work was emerging within media studies: the concept of “convergence culture” was outlined by Henry Jenkins (2006), wherein new media technologies were recognized, even before the rise of social media platforms, as altering the relations between producer and consumer (see also Sobchack, 2004; Tofolletti, 2007). Concomitantly, feminist media scholars brought discussions of post-feminism and sexualization to the forefront of pop culture analysis (Attwood, 2006; Gill, 2007; McRobbie, 2007; Tasker and Negra, 2005; 2006; 2007⁴¹).

These cultural shifts provide the background for the case studies that I have chosen to examine, which, in turn, due to their continued prominence, will allow for a comparative, diachronic analysis across two points in time: 2007/2008 and 2014. Case study analyses, as noted by Morrow and Brown (1994), are compatible with critical and post-structural theory in that they allow for the interrogation of both the general and the specific, at once. As noted in the above section, I use a comparative method, where several case studies are examined intensively for both their similarities, as well as their differences (Morrow and Brown, 1994, pp. 250-253). In this particular instance, I look at two different forms of “leaked sexuality” or “image-based sexual violence” (McGlynn, 2017) across various media sites – the stolen image (as exemplified through the “hacked” nude photos of several female celebrities in separate incidents that occurred in 2007/2008 and 2014), and the sex tape (as exemplified in and through the stardom of both Paris Hilton and Kim Kardashian, with 2007 signaling the fading of Hilton’s stardom and the rise of Kardashian’s). This set of case studies will allow me to juxtapose the various forms of

⁴¹ This is not to say that post-feminism had not been discussed prior to this era. Susan Faludi (1991) uses the term in *Backlash*, and Sarah Projansky (2001) applies post-feminism in this more recent sense, to her insightful analysis of rape in pop culture.

media stardom involved (reality television/Internet stardom; acting stars) in relation to classed and marketized forms of value; examine how these stars/texts fit into new media developments (the “democratizing” potential and commodification of new forms of fame; the nude selfie as part of smart phone technology; the rapidity and reach of Internet distribution for leaked and released videos); examine the Internet companies’ responses to the circulation of unauthorized, and in some cases, illegal imagery (Reddit, Google, Apple); and look at how women’s sexuality is policed across these various sites, sorted into “worthy” and “unworthy” victims of violation. Though I have chosen a small sample of case studies for analysis, my approach, grounded in an intersectional feminist framework, will allow for a comprehensive analysis of hegemonic beauty/sexual scripts across varying axes of identity; power distribution across media formats, new and old; the economic implications of “leaking” celebrity bodies, as well as the institutional (legal and corporate) responses to such “leaking” bodies. Comparing mainstream media discourses from a point of crisis (2007-2008) with the discourses a few years later could reveal the ways that new media technologies both challenged structural power relations and upheld (were taken up into) them.

b) Case study justification

My aim to investigate the discourses around these instances of “leaked” sexuality necessitates a wide scope of sources from which to cull my data for analysis. Due to my interest in the way that such discourses might be inflected with concern over shifting economic and technologic relations, I chose to focus on “old” or institutionalized media, rather than independent or “new” news media sources. By old news media, I refer to news that exists both within and beyond an online platform – most traditional news sources now include an online

version where content can be accessed – as well as those news organizations that are corporate-owned (usually part of a larger media conglomerate), ad-driven and, therefore, do not challenge, but instead often promote corporate/capitalist value systems. Although media scholars like Henry Jenkins (2006) might argue that today’s convergence culture makes such distinctions (between old and new media) obsolete, I would argue that the association of old news media with the previously outlined journalistic standards (frames of “objectivity,” use of rational, common sensical discourses, the assumption of accuracy and fact-checking⁴²) lends an air of authority to the news reported in, for instance, *The New York Times*, versus such online news blogs as Gawker and Breitbart (for further discussion of the differences between old and new news media see Beers, 2006; Solove, 2007). Furthermore, the database from which I am collecting news (Factiva) provides the option of excluding blogs such as those mentioned above, although that could be considered a limitation of my study and a potential area for future research.

My choice to focus on certain high-profile female celebrities over other victims of privacy invasion and image-based sexual violence is further intended to highlight issues of economics and class status/mobility. While numerous celebrities – both male and female – have both produced and “leaked” sex tapes in recent decades, Paris Hilton and Kim Kardashian are two of the most high-profile women to have appeared in sex tapes, while existing (and thriving) beyond the confines of the traditional, (gate-kept) talent-based media system (i.e. they use new media to build and maintain their celebrity). They are also often discursively linked to those sex tapes in news narratives. Kardashian is of further interest, for the ways in which this narrative has followed her across other instances of privacy violation (as she was allegedly a victim of the

⁴² Of course, the popularity of the term “fake news” speaks to the declining authority that traditional news media have in today’s climate. Although this might increasingly be the public perception of news, there is still a marked difference between news organizations that adhere to industry standards and ethics versus blogs or other sites that do not.

2014 iCloud photo hack) as well as into motherhood; the news media have grappled with imaging her in either role – as victim and/or mother – because of her ongoing conflation with and profiting from excessive sexuality.

On the other hand, stars for whom sexuality is more appropriately channeled into a recognizable media profession – into, for instance, acting or modeling – may be more easily accepted as victims of privacy violation in the news discourse. This is why I was particularly interested in the cases of actresses Jennifer Lawrence, Gabrielle Union, and Vanessa Hudgens. The first two in particular – Lawrence and Union – are of note for their willingness to speak out against the 2014 nude photo hacking, as well as (in the case of Union particularly) noting the complicity of Internet conglomerates in the circulation of said images. Hudgens, as a victim of both the 2007 and the 2014 hacks, provides comparative analysis across these periods; particularly, I predict, as someone who did not “learn” how to properly manage and conduct her private media production/consumption after the first violation. She is also important in the context of hegemonic femininity in crisis, as she was a Disney star at the time of her first photo hack and had to deal with not only the media reporting on the incident, but also Disney’s subsequent reactions and framing of the event (which will be discussed in the analysis). Disney is known as a wholesome, family-oriented, all-American media corporation whose brand requires vigilant image maintenance, free from scandal (especially a sexual one!) as well as any significant markers of “excess” (class, racial, or otherwise). As one of numerous female Disney stars to “fall” from grace (Lohan, Spears, Cyrus) around 2007/2008 – and one who was subsequently “forgiven” rather than fired by her “parent” company – Hudgens is a particularly useful case study to contrast against the tainted and excessive reality/sex tape stardom of Kardashian/Hilton.

c) Research Questions

The research questions I have formulated center on each of the chosen case studies; stolen images and sex tapes, respectively. They are as follows:

RQ1) How did “old” news media frame the hacking and leaking of celebrity photos in 2007 compared to the iCloud hack of 2014? What frames were used when (and if) describing the Internet/communications companies implicated in the hacks (Apple, Google, Reddit, etc.) and those charged with containing and punishing the offenders (the FBI)? How were specific celebrities’ photos (Jennifer Lawrence, Gabrielle Union and Vanessa Hudgens) reported on in relation to their race, age, class, as well as the media formats from which they emerged (i.e. old versus new media)?

RQ2) How do “old” news media frame Paris Hilton and Kim Kardashian in relation to their “leaked” sex tapes? What discourses circulate about privacy, labour, fame, and economic reward? How is Hilton’s whiteness framed in comparison to Kardashian’s? Are there differences in the news reporting on these stars across 2007-2008 and 2014?

Additionally, I wanted to incorporate some analysis of audience commentary in response to the news. After reviewing my data, I found that there were several news stories quoting the “public” (i.e. fans or non-fans of celebrities) allowing me to use those in my analysis rather than searching through online commentary on specific articles where, it is worth noting, anonymity might allow for more “authentic” views to be expressed, but also perpetuates some of the power imbalances governing online “free speech”/hate speech that this thesis – particularly the chapter on the Apple hack – seeks to critique. Additionally, I thought it might be interesting to note how journalists, in their reporting, construct an audience: does the audience share their critical (or

celebratory) views or does the journalist serve as a paternalistic figure reminding audiences how they ought to react to the celebrity? My third research question was formulated and then operationalized throughout the analysis of both RQ1 and RQ2:

RQ3) How does the broader audience – as evidenced in the data collected and as constructed by journalists – react to the discursive frames used by the news media in their reporting on female celebrities?

III. Step-by-step Method

a) Database – Factiva

Rather than choosing a handful of news sources, based on my own understandings of what constitute more “progressive” or “conservative” publications to represent various ideological positions, I decided to work with the online news database Factiva. Owned by Dow Jones, a business/financial news source that aggregates data, information, and advice, Factiva is a global news database that contains over 33,000 sources (Dow Jones: Factiva, 2013). I chose it due to accessibility (available through the University of Ottawa’s online library account), as well as for coverage; it covers a variety of (but not all) English-language news publications in Canada and abroad, as well as blogs, magazines, and reports, although results can be filtered to exclusively focus on news (which was done in my searches). It also provides a wide range of date coverage as opposed to databases like PressReader, which archives news for a limited time.

Broad coverage was desirable to me in order not to arbitrarily favour certain news sites over others (including news sites with more accessible online archives), as well as for detecting patterns in coverage. For instance, the iCloud photo hack received significantly more coverage in financial/technology papers and university publications than did the earlier celebrity photo hacks.

Focusing on a handful of predetermined news sources would not have revealed such a trend, nor allow me to examine the variations in reporting across these sources. However, in choosing to widen my data sources, I knew that I would be working with a much larger corpus of articles. I therefore had to choose my keywords wisely and narrow my search parameters (dates and countries) as much as I could (to be explicated further in the following sub-section).

A brief overview of my search results, however, revealed that despite the large corpus, there were many articles unsuitable for my discourse analysis (and the specific figures for this will be discussed in the following sections) for a variety of reasons, including, for example, an offhand mention/reference to the case study, rather than it being the central topic of reporting. Thus, I was able to broaden my initial search terms, and from there see exactly which kinds of news sources (i.e. independent/local newspapers versus multinational conglomerates) were, on the one hand, partaking in reporting on these incidents and, on the other hand, what kinds of frames they were using. The use of Factiva, then, allowed me to address both levels of analysis outlined above: the structural (news/media owners) and the individual (individual journalists' choices; the varying responses to different female celebrities' claims to privacy).

b) Parameters, Keywords, and Results

After conducting a few exploratory searches on the Factiva database, my first choice was to limit all news sources to those in Canada and the United States. While it could be of value to examine, for instance, European perspectives on female celebrity and sexuality, my interests as outlined earlier in this chapter are to examine gender and economic power relations in the specific Canadian/American context (Canada being my country of habitation, the US for its cultural imperialism here) and, therefore, the news sources of most interest to me are the ones

reflecting Canadian and American “common sense” values. Furthermore, Factiva provides an option where one can limit search results to show only those articles that contain the chosen search terms in the headline and/or lead paragraph. While this would be very helpful in narrowing down articles to those that focus on the celebrities in question (rather than including any article that mentions her at all), it would not allow me to get a sense of which articles, while focusing on some other element of, for example, Kim Kardashian’s public image, insist on including somewhere in the article (not necessarily the lead paragraph) a reference to her sex tape⁴³ – a central concern of this thesis (how and why her fame and/or other media activity is framed in relation to the sex tape). I chose therefore to search the full article for my terms, and then sort out the relevant ones (those about the star/incident in question) at a later stage (to be discussed further in subsection c).

Choosing the appropriate search terms would ensure that I could obtain an adequately large sample size to account for those articles that would not address my research questions and therefore have to be discarded from the analysis, while ensuring that the data set was still manageable. After a few experimental searches, I found that a manageable result was around the 100 article range, but some terms yielded much more. It is important to take some time here to address which search terms were ultimately used and why, recognizing that each choice made necessarily pushed the research along one avenue at the expense of several other potential routes.

As outlined earlier in this chapter, my data focuses on two major case studies (the celebrity sex tape and the stolen/ “leaked” celebrity photo) at two distinct moments (2007/2008 and 2014). I broke down my searches accordingly into four subsections, brainstorming a list of

⁴³ If I were to narrow the search to include the terms in the headline and lead paragraph, it would search for both terms – Kim Kardashian and the sex tape – in that part of the article, significantly reducing my corpus to articles that are, for the most part, about the sex tape.

terms that might be applicable to each case set. However, the two cases studies vary in that there are many more euphemisms for stolen photos than there are for “sex tape.” While “sex video” is a term that has been used in the academic literature (see, for instance, Hayward and Rahn, 2014), my own experiences with consuming celebrity journalism suggests that “sex tape” is the most accurate and widely used term to describe the phenomenon of interest here: an intimate (home video) aesthetic – signaling illicit footage – starring one or more publicly “known” people (whether their fame pre-dates the sex tape or not). RQ2, then, was investigated using a combination of the words “Kim Kardashian” and (not or) “sex tape” as well as “Paris Hilton” and “sex tape” across my date parameters; 2007/2008 and 2014.

On the other hand, while the iCloud hack of 2014 has been colloquially termed “The Fappening” (which is itself a sexual term that will be discussed in Chapter 5), there are many other terms by which this, as well as the 2007 celebrity photo “leaks,” have be described. My search terms for those were accordingly more extensive; after brainstorming a list of potential word combinations, I tried each in turn to see what the results were. Since there was no collective nickname for the 2007 celebrity photo hacks the way there was in 2014, as they were not “networked,” I tried a variety of word combinations, most of which yielded paltry, if any, results. The table below (Table 3.1) charts these specific word combinations searched through articles from January 1, 2007 to December 31, 2008; the numerical results of those searches; and the justification for discarding the search (I will later provide a summary table of the searches that yielded fruitful results, from which I culled my data):

Search terms	Results	Justification
1. “Celeb” + “hack”	19 results, did not save	Too small a sample size
2. “Celebrity” + “photo leak”	0	N/A

3. “Nude photo leak”	0	N/A
4. “Celebrity” + “Photo hack”	1	Too small a sample size
5. “Nude” + “celebrity”	1252, did not save	Too large, “nude” is too general (and not necessarily referring to stolen photos)

Table 3.1 Excluded Searches

After the above searches, the next combination of terms that I tried, covering the years 2007 to 2008, was “Celeb” and “nude.” This yielded a healthy sample size of articles (112), so the results were saved and I decided to use the search term “nude” with the names of the specific celebrities I was interested in analyzing: Lindsay Lohan and Vanessa Hudgens (full results will be provided in summary table 3.2 at the end of this sub section). While at first I thought I would include Paris Hilton in this section as well, in order to compare coverage of her stolen nude photos with that of her sex tape, the results of that search were too large to be manageable (413 articles). I decided not to use the Hilton search, but rather to examine my other data set (from searching her name with “sex tape”) to see if any of the previously collected articles from that time frame mention both incidents of “leaked” sexuality (which few did, as will be discussed in Chapter 6 on sex tapes).

For the iCloud hack of 2014, I narrowed my time frame, as the incident happened in late August of 2014. I therefore searched articles in Canada and the United States from August 1, 2014 to December 31, 2014. After searching and saving the results for “Fapping,” “iCloud leak,” “iCloud hack,”⁴⁴ and “Celebrity” plus “photo hack” (see full search results table 3.2), I focused on two celebrities in order to mirror my research design and results from the 2007/2008 searches and allow for a comparative analysis across those seven years. I focused on Vanessa

⁴⁴ Separating “iCloud” and “hack” into two combined search terms yielded no results. This is why I searched the full phrase “iCloud hack” and “iCloud leak.”

Hudgens (again searching “Vanessa Hudgens” and “nude,” which yielded 51 articles), allowing for comparison of coverage across both incidents wherein she was victimized. I also chose Gabrielle Union, a Black female actress, for her prominence as one victim who spoke out strongly against victim-blaming in the aftermath of the 2014 attack. “Gabrielle Union” and “nude” yielded 60 results. I wanted to also focus on Jennifer Lawrence as another actress who spoke out against victim-blaming – and one who spoke from a place of white privilege – but the results, much like the case for Paris Hilton with regards to her photo leak, were unmanageable (“Jennifer Lawrence” and “nude” yielded 1,058 articles across August to December of 2014). I did notice, however, that several of the previously collected articles from searching, for instance, the “Fappening” and Gabrielle Union mentioned or highlighted Jennifer Lawrence and her high-profile *Vanity Fair* interview about the incident. I therefore was still able to sample and analyze the discourses surrounding Lawrence at this time, and compare the coverage to other, racialized stars. My analysis also addresses the hugely disproportionate reporting on Jennifer Lawrence as a blond-haired, blue-eyed white woman and her sexual impropriety/punishment in relation to her legitimacy as a celebrity known for having a recognizable “talent.”

For ease of reference, I include at the end of this section (pages 118-119) Table 3.2 listing all searches (keywords and parameters) from which my data was culled. As noted above, there were other combinations of words that yielded little-to-no results. I also acknowledge that there were even more synonyms, euphemisms and dysphemisms⁴⁵ that could have been used but I had to make decisions on what I thought would be the most commonly used phrases and descriptors, as well as what amount of results was manageable for analysis.

⁴⁵ When collecting data, I noticed other phrases being used such as “naughty photos” which, as a term in itself implies guilt.

It is worth pointing out that as I was collecting the search results for analysis, I noticed that Factiva included, along with its news results, several television news/talk show/radio transcripts that also contained the keywords. Although it could be fruitful to conduct an analysis on broadcast news reporting as opposed to written (online or print) news, that was not the aim of this thesis. While certainly numerous people get their news from television alone, and so it possibly represents a wider hegemonic viewpoint, the shows that entered my results were not simply news reporting shows, but rather talk shows that not only report on, but also analyze and debate the news, often including panel discussants to represent opposing views. Again, this could be a fruitful avenue for further analysis, but was beyond the scope and methodology chosen for this thesis. My first step after collecting my data, then, was to eliminate broadcast news transcripts from my corpus. That altered my totals as outlined in Table 3.2, which lists the search terms and parameters (dates), the number of results, and then the number of articles downloaded (with the transcripts manually removed by “deselecting” them when saving my search results).

c) Selection of articles

After downloading all of the articles fulfilling my search parameters, I went through each one in order to decide whether or not it would be included in my final corpus for discourse analysis. The first round of eliminations was to rid the results of television transcripts that I had not noticed or omitted in the initial selection/downloading process. The second phase was to rid the corpus of any duplicate articles that had not been filtered out through Factiva. This occurred because although many news sources carry the same story distributed across newswires such as the Associated Press, most publications alter the headlines somewhat, a decision clearly made at

the editorial level. Although these differences in headline themselves are noteworthy,⁴⁶ my data set was already large enough without including numerous versions of articles that differed only at the level of the headline. This could, however, provide a fruitful avenue for further research, particularly an examination of the ways that ideological or political leanings are reflected in words and phrases used as “clickbait” for readers (with contemporary readers often deciding, based only on headline/author/lede, whether to click on and read an article or not, thus generating ad revenue).

Once these steps were completed, the process was more complex. The criteria for inclusion differed for each search, as the searches by specific name (“Kim Kardashian” or “Gabrielle Union,” for example) had stricter limits than those that were general (“Celeb” and “nude,” for example). In the searches specifically on a celebrity name, I favoured articles that were specifically about the celebrity in question. For instance, in my searches of “Paris Hilton” and “sex tape” for 2007-2008 [For ease of reference I labelled my searches, as outlined in table 3.2 below, this being Search 1, abbreviated to S1], numerous articles were returned that were about Hilton’s ex-boyfriend and partner in her sex tape, Rick Solomon, as that year he courted and then wed fellow celebrity Pamela Anderson. Those articles were eliminated from my corpus. On the other hand, when the article included “Paris Hilton” and “sex tape” as *examples* of a certain cultural phenomena – even if she was only mentioned once – I included the article in my corpus. For instance, I included several articles about other celebrity sex (tape) scandals which mentioned her, as well as articles lamenting the state of contemporary news media/gossip. Although this process of elimination was rooted in subjective judgments, I believe that my

⁴⁶ For example, two identical articles from the Associated Press about Paris Hilton from 2007 have the following headlines: “Paris Hilton’s Private Items on Internet” and “Website posts Paris Hilton items, including racy videos, photos, love letters.”

decisions were justified in light of the larger aims of this thesis; that is, to examine how Hilton's sex tape is mobilized in larger narratives about stardom, success, and the media.

Similar choices were made in the case of "Kim Kardashian" search results [Search 3 or S3]. Although she was referred to once, offhandedly, in many articles, I included some of those articles when they were about new media trends such as sex scandals or reality television. I also included articles that specifically made fun of her or were shorter gossip items about her, as she could be coded as being the "main" subject of the piece. I struggled with whether to include articles about her ex-boyfriend and sex tape partner, singer Ray J, as he was famous before the "leak" (which does not apply to Paris Hilton's co-star Solomon, as described above). I decided to only include articles that discussed his part in the sex tape scandal (therefore eliminating articles about, for instance, who he was now dating but including articles where he was "punished" for his part in the sex tape, i.e. he was uninvited to a Thanksgiving parade). Overall the articles mentioning Kardashian and her sex tape were found to be more *about* her than the Paris Hilton articles (based on the percentage of articles included in my corpus for analysis), suggesting that Hilton was more often used by writers as an offhanded "punch-line" or an example of some larger trend (another trend worth exploring in more detail at another time).

When it came to searches on "celeb" and "nude," there were other challenges in my selection process. "Nude" is a very common word, that is often used to describe a hue in fashion and beauty articles. Those were eliminated from my corpus. Additionally, while I had intended to focus on prominent incidents of stolen nude photos, these search terms yielded reports of nude photo spreads in the context of advertising and magazines, as well as nude celebrity photo scandals outside of the North American context (one in Hong Kong, and one in France), which were beyond the scope of my interest here. I did, however, include articles that mentioned nude

photo “controversies” (and here, my understanding and application of the term “controversy” is clearly subjective). Additionally, I included articles that mentioned a prominent woman’s nude photos (re-)surfacing at another point in her career (i.e. Vanessa Williams, Marilyn Monroe and *American Idol* contestant Frenchie Davis). However, being included for analysis did not necessarily correlate to being discussed in the final chapters/analysis, as other debates and patterns emerged in the reporting.

After completing my general searches, I specifically searched two Disney stars who had been victimized by having nude photos stolen and released online. At the time of designing my research project, I was only aware that Paris Hilton, Lindsay Lohan, and Vanessa Hudgens had photos stolen during the 2007/2008 time-frame. I did not include a specific search on “Paris Hilton” and “nude” because, as noted earlier, the results were far too numerous (413 results) and would likely overlap with the results of my previous search of “Paris Hilton” and “sex tape” covering the same dates and geographical scope. Furthermore, Paris Hilton’s background as a “sex tape” star differentiates her from young actresses/singers like Lohan and Hudgens who were “discovered” and fostered by the Disney corporation. The sex and gender expectations surrounding them, particularly as “role models” for young audiences, diverge quite clearly from Hilton and Kardashian, and were therefore worth separating and considering as their own, distinct case studies.

Once that decision was made, I went through the results of both searches: “Lindsay Lohan” and “nude” across 2007 to 2008 [S7] and “Vanessa Hudgens” and “nude” across the same time period [S8], I learned that there were more scandals around nude Disney stars, including a then fifteen-year-old Miley Cyrus posing nearly nude on a *Vanity Fair* cover. While many articles about Cyrus were returned in my searches as outlined above [S7; S8], they usually

only mentioned Lohan and/or Hudgens in passing, as examples of Disney girls “going wild.” Even though my original intent had been to include articles that were mainly about the stars in question (i.e. mentioning them more than once), I chose to include articles from the searches that were *about* Cyrus as well (where she was the main subject, not Lohan or Hudgens), as those articles were often analyzing the broader context of young (female) stardom itself. Furthermore, my interest in the economic relations underpinning these discussions and ideologies makes the Disney corporation of particular interest for its discovery and fostering of (hegemonic) ideals of femininity and success.

It is also worth mentioning that both young stars Lohan and Hudgens released cultural products during the time in question; Lohan was featured in two movies – *Georgia Rule* and *I Know Who Killed Me* – while Hudgens released music and appeared in the third installment in Disney’s massively successful *High School Musical* series. I therefore included reviews of these products in my final corpus of articles for analysis, even if Lohan or Hudgens (and their scandals) were mentioned only once. I also included articles where they were mentioned in the context of lists, which could provide some insight into the temporal context of these moments (i.e. the most-searched stars according to Yahoo, or the biggest celebrity scandals of the year).

In the case more specifically of Lohan, where her nude photos were framed less as a feature story/scandal and more as yet another symptom of her “downward spiral,” I included articles where she was mentioned – even if only one time – as examples of how hard it is to be a young star today or how not to behave as a young star today, or conversely, how similar Lohan’s trajectory is to that of classic Hollywood sex symbol Marilyn Monroe. The kinds of articles about Lohan that were eliminated were repeats (with slightly different words, bylines or headlines – the longest version was always the one included), articles about fashion or brands

mentioning Lohan as having sported the item/trend, and gossip articles mentioning a club or restaurant appearance by Lohan. Many of these were written in the context of “gossip round-up” articles, with several items about several celebrities, providing little-to-no commentary or context and thus leaving little to analyze discursively.

The articles returned in the Hudgens search [S8] had a much higher rate of inclusion in my corpus for analysis (79.59% as opposed to 62.77%), as she was often mentioned several times or indeed the main subject of the news article. However, again there were exemptions to this that were still included in my final analysis. As noted above, I included articles that mentioned her in the context of Disney stars – and young female Disney stars specifically – and scandal. I included articles that mention or analyze the moral panic around teen “sexting” when Hudgens was used as an example. Hudgens appeared less often than Lohan as a one-off mention and the vast majority of articles excluded in her case was due to repeated content (again, I included the longest version of pieces carried across news organizations through, for instance, the Associated Press with slightly varying bylines, content, and headlines).

Finally, I sorted my search results stemming from the 2014 iCloud photo hack. While initially going through the results, I noticed that there were many articles that overlapped and appeared in numerous searches, therefore making my total number of articles lower than it would seem. When it came to the specific celebrity searches in 2014 – Vanessa Hudgens [S14] and Gabrielle Union [S15] – I did include articles that only mentioned them once, if the main subject of the article was the stolen photos. I did exclude several articles that did mention the stars’ names out of that context (with “nude” referring to some fashion-related item, for instance, or appearing in a headline that was hyperlinked within the main body of another article that Factiva included in the results). As can be seen from the table below, however, the rate of inclusion for

these articles was higher than for other searches containing the celebrity names as this was such a high-profile event that received much more coverage than the earlier hacks (and the implications of this trend will be discussed).

The table below presents the exact number of articles that were returned in each search, the number downloaded (the discrepancy is due exclusively to broadcast transcripts, as mentioned earlier), and the number that were, in the end, selected for discourse analysis. As noted earlier, just because an article was included for analysis does not mean it is discussed in my analysis chapters, as I followed the themes that emerged overall and could not discuss each and every article.

Search Number	Search terms/ Parameters	Dates	Number of Results	Number Downloaded	Number Analyzed
S1	“Paris Hilton” + “sex tape”	01/01/2007 to 31/12/2008	536	388	163
S2	“Paris Hilton” + “sex tape”	01/01/2014 to 31/12/2014	47	47	22
S3	“Kim Kardashian” + “sex tape”	01/01/2007 to 31/12/2008	163	163	101
S4	“Kim Kardashian” + “sex tape”	01/01/2014 to 31/12/2014	172	172	115
S5	“Celebrity” + “nude photo”	01/01/2007 to 31/12/2008	77	58	18
S6	“Celeb” + “nude”	01/01/2007 to 31/12/2008	118	113	33
S7	“Lindsay Lohan” + “nude”	01/01/2007 to 31/12/2008	339/332*	274	171
S8	“Vanessa Hudgens” + “nude”	01/01/2007 to 31/12/2008	212	196	156
S9	“iCloud hack”	01/08/2014 to 31/12/2014	51	48	43
S10	“iCloud leak”	01/08/2014 to 31/12/2014	11	10	7
S11	“The Fappening”	01/08/2014 to 31/12/2014	44	44	40

S12	“nude” + “celeb”	01/08/2014 to 31/12/2014	95/94*	90	74/73*
S13	“Celebrity” + “photo hack”	01/08/2014 to 31/12/2014	74	68	57
S14	“Celebgate”	01/08/2014 to 31/12/2014	21	21	21
S15	“Vanessa Hudgens” + “nude”	01/08/2014 to 31/12/2014	51	47	44
S16	“Gabrielle Union” + “nude”	01/08/2014 to 31/12/2014	60/56*	51	47

Table 3.2 Full List of Saved Searches

*See footnote 47 below for explanation of second number

d) Critical Discourse Analysis

Once I had sorted and selected all articles for analysis, I was still left with a very large corpus of articles for analysis (1,077 in total, though I already knew that many searches contained overlapping articles and thus my total sum would be smaller). In order to work with my data, I initially intended to use the qualitative analysis software NVivo. I re-downloaded my articles selected from Factiva (which meant returning to the database and hand selecting articles for download and triple-checking the numbers for accuracy⁴⁷) in order to remove unwanted articles from my corpus. I then had the articles I wanted saved as PDF files, which included a table of contents with the headlines, as well as the full body of each article. This follows the first step of critical discourse analysis (CDA) as identified by Jäger and Maier (2009) wherein the researcher identifies the articles relevant for analysis (p. 53).

⁴⁷ In fact there were three discrepancies when I did the searches again; the Lindsay Lohan search [S8], the “nude” and Celeb” search [S12] and Gabrielle Union [S15] had different total results the second time I conducted the search on Factiva. While Lohan’s was missing 7, none of them were articles that I had selected. The same goes for Gabrielle Union. However, Search 12 was missing one article and it was one I not only selected, but had also highlighted as being of particular interest. (Luckily the article remains in the old version of the saved search and is included in my analysis).

After a few attempts to code with NVivo software, I found that its format limited my ability to easily find and retrieve relevant quotes vis-à-vis the articles where they appeared. Although this issue could have been addressed by copy/pasting each article into a separate document (Word or PDF) to be analyzed in NVivo, I found that approach would be too time consuming as I was working with hundreds of articles. I decided not to use the NVivo coding software, but to instead sort and code my data by hand using hard copies of the articles. My coding followed a very broad schemata, identifying relevant themes as they emerged and then grouping the articles accordingly.

Deacon et al. (2010) define a code as:

a systemic device or procedure which operates to organise and frame material in particular forms of communication. Codes operate hand in hand with conventions, and in order to interpret any item or unit of communication, we need to understand its constitutive codes and conventions, for without these we shall either be baffled or make culturally inappropriate guesses at what is meant. (p. 380)

The process of applying various codes to data sets is called coding. However, coding can also more broadly refer to the “process of examining the text closely” (Coyle, 2007, n.p.). As noted by Coyle (2007), discourse analysis is generally less rigid in its processes than, for instance, content analysis, and coders often have to approach the data openly, without a pre-determined set of codes in mind. This latter approach was most fruitful to me, as I noted new and different codes and themes emerging across the data, and ones that were specific to each case study chosen (and therefore not applicable across all data sets).

I used the organically-emerging themes to organize my articles. For the Disney Chapter, the articles were categorized, at the first level based on which stars they were about (i.e. Lohan,

Hudgens or Cyrus). From there, the articles were organized along sub-themes that also emerged as I read and analyzed each article. After noting the repeated themes across the reporting on the separate incidents, I organized the data for my other Chapters around broader themes, rather than coding according to celebrity. This was especially helpful for the Chapter on the iCloud photo hack, which had numerous victims. Table 3.3 below lists the themes and subthemes that emerged in my coding process.

Chapter	Themes	Subthemes
Disney Chapter (Ch. 4)	Lindsay Lohan	Marilyn Monroe Photo Shoot Stolen nude photographs
	Vanessa Hudgens	Stolen nude photographs
	Miley Cyrus	Consensual nude photoshoot
iCloud Hack Chapter (Ch. 5)	Culture	Victim-blaming versus anti-victim blaming Feminist Discourse College publications
	Technology	Apple (responsibility, finance) 4chan and Reddit
	Celebrity	Celebrity discourse (i.e. quotes and statements from the celebrities) Intersectional frameworks (race, class) Status/mode of celebrity
The Sex Tape (Ch. 6)	Cultural Reporting	Other scandals Pornification stories Shifts in technology use Current events
	Textual Containment and/or financial stories	Reality show Other business endeavors Financial information Celebrity status (questions of legitimacy)
	Other Celebrities	Other sex tapes Comments made about PH or KK by other celebrities
	Stolen Photos	Paris Hilton's property stolen from storage locker KK and The Fappening

	Hilton's Legal troubles	2007 DUI arrest and prison sentence
	Kardashian's Partner	Reports on KK's sex tape partner Ray J (and the aftermath)

Table 3.3 Themes and Subthemes by Chapter

The next steps in Critical Discourse Analysis are to examine how often the sub-topics appear and how they are dispersed over time (Jäger and Maier, 2009, p. 54). For my corpus, a comparison across time was ideal – each of the scandals studied were framed in narrative terms, allowing me to identify the major narratives across each story as they unfolded. This framework follows traditional journalistic standards where events follow a cause-and-effect sequence, allowing for parallels between stardom and scandal narratives to emerge (where one is the inverse of the other – an individual act/decision brings about the success/downfall of the star in question). While such narratives might seem trivial on the surface, they were of particular interest to me in relation to the diachronic element of study – allowing me to examine, for instance, the narratives around Kim Kardashian at very specific and disparate points in her career or the repeated narrative, as applied to the Disney stars, of successful girls/women out of control and tainted female purity.

From there, I followed Jäger and Maier's (2009) next step, which is to examine the ways that identifying discourse strands "yield[s] ideas for the ensuing detailed analysis of the typical discourse fragments and for the final synoptic analysis" (p. 54). The detailed analysis comprises of examining a discourse fragment in terms of the following: (1) Context; (2) Surface of the text; (3) Rhetorical means or devices; (4) Content and Ideological statements; (5) Other peculiarities of the article; (6) Discourse position and overall message of the article (p. 55). "Context" refers to considerations about the publication, the author, the cause of the article and where within the publication it appears (although the last element was not available for analysis from the Factiva

website) and the justification for choosing it as a “typical” article (p. 55). “Surface” refers to layout, pictures, and graphs, as well as headlines and sub-headings (p. 55). Again, because of my use of the Factiva database, many of these elements of the article are unavailable to me – including photos and graphs that might have appeared alongside the articles. I can, however, access headlines and sub-headings which are used to draw in the reader and thus have discursive significance. Surface also refers to the discourse fragments that appear in the article. “Rhetorical means” refers to the kinds of arguments made and how, logic and composition, implications, insinuations, vocabulary (i.e. “all” or “never”, “should” or “should not”, “innocent” or “racy”), symbolism and metaphor, idioms, subject/persons, and references to knowledge sources (p.55). “Content and Ideological statements” examines the broader power relations at stake, the power structures, and what kinds of futures are imagined (p. 55). Content and ideological statements, as well as the “Discourse position and overall message” are key to drawing connections to the broader discourses at work that connect individual discourse fragments.

In their guideline to Critical Discourse Analysis, David Machin and Andrea Mayr (2012) provide a similar set of methodological guidelines. They suggest that analysts focus on lexical fields and choices within a particular text, including not only to examine what is in the text, but also what is missing from the text (p. 11). Lexical choice means also considering what words are chosen, as well as the common connotative meanings of such words (pp. 32-37). For example, in my corpus, the term “leaked” was used many times, which has a connotative association with wetness and, in turn, female sexuality. Machin and Mayr also outline the analysis of verbs, and the ways that values can be inscribed on such choices (p. 12). In the example given above, the use of the term “leak” to describe the deliberate stealing and posting of private images erases the agency of the perpetrator(s) and suggests that such situations are inevitable. Machin and Mayr

also point out how the use of certain verbs in describing people's statements (i.e. quoting verbs) can reveal implicit value-judgments (pp. 11-12). For example, in my data the celebrities were sometimes described as "railing" against the media rather than "critiquing" it. Other useful modes of analysis suggested by Machin and Mayr include descriptions of people; use of metaphor and rhetoric; nominalization; modality/authority and ambiguity (pp. 12-13). Although these factors will be examined, they are often more implicit in texts, and are operationalized at a broader level. For instance, the descriptors of celebrities such as Paris Hilton, as will be demonstrated, invoke specific lexical choices (i.e. "useless") to convey a broader meaning of "success." In this case, the author (journalist) is exercising an authority over the celebrity system and the celebrity herself by undermining her legitimacy and reaffirming their "truth" of meritocracy.

In relation to this, Jäger and Maier's (2009) outline their final conception of CDA as synoptic analysis, where: "a final assessment of the newspaper's discourse position is made. For this purpose, the findings from structural analysis and detailed analysis are interpreted in relation and comparison to each other" (p. 56). The structural analysis suggested by Jäger and Maier (2009) is intended to provide a broad overview of the newspaper from which the analyzed article is culled. However, I am diverging from this model for two reasons: firstly, on practical terms, because I am using Factiva and did not choose a select few publications to analyze, I am unable to make claims about specific articles vis-à-vis the newspapers' overall "discourse position" (though I can and will note trends in coverage of certain stories across a publication); secondly, at the structural level, as news organizations shift in response to industry change, more and more articles are picked up across newspapers and thus not confined to their original "source." This was demonstrated in my data collection when numerous versions of one article appeared across

different sources and the duplicates were eliminated. In this way, it would be difficult to make claims that any specific article chosen for analysis is *typical* or representative of a single newspaper's position (a standard suggested by Jäger and Maier, 2009).

Another reason for moving away from making conclusions about one publication is that the Factiva database allows for comparison across different news sources, providing for more in-depth analysis at the structural level. For example, several articles in my corpus were sourced from UWire: a newswire service dedicated to college newspapers. Examining those specific articles in relation to who wrote them (usually students/non-professional journalists) and their target audience (university students) often revealed much different discourse positions in relation to sexuality or technology than those appearing in stories distributed through the Associate Press newswire. I therefore examined the articles at not only a detailed level – using the techniques outlined above – but also at the structural level, examining what kind of publication it appears in, what journalist(s) is writing it (depending on the information available to me in the text as well as through Googling them⁴⁸), as well as what kinds of discourse planes – or societal locations of speech (Jäger and Maier, 2009, p. 48) – are used; much news is framed in “common sense” or everyday speech, but some of the articles here, for instance, draw on science and technology discourses, or financial ones. Furthermore, an important distinction exists (but is observed less and less, if my data is any indication) between news reporting that remains “distant” and “objective” and news reporting that uses an editorial tone or personal voice – particularly when it

⁴⁸ Where a journalist was named, I used Google to look up their professional profiles to determine as much demographic information about them as I could either visually (gender/race) or through other characteristics (names suggesting a gender, biographies suggesting an age). I did not “Google” the authors of the college newspaper articles, as they most likely were not writing in a professional capacity (uncredentialed and unpaid work). In those cases, I drew on any information included in the article only (name and, as often listed in university papers, major and year of study). This choice was made in order to reflect the power differentials between each of these platforms and the ethical implications of publishing in a major newspaper where, even if the author is not a professional journalist (i.e. an “op-ed”), their work is read over, fact-checked, and approved by professional editors.

comes to celebrity news reporting. While, again, that would fall into the rhetorical devices as applied to my detailed analysis, it is also pertinent when examining structural features of news reporting – particularly when employed by journalists working at “traditional” news publications and agencies – and thus will be a theme throughout my analysis.

One final note is that, because of the large amount of articles I was working with as my data, I decided to separate them into a different reference list. Therefore, there are two reference lists at the end of this thesis: the first of which comprises all of my secondary sources, including academic, news, and other sources of information, while the second list provides specifically the articles collected by Factiva and then analyzed (my primary sources). Because there are newspaper articles in both sections, I decided that the simplest way to indicate to readers which one is from which list was to include an asterisk (*) for all in-text citations that quote or refer to articles that were collected as data/primary sources. Readers thus should look to Reference List 2 to find the full citation information for sources cited with an asterisk (*). Additionally, where I could find them, I did include with the article in the reference list a link to it as posted online as news content. Though I did not study these links (and therefore am not analyzing the images used with the articles or the topics hyperlinked), I erred on the side of including more rather than less data to help others locate these articles. They all were, again, sourced from Factiva and thus originally collected prior to being accessed on the news sites listed in Reference List 2.

In the next Chapters, I follow the general separation of my two central research questions so that the first section is structured around stolen celebrity photos and the second, around “leaked” celebrity sex tapes, both of which employ diachronic analyses across two periods of time. However, my third research question will be addressed throughout the two sections, woven into the discussion when applicable. While initially I had thought I might be able to search

responses (via comment forums) to particularly interesting articles, the amount of data I collected required flexibility on my end. Because of Factiva's structure, however, some of the searches returned articles that gave me insight into audience response via letters to the editor and/or the inclusion of quotes, tweets or other responses from the "public," as constructed by the journalists. These are included, where appropriate, in the relevant chapters. Finally, after analyzing my data I provide a synthesis of the findings and some implications of my results in my conclusion.

Chapter 4 “Disney Girls Going Wild”: Young Stars (Mis-) Performing American Hegemonic Femininity

Introduction

As noted earlier in the Theoretical Framework (Chapter 2), the anxieties surrounding successful women and girls are not unique to contemporary culture and/or the age of the Internet. While there has long been an association between publicly performing women and prostitution (Berlanstein, 2004; Hindson, 2011; Pullen, 2005), contemporary discourses about “sexualization” and “pornification” heighten concerns over the relationship between women’s bodies, sexuality, media, and the market (Attwood, 2009; Dines, 2010; Durham, 2009; Gill, 2009).

As a corporation that is known for children’s entertainment, the Walt Disney Company is a significant site to examine the relations across these issues – particularly as their young female stars are mandated to represent and embody a kind of sexual innocence and purity that is not necessarily marketable in the wider entertainment industry. While there are numerous divisions and, more recently, acquisitions of the Walt Disney Company (i.e. Walt Disney Studios, Marvel Entertainment, The American Broadcasting Company, Pixar Studios), the majority of Disney’s young stars are fostered and nourished through the company’s cable television network, Disney Channel. In 2018, Disney Channel had over 89 million subscribers in America and 225 million worldwide (“Number of subscribers” Statista, n.d.). The programming on this channel is specifically targeted to children, as is evidenced by the following warning message that appears on the Disneychannel.ca homepage:

By visiting disneychannel.ca you may link out to other sites that we don’t control. Before you click grab a parent (or the person in charge of you) and make sure that it’s okay with them that you leave our site. (Home Page, disneychannel.ca, 2019)

The target demographic of Disney Channel is 9 to 15-year-olds, with the recently-launched Disney Junior Channel serving even younger audiences (Disney Channel Wikipedia, n.d.). Although the Disney Channel President across 2007-2008 (serving from 2000 to 2014, in fact) was a woman, the Walt Disney Company itself has never, in its nearly 100-year history, had a female president, chairman, or CEO (The Walt Disney Company Wikipedia, n.d.). The Walt Disney company in 2007 earned over \$35 billion and, in 2008, over \$37 billion (Investor Relations, n.d.), thanks in part to the massively successful, female-led franchises launched on Disney Channel in the 2000s, including *Hannah Montana* (starring Miley Cyrus), *Lizzie McGuire* (starring Hillary Duff), *That's So Raven* (starring Raven Simone), and *The Wizards of Waverly Place* (starring Selena Gomez).

Young female Disney stars, who are sites of mass investments of money, time, and labour are an ideal case study wherein one can examine the relations between sexuality, labour, and capital (i.e. social, economic, cultural, and sexual capital, as discussed by Tabet, 2016, see Chapter 2 Theoretical Framework). They undergo and model the sexual regulation that structures white, middle-class girls' sexual lives more broadly: as noted by R. Danielle Egan, "[t]he white bourgeois body [is] conceptualized as pure, hygienic, and emblematic of restraint and rationality; and the middle- and upper-class child the embodiment of innocence, purity, and the bright future of the class, race, and nation" (quoted in Banet-Weiser, 2018, p. 83). Young Disney stars start out as sites of exploitation: they generate massive profits for Disney, of which they earn a small-to-large share or wage. They (and their family) invest massive amounts of labour and often money into their career, through dancing/singing/acting lessons, constant auditions, and performances (which can necessitate parents taking time off work to accommodate). As they mature, which, if they wish to retain their success/fame post-Disney will necessarily require

building their sexual capital, they learn to wield their image in ways that could threaten media conglomerates' ability to exploit them (i.e. they become less dependent on specific platforms, producers, and directors). Young Disney stars who can successfully navigate this transition potentially represent a site of media power that far exceeds that of an adult female actress in Hollywood, whose power often diminishes as she ages.

This chapter begins by exploring when and how famous young women's sexual capital is framed as "normal" and morally acceptable, with the hypothesis that it is most accepted when safely exploited and/or sanitized by media companies and channeled into their profits rather than actresses' own pockets. Furthermore, as my analysis developed, I also came to be interested in narratives about the "aftermath" of girl stardom; the apparent difficulties that some young female celebrities have in navigating the transition from child superstar into proper, successful woman (who spends her sexual capital in acceptable ways), as evidenced by the numerous trips to rehab and/or treatment by young Disney starlets such as Britney Spears, Lindsay Lohan, and, more recently, Demi Lovato and Selena Gomez. Perhaps the anger and derision directed toward these stars is not as much informed by a moral panic about girls' wellbeing in contemporary society as it is by the potential weaknesses in post-feminist capitalist ideology that their "successes" – and "failures" – expose.

The news media play a critical role in framing and shaping our understanding of these young women's successes and failures while perpetuating the myth that they do and/or ought to serve as role models for young women in American and Canadian society. In this chapter, I examine three Disney stars and the specific panics that unfolded in the media reporting around them across 2007-2008. Firstly, I examine the Disney, pre-sexual version of female stardom: the sexually pure young talent with huge earning potential, who inadvertently "leaks" her sexuality

and/or “sells” it. This stage of stardom is embodied at that time by *High School Musical* star Vanessa Hudgens and *Hannah Montana* star Miley Cyrus.⁴⁹ These “scandals” signal a wider panic over a female sexuality that was always lurking just beneath the sanitized, Disney-approved surface: a sexuality that is immoral both in private (i.e. when made visible *through technology*, within a heterosexual, monogamous relationship) and in public (i.e. when sold to audiences in the mainstream media). Finally, I turn to stage three of Disney girl stardom: the aftermath. In this section I examine the narratives surrounding the “trainwreck” celebrity who often serves as a cautionary tale about the dangers of success for young white women in the post-feminist, “sexually empowered” era.

I. Disney girl, interrupted

The Disney formula has proven that young female stars are immensely profitable. While the corporation’s role in “discovering” and “nurturing” female stars at transitional ages and, in turn, idols of American hegemonic femininity, is not new (e.g. Annette Funicello’s career across the 1950s and 1960s), Disney’s “star-making machine” (Ho, 2007*⁵⁰) consolidated its means of production in the early 2000s through the Disney Channel, as noted above. The years 2006-2008 in particular marked a point of transition at Disney, as *That’s So Raven* came to an end (2007) while new franchises were being launched, including *Hanna Montana* (2006) starring a then 14-year-old Miley Cyrus, *High School Musical* starring a then 18-year-old Vanessa Hudgens (2006),

⁴⁹ Interestingly, we know now that Cyrus would stir up even more scandal just a few years later in her career when making her transition from young star to adult (i.e. navigating post-*Hannah Montana* life). In spite of (or maybe even correlating to) the massive backlashes against her, she remains one of the most “successful” former Disney girls, maintaining a strong public profile as a singer and entertainer.

⁵⁰ A reminder to readers that the in-text citation asterisk (*) refers to data and thus can be found on Reference List 2.

Wizards of Waverly Place starring a then 15-year-old Selena Gomez (2007) and *Camp Rock* (2008) starring a then 16-year-old Demi Lovato.

Disney seemingly encourages its young audience to identify with its female stars and characters, most evidenced by the sale of merchandise that immerses them in the worlds of their favourite female characters and/or costumes enabling young girls (and boys) to dress up as them. Although this form of marketing has been critiqued – particularly the Disney Princess line for its limited representations of girl/womanhood (see Golden and Jacoby, 2018) – most parents and writers in my dataset uncritically reproduced the role-model discourse. In other words, rather than challenging the idea that these characters – especially those not animated but embodied by real, young, working girls/women – should be role models, the media often instead judged how well they perform this seemingly common-sensical role. After discussing the ways that the reporting on Hudgens and Cyrus reflects this positioning, I will draw on the reporting around Lindsay Lohan to think through why this might happen so regularly.

a) Leaking sex: Private versus public nudity and technology

At the time of her naked photo “scandal” in 2007, Vanessa Hudgens’ stardom was almost entirely sutured to the Disney brand via her affiliation with the Disney Channel’s phenomenally successful *High School Musical* [herein HSM] franchise. After a series of bit parts in both television and film, Hudgens became a star at the age of 17 when cast by Disney in the first HSM film. The film and its soundtrack were massive hits for Disney, launching the careers of several young stars besides Hudgens (including Zac Efron and Ashley Tisdale), and spawning two film sequels (the third film was able to secure a theatrical release across the US in 2008), as well as worldwide stage productions, ice shows, and numerous other merchandise tie-ins. In between the

first HSM film and the second (released on the Disney Channel in summer of 2007), Vanessa Hudgens recorded and released her debut album *V* (2006), also under the Disney umbrella through their recording company Hollywood Records. In this way, she followed in the footsteps of both earlier⁵¹ and contemporaneous young female Disney stars.

The economic success of *High School Musical* was alternately – and paradoxically – framed in the news media as intentional, a part of Disney’s “star-making machine” (Ho, 2007*) and as accidental, an unexpected “phenomenon” (Blank, 2008*). Calling HSM “Disney’s biggest act since a rodent named Mickey” *Buffalo News*’ Andrew Galarneau (2007*) notes that the first film’s soundtrack was the top album of 2006 and counts 46 HSM items available for sale on Amazon.com alone in 2007. The sequel to the film premiered to 17.2 million viewers in 2007: the highest ratings for any television program that summer (Bauder, 2007a*) as well as the most-watched “individual program in cable TV history”⁵² (Keating, 2007*). The number-one ranking soundtrack for the second film sold 1.2 million copies in the first week (Keating and Zeidler, 2007*) and was the third best-selling album of 2007 (Blank, 2008*). In just one city stop (Atlanta), the *High School Musical* tour (which featured different actors than the film version) grossed \$4.4 million over a three-week run (Ho, 2007*). These profits are likely bolstered by the extensive merchandising surrounding the franchise as well. Affiliated products include, among others, a NYT best-selling novel, paper cups, Magic 8 balls and – notably – girls’ panties (Galarneau, 2007*).

⁵¹ Disney has long been perfecting this kind of star packaging with singing-actresses dating back to the days of Annette Funicello, whose career was launched on *the Mickey Mouse Club* and who subsequently released several pop records in 1959 through the Disney label Buena Vista Records.

⁵² The article is unclear on the definition of this term, though I interpret the phrase as suggesting that it was the most-viewed cable TV program that aired only once (“individual”), that is, not a series or mini-series. Other articles simply say it was the “largest audience in history for a basic cable broadcast” (Galarneau, 2007*).

Perhaps just as critical to the franchise's success as its multimedia platforms and merchandise – and thus what was threatened by Hudgens' "scandal" – is the "unflinchingly G-rated" narratives of the show itself (Blank, 2008*). Central protagonists Troy and Gabriella, played by (at that time) real-life couple Efron and Hudgens, respectively, do not even kiss until the very end of the second film, thus providing parents with a show that "won't make for any uncomfortable questions [from children]" (Bauder, 2007a*). In the film, Gabriella's racial ambiguity leaves room for interpretation,⁵³ but she is clearly presented as a "good" shy girl with excellent grades and high ambitions. Many of the initial reports on Hudgens' photo conflated star and character, emphasizing how "squeaky-clean" Hudgens' image was up until that point (*Calgary Herald*, 2007*), how "sweet" and "innocent" her character in the films is (Keating and Zeidler, 2007*), and even imagining the fictional Gabriella's mortified reaction to the Hudgens scandal (Bauder, 2007a*). Reporting also emphasized the targeting of the series toward younger children and adolescents (Bauder, 2007a*; Bauder, 2007b*; Keating and Zeidler, 2007*; Galerneau, 2007*; Steinberg, 2007*). Such framing is noteworthy in the reporting on Hudgens who, at the time of the "scandal" was of legal age of consent yet expected to embody the same chaste femininity that she performs onscreen.

However, the age of consent came to be a key element of this so-called "scandal." When Hudgens' nude photo scandal broke in September of 2007, shortly after the initial airing of *HSM 2*, the young actress was only 18 years old. The photo, which was reportedly taken when she was

⁵³ Gabriella Montez is a new transfer student, who arrives at the fictional East High School in Albuquerque, New Mexico. Her mother is played by Socorro Herrera, and thus the character reads as potentially Latina. That she is portrayed by a Filipina actress marks her out as ambiguously racialized, thus fitting into larger ideologies about "post-race" America where markers of race are taken up into discourses of "difference" and "diversity" (see Hasinoff, 2008; Graefer, 2014). It also allows Hudgens' racial status to "disappear" in the reporting, as none of the journalists mention or discuss her "scandal" in relation to longstanding distinctions between the sexuality of white, Asian, and Latina women.

16 years old, was technically child pornography and would have been illegal to distribute.⁵⁴ However, that issue rarely arose in the subsequent reporting on the incident, with numerous reporters describing – in specific detail – the image that was stolen and circulated online. The fact that the photo was reportedly taken by Hudgens with the intention of sharing with her boyfriend at the time (another minor) complicates its legal status as child pornography (for a thorough discussion of this issue, see Hasinoff, 2015).

While a consideration of the actual legal status of the photo is beyond the scope of this thesis, I am interested here in the ways that such legal status was occluded in the reporting on the photo, which, at the outset of the incident, suggested that numerous journalists searched for and examined the photo themselves. For example, when describing the photo, at least three separate journalists provided interpretations of the site of the photoshoot. All of them use wording that suggests first-hand reporting on the contents of the photo: the photo “shows her” naked, rather than “is reported to show her naked.” Table 4. 1, below, summarizes these phrasings, and their sources:

Phrasing (my emphasis throughout)	Journalist	Newspaper/Source
“Hudgens apologized Friday for the photos, which <i>show her</i> smiling as she posed naked and in underwear in a bedroom with a red curtain behind her”	Bauder, 2007c*	Associated Press Newswire
“[The photo] <i>shows</i> a coquettishly smiling Hudgens posing naked in a bedroom with a red curtain behind her”	Bauder, 2007b*	Associated Press Newswire
“The photo <i>shows</i> the 18-year-old actress standing naked in what appears to be a bathroom, with a red shower curtain behind her”	Keating and Zeidler, 2007*	Reuters

⁵⁴ The US Department of Justice defines child pornography as “as any visual depiction of sexually explicit conduct involving a minor (someone under 18 years of age). Visual depictions include photographs, videos, digital or computer generated images indistinguishable from an actual minor, and images created, adapted, or modified, but appear to depict an identifiable, actual minor.” (Department of Justice website: <https://www.justice.gov/criminal-ceos/citizens-guide-us-federal-law-child-pornography>) The regulation notes that sexually explicit conduct can include nude photos that are “sufficiently sexually suggestive.”

“The photo <i>features</i> Hudgens in the nude standing beside either a bedroom or a film set”	(no author listed)	WENN (World Entertainment News Network), 2007a*
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Table 4.1 Phrasing suggests direct examination of naked photo

One source (the tabloid-like *New York Post*) articulates outright that they examined the photo, although this is done in an attempt to potentially downplay the scandal or to flatter the young star: “Having *studied* the relatively innocent photo, we’d say she has nothing to be embarrassed about” (*New York Post*, 2007a*, my emphasis). Notably, once it was reported that the photo was from an earlier relationship (and thus from when Hudgens was under-age), there were no more similar descriptions in mainstream news reporting.⁵⁵

While mobilizing discourses of child pornography might have been an effective way to re-frame or shut down the scandal (for Hudgens at least), the connection to Disney – her status as not only part of a Disney product, but also being a Disney product herself through her recording contract (not to mention the sales of her likeness as Gabrielle, her HSM character, as well as her real-life relationship with another Disney star) – might have been too damaging to the brand. That is, her star image would have been overly-tainted by making the discursive connection to child pornography, something that Disney would surely distance itself from. In fact, a surprising finding in my analysis was that, despite the scandal, Disney “stood by” the star, rather than firing or replacing her (as phrased by Gorman, 2008*).

When the story initially broke, Hudgens, through her representative, immediately confirmed that the photo was of her and that it was real, though the rep emphasized that it was

⁵⁵ Only one source in my dataset explicitly mentioned looking at the photos after this report surfaced on September 13, 2007: a college newspaper editorial wrote extensively about searching for the photos, noting that “everywhere [they] searched, Hudgens’ legal team had been there first, removing the offensive pictures” (Reville Editor, *The Daily Reveille**). The reasons behind the removal of the photos are unclear here (the lawyers may have invoked copyright law over child pornography), but I imagine that because of its status as a student-run newspaper – and therefore not likely to employ legal counsel – the editors were not aware of the potential liabilities in admitting to searching for (and finding) these images (whereas all other newspapers immediately stopped using this language in reports).

intended to be private: “‘This was a photo which was taken privately,’ said Jill Fritzo, Hudgens’ publicist. ‘It is a personal matter and it is unfortunate that this has become public’” (Bauder, 2007b*). Using the word “private” is noteworthy in this context, particularly in terms of its social and economic connotations. As noted in the introductory chapter of this thesis, the concept of privacy is two-pronged: the right to autonomy over one’s own body and the right to separate one’s public (sphere) self from one’s private (sphere) self. Both of these components are directly related to capitalist systems: the freedom to do what one wants with their body (on the marketplace) and the distinction of a marketplace (paid work life) from domestic space (home life). In his book on Internet and reputation, Daniel J. Solove (2007) notes that privacy is more of a norm than it is an official (legal) status separate and distinct from the binary concept of “publicness.” While privacy is a mutually constructed (and, ideally, respected) social concept, it is often key to a person’s sense of autonomy, freedom (from social/institutional control) and therefore to not only their “psychic survival” (Solove 2007, p. 72), but also their economic one (i.e. when one is incarcerated and removed from the free market, they are often forced to give up their privacy in that they lose autonomy over their actions/labour, but also in the sense of constant surveillance). Privacy is also further tied to juridical punishment, in that some people’s – particularly young people’s – mistakes are conceived of as being part of the maturation process and thus deserving of privacy. For instance, minors often have their criminal records expunged, which “permits room to change, to define oneself and one’s future without becoming a ‘prisoner of [one’s] recorded past’” (Solove 2007, p. 73).

Of course, accessing privacy is also dependent upon one’s relation to privilege: the least privileged in society often find their access to privacy and the ability to hide past transgressions quite limited. On the other hand, celebrities are also often denied a right to privacy, as their fame

and fortune is figured as outweighing or negating their right to both privacy and transgression. Here, again, we can delineate both forms of privacy in relation to celebrity: the right to bodily autonomy (lost through the mass circulation of images and discourses about their bodies) and the right to separate one's public self from their private self (lost through the mass circulation of images and discourses about their private lives). Of course, this is not to suggest that they are in a similar position as marginalized population when their privacy had been violated: celebrities often have recourse to legal or media institutions that can reaffirm such rights (often through recourse to property law, i.e. copyright). Using the word "privacy" in her representative's statement, then, Hudgens' team is drawing upon socially constituted norms that build empathy for her and recognize her immaturity in this transgression.

Yet, they are also drawing upon capitalist norms that recognize private property. The right to privacy is tied specifically to industrialized, capitalist society as well as, increasingly, neoliberal values. At the same time, however, certain forms of privacy are willingly traded off in neoliberal societies. Increased surveillance measures and policing, as well as the voluntary sharing of personal information online are framed as beneficial to – or even necessary to securing a safe state of being. The latter trend in particular – the normalization of and profiting from personal information shared online – is where current crises over privacy are most visibly manifesting (see, for instance, the recent Cambridge Analytica scandal and Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg's testimony before Congress). Yet such crises are not equally felt across all technology users. The existence of "revenge porn" points at the gendered double-standards when it comes to privacy and technology: the ones breaking social norms (and therefore being shamed) are those using the technology to *take* nude/sexual photos rather than those who, without permission, use technology to non-consensually *share* such imagery. That those takers of photos

are most inevitably female not only reflects centuries of conditioning women to see/present themselves as objects of sexual desire (see Berger, 2010; Gill, 2007), but also the need for (and thus development) of media tools that provide women with agency in constructing themselves as such (an agency that comes with its own set of built-in shaming mechanisms, i.e. revenge porn, which removes the very agency that the device enabled). Women's use of technology is inevitably taken up into ongoing power struggles and informed by their precarious position in the public/private divide (see also Tabet, 1982).

Even at this time (2007-2008), however, there were already some counter-discourses emerging within the news. Shortly after the release of the photo and the uproar over her relationship to Disney, the *Calgary Herald* (2007*) published an editorial down-playing the scandal and Hudgens' transgressive behaviour with the headline "No need to fear naked truth." They also, somewhat surprisingly, emphasized the role of parents in discussing and mediating between these Disney "role models" and their children (a rarity in the reporting on Disney's young stars more generally, as will be discussed further in part 2 of this chapter):

But as devastating as this may seem to an impressionable eight-year-old, parents must downplay the picture. There are a lot worse [sic] behaviours for role models to engage in than standing around naked. Hudgens' privacy has been violated and her reputation doesn't deserve to suffer because of it" (*Calgary Herald*, 2007*).

This view was not necessarily reflective of Canadian publications more broadly, as the *Ottawa Citizen* ran a version of a *New York Post* victim-blaming article within the same week (Hinckley, 2007a*), telling Hudgens: "You're 19 years old and you never came across the phrase 'Download Screen Saver'? You gotta get out more."

Hudgens' subsequent statements suggest that such discourses had their intended effect in neutralizing a sexually deviant young woman. Shortly after the initial statement about privacy, Hudgens issued the following apology: "I want to apologize to my fans, whose support and trust means the world to me. I am embarrassed over this situation and regret having ever taken these photos. I am thankful for the support of my family and friends" (as reported in Keating and Zeidler, 2007*). In the statement issued directly by Hudgens, she accepts full responsibility for this "scandal," abandons talk of (her right to) privacy (perhaps having learned that celebrities cannot acceptably draw on such rights discourses), and emphasizes the loving and trusting relationships of those supporting her, including her fans, family and friends. By abandoning her own rights discourse and expressing "regret" at having taken the photos (rather than regret at having shared them with an untrustworthy person or at having not protected them enough), Hudgens affirms her position as a transgressor and, thus, instead of pushing back on norms about female sexuality and technology, affirms them. Interestingly, just seven years later when the profits of a major technological company (Apple) are at risk, the norms were able to shift enough that, as will be demonstrated in the next chapter, the person stealing and posting nude photos was often centered as the site of transgression rather than the women taking and sharing nude selfies.

While companies like Apple may have their own reasons for defending the use of technology in people's sexual practices, Disney has less reason to intervene in the debates and tensions over these social norms. Despite Disney's surprising decision to retain Hudgens after the scandal, their choice not to defend her right to privacy, autonomy or sexuality was disappointing, though perhaps not surprising. As discussed earlier, Disney's female stars are often sites of enormous labour and monetary investments, and an affirmation of Hudgens' burgeoning sexuality may have also had the effect of highlighting a form of (sexual) capital that

is not as easily contained and harnessed into the Disney profit machine. Disney's statement positions female sexuality "leaking" into the public sphere as a mistake, rather than an inevitability: "Vanessa has apologized for what was obviously a lapse in judgment. We hope she's learned a valuable lesson" (Bauder, 2007a*). Disney's motivations in this instance are certainly different from Apple's in 2014, whose investment in personal devices warranted a defense of users' privacy. Disney, on the other hand, as a children's entertainment company, must secure their consumers' expectations of wholesome, family values: values which are seemingly incompatible with female sexuality as mediated through a specific use of technology (for it is clearly acceptable when contained in a "G-rated" love story). Here the distinct composition of Disney's market – comprising both children, whose desire drives consumption and parents, who retain ultimate control of that consumption – is reflected in the reporting. This case contained some of the few instances across all my data where journalists made an effort to talk to at least one part of the audience, the parents.

Speaking to *Reuters* reporters Gina Keating and Sue Zeidler (2007*), "Los Angeles mother of two" Renee Rollins-Greenberg called Hudgens "damaged," and added, "She's got this teeny-bop audience, young preteens and younger, who are admiring her and thinking she's this wonderful, pure innocent person. Eighteen is awfully young for this kind of display." Such comments assume that Hudgens' sexual display, though intended to be private, is incompatible with her being a "wonderful, pure innocent person." Perhaps more importantly, they affirm that this "kind of display" on the part of young women is to be expected, perhaps inevitable, but that it is their job to know when exactly the time is right for that display. The same article quotes another area mother Rosie Konkell who is concerned about how to explain the photos to her eight-year-old daughter who "always looked at this character as a very smart and proper young

lady.” Both quotes, notably, conflate character and actor, a heavy responsibility placed upon Disney’s young female actors to embody and perform ideal, hegemonic femininity. They also demonstrate how tied these actresses are to the Disney brand and franchise they are selling, and thus the danger their transgressions pose (to profits).

Not all parents viewed the actors this way. In his Associated Press article, David Bauder (2007a*) found Michele Smith of Westborough, Massachusetts, mother of another eight-year-old fan who, contrary to the Los Angeles mothers, expresses hope that her daughter does not even find out about the photos (and this could be a cultural difference across Los Angeles versus Massachusetts where one area is figured as being preoccupied with image and gossip more so than the other), and, if she does, “[Michele’s] prepared to talk about it. She’ll say it’s something private for Vanessa that shouldn’t have been shared” and that “[the] picture got leaked by somebody who broke a trust with her.” Smith added, notably, that her daughter was a big enough fan of Hudgens to pose a threat to Disney’s bottom-line if the HSM formula were changed: “If Vanessa is not in the movie, my daughter would not be so excited to see it” (Bauder, 2007a*). Not only was Hudgens not dropped from the film, reports later emphasized that she received a “substantial” pay raise for reprising her role (*New York Post*, 2007b*).

In his review of that reprisal and the film more broadly, *Boston Globe* reporter Ty Burr (2008*) situates himself as a parent accompanying his preteen daughter and her friend to the show, thus occupying two positions in relation to this story. Although the girls’ opinions are offhandedly mentioned in his review (“On the drive home, the girls even said they liked ‘HSM3’ better than the first two”), there is no mention of any discussion with them about Hudgens’ stolen photo, thus suggesting that the parents’ fears above – how to handle these awkward conversations with their kids – might have been unfounded. This does not, however, mean there

was no mention of the photo in his article. In an illustration of just how “innocent” a vision of America is embodied in HSM, Burr jokes that “in the real world... Gabriella [the character played by Hudgens] would be sending nude cellphone pictures to her boyfriend that would end up on the Internet. (Oh, wait...)” (Burr, 2008*). While Burr does imagine a distance between this “real world” version of Hudgens and the innocent character she plays, he undoes that distance by discursively connecting them and collapsing character into actor for her alone (whereas his imagined “real world” scandals for the other characters are fabricated and not connected to their portrayals). While no mention is made of either Gabriella’s or Hudgens’ race, the positioning of her as “different” from the rest of the cast marks her sexuality out as transgressive. Furthermore, the mention of nude photos in a review of Hudgens’ onscreen work for Disney, in the context of a male parent attending a children’s film with his daughter, is noteworthy. A racialized, young actress mired in scandal – even one that is arguably not of her own making – does not merit the same work/life separation as the other, white actors who are able to adequately contain their private (sexual) life.

Although this sentiment may or may not be echoed by the children viewing the film (these reports only interviewed parents, not children/preteen fans of the show), it was picked up on by an older portion of the audience: teenagers immersed in enough media to be reading *Teen Vogue*. In the one article in my dataset that comes closest to representing the intended audience of *High School Musical*, *Teen Vogue*’s readers had mixed responses to the magazine’s choice to feature Hudgens’ on the cover of their September 2008 issue (one year after the nude photo scandal). In letters to the magazine, some teens expressed outrage similar to that of the parents quoted above, but they exhibited a different position vis-à-vis the media. The young readers who were upset to see Hudgens given a platform in a magazine wrote to express/direct their outrage

toward and within that same media outlet. While it is not unique that *Teen Vogue* provides this platform (most publications have a section dedicated to letters from their readers), it was notable that parents—while admonishing Hudgens for her actions—did not also express outrage toward the newspapers for discussing/propagating the controversy. (Of course, those parents could have expressed this outrage and the papers just edited it out, which, in contrast, affords the young readers of *Teen Vogue* with more of a sense of agency in relation to the media they consume.)

One young reader from Hartford, Connecticut said: “It *frustrates* me that [Hudgens] has continued to get press and endorsements following last year’s nude-photo scandal. This sends a terrible message to girls, and I wish teen VOGUE had chosen a better role model for readers” (V-Mail, 2008, my emphasis). While this discourse could be read as indicative of a young woman reading media critically, it could also signal an internalization of victim-blaming scripts. If Hudgens’ press and endorsement deals are “frustrating” – and if Hudgens’ only professional misstep at this point was the nude photo scandal, for which she apologized – how are understandings of just or fair success (in the form of press and endorsements) predicated upon gendered scripts of acceptable, chaste femininity? The use of the term “frustrates” conjures further connotative associations with capitalism. As defined by Merriam-Webster (Definition of “Frustrate,” n.d.), to frustrate variously means “to balk or defeat in an endeavor” (suggesting competition); “to induce feelings of discouragement in” (suggesting a self-reflexive, affective element); and “to make ineffectual” or “to make invalid or of no effect” (thus suggesting a loss of or block in productivity). Here one can see the breakdown – and the effect/affect of that breakdown – of celebrity’s critical role in the myth of meritocracy, where success is not only earned, but also “justly” distributed.

Another, female (-named) reader wrote that “teen VOGUE has a reputation for putting *established* and *sophisticated* actresses on the cover, and Vanessa has done little to earn the honor. High School Musical and her off-screen relationship with Zac Efron are her only claims to fame” (V-Mail, 2008*, my emphasis). Notwithstanding the reference to Hudgens’ onscreen work in a way that minimizes such work (again, Hudgens acts, sings, and dances in the films along with the rest of the young cast), it is interesting to note the reader/letter writer making a clear distinction between Hudgens’ status and that of other young actresses appearing contemporaneously on the cover of the same magazine. A quick online search revealed that other cover girls across 2008 included a then 18-year-old Hayden Panettiere (June 2008) and a then 21-year-old Blake Lively (March 2008), both of whom were also “known” for one major acting role on television (Panettiere in *Heroes* 2006-2010, and Lively in *Gossip Girl*, 2007-2012), and neither of whom sang or danced in their respective roles. This young reader, who was disappointed to see Hudgens on a magazine cover that usually features blonde-haired, blue-eyed actresses that she deems as being more “established and sophisticated,” could most certainly have also expressed her disappointment via letter over the choice to feature similarly-situated actresses Lively and Panettiere (although searching the reader responses to other covers is beyond the scope of my thesis). However, the focus of her “upset” on Hudgens suggests that the combination of the Disney label (targeted to younger, and therefore less “sophisticated” audiences) with the media focus on her private life (dating/sharing photos with Efron) marks her out as being a less “established” actress, undermining the work/talent that led to her stardom/success in the first place. Furthermore, it repositions white femininity as the norm against which other young women are measured. It is particularly noteworthy that such

discourses are emanating from young women who might be learning/internalizing important messages about private life, gendered success, and reputation.

While again demonstrating a critical media literacy that echoes dominant discourses circulating through the mainstream news media (that sex/scandal undermines “legitimate” forms of success), the young women’s comments also cement a cynicism toward the celebrity system – as a breakdown of how capitalism “should” work (thus generating feelings of upset and/or frustration) – rather than merely reflecting the fallacies of capitalism as a system that supposedly rewards merit indiscriminately. Their frustrations can be corralled and targeted to certain celebrities rather than to the larger socio-economic system in which they are embedded, while also giving young readers a sense of having critical media literacy and a limited sense of agency, cultivating cynicism toward female celebrity/role models and the (news) media more broadly.⁵⁶

The specific choice of certain words over others helps to perpetuate the circulation of these dominant discourses of individual critique. In particular, the reporting on Hudgens’ stolen image utilized passive language to deny agency on the part of the perpetrators and re-framed the violations of her privacy as non-agentive “leaks” of uncontrollable female sexuality. Although Hudgens may or may not have “leaked” and posted the photo herself (and there is no evidence to suggest that she did), the passive language repeatedly used by journalists often ascribed agency to anyone other than the person who posted it. Examples are listed in Table 4.2, below.

⁵⁶ It is worth noting that not all readers’ responses to Hudgens were negative. One fan from Juno, Alaska wrote: “Thanks for featuring Vanessa Hudgens. She is such an emerging talent! I love her new album, *Identified*—it has fun dance tracks and is easy to listen to—and I am looking forward to seeing her in her first post-HSM movie, *Bandslam*. Even more, I consider Vanessa an up-and-coming fashionista!” (in *V-Mail*, 2008*). Countering the discourse of the second reader quoted above that uses reporting on Hudgens’ private life to minimize her public achievements, this response makes specific mention to the inter-textual labour and “talent” that helps bolster and legitimize Hudgens’ celebrity in her fans’ eyes.

Description of photo	Journalist	Newspaper/Source
“slipped out onto the Internet”	Bauder, 2007a*	Associated Press Newswire
“surfaced”	Keating and Zeidler, 2007*	Reuters
	No author	<i>Globe and Mail</i>
“had been taken from her possession”	No author	WENN 2007a*
“leaked”	No author	<i>New York Post</i> , 2007a*
“made its way into cyberspace”	Steinberg, 2007*	<i>New York Times</i>
“found their way onto the Internet”	Garron, 2007*	<i>Hollywood Reporter</i>
“ended up on the Internet”	Hinckley, 2007*	<i>New York Daily News</i>
“showed up online”	Rubinoff, 2008*	<i>Waterloo Region Record</i>

Table 4.2 Journalists describe the non-consensual release of Hudgens’ photo

“Surfaced” appeared to be the most popular term for journalists reporting on the scandal, used 23 times across the articles. This term not only constitutes passive language (photos do not “surface” onto the Internet the way something can, without intervention, float up from a body of water) but also alludes to wetness, much in the same way that “leaking” and “slipping” onto the Internet do. Wetness, of course, has connotations with female sexuality, but also texturally makes something hard to hold onto, to contain, to protect. While these descriptors were passive, the descriptors of the photos “making their way” or “finding their way” online ascribe agency to the photos themselves, as though they are little explorers hiking through the World Wide Web. Again, this suggests that the sexuality of women must be actively held onto and protected, and that it is beyond containment: even if sexual expression is intended to be private, it is normal and logical that it will slip away, surface somewhere, or set out (on its own) to conquer cyberspace. Technology, particularly in the hands of women (and not the men who receive the images nor the hackers who steal and post them), is inherently dangerous for women: for, again, it is not the men who receive the images, nor the hackers, whose image is sullied.

This use of passive and weak language to describe stolen nude photo circulation is not exclusive to celebrity reporting. The reports from that time (2007-2008) about teen sexting drew

on similar discursive practices, removing agency from the perpetrators and placing it onto girls taking photos and the photos themselves. For instance, in his feature news story on sexting (“Using cell phones badly: School district finds nude photos”⁵⁷) *Buffalo News* reporter Stephen T. Watson (2008*) describes a specific incident that occurred at Pioneer High School where a young girl sent nude photos of herself to her boyfriend. They were shared without her consent, but Pioneer High School Principal Mark Schultz describes that event as follows: “That picture was then forwarded *somehow* from that phone to another phone and *was distributed* from there” (Watson, 2008*, my emphasis). There is no mention of any agent (or subject acting) in the sentence. Asserting that the photo “was forwarded” and “was distributed,” again erases the agency of the students who were themselves forwarding and distributing the photos. In addition, the use of the term “somehow” which is echoed in Watson’s reporting in other sections of this piece, mystifies the process of violation. “Somehow” means “in one way or another not known or designated” (Definition of “Somehow,” n.d.), as though cell phone technology is so complex that neither journalists nor high school principals—let alone high school students—can figure out how, when, or why it will be used (or decide to use itself, as the lack of user agency framing above suggests).

Hudgens’ scandal unfolded at a time when teen sexting was just emerging as a concern for parents and society more broadly (again, 2007 was the year the iPhone was first released). Hudgens, like most young women caught sexting at the time, was being held responsible not for presenting herself as a sexual object, but for her inability to contain her sexuality to the private realm (hence the appropriateness of the term “leak”). The transgression represented in this

⁵⁷ Even this headline reinforces the policing of proper uses of technology and erases the agency of perpetrators. School districts do not just “find nude photos”; they have to be shared and circulated for school *officials* – not districts – to “find” them.

scandal, according to the news framing, is Hudgens' use of technology to capture and share her sexuality with her boyfriend, rather than the sexuality itself (again, this sexuality is not scandalous when contained in a Disney program as a female love interest/object of "innocent" desire). Hudgens is then able to serve as a larger cautionary tale about the dangers of women engaging with technology for pleasure and thus plays into larger moral panics unfolding in the United States and Canada at the time.

Using Hudgens' scandal as an example, several feature-length news pieces, including one for the *Philadelphia Daily News* and one for the *Boston Globe* (both "serious" /award-winning news publications) hint at a moral panic over this new relationship between technology and (female) sexuality, while at the same time, reflect differing generational norms over these relations. The statistics included in both pieces (from the same influential national study by the National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unwanted Pregnancy and Cosmogirl.com, 2008⁵⁸) suggest that – in the early years of smart cellular phone technology – already one-fifth of teenagers had "sent or posted online nude or partially nude photos or videos of themselves" and approximately one-third of young adults (20-26 years old) had, thus pointing to the potential development of new norms amongst younger generations.

This growing normalization amongst young people is reflected in the shift in Hudgens' own discourses after the scandal. When doing press for the new HSM film in 2008 – a year after the scandal had first broken – Hudgens was repeatedly asked about the photo. Her remarks, quoted in two World Entertainment News Network stories, reflect perhaps a growing frustration

⁵⁸ The survey demonstrates that this phenomenon is pretty evenly spread across gender (22% of girls aged 13-19 having admitted to sending nude photos of themselves, versus 18% of boys of the same age), despite the panics centering on young girls (National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unwanted Pregnancy and Cosmogirl.com, 2008). The survey only provides overall statistics on race, with 73% of respondents identifying as white or Caucasian, and no breakdown of racialized groups' answers to questions about sexting practices.

with the stigma of the photo. In July of 2008 she was still framing the incident as a “mistake” – “I am very sorry about it. But everybody makes mistakes. It was supposed to be a private thing.” (WENN, 2008a*) – but by October of that same year, after multiple promotional interviews leading up to the October 24 release of HSM3, she is quoted as not “regretting” the photos: “I wouldn’t take back anything I’ve done. I don’t like talking about it because it was something that was meant to be private and I’d still like to keep it as private as I can” (WENN, 2008b*).⁵⁹

Hudgens’ shift in discourse may or may not have been affected by her professional relationship with Disney across these times, but it also reflects a rejection of the victim-blaming scripts that were circulating through the news. The broader trends around youth sexting, wherein punishment targeted the (mostly) female selfie-takers rather than the male photo-sharers, as well as the disproportionate punishment toward young queer and visible minority users, is a phenomenon that is powerfully broken down by Amy Adele Hasinoff in her book *Sexting Panic* (2015). What is of interest here, however, is the ways that news discourse at the micro-level—the choices of words and the building of sentences—performs ideological work that legitimizes such punishment toward women in particular. For instance, when describing the suspension of two young girls for sexting in Seattle, *Daily News* Reporter Jenice Armstrong constructs what, at the very least, sticks out as an awkward, imbalanced sentence: “two high-school cheerleaders were suspended after nude photos of them were texted all over high school.” (Armstrong, 2008*a). Whereas one expects the first clause of the sentence “two high-school cheerleaders were suspended after...” to be followed by a description of their actions (e.g. “after they pulled a prank...”; “after they took pictures of themselves...”), the switch to the passive voice in the

⁵⁹ Significantly, after this point Hudgens was able to wield tort laws in order to prevent other nudes from being published online. She was also free of her association with the *High School Musical* franchise and with the Disney Channel (though her career floundered for a while afterwards).

second half betrays the irrationality of punishing them, not for taking the photos, but for the actions of someone else *upon* them. This discursive exercise, seemingly innocuous, performs important ideological work, naturalizing the punishment of certain segments of the population for taking photos, rather than those who share those photos without permission. It is unsurprising that this trend continued relatively unchallenged (and still continues) until the effects of the discursive framing of technology-as-perpetrator started threatening the profits of one of the largest technological companies in the world (i.e. Apple).

Although Hudgens' visibility and privilege as a Disney star mark her out as being much more immune to certain forms of punishment than "everyday" marginalized groups, her teenage status at this time ties into the moral panics circulating more broadly around stolen nude photos. The use of the passive voice by adult school officials and journalists, whether discussing teens in high school or teens in *High School Musical* highlights a naivety toward new technologies – adults being unable to explain how photos "somehow" end up online; young users' inability to conceive of long-term consequences of their technology use – while paternalistically foreclosing new technology as a site of (sexual) expression and pleasure. The "slipperiness" of a particular kind of young, female, desirable sexuality is the transgression that merits punishment: keep it contained or it will leak into/onto horrifying places. Adults can only protect the innocent, and even then, technology is always stronger. The emphasis on the technologies being used to harm girls and women reinforces the message that girls' and women's use of technology must be policed, rather than the use of those who violate others' privacy. It is worth considering the consequences of the internalization of such messages for women – as technology being a dangerous tool, and the Internet/networked connections as being dangerous places for women – and their sense of belonging in technological spaces as well as what that might mean for their

personal and professional lives in contemporary society. Furthermore, the ongoing impetus placed on users to protect their own privacy, rather than building a network of privacy norms or putting the onus onto technology developers to ensure privacy, allows tech conglomerates (social media sites, apps, etc.) to continue to gather unknown masses of data and violate user privacy expectations and laws with little-to-no consequences.

b) Selling sex: Parents and profits

In early 2008 another moral panic erupted within the media after a then 15-year-old Miley Cyrus posed “provocatively” for renowned photographer Annie Leibovitz and *Vanity Fair* magazine. The consensual photo shoot and release, in which Cyrus is shot from behind and appears to be nude, covered strategically in a bed sheet with tousled hair, outraged many commentators and incited much speculation as to whether Cyrus, in her transition from girl star to woman, was headed down a path similar to other Disney “Girls Gone Bad” (Deveny, Kelly, Reno, Springen, Meadows, Underwood & Scelfo, 2007*) like Lindsay Lohan, Britney Spears, and Vanessa Hudgens. Unlike Hudgens, Miley Cyrus’ stardom – although nourished and magnified through the Disney channel’s *Hannah Montana* (2006-2011) – was not entirely sutured to the Disney brand when the “scandal” erupted over her *Vanity Fair* photo. In addition to the massively successful show, Cyrus is also the daughter of American country music singer Billy Ray Cyrus, and thus her stardom straddles both the child and adult entertainment worlds.

Cyrus’ ties to the country music world, as embodied through her parental lineage as well as her close relationship to godmother Dolly Parton, marks her as belonging to a particular class of American society that is often figured as “down home” and authentic (i.e. of lower class). Her image across both of these sites – her immense privilege as a Disney star as well as a

homegrown, All-American girl as connoted by country music – inflect this scandal in interesting ways. As noted by Melanie Kennedy (2014), Cyrus and her father perform a specific kind of “hillbilly” Americanness in *Hannah Montana*. The repeated reliance upon low-class white identity within the show for humour seemingly informs how her family’s “real life” economic motivations are read into narratives of class mobility by the news media in their framing of this story: it was her relationship with her parents rather than that with Disney that was often framed as exploitative in news media.

Despite such framing, Cyrus’ parents need not have agreed to the *Vanity Fair* shoot for economic survival. In 2008, *Hannah Montana* was already generating millions of dollars for Disney and likely a fair amount of that money was also going to the Cyrus family. The 2008 concert film *Hannah Montana and Miley Cyrus: The Best of Both Worlds Concert*⁶⁰ grossed \$65 million while her tour reportedly was generating \$1 million per week (Fralic, 2008*). At this time, the 15-year-old had also signed an agreement – with Disney – to write her own autobiography and was estimated by several analysts, to be on track to be worth \$1 billion by the time she turned 18 years old (Fralic, 2008*; Hodges, 2008*; Kronfeld, 2008*).

Yet as outrage spread about the apparently scandalous photo, several commentators could not help but remark on Cyrus’ parents’ greed, re-framing the story from a potentially powerful critique of the ways that young women’s sexuality are mobilized toward corporate profits to an individualist, classist narrative about the dangers of female/parental ambition and teenaged sexuality. In a blog for the Huffington Post (quoted in Serjeant, 2008*), actress Jamie Lee Curtis,

⁶⁰ Even the title of this film suggests some sort of arrangement wherein Miley Cyrus uses the *Hannah Montana* platform to build her own brand; whether she shared in these profits or how much does not negate the ways that the show allowed her to launch a broader stardom that Disney alone would not be able to economically contain.

who is described by Reuters' reporter as "a former child star,"⁶¹ places blame somewhat vaguely on the adults in the situation: "[Cyrus] is a young girl. She shouldn't have to deal with any of this. I don't feel that she was duped... there were people at the shoot that should have been looking out to make sure this didn't happen." Writing for the *Salt Lake Tribune*, Corey J. Hodges⁶² (2008*) noted that Cyrus' parents were on set of the shoot and "expressed regret only after the controversy erupted." Perhaps it was naïve of the Cyruses to think that the photo would not spark outrage, but there is both a long history of reading Leibovitz's often nude celebrity portraits as artistic, as well as a broader expectation that Cyrus will one day need to "grow up" that better explains their possible motivations than exploitative greed (which, again, is a motivation that can be extended through to the use of their child by Disney, rather than isolated to the work of Leibovitz and *Vanity Fair*).

The more cynical readings of Cyrus' parents' financial motives – "Perhaps her parents have adopted an equivocal attitude so as not to jeopardize what has become a *lucrative cash cow* for them" (Hodges, 2008*, my emphasis) – was not often extended by journalists to Disney or *Vanity Fair* (understandably, as journalists work in the media machine comprised of conglomerates such as Disney and Condé Nast). Framing parents as the cause of (and solution to) sexualization, scandal, and mental health issues, rather than the media machine, sexism, capitalism, etc. follows a larger neoliberal trend of individualizing systemic issues. It further

⁶¹ This is a puzzling description of Jamie Lee Curtis, as the earliest roles I can find for her are in 1977, when she was 19 years old (imdb.com; https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jamie_Lee_Curtis). Under standard frameworks, this would not qualify her as a *child* star (maybe a teen star?), but perhaps the need to equate her with Cyrus in this piece outweighed the need for accuracy. Curtis was, however, famous as a child (a *child celebrity*), as the daughter of actors Tony Curtis and Janet Leigh. The conflation of childhood fame and childhood labour/work is worth noting.

⁶² Hodges' Wikipedia page describes him as "an African-American preacher and columnist for the Salt Lake Tribune" (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Corey_J._Hodges). Having a preacher write this story about Cyrus is an interesting choice, given the connections between purity and virginity in many religions.

allows journalists to follow cause-and-effect narrative frameworks that isolate responsibility and mask their own role in perpetuating these cycles.

An exception to this appears in *The Deseret News*, which follows the wider trend of blaming the photo scandal on Cyrus' parents, but also hints at a media (self-)critique that becomes much more apparent in the reporting on sex-tape/reality stars as discussed in Chapter 6 of this thesis. The *Deseret News* asserts that "It's a bit of a stretch for Disney Channel to claim Miley was somehow manipulated [by Vanity Fair's staff] when her own parents and handlers were with her the entire time" (Cortez, 2008*). Although there is some suggestion here that Disney Channel's outrage is mis-directed (a rare instance of suspicion directed at Disney during these scandals), the story ultimately concludes that, while her parents need not be concerned over the way Disney uses Miley's image, they should be concerned over the way *Vanity Fair*/Annie Leibovitz does.

Yet it is Disney that apparently struggles to contain the sexualizing imagery of these young stars as they transition from girls into women. Several elements of this "scandal" paralleled what happened to Hudgens just a few months prior. The photo – once again, of an underage/teenage girl – was simultaneously read (by adults) as signalling an immature young woman's desire to be perceived as mature/sexual and shed her Disney image, as though that transition is of concern more than any particular photo. Beyond the media's attempts to connect Hudgens to a wider moral panic about sexting, very little effort was made across my dataset to distinguish the key differences in these scandals: one was a privately-produced photo and the other, a public image intended to circulate in the economy of visibility (see Banet-Weiser, 2018 discussion in Theoretical Framework). Interestingly, despite the differences, Disney treated both cases the same: stepping in, framing the photo (and, by implication, the sexuality) as a mistake,

and (re-)asserting the girl's association with the company/their ownership of her. Cyrus' own discourse also shifted from challenging the scandal to apologizing for her actions.

Cyrus herself (quoted from the *Vanity Fair* interview that accompanied the photo) first drew upon frames of artistry – particularly in relation to renowned photographer Annie Leibovitz – to justify the shoot, calling the photo “‘really artsy,’ but not ‘in a skanky way’” (Kronfeld, 2008*). This phrasing invokes a long history of “artistic” depictions of women's bodies, often in sexual, but not “skanky” ways (and here Miley's wording reinforces her “down home”/low-class image more broadly). It also demonstrates the very fine line between “sexy” and “skanky” that police acceptable forms of womanhood. Interestingly, another quote from Cyrus' same interview undermines this claim to art, despite Leibovitz's own renown as a portrait photographer, suggesting that Cyrus was doing Leibovitz a favour: “‘You can't say no to Annie,’ Miley said. ‘She's so cute. She gets this puppy-dog look, and you're like, OK’” (Kronfeld, 2008*). Certainly, this could be read as a gendered minimalization of Leibovitz's artistic vision and authority, but it also individualizes blame, making Leibovitz responsible for the supposed “scandal” that would erupt afterward and containing any threat that might be perceived by a young, extremely famous and wealthy woman navigating her burgeoning sexuality.

This threat is then fully contained in Cyrus' subsequent apology:

I took part in a photo shoot that was supposed to be ‘artistic,’ and now, seeing the photographs and reading the story, I feel so embarrassed [...] I never intended for any of this to happen, and I apologize to my fans, who I care so deeply about. (Kronfeld, 2008*)

This apology echoes the sentiments of Hudgens' apology, demonstrating that the transgression is in posing (nude) for photos, not how those photos are taken up into a broader sexualization of girls (Cyrus) or violations of women's privacy (Hudgens). Again, we know now that Cyrus was

just beginning to explore the potential of an unleashed sexual capital, and her later, more “sexualized” performances in fact amplified her stardom as a young adult, despite the moral outrage that her infamous “twerking” and tongue-posing instigated (for a discussion on this later stage of Cyrus’ career, see Mendenhall, 2018).

Cyrus’ apology was issued at the same time as a statement by the Disney Channel denouncing the photoshoot: “Unfortunately, as the [*Vanity Fair*] article suggests, a situation was created to deliberately *manipulate* a 15-year-old in order to sell magazines” (Kronfeld, 2008*, my emphasis). The denial of Cyrus’ agency in this instance differs from that of Hudgens where Disney asserts that a mistake had been made on the star’s part (and the bad judgment adheres to the racialized star while the white star is innocent and manipulated). However, both statements reinforce the message that Disney’s use of these girls’ images is the correct one, and other uses – either by the media or the stars themselves – are less legitimate. Yet perhaps it is the audience whom Disney ought to reprimand: the Cyrus issue of *Vanity Fair* sold over 400,000 copies and elicited a “record number” of letters from readers (Lewis, 2008*). Disney’s motives are no less sales-based, but they do rely upon Cyrus to maintain a “wholesome” innocence for their bottom-line. The sales figures of the *Vanity Fair* issue, on the other hand, point to a whole new potential audience for a sexual(ized) Miley Cyrus, one that she will necessarily have to tap into if she wishes to remain a star (see Fairclough, 2008).⁶³

Relatedly, a *Los Angeles Times* report notes that after Cyrus’ *Vanity Fair* photoshoot, the tabloid market became a lot more interested in her. “She’s started to sell more... Now the

⁶³ This transition is often navigated by young male stars as well, and the emergence of the men’s Calvin Klein underwear spread as a rite of passage for male teen idols is noteworthy for the lack of scandal it instigates (Ramani, 2019). Even Cyrus alluded to this herself, juxtaposing a photo of herself, posing topless with Calvin Klein underwear to a photo of recent collaborator and teen idol Shawn Mendes posing similarly for the company, with a caption warning parents not to let their children hang out with her (Cyrus, 2019).

pictures are going for a higher price. It used to be \$300 for a shot [of Miley] now it's \$2,000 for a picture" says X17 photo agency owner Francois Navarre (in Abramovitz, 2008*). The shift from Cyrus' chaste, all-American girl image to budding, sexual starlet may be threatening to Disney's bottom-line but is potentially lucrative for a much broader range of celebrity-industry companies, including the celebrity herself. Adults/journalists chastised Cyrus – and others in her position – for playing to this broader market (or succumbing to it, depending on whether she is seen as victim of success or pursuer of it) while also helping to instigate/perpetuate the controversy in the first place. Journalists construct transgression through discourses of outrage and disapproval that continue to stigmatize female sexuality, admonish young women with ambition, and individualize broader systemic issues. Such discourses become normalized and are taken up into everyday social discourses and understandings of young womanhood.

This trend is evidenced in the research that Vares and Jackson (2015) did with young Miley Cyrus audiences in the aftermath of the *Vanity Fair* photoshoot. While young girls may not have been as easily able to access the photos themselves, tween girls (approximately 11-13 years old) accessed and mirrored discourses (often from the media and their parents) about the sexual scandal, reading Cyrus' sexual impropriety at this moment as signifying and solidifying her decline into "slut" status: "She's just trying to be a slut like everyone else" (p. 559).⁶⁴ Interestingly, as noted by Vares and Jackson, the term "slut" here is used by young women as a physical descriptor (to describe a state of undress) rather than a behavioral one (see also Melanie Lowe's 2003 study on Britney Spears), thus pointing to the ways that female sexuality as a visual

⁶⁴ One of the participants, in describing the incident, said that Cyrus "took photos of herself basically practically nude" (p. 561). This phrasing, which could be a response to the Cyrus-blaming narratives surrounding the scandal, places all agency upon Cyrus herself and conflates private nude selfies (as in those taken by Vanessa Hudgens) with professionally produced photos for a respected magazine. Vares and Jackson do note that some of the participants challenged this framing, instead shifting responsibility to the media machine surrounding Cyrus.

image (based only on how a woman looks) is mobilized to police the behaviour of women and potential media power that they might wield.

Furthermore, the tendency to conflate drug abuse with nudity/sex scandal (the young interviewees mentioning Britney Spears, Lindsay Lohan, and Miley Cyrus together, which journalists also did repeatedly) demonstrates how Disney's girl idols function more broadly as prescriptive models of femininity whose sexual, emotional, and criminal "lapses" are judged as being morally equivalent. While tweens' critical reactions to specific celebrities are often welcomed by critics and parents, affording girls an agency and distance from the supposed "role models" they are imagined to want to emulate, Vares and Jackson (2015) suggest that this critical distance often draws upon prescriptive gender norms around sexuality and "reproduce[s] the binary of good, innocent girl and bad, 'sexual' girl" (p. 556). I would further argue that this binary, as applied to stars like Cyrus, cannot be disentangled from the economic relations circulating in and through such imagery: the "good, innocent" girl is an aspirational Disney role model (and property) and the "bad" and "sexual" one is famous for the wrong reasons, whose sexual image exceeds (and must be contained by) Disney and/or the media.

At the same time, the reading of this particular image of 15-year-old Miley Cyrus as a sexual one is itself informed by the broader context of women's role across visual media. A few journalists challenged the very basis of this reading of the *Vanity Fair* image, arguing that it was not, in fact, sexual (see, for instance, Ron Rollins for the *Dayton Daily News*, 2008*).

Photographer Annie Leibovitz's own comments in light of the scandal point to the ways in which the male gaze haunts most images of women, even when literally framed by a female gaze.

Leibovitz stated that she was "sorry that [her] image of Miley has been *misinterpreted*"

(Brodesser-Akner, 2008*, emphasis mine). That "misinterpretation" is demonstrated by Corey

Hodges of *The Salt Lake City Tribune* when describing the photo as follows: “By Hollywood standards the image is not racy, but the issue is more about what the photo suggests – the 15-year-old appears to be nude in bed and has a seductive, come-hither look on her face” (Hodges, 2008*). Though the “appearing to be nude” reading is not, I would argue, up for dispute, the descriptors “racy,” “seductive” and “come-hither look” are all subjective terms that depend on how one reads the photo.

In fact, there was little evidence in the reporting that parents were reading these images the same way. Unlike the reporting on Hudgens’ nude stolen photo, which included several quotes from outraged parents, in the Cyrus reporting there were few instances where parents spoke out. In her article for the *Charleston Gazette*, Jennifer Winkler (2008*) claims that “parents and fans” had mixed reactions to the photo, but interviews none. *Palm Beach Post* staff writer Rhonda Swan (2008*) was able to get quotes from relatives of *Hannah Montana* fans. Although the mother she interviewed did not exactly demonstrate outrage (“to each his [sic] own,” the mother stated), Swan was able to track down two scandalized grandmothers: “I just find it [the photo] sends a poor message to young girls” said Barbara Chane; “It makes them wanna [sic] be too grown-up at their young age” said Betsey Bouarnick. Barbara and Betsey are grandmothers to the same set of young girls who are “huge fans of Hanna Montana” (Swan, 2008*). The story also quotes an older sister who, at 18, was worried about her little sister thinking “it’s OK for all young girls to pose nude” and, on the other hand, an uncle to a young fan who thought the photo revealed nothing more than a swimsuit would, adding that, “It’s not the responsibility of Hannah Montana to instill values in children, it’s the responsibility of the parents” (Swan, 2008*). A poll conducted by the *Vancouver Sun* found that 60% of respondents

thought that Cyrus should not apologize for the photo, although none of the three quotes from respondents included in the story represented this view (Fralic, 2008*).

While several news outlets debated the salaciousness of the photo itself, some viewed it as a symptom of a broader pattern plaguing Cyrus and her peers. For instance, in her article for *The Philadelphia Daily News*, Jenice Armstrong (2008b*) argues that the photo shoot was part of the “pornification of Miley Cyrus.” Although Armstrong is quick to add that the *Vanity Fair* photo “can hardly be considered sexually graphic,” she reads it in broader conversation with two other controversial “leaked” private photos of Cyrus circulating at the time (one where she and a friend pass a candy from one mouth to another, and one where she is lifting her shirt to reveal her bra). Interestingly, Armstrong also reads the *Vanity Fair* photo and “pornification” of Cyrus as a repeat of what happened to Lohan and Spears, drawing upon frames of calculated ambition: “When they were ready to broaden their appeal, Britney Spears, Lindsay Lohan and others *knew* that they had to show more skin and turn up the heat, so to speak” (2008b*, my emphasis); “It was a *calculated* move that, no doubt, will begin to transfer Miley’s appeal onto a more mature audience. In the process, she’ll have to leave her loyal tween fan base behind. But hopefully not herself as well” (my emphasis). The notion that a sexualized Miley Cyrus is not part of “herself” not only elides her (private) sexual self and reinforces expectations that Cyrus will self-sacrifice, but also denies the ways that Cyrus’ continued success beyond her tween/Disney audience will, as it does for most women in Hollywood, rely upon conveying and selling an image of hegemonically beautiful, sexy (and sexual) femininity. The suggestion that this was a “calculated” move on the part of Cyrus, Lohan, and Spears – by literally using the word – connotes an unnatural, illegitimate form of publicity engineered to maintain fame and success. It minimizes the work and talent of all of them, the tastes of the tween audiences that will grow up

alongside them and comprise their adult audiences, as well as the “calculation” of producers, studio heads, news editors, investors, advertisers, and male celebrities who also ambitiously make decisions that will further their public profile and profit. The gendered dynamics of these issues – why is it apparently so difficult for female stars in particular to navigate this transition – almost never arise in the reporting.

II. Damaged Goods: post-feminist “trainwrecks”

As I have argued elsewhere in relation to Snooki from *Jersey Shore* (Patrick, 2017), the years 2007-2008 also mark somewhat of a decline in post-feminist hegemony in American popular culture. I assert that this decline is signified through MTV’s youth-targeted programming shift away from shows like *Laguna Beach*, *The Hills* and *The City*, which are docudrama reality programs following the lives of privileged white, “successful”⁶⁵ women in their teens and early twenties, to programs centering on young women’s failures (such as *Jersey Shore* and *Teen Mom*, both premiering on MTV in 2009). Yet the narratives of feminine failure, as seen in the reporting at this time on the lives of Lindsay Lohan, Paris Hilton, and Britney Spears, extend beyond the confines of MTV and send critical messages to young women about how they should and should not behave in an era wherein the so-called promises of a post-feminist world – wherein gender equality has been achieved, women are now economically successful and sexually empowered (McRobbie, 2009) – failed to materialize. In this section I

⁶⁵ As I employ it throughout this thesis and discussed in the Theoretical Framework, I follow Bourdieu (1984)’s notion of success as meaning being able, not just to sustain a comfortable standard of living, but to pursue “the art of consuming, spending and enjoying” (p.311). There is thus also an element of visibility (through material products, ‘lifestyle,’ and imaging) to this idea of success and therefore an aspirational connection to the imagery circulating in and through celebrity culture (see also Dyer, 1979; Hearn, 2013).

analyze the narratives surrounding Disney's female failures in relation to meritocracy and post-feminism.

As noted in Chapter 2 of this thesis, one key function of the celebrity system in Western capitalist democracies is to legitimize the concept of meritocracy (Dyer, 1979; Littler 2004; 2013; Marshall, 1997; Meeuf, 2015): that no matter where one is born, or what their identity is, the capitalist system allows "the best" to rise to the top of the socio-economic ladder. However, the failure of meritocracy to materialize in everyday life – particularly in the era of globalization and neoliberal capitalism (Littler, 2013) – has made this idea for most people, a relation of cruel optimism (Berlant, 2011). Cruel optimism is, as described by Lauren Berlant (2011), a "relation of attachment to compromised conditions of possibility whose realization is discovered either to be impossible, sheer fantasy, or *too* possible, and toxic" (p. 24, emphasis in original). Berlant conceives of neoliberal capitalist society as one in which relations of cruel optimism abound – particularly to the "lost" values of capitalism inherent in fantasies of "the good life": those capitalist principles which never emerged such as "upward mobility, job security, political and social equality, and lively, durable intimacy" (p. 3). As noted by Jessalynn Keller and Maureen E. Ryan (2018), the global recession of 2008 made such relations of cruel optimism at the least more visible in popular culture, if not always more scrutinized (pp. 10-11).

While neoliberal policies were taking hold in the United States and further eroding the possibilities of upward mobility, post-feminist ideologies, as outlined by such theorists as Angela McRobbie (2007; 2009), were helping to perpetuate the notion that – for white, middle-class women at least – gender was no longer a barrier to meritocratic success. Post-feminist narratives circulating in popular culture simultaneously celebrated women's economic successes while also exhibiting the anxieties still underpinning women's sexuality, particularly in an age of supposed

“sexual empowerment” (McRobbie, 2009). These anxieties, I would suggest, solidify at this moment in popular culture, reflected in the news media’s apparent concern – as demonstrated and discussed throughout this thesis – that women are now “using” their sexuality to gain fame and success and that this is a new development in Western societies that itself is contributing to the erosion of capitalist meritocracy (as opposed to, say, the amassing of wealth or deregulation and privatization). I read this as a moment of post-feminist rupture, wherein a cynicism toward young women’s economic motivations crystalizes in the news reporting: instead of a post-feminist embrace of feminism that temporally displaces gender inequality as a bygone issue, this moment reframes female (sexual) “empowerment” and economic freedom as being achieved, but now revealing itself to be the real threat to women and girls.

In this reading, the news’ common-sensical framing of young famous Disney women as role models – and the judgement of them in their ability to perform this role – makes sense. We are supposed to look up to them because, in theory, they did everything citizens are encouraged to do in capitalist society: they amassed wealth and fame through a recognized merit (i.e. acting or singing talent). Additionally and more specifically, they did everything that *women* are supposed to do: they were “sexy,” successful, and economically independent. Young women like Britney Spears and Lindsay Lohan embody the promise of post-feminist, meritocratic success, as well as its cruelly optimistic failures. They become “trainwrecks,” a gendered moniker that, as outlined by Kirsty Fairclough (2008) “has become a catch-all term for young female celebrities deemed to be ‘out of control’” (para. 13). The term also connotes a specific trajectory: they are women who were, at some point “on track” somewhere, but have gone off the rails. Their “trainwreck” narratives of falling off the track toward the “good life” prompt us to ask, what if success is not enough? What if the “good life” that we have been conditioned all of our lives to

want and to work for is itself toxic? Such questions are refused by the gendered frameworks that insist on pathologizing these women and refiguring them as the failure(s), as opposed to representing the failure of the system.

While certainly it is the case that some young girls look to these stars as people whom they should emulate, the prevalent discourses surrounding them in the media suggest that these women are not viewed as “proper” versions of femininity and/or success and, what’s more, that they are or ought to be objects of scorn, disgust and even vitriol. In fact, research with the young girls who are often framed as victims of celebrity culture, displays an often critical (as in negative) and distanced stance toward female celebrities that reflects the broader discourses circulating in negative news coverage and taken up socially (see Lowe, 2003; Keller and Ringrose, 2015; Vares and Jackson, 2013).

What interests me here, then, is how the reporting on these women reinforces both of these contradictory ideas at once: that these women *should be* serving as role models, while also serving as objects of scorn and derision. Furthermore, I am interested in thinking about what kind of ideological work these discourses do. While in Chapter 6 of this thesis, I examine the ways that the media react when the so-called meritocracy of celebrity fails (as evidenced by the emergence of the sex-tape/reality star), the remainder of this chapter aims to examine the failures of “success”: the aftermath of young female celebrity, as embodied by Lindsay Lohan and as framed by journalists’ reporting on female celebrity “trainwrecks.”

a) Constructing failure

One way that reporters individualized these issues was by contrasting the “failures” of the out-of-control female celebrity to the “successes” of well-behaved female celebrity. At the time

covered in this analysis, Hillary Duff was often invoked as a model of “successful” transition from tween Disney star to adult. On the other hand, Britney Spears (who in 2007 infamously lost custody of her children and her estate) and Lindsay Lohan (after several visits to rehabilitation) were repeatedly mentioned as Disney failures. For instance, in an article in the *Deseret News*, Marjorie Cortez (2008*) uses Hillary Duff as an example of a successful transition to adult actress. While transitioning out of the Disney character of Lizzie McGuire, Duff starred in several moderate box office successes. Her biggest monetary hits – *Cheaper by the Dozen* (2003) and its sequel – featured Duff in supporting roles not starring ones (Hillary Duff Movie Box Office Results, n.d.). After several box office disappointments across 2005-2006, she transitioned to independent films and television where her career has remained fairly steady yet modest (Hillary Duff IMDb, n.d.). In her article, Cortez (2008*) asserts that Duff “maintained her *dignity* as she’s moved from the small screen to the big screen, not to mention a *respectable* recording career” (my emphasis).

Joel Rubinoff (2008*) of the *Waterloo Region Record* also contrasts Duff against her “whack job” contemporaries (e.g. Paris Hilton, Spears, and Lohan), noting that she has “*settled* for a low-key recording career and a slew of Razzie-nominated⁶⁶ film roles” (my emphasis). Rubinoff’s suggestion here – and throughout the article – is that Duff’s modest lifestyle has barred her from having the same career as her scandalous peers, who use that scandal to their professional advantage. While Duff’s lacklustre post-Disney career could equally be attributed to either her choice of “bad” films or her not being able to land more serious, respected and challenging roles, Rubinoff ascribes this specifically to her lack of scandal. Here it is worth noting which kinds of women gain agency in navigating their career – the “good” girl is a victim

⁶⁶ The “Razzie” awards are a tongue-in-cheek celebration of the worst in film each year.

of the scandal-driven industry where the “bad” girl uses it to her advantage to build a post-Disney career.

However, the “bad” girls invoked by the media in these narratives – including Spears and Lohan – were often figured nostalgically in relation to Disney as stars who went wrong, not as stars who were able to parlay their scandalous lifestyles into broader success. Lindsay Lohan (and Spears) came of age alongside Hillary Duff as part of an earlier, post-feminist Disney generation than Vanessa Hudgens and Miley Cyrus.⁶⁷ In 2007 Lindsay Lohan was a 21-year old working actress. After starting off her acting career as a child on the soap opera *As the World Turns* (from 1996-1997), Lohan became a known face and name she was cast as the lead in Disney’s remake of *The Parent Trap* (1998). After this, several major film roles followed, including other Disney projects *Freaky Friday* in 2003 and *Confessions of a Teenage Drama Queen* in 2004 (Lindsay Lohan IMDb, n.d.). Her first project away from Disney – and one that marked her turn from child star into adult one (i.e. from “G-rated films to “PG-13”-rated ones) – was the hit comedy *Mean Girls* (2004). Despite the ongoing popularity of *Mean Girls*, her Disney film *Freaky Friday* remains Lohan’s top grossing film (Lindsay Lohan Movie Box Office Results, n.d.). At this time, Lohan was also pursuing a music career, recording several songs for Disney (including songs for her own films), as well as releasing two solo albums in 2004 and 2005, which spawned several singles that charted on the Billboard 100.

Her professional trajectory had slowed by 2006, when the disappointing performance of romantic comedy *Just My Luck* “broke [her] winning streak” at the box office (Gray, 2006). She began starring in smaller, independently-produced (i.e. non-Disney) productions, while her

⁶⁷ The generational contrast is apparent when examining the outrage directed toward Cyrus’ photo in 2008 versus Britney Spears’ “breakout” video for “Baby One More Time” released ten years earlier in which the pop star – who was 16 years old at the time – is dressed as a “sexy schoolgirl” and dances provocatively. By 2008 there is evident a strong cynicism in the news towards young women’s sexual “empowerment.”

personal life increasingly became the focus of public discourse, as she had several violent encounters with paparazzi (usually involving her car) and entered rehab for the first time in 2006. Rumors of “unprofessionalism”⁶⁸ additionally plagued the star in 2006 as she shot the comedy *Georgia Rule* with Jane Fonda. By 2007, Lohan’s early successes with Disney were overshadowed by her personal and professional troubles (with the reporting on her often conflating these two domains, as they did when she was shooting *Georgia Rule*, see footnote 68).

There were several major narratives in the news coverage surrounding Lindsay Lohan across 2007-2008, many of which center her as a site of concern over young female celebrity in crisis. Across this period, Lohan was arrested for drunk driving, sent to rehabilitation, recreated a nude Marilyn Monroe photoshoot in one magazine while turning down another nude photoshoot for *Playboy*, and was labelled a lesbian/bisexual woman after pursuing a relationship with Samantha Ronson (she does not claim this label herself in any of the news reporting). A few stories focused on her film releases and upcoming projects, often speculating on her ability to manage her drinking/recovery with her workload. During this time Lohan was also victim of a photo hack wherein nude photos of the actress were stolen and posted online. Although all of these narratives work together in important ways, I will focus in the next section on both the extensive news coverage of Lohan’s consensual nude photo shoot and the lack of reporting on her stolen nude photos and situate those incidents within the broader “failure”/crisis narratives and sexual cynicism that was circulating in the news at the time.

⁶⁸ At the time, the Associated Press obtained and published a letter to Lohan from a Morgan Creek Productions studio executive where he calls her “discourteous, irresponsible and unprofessional” adding that, during the shoot for *Georgia Rule* Lohan acted “like a spoiled child.” (Associated Press via today.com, 2006).

b) Stolen versus consensual photos

Out of 171 articles about Lindsay Lohan across 2007-2008 included in my corpus, only five made any mention of the stolen nude photographs. Of the five, only two were articles about (centering on) the nude photos, as the other three were short paragraphs included in regular celebrity gossip “round-up” types of articles (columns containing a series of short paragraphs regarding news about various celebrities). The two full articles about the stolen nude photos were published by the *New York Post* and the World Entertainment News Network and both frame their headlines in relation to Lohan’s reactions to the news, arguably perhaps even building empathy for the starlet: “Nude Photos Haunt Lindsay” (*New York Post*, 2007c*) and “Lohan Angry About Stolen Nudes” (WENN, 2007b*). The use of the word “stolen” in the headline here is unique compared to the framing around Hudgens, where the repeated use of passive language denies the agency of the perpetrator, although the attribution of agency to the photos themselves in the other headline (in that they are haunting Lohan) recalls some of the earlier frames used in Hudgens’ case (i.e. when photos “made their way” onto the Internet like little explorers).

What received much more of the news media’s attention in comparison was Lohan’s 2008 *New York Magazine* photo shoot, discussed at length by 15 different journalists. In the magazine, photographer Bert Stern and Lindsay Lohan recreate the nude photoshoot that Stern originally conducted of Marilyn Monroe just six weeks before her death in 1962. The original photos of Monroe were released posthumously in a book by the photographer called *The Complete Last Sitting*. According to the report by Reuters (quoting a spokesperson for *New York Magazine*), Stern was paid “the normal fee” for the shoot, while Lohan was “not paid at all” (Collett-White, 2008*). None of the reports in my analysis indicated if and how much Monroe was paid in the original shoot, nor how much money Stern made from his photos/book published

after her death. Although the reports do not mention how much money was made by Stern, analysts did offer some insight into the boost in *New York Magazine*'s profile, as evidenced by their website crashing in response to the heavy traffic drawn in by Lohan's shoot. Reporting for Reuters News, Mike Collett-White (2008*) noted that daily website traffic for the month of the shoot (January 2008), was up from an average of 1.2 million visits to 20 million. Using the magazine's "rate card" (a card that outlines prices for advertising on the site), Forbes.com estimated that the extra traffic was worth roughly \$500,000 (Collett-White, 2008*). The photoshoot also generated significant news coverage (it was one of the most-reported incidents surrounding Lohan across 2007-2008), most of which was negative. This news coverage, in turn, likely generated more clicks and sales for *New York Magazine* as people who might not otherwise subscribe to the magazine sought it out because of the "scandal."

Again, as reflected in the comparatively little reporting on Lohan's stolen nude photos, the transgression on Lohan's part was not posing nude for a photo, as her image was already tarnished by scandal. In fact, in contrast to the earlier reporting on Hudgens' and Cyrus' nude photo "scandals," the Lohan NY magazine photoshoot should not have instigated as strong a reaction among journalists for several reasons: Lohan was no longer a Disney property; she did not take the photos as part of her own (private) engagement with sexuality and technology (a la Hudgens); nor was she underage when posing for her "renowned" photographer (a la Cyrus). Furthermore, Lohan's career was in decline, rather than on the rise when she posed for the Stern shoot. As noted by Cal State-Fullerton's *Daily Titan* writer Dawn Pettit (2008*), the photos, in which Pettit describes Lohan as looking "healthy" and "sexy," could in fact serve to "boost her career." Pettit cites a survey done by eonline.com suggesting that respondents saw the photos of Lohan in a positive light and thought it "could help get her career back on track" (2008*). It is

worth noting that Pettit writes for a college publication, and therefore her alternate reading suggests perhaps different generational views on the “sexual” celebrity: differences that enter the mainstream when this generation of reporters later takes up employment in corporate-run newsrooms (as reflected in the reporting on the 2014 iCloud hack).

There are also, in my data, differing views amongst college students and mainstream journalists about the sanctity of Marilyn Monroe’s image. In fact, what seems to be the main transgression here on Lohan’s part, for many journalists, is the hubris demonstrated by putting herself in Monroe’s shoes (not the editors or photographer who helped place her there), reflecting a broader nostalgia for a romanticized vision of Hollywood sex symbols – Make Hollywood Great Again? – that does not acknowledge the similarities of these two women’s public trajectories. While both Lindsay Lohan and Marilyn Monroe were publicly known for acting in films, it is dubious to claim that they both were famous *because* of this, or to locate the origin point of their fame in one particular location (their first film appearance, for instance, because both women started their careers as models). Actresses do not just “appear” one day in media, and the changes to, for instance, Monroe’s appearance and name (from brunette Norma Jeane Mortenson to the blonde Monroe we think of today), or the young age at which Lohan began her career (she began modelling at the age of 3) point to agency on someone’s part to build a career.⁶⁹ However, both were “successful” (and here I mean not only working actresses, but also and especially publicly visible and recognizable ones) in an industry that values young, buxom, white women for their appearance, yet often disguises that value using discourses of “talent.”

⁶⁹ I am not trying to be vague with this claim, just to suggest that multiple people could be the site of agency in these scenarios – Monroe herself, for the changes, but also studio executives, talent agents, directors, etc. Or, in the case of Lohan who at the age of 3 was too young to attribute agency to over her career, her parents as well as talent/modelling agents, casting directors, photographers, etc.

In studying the news narratives around Monroe and Lohan, I was most drawn to the comparisons between the two young stars – heavily favoring one as being “more talented” than the other, or at times even abandoning the discursive disguise of “talent” in favour of an outright comparison of their physical beauty. While this chapter is not interested in investigating whether the discourses of stardom of Lohan are distinct from those surrounding Monroe at the height of her fame and substance abuse (for that would require comparing the reporting on Marilyn Monroe at the height of her own successes and scandals), I was driven in this portion of my analysis by the question of if and how the stardom of Lohan is *presently* framed by the news media as being different than that of Monroe. What nostalgias are these frames drawing upon? And what might such frames suggest about the anxieties around work, “talent”/beauty, sexuality, and merit circulated through contemporary narratives of celebrity and gender?

A sampling of headlines demonstrates some of the perceived differences between Monroe and Lohan: the *Daytona Beach News Journal* writes “Lindsay, you’re pretty, but you’re no Marilyn Monroe” (de Yampert, 2008*); “Don’t flatter yourself, Lindsay” urges the Associated Press (2008*) in their write-up; while *The Philadelphia Inquirer* does not name Lohan in their headline, writing “Of Marilyn and a Pretender” (Derakhshani, 2008*). As the photo shoot is a visual recreation, much of the news’ focus relies on a physical comparison between the two women. In her *Globe and Mail* column, headlined “Lohan does Monroe: Some like it Cynical,” Lynn Crosbie (2008*) starts off by teasing her reader: “Marilyn Monroe is alive. There she is, on the cover of this week’s New York magazine, wearing only a length of pink chiffon, held between her pale pink lips.” Crosbie’s reveal then points out the myriad ways in which the facsimile falls short: “Oh no. It’s [actually] Lindsay Lohan – there are the horse teeth, the freckle masses, the cheap, yellow wig,” immediately conjuring a classed comparison to

Monroe's (imagined/remembered) perfect teeth, smooth (i.e. *white*) complexion, and more sophisticated (yet still inauthentic) platinum blonde hair.

While through the very act of posing nude, Lohan seems to be opening herself up to such a critique of her body and her looks, I posit that something more meaningful is taking place, beyond a mere physical comparison of two famous women (whose careers, in many ways, relied upon embodying an unthreatening, attractive femininity). Invoking Lohan as a "wannabe" Monroe not only diminishes Lohan's acting accomplishments (and in her early career, Lohan was celebrated by critics and audiences), it also contains the threat that Monroe's unruly sexuality also posed to the mainstream media in her day, while minimizing the late star's own struggles in balancing the expectations of Hollywood for a sex symbol and her own (reported) ambitions to be seen as more than that. The disproportionate amount of news coverage of this event, compared to anything else that happened to Lohan over this period, hints at the anxieties stirred when a young starlet (wittingly or not) makes obvious such continuities – particularly at the height of a post-feminist culture that wants to imagine today's women as being more "equal" and "free."

Indeed, the majority of the reporting imposes a reverence onto Monroe's image and struggles that is not accorded to most contemporary young female celebrities, especially those that might (dare?) identify with her. The reporting draws upon post-feminist frameworks that imagine Monroe as being more oppressed by her beauty than actresses today, despite the evidence suggesting that Monroe herself was viewed quite cynically by the media at the time (Crosbie, 2008*). To counter these similarities, *New York Times* reporter Gina Bellafante (2008*) for instance, insists on re-framing Lohan's image in line with Madonna, who emerged as a sexually "liberated" celebrity in the 1980s: "Lohan has spoken freely about her obsession with

Monroe over the years, but it is Madonna's strategy of managing the image of her own sexuality that perhaps Lohan hopes to reproduce.” Bellafante does not note that Lohan’s failure in this endeavor to “manage the image of her own sexuality” (and her descriptor of Lohan’s photos as “macabre” underlines this failure) already aligns her with Monroe’s out-of-control sexuality more so than Madonna’s strategic, carefully-managed one.

What does, on the other hand, align Lohan with Madonna is the cynicism with which they are both viewed (in contrast to Monroe’s innocent availability): “Monroe looked available in her Stern photos; Lohan looks available *for sale*” (Bellafante, 2008*, my emphasis). Notwithstanding the larger unanswered questions here (i.e. in what way is Monroe available to us – either then or especially now – outside of capitalist/commodity exchange? ; What role does Stern play in this commoditization?), there is an implication that today’s stars are more generally “for sale” and the thing that is being sold to us is their sexuality. Again, this message falls back into a post-post-feminism cynicism wherein women’s supposed economic success and sexual freedom – and again, this success is only accessible to certain women who are most often white, young, able-bodied, and hegemonically beautiful – is no longer cause for celebration, but rather a site of danger and concern. It therein sets up a cruelly optimistic relationship for (certain) women to “success”: once it has been attained, it ends up not only not being fulfilling, but also potentially toxic.

c) Success, fame, celebrity culture: gendered toxins

Such failures of success are evident in the trajectory of numerous male stars as well, yet often framed differently by the mainstream media. In her discussion of the “pathology” of female fame, Emma Bell (2011) notes the gendered distinctions between the trope of the “bad girl”

celebrity and the “bad boy” genius where, for women, rebellious behavior is seen to represent a broader pathology for which fame (seeking) is symptomatic (and, eventually, catastrophic) while men’s rebellious behavior is not only accepted, but sanctioned as contributing to their art (and fame) as well as a “natural” expression of their “essential masculinity” (p. 203). Such framing supports the notion that, for men, fame and success are a natural state of affairs, in which self-destructive behavior is not only understandable, but in many cases bolsters their credibility as artists (Bell, 2011, p. 203).

This is not to imply that men handle the vices of fame and success better. Offhand I can name a handful of male stars whose self-destructive behaviour proved lethal: the infamous “27 Club”⁷⁰ alone features many more male musicians than female ones (Kurt Cobain, Jim Morrison, Jimi Hendrix). However, dissecting the psychological pressures of fame and artistry is of less interest to me here than examining the continued propagation of the notion that women, in particular, are less equipped to handle such pressures and, more particularly, the insidious ways that the exploitation and abuses of famous women are, not only recast as individual pathology, but are marketed and sold back to us as cautionary tales about the dangers of success, especially in an era wherein female success is so often tied to sexuality.

The operationalization of such tales is well-illustrated in a lengthy feature story for *Newsweek* magazine that ran in 2007. In the 3,700-word article, a team of female reporters investigates the influence of sexualized, scandalous female celebrity on a generation of young women who – according to this very report – are actually doing quite well (perhaps even better than the celebrities?). The headline/lede for the story reads: “Paris, Britney, Lindsay & Nicole: They seem to be everywhere and they may not be wearing underwear. Tweens adore them and

⁷⁰ This moniker refers to a group of musicians who died at the age of 27.

teens envy them. But are we raising a generation of prosti-tots?” (Deveny et al., 2007*). This phrasing not only reinforces a connection between female celebrity and prostitution, but also assigns parental responsibility to Paris (Hilton), Britney, Lindsay and Nicole (Richie), as well as the media, suggesting that celebrities, audiences, and journalists are as implicated in “raising” America’s children as parents are (which they are if their role is to perpetuate meritocratic myths of success: something that cannot be done by parents who, like most other people, are not living in a meritocracy).

Newsweek is one of the more “serious” journalism magazines circulating in the US. In 2006 (the latest year for which I could find reliable data), the magazine had approximately 3 million subscribers (Matsa 2013), with readers having a higher mean income than the US national average (Pew Research Center, 2007). This means that this story was likely one of the most widely read of any included in my corpus. It was also one of the most geographically representative: there were two reporters highlighted in the byline (Kathleen Deveny “with” Raina Kelley, implying that Deveny is the main writer), with another five reporting out of San Diego (Jamie Reno), Chicago (Karen Springen), and New York (Susannah Meadows, Anne Underwood and Julie Scelfo).

The story’s first sentence hook immediately identifies one of Deveny’s stakes in the debate over sexualization and celebrity culture, noting that her six-year-old daughter “loves Lindsay Lohan.” She does not so readily articulate her other key role: as part of the media (a quick Google search reveals that she remains at *Newsweek* as an editor to date). Deveny describes having breakfast with her daughter when the young fan spotted a picture of Lohan from a tabloid paper sitting on their breakfast table and asked: “What’s she doing?” This leads to the author lamenting that “of course” she cannot explain to her young daughter what Lohan was

doing (taking pole dancing lessons to prepare for a movie role), nor what Nicole Richie or Britney Spears are doing (leaving the reader to wonder if tabloid photos of them are also spread out at the six-year-old's breakfast table). The cursory glance at the recent scandals incited by these young women leads the author to her first thesis statement: "Like never before, our kids are being bombarded by images of oversexed underdressed celebrities who can't seem to step out of a car without displaying their well-waxed private parts to photographers" (Deveny et al., 2007*).

Yet Deveny erases her own positionality in this narrative. A journalist writes about kids being "bombarded by images of oversexed underdressed celebrities" while neither naming who is bombarding them, nor justifying the ease with which her six-year-old is able to access tabloid news reports. What does it mean for young children to witness adults consuming gossip and vitriol about visible/successful women? What kinds of messages about femininity are circulating in a household that (financially) depends upon representations of women failing? What does it mean when the ones who fail were once adored (or remain adored) by girls? What does it mean that, despite these modeled "failures," girls are apparently succeeding?

That is, in fact, the topic of the second section of the *Newsweek* feature. After affirming that we are living in a "sex-drenched" culture that would make any reasonable parent cringe, Deveny's plot twists: "Statistical evidence indicates that our girls are actually doing pretty well, *in spite of* Paris Hilton and those like her: teen pregnancy, drinking and drug use are all down, and there is no evidence that girls are having intercourse at a young age" (my emphasis). Here, seemingly, this news is good, the article can end. We are not, in fact, raising a generation of prosti-tots: the main question of the article headline apparently answered.

Despite the good news quoted above, this story still goes on to raise more concerns. What does it mean that young women wear revealing clothing? How does repeated exposure to sex in

media influence teens' sex lives? Does sex play a bigger role in our culture? (Interestingly, this is not approached as even possibly a welcome development.) Are Paris, Britney, and Lindsay too promiscuous? After raising the spectre of panic once again, Deveny again soothes with statistics that suggest girls are not emulating this toxic culture: "Our anxiety about girls and sex is growing just as the statistics seem to be telling as [sic] different story."⁷¹ She goes on to note that the average age for girls' first sexual intercourse is 17, while the overall teen pregnancy rate for 2002 (the most recent data available then) was "down 35 percent from 1990" and that "the overall rates of drinking, smoking and overall drug use among teenage girls ha[s] declined in recent years." Young women are also outlined here as being more educated than ever before and more represented in politics than ever before. It is, apparently, a great time to be a woman – just not a highly visible and "successful" woman (not to mention the ongoing inequities across measures of income, ability, class, or sexuality).

Despite these statistics, the article still insists there is a threat to (young, white, middle-class) women, and that the threat is the female celebrity:

The *greatest threat* posed by these celebrity bad girls may be that they're advertising avatars, dressed by stylists and designers, who seem to live only to consume: clothes, cell phones, dogs and men. But there's good news: that problem is largely under the control of we who hold the purse strings. (Deveny et al., 2007*, my emphasis)

The "threat" here of consumerism is assigned to celebrity women rather than the brands/designers they wear or the larger corporations which circulate and profit off of their images, while the victims of that threat are children whose parents "hold the purse strings." Celebrities "live only to consume," occluding their accomplishments (which for Lohan and

⁷¹ Such claims will be challenged in another *Newsweek* article from 2014, to be discussed in Chapter 6.

Spears at the very least are accepted as more legitimate than, say Hilton's or Richie's who – to an extent – inherited their fame) and minimizing the very real joy that they bring or once brought to the lives of their young (mostly female) fans.

After exploring the range of messages that young women receive about sexuality, their own complex responses to those messages (much of which, notably, can be classified as resisting sexualization), and providing a comparatively nuanced analysis of the responsibility of parents in these times, Deveny's linguistic move at the end undermines it all, shifting responsibility back onto young women to navigate these contradictory and oppressive spaces: "celebrities gone wild and all their tabloid antics can be teachable moments. *Lesson No. 1: wear underwear*" (my emphasis). While I am not interested in disputing this advice, it is telling that the complex messages throughout the 3,700-word feature are distilled into this one key lesson which follows the classic frame of blaming victims for their victimization (here, I do not read this as telling parents to wear underwear⁷²). Until this moment the article reads as a journalist's address to parents, (from the headline "are *we* raising a generation of prosti-tots?" to the final paragraph "and even if our adolescents pick up a few tricks from the Brit Pack, we have a big head start on them"), but the subject is so destabilizing that the journalist cannot help but switch to the parental-child voice: who is really the target of this story and these messages/panics about young women?

Another feature story that examines the "dangers" of young celebrity appeared in the *New York Times* in September of 2007. Written by female correspondent Mireya Navarro, the story "When Childhood Is A Tough Role" (2007*) is worth examining for its emphasis on the

⁷² A more consistent ending would have been "Lesson No. 1: remind your daughters to wear underwear." Even this framing, however, reveals the underlying assumptions that women's sexuality is something that they must protect or should expect to be violated (see Valenti, 2009). Perhaps Lesson No. 1 could one day be "don't take photos of women without their consent, especially if they are not wearing underwear."

“business” side of child stars in show business. Contributing to a wider narrative about the dangers of success for young people – particularly young women – this 1,500-word feature centers on Emily Osment (younger sister of child actor Haley Joel Osment) as she navigates “a new Hollywood, the one that caters to the tween and teenage market,” of which *Hannah Montana* and *High School Musical 2* are noted examples. Navarro’s report takes the angle that childhood stardom is shifting in ways that put increased pressure on famous children, including wider scrutiny and more negative coverage:

Up until very recently, press coverage usually came from tween magazines that offered uniformly positive, mostly wholesome coverage [...] But now, it is not unusual for stars who have not yet had their sweet 16 to be scrutinized by the fashion police on the red carpet. Tween fans can be just as merciless as they blog away. (Navarro, 2007*)

There is a narrative shift from nostalgic conceptions of innocuous press/teen magazine coverage to the “scrutinizing” fashion police and – remarkably – *teen bloggers* as being responsible for the negativity of coverage of child stardom today. This discursive maneuver, of course, removes culpability from media institutions like the *Times* (whose own scrutinizing coverage of, for instance, Lindsay Lohan as discussed earlier, exacerbates rather than challenges the trend of negative coverage).

The feature goes on to interview industry insiders – people who, notably, profit from child stardom and therefore do not speak from an “objective” or distanced perspective – who assert that kids (and their parents) are more ambitious today. Nickelodeon producer Dan Schneider asserts that, “Kids before were focused on the moment [...] Now the kids and their parents are looking at their work with Nickelodeon as more as Step 1” (quoted in Navarro, 2007*). Of course, not being “happy” with success in the moment is connected, structurally

within the article, to “crashing and burning” like Lindsay Lohan, mentioned in the very next paragraph. Raising these two issues side-by-side reinforces the discursive connection between overly ambitious stars and spectacular failure. Lohan’s failure to be happy is not tied to the potentially unfulfilling trappings of success, but rather to an out-of-control ambition that cannot fully appreciate what she has achieved.

In all, the reporting on Lohan at this time reflected and perpetuated a shift in discourses around her stardom away from notions of “talent” and “work” toward the framework of “calculating,” “overexposed,” “unreliable” and “for sale” celebrity. While, again, I am not interested here in adjudicating whether Lohan is talented versus overexposed, I am interested in what those discourses are doing. In the broader context of Lohan’s life such frameworks (and panics) could seem quite commonsensical, yet the news media’s outrage on behalf of young audiences – audiences who seem to be, on the contrary, viewing these celebrities quite critically – point to a potentially larger transgression being contained. The danger that Lohan’s “crashing and burning” represents is perhaps not that girls will emulate her, it’s that girls won’t want to emulate her: they won’t believe that fame, fortune and, even “being sexy” are key to happiness and fulfillment. The cynical readings of Lohan’s and Spears’ apparent sexual empowerment (i.e. not wearing underwear) underpin a broader shift away from post-feminist discourses celebrating the supposed achievements of gender equality, to a skeptical post-post-feminist thinking that blames women’s achievements and sexual freedom for their ongoing oppression.

Conclusion

As noted at the outset of this Chapter, Disney’s young female stars are in a unique position in that they are not subject to the same form of sexual exploitation as their older female

peers. They are, however, expected to be able to navigate maturity into that role in the marketplace. It is perhaps notable that sexual scandals so often coalesce around former Disney stars, as though they are the ones in the wrong rather than the impossible demands of a patriarchal media market. That they enter adult womanhood with so much social, cultural, and economic capital (as compared to stars whose careers begin in adulthood), is perhaps not incidental to but rather precisely why some form of failure is inevitable: not because they all share a character flaw that makes them crumble when successful, but rather that the system is set up to ensure their growing power is contained and that they do not learn to build or fully use their various forms of capital.

While the Hudgens' scandal reflects that time's growing moral panics over how young women were increasingly engaging with technology and sexuality, the outrage over Cyrus' photo demonstrates the precarious relationships between girls, sex, and profit that uphold the mainstream media to this day. The "trainwreck" narratives that emerged at this time around Lindsay Lohan in particular but also Britney Spears, demonstrate the fallacies of a meritocracy promising that the "best and brightest" will get what they deserve. Because Lohan and Spears, in my view, did not at all get what they deserve, their public image needs to be re-framed and re-contextualized within a broader patriarchal capitalist project that has long been and continues to use women up and spit them out. The story of Marilyn Monroe represents the continuity of this treatment, not a nostalgically simpler time when being a woman was easier because success was earned, and men could control and contain it.

Chapter 5 The Fappening: Apple, Reddit, and “good” versus “bad” victims and celebrities

Introduction

On labour day weekend in 2014 nearly 200 private photographs of naked female celebrities stolen from Apple’s iCloud service began making the rounds on the Internet, first posted to underground websites AnonIB and 4chan and then picked up and circulated much more broadly through the Reddit messaging boards.⁷³ As the celebrities were identified numerous companies, lawyers and criminal investigators scrambled to trace the privacy breach and remove the photos. A few weeks later another two “troves” of nude photos of female celebrities were released. The most prominent victim of the attacks was then 24-year-old actress Jennifer Lawrence. The event was commonly referred to as “The Fappening” in reference to the slang term “fap,” meaning masturbation, and “Celebgate” after one of the websites that hosted the photos.

A quick overview of the amount and kind of news coverage of the 2014 Apple iCloud “hack” compared to the incidents across 2007-2008 reveals not only shifting attitudes with regards to nude selfies, but also towards technology companies in providing security and privacy for their users. While the amount of coverage reflects both the high volume and status of the victims of these violations, the sources reporting on these stories were often more “serious” publications, including trade publications (i.e. *Variety*, *Hollywood Reporter*) and publications with nation-wide reach (i.e. *Washington Post*). In this chapter I first explain and contextualize the so-called “Fappening” as a significant *cultural* event, reflecting on the reporting from that time period that highlights the (shifting) attitudes around gender, sexuality, and technology at a

⁷³ Reddit is another popular Internet messaging board that will be described further in this chapter.

broader level (compared to 2007/2008). I then examine this event as a *technological* event, analyzing the discourses surrounding the technology companies involved (Apple, Google, Reddit, Snapchat, Sony) and the financial implications of this event on those companies, for rarely are the economic implications for those women addressed (one exception to this occurs in Liz Braun’s article for Sun Media, as will be discussed in part 3). Finally, I examine the incident in relation to celebrity culture, and therefore as a *pop culture event*. In other words, I examine this event in terms of its visibility as a model/warning around success/status (and how this model, in turn, operates intersectionally to create “good” and “bad” victims).

I. “The naked photo you took on your phone is still around, somewhere”: The Hack as Cultural Event

Two decades ago Richard Barbrook and Andy Cameron (1996) described “Californian Ideology” as a utopian, liberal idealism surrounding the proliferation of new technologies. This term highlights in relation to technology both the cultural importance of California (with its connotations of surfing, Hollywood, hippies) and the geographical importance of Silicon Valley as a site of technological production (and, notably, California is a site that is equally important to celebrity culture). Barbrook and Cameron noted the contradictory forces at work in discourses that simultaneously celebrated the possibilities of technology to “level the playing field” within the capitalist free market economy – allowing the most savvy and skilled to rise within a new technological meritocracy – and a belief in the equalizing potential, socio-economically speaking, of a technology that was supposedly available to anyone willing to learn. To that idealism, other cultural commentators such as Laura Hudson (2018) have added the supposed liberatory potential of post-human technologies: “to some, the Internet meant leaving the baggage of their imperfect bodies behind – existing purely as intellect.” Hudson also notes that

this “ideology” was often internalized and circulated by the very demographic that had been promised or told of its privilege (white males), but often felt denied that status (because of their “nerd” identities).

The so-called Fappening, then, is a critical moment in the (his)story of the Internet for several reasons. Firstly, it forms part of a broader shift in understanding that the Internet, rather than liberating people from oppression and violence, in many ways reifies it (see Banet-Weiser 2018; Hudson 2018; Massanari, 2017). This shift is reflected in other gendered mediated/technological violence occurring in and around this time, including the Stubenville rape case in the U.S. and the Rehteah Parsons rape case in Canada, the gendered killing spree in Isla Vista, California by an “incel” hero,⁷⁴ as well as the “#Gamergate” hate mob unleashed on several prominent women in the video gaming industry in the U.S. Secondly, the iCloud hack signaled – according to my data – a crucial shift in the understanding of the relations between identity and technology: rather than obfuscate “real world” identities, participation in new technologies increasingly requires a merging of one’s online and offline identities into a singular coherent, self-surveilling (neoliberal) subject. The importance of “privacy” debates, then, takes on new meaning as more and more of our lives are lived online, with cloud services tracking and storing all kinds of data about us (often under the guise that this tracking makes things safer for users), regardless of whether we agree to it or even understand how these apparatuses work.

⁷⁴ I chose not to use the killer’s name, as his name is often invoked and celebrated as a martyr by many in the “incel” community, particularly in light of recent acts of violence in the city of Toronto in 2018. The specific 2014 event I am referring to is summarized in this news article (BBC News, 2018): <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-43892189>

a) New technologies under patriarchy

The utopianism of the California ideology outlined above has been supplanted by not only the entrenchment of white male privilege in online spaces (as will be discussed in this chapter) but also an underlying sense of cynicism towards a number of competing and contradictory targets, including new technologies themselves; “progressives” using technologies to spread “PC” (politically correct) culture; “fake news” and “bots” (fake social media accounts); and the unchanging “boys club” tech industry, to name just a few.⁷⁵ The significance of the iCloud celebrity hack is, as noted earlier, reflected in the amount of news coverage it received, particularly from “hard news” (i.e. Pulitzer Prize and Peabody Award-winning) publications, as well as the kinds of reporting it generated: many columnists wrote about the moral implications of stealing, circulating and even merely clicking on the celebrity images. Writing for the *Washington Post*, for example, columnist Caitlin Dewey takes a distinctly feminist stance in her extensive coverage of the event, with six feature-length pieces included in this section of my analysis (and several more in part 2 of this chapter).

In fact, Dewey’s reporting was amongst the most consistent in its defense of celebrities against victim-blaming/shaming and examining the gendered double-standards around online behavior. This is likely influenced by her own identity as a young white female reporter (her Wikipedia page suggests that she was still in journalism school in 2012 and therefore would likely qualify as a millennial) who would most probably have been in late adolescence when the earlier celebrity photo “leaks” were circulated in 2007/2008. Unlike many of those reports/reporters, Dewey’s discourse – as circulated through her regular tech-focused

⁷⁵ A clear example of the ways that this kind of cynicism is fostered is found in the repeated calls of progressives for Twitter to implement some form of policy on their platform to protect users from harassment and the refusal of Twitter to do so (see, for instance, Cuthbertson 2018; Ovenden 2018).

Washington Post.com blog “the-intersect” – normalizes the taking of nude selfies and directs outrage toward the hackers who stole the photos and the Internet culture that shared them. For instance, in her (2014a*) 1,923-word “comprehensive” guide to the “scandal” (unfortunately she does use this term, as most reporters generally do until Jennifer Lawrence is able to shift the discourse, see Part 3 of this chapter), Dewey notes that “just about everyone” is vulnerable to such forms of tech security breach:

Even if you don’t take nude photos (which *as many as half of Americans say they do*), and even if you don’t use iCloud, you probably store profound amounts of personal data on your phone, in your e-mail, and on your social accounts. (2014a*, my emphasis)

This excerpt is notable for conflating nude photos with other forms of personal information stored in personal devices/technologies rather than exceptionalizing them. In other instances, Dewey refers to the hackers and circulators of the photos as “shady” and “unsavory” (2014a*), as well as referring to the website Reddit, on which they were shared, as a “feeding ground” for the Internet (2014b*).

Dewey is not, however, the only reporter that normalizes nude selfie-taking in their discourse. Several other journalists came to the defense of victims; there were at least five other articles where the taking of nude photos was not only framed as an insufficient reason to be victimized, but also as a “normal” interaction with technology (though that word is not necessarily used). An article in the *New York Daily News* by Nicole Lyn Pesce draws on a Cosmo reader poll to note that 88% of female respondents admit to taking nude selfies (Pesce, 2014*). Pesce also finds an everyday New Yorker to go on record about her nude selfies, admitting that she takes them for her boyfriend, but also, when she was single, for herself: “You just want to see how you look” (2014*). From there Pesce contextualizes nude portraits within

the history of art and media, demonstrating that the uniqueness of the nude selfie lies in the specific technology (smart phone technology) as opposed to content (female nudity) or form (nude portraiture).

Another example from a NetNewsCheck (no author) article argues that “Whether famous or seemingly anonymous, people from all walks of life put all sorts of things online or into cloud-based storage systems, from vital financial information to the occasional nude photo” (NetNewsCheck, 2014*). Although the use of the word “occasional” here might mark out this practice as uncommon, the author again conflates nude photos with other kinds of private information (here, the example is financial) to demonstrate to readers just how much of our non-anonymized selves are digitally accessible.

In a piece for MediaPost.com, George Simpson (2014*) asks: “Who among us does not know of a compromising photo of ourselves currently in the possession of another, who could post it to the Internet tomorrow if they wanted to?” A *Washington Post* reporter interviewing celebrity culture critic Anne Helen Peterson notes that “eventually, it’s going to be really difficult to find someone to run for public office who doesn’t have nude photos or who doesn’t have compromising information about themselves on the Internet,” to which, Peterson responds: “Either no one’s going to get elected, or we’re very gradually going to have to change our understanding of what it means to be a good and decent person and a nude photo is not going to be the opposite of a good and decent person anymore” (McDonald, 2014a*). These quotes normalize the practice of taking nude photos: an increasing expectation we *ought* to have around people’s engagements with technology. However, these statements also often erase the agency of the photo taker – the photos are merely there.

Taking the opposite approach, reporter Michael Andor Brodeur (2014*) embraces the agency of nude photo-taking. Writing for the *Boston Globe*, Brodeur not only questions the gendered implications of “leaked” nude selfies (“Time [magazine] asked where all the hacked photos of men were. [Answer: They’re out there, but no one cares]”⁷⁶) (2014*), but was also one of the few reporters that normalized the practice within the context of a changing relationship between physical bodies and technology, rather than information and technology:

[O]ur camera phones, and our increasing comfort with them, have given us a closer relationship with our own bodies than we’ve ever had before. We check our makeup, we check for moles, we check ourselves out [...] And, yes, why not, sometimes they come out in the bedroom or bathroom, for sexy purposes and un- [sic]. (Brodeur, 2014*)

Brodeur normalizes the existence of nude selfies in this article without drawing a parallel to financial information to justify their existence. The use of technology has pervaded multiple facets of life, and, in this framing, no use is presented as morally superior to another (i.e. financial information online is not framed as “normal” while nude photos are “occasional”).

Another noteworthy issue with the above quote is that Brodeur is using a collective voice in his writing. As opposed to earlier quotes that either used second-person address (“you store data on your phones”) or third-person address (“people store data on their phones”), Brodeur uses “us” and “we” to implicate himself in this process. The use of “we” and “us” is uncommon across the news reporting so its use here is of particular interest as key debates were unfolding about privacy and responsibility. While it may or may not have been intentional, the use of “we”

⁷⁶ Although the gendered dynamics of this double-standard are mentioned offhand here, they are precisely what interests me in this thesis: why are women’s nude bodies subject to public shaming and humiliation? Why does a man’s nude photo not illicit the same reactions, even when he is famous? The male body apparently serves a different purpose in the gendered economy of visibility; i.e. the male body belongs to him, even if it is “public” or famous. Perhaps this is one reason that male celebrities are more often involved in violent clashes with paparazzi when they feel as though their personal space is being violated (for example, Alec Baldwin, Justin Bieber, Kanye West have all been violent toward paparazzi).

challenges gendered scripts about un/acceptable technology usage: when users are chided for taking selfies – let alone nude selfies – that user is often implicitly framed as female. By naming himself *and his reader* as not only a taker of selfies, but of doing so in the “bedroom or bathroom,” Brodeur not only interrogates the policing of women’s use of technology, but also implicates/interpellates his reader as a user/subject which, in turn, can have multiple discursive effects: building empathy for those whose privacy is violated, normalizing certain uses of technology across gendered lines, and creating community across various users/consumers who have particular needs that technology makers have the power to address.

Such a framing both supports and is informed by the broader public opinion towards nude selfie-taking. As noted in a report by PR Newswire (2014a*), a survey of Americans just two months after the iCloud hack suggests that the immoral behavior, according to nearly three-quarters of respondents, is the stealing and sharing of others’ nude images rather than the taking of them. That same poll found that 66% of Americans also support stronger laws to “crackdown” on Internet harassment (PR Newswire, 2014a*). While this suggests that for the average American, the victims of the celebrity hack were not to blame, several journalists still insisted upon using that frame, questioning the celebrities’ motives over those of the hackers (of which there remains little information about today, perhaps because reporters were not interested in that angle).

For instance, in her reporting for the Associated Press, Sandy Cohen who, according to her website, has been a Los-Angeles based reporter for over twenty years (Sandy Cohen, n.d.), expresses confusion about how and why a person would take nude selfies: “It is unclear when and in what context the targeted actresses created the nude images” (Cohen, 2014*). Perhaps this confusion can be attributed to Cohen’s age – having a twenty-year career in journalism suggests

that she may be of a different generation, and likely have a different relationship to technology than millennial reporters. Malene Arpe – a then-49-year-old white female reporter for the *Toronto Star*⁷⁷ – also expressed confusion about such practices in her story, including the victim-blaming line “[Kate Upton’s] lawyer did not explain why his client had taken nude photo of herself and had posted them to iCloud or why she had them on her phone” (Arpe, 2014*). Interestingly, male reporter Alan Duke, writing for CNN, but of a similar generation to Cohen and Arpe (according to his profile on Adweek.com, Horpe, 2014), came up with numerous reasons why someone – celebrities in particular – might take a nude selfie, including the long stretches of time that working actors likely spend away from their partners or as a way to monitor one’s diet or physique (Duke, 2014*). These different perspectives on nude selfies could speak to the influences of so-called “second-wave feminism” on white female reporters in Canada and the U.S. vis-à-vis “self-sexualization” in the media. The difference in Duke’s perspective could also reflect men’s socialization toward consuming naked images of women.

Notwithstanding the generational gap in understanding of young women’s sexting practices (thus perhaps undermining their suitability to report on popular culture), such phrasings are disingenuous as they seem to be willfully ignoring that the photos themselves – as reported in *their own* stories (again, I have not examined the photos myself as I believe that re-victimizes the women) – indicate that they were taken by these celebrities on their phones within the privacy of their own home. The day before both Cohen and Arpe’s stories were released, actress Mary Elizabeth Winstead – in a quote included in Arpe’s story – asserted that the images were taken in the context of her relationship with her husband “in the privacy of our home” (Drexler, 2014*) and thus could have provided Cohen and Arpe with some of the context they felt was missing.

⁷⁷ I was unfortunately able to determine Arpe’s age due to an obituary and tribute posted on *The Star*’s website after her passing in 2015.

(Incidentally, this framing – photos being taken in the context of a long-term, monogamous, heterosexual relationship – was often employed by the celebrities in the aftermath of the hack, demonstrating the ongoing importance of “acceptable” forms of female sexuality, even when mediated through new technologies). This deliberate discursive removal of the photos from their context – the explicit confusion expressed by reporters over the how and why of nude selfie production despite those contextual details being readily available or inferable – stigmatizes those engagements with media technologies: engagements that, in fact, might offer famous women more agency and pleasure than their normalized and professionalized engagements with media technology (which often involve similar sexual posturing).

Such moments of confusion were often situated in longer stories about how to protect yourself from similar violations, not only underlining the ways that celebrity women serve as examples to women more broadly, but also reinforces victim-blaming scripts placing responsibility and agency on victims. In Cohen’s (2014*) lede sentence, agency is acknowledged, but only on the part of those who take/store nude photos: “to keep private pictures private, never upload them online.” Cohen’s piece then goes on to quote several “experts” who each echo one another’s advice: “Don’t put a document or photo online or in the cloud if you don’t want it to get out at some point”; “don’t upload [something private] and don’t share it.” Not only does such phrasing deny the agency of hackers (a term itself that automatically connotes agency), it also obfuscates the fact that much of what is uploaded onto Cloud data storage systems is automatic: Apple users often need to *opt out* of having their data accessed by the Cloud.

Cohen's article was one of a several (five in this dataset⁷⁸) victim-blaming articles that framed the issue in terms of "privacy protection." In an article for CNN, for instance, reporter Jose Pagliery (2014*) uses second-person address to warn readers in his lede sentence that "The naked photo you took on your phone—and deleted—is still around, somewhere." Although here Pagliery could be said to be normalizing nude photo-taking by interpellating his reader as such a user, the implication here is that "you" are naïve in your understanding of how data is stored and thus sets up a paternalistic relationship where he then outlines the "proper" ways to use your technology: "The lesson: Unless you take careful steps, your files no longer begin and end with the device on which you created them" (Pagliery, 2014*). Pagliery differs from Cohen in that – probably because he is a tech reporter – his framing acknowledges that, at that time, agency was required to *prevent* the uploading of data (changing devices from their default settings), yet this framing is part of a broader message about how little agency users actually have:

[E]ven if you log into that cloud service and delete [a file] from there too, the disturbing truth is that company probably already copied your files to another server you can't access. In that case it would be hard to [sic] hackers to get them too—but they're still out there. (2014*)

Interestingly, in the next sentence Pagliery notes that "no one knows yet if this is how the hackers leaked [the] nude photos," yet still feels a need to warn his readers about the dangers of the cloud.

Experts providing security tips to readers may have been a way to instill a sense of agency amongst readers who often are neither fully aware nor in control of who has what of their

⁷⁸ These are articles from mainstream (non-university) publications that were sorted and classified as being about the iCloud hack in relation to shifts in culture (i.e. our uses and understandings of technology; gendered relations to technology). See Methodology chapter for more detail on how articles were sorted.

personal information. However, as the reporting on the incident unfolded, and as Apple's reputation (and bottom-line) were threatened, it became clear that the breach was not necessarily due to weaknesses in the iCloud (this will be discussed further in section 2 of this chapter), but rather, a deliberate act that targeted specific female celebrities, often through phishing scams or, what are called "brute force" attacks (where hackers use software that try every possible combination of passwords until the correct one is accessed).⁷⁹ While, in some instances, this information allowed reporters to re-frame the event as one of technological (and celebrity) naiveté (with all the inherent gendered implications of this), many reporters still refused to blame the victims for what had happened.

CNet News.com – a technologically-oriented publication – notes specifically that celebrities are desirable targets for hackers because of their (symbolic) status (which, in turn drives profit) and are therefore vulnerable no matter what measures they put in place (Cooper, 2014*). In her article for the *Winnipeg Free Press* Jen Zoratti (2014*) reflects on technology in the form of Internet culture, rather than user security measures: "people are funny about the Internet. It's treated as though it's this Wild West or virtual Vegas, where anything goes and society's rules don't apply." By pointing out that this approach to the Internet as "lawless" is a conscious choice and not inevitable (and, here she also links it to celebrity culture –anything goes when it comes to celebrities, that's the so-called price of the privilege of being a celebrity), Zoratti refuses a framework that denies responsibility to policy-makers, law enforcement, and the tech industry in protecting users from such violations.

⁷⁹ As noted by Barbara Flappert (2014) and Post Media (Cook, "Inside the iCloud hacking" 2014) the group of hackers were likely targeting many celebrities across a broad time frame (i.e. months), amassing so many photos that, when released, it would be nearly impossible to track the breaches or the hackers themselves.

The targeting of female celebrities was used by some reporters to point out that it did not matter *how* they were targeted, but rather, why. Liz Braun (2014a*), for instance, notes that “Naked celebrities are a dime a dozen,” and that it is easy to obtain photos or film of many of these same celebrities in naked or scantily clad/provocative fashion. Besides what that indicates about the gendered status of media work, it also reveals that a key titillation in this “scandal” was the non-consensual element, and that if these particular celebrities had not been targeted other famous women could and would have been. *Boston Globe* reporter Michael Brodeur provides a structural framework, connecting this incident to a wider misogynist culture online that is bigger than one or two hackers and security breaches:

The MCPH [Massive Celebrity Photo Hack] had more to do with consent than content. It was yet another part of the pervasive, invasive, misogynist, dynamic that fuels ‘revenge porn’ sites, ‘fucking’ troves (where Photobucket caches are discovered and exploited), concentrated hacking efforts, and pic-trading rings like the one that commodified and exposed Lawrence and others. (2014*)

Several other commentators in mainstream news also made the broader connection to other instances of networked gender violence such as revenge porn (Drexler, 2014*; El Akkad and Dingman, 2014*; Zoratti, 2014*).

A few reporters specifically discussed the different reactions when male and female celebrities have nude photos released online. *Washington Post* reporter Soraya Nadia McDonald (2014b*) notes the effort taken to humiliate women specifically when threats were made against Emma Watson to leak nude photos after her U.N. feminism speech: “No one is telling men, Hey, stop saying things I don’t like, or I’ll humiliate you by showing everyone your genitals.” Liz Braun (2014a*) notes that singers Kanye West and Chris Brown as well as comedian Steve-O

have all had nude photos “out and about on Twitter” (the report is unclear on whether those images were consensually released or not), and that “it doesn’t seem to be such a big deal. The general attitude is that we’re all just lucky to bear witness.” Though the racial politics at work here remain unexamined (West and Brown are both Black men with the attendant connotations about virile black masculine sexuality), the broader gender dynamic reveals differing power dimensions to the female gaze which is under the control of the male object of that gaze (female gazers are “lucky” – and here female gazing can encompass a homosexual feminized gaze at the male member) versus the male gaze that produces power over the female object of their gaze. Such power relations are reified in the way selfies are described: Chris Brown’s fully-nude frontal selfie was described by MTV as a “self-portrait” (P. Thomson, 2014*).

b) Generational gaps and shifting attitudes

Articles sourced from U-Wire (university newspapers) were just as likely to invoke structural critiques of online violence and violations targeting women and were, on average, also the least likely to invoke victim-blaming scripts. Only one out of 16 college newspaper articles explicitly framed the victims as being responsible for their violation.⁸⁰ Notably, amongst these, there was comparatively little discussion about what a storage cloud is, what two-factor authentication is, or how to store and protect passwords. Perhaps because they are generally younger reporters with younger readership (most stories in college newspapers are written by undergraduate students), they do not feel the need to explain these technologies to their readers. However, it also discursively removes responsibility from the individual users (women,

⁸⁰ Here, I am counting the U-wire articles that were classified as being about the cultural impacts of the iCloud hack (therefore not including articles about the technological implications or pop culture/celebrity culture implications). After going through that corpus I found one other article that blamed the victims for their violation (Gleinser, 2014*).

celebrities) whose privacy is violated and allows for a broader argument about ongoing sexual violence and privacy violation.

In fact, a particularly interesting trend among the U-Wire publications was the explicit address to potential viewers of the photos that doing so was morally reprehensible.⁸¹ At least four articles directly (using “you”) chided readers who might have clicked on the photos. For example, University of Wisconsin *Daily Cardinal* columnist Cullen Voss (2014*) concludes his defense of the targeted celebrities with a turn toward direct (second-person) address:

Now I’d like to talk to those of you out there who have looked at these actresses’ photos.

You’re low. Really low. It doesn’t matter to me how you did it. Whether you saw your roommate looking and you leaned over to check out or you willingly sought them out.

These hundreds women [sic] did not consent to their photos being released to the public and you went ahead and violated their privacy just as the hackers did.

Voss’ admonishment is broad, as it implicates those who both actively and more passively viewed the photos.

In her article for West Virginia University’s newspaper, Emily Torbett (2014*) noted the ways that “looking” contributes to the value of the photos: “Don’t search for the photos or share them with anyone. If you do, you’re only helping the criminal by making the photos valuable and further hurting the victims” (“Violations of privacy”). Reporter Kylie Adkins (2014*) echoes this sentiment: “don’t click on that link. You are better than that. You have self-control. It’s time to

⁸¹ There were two mainstream news publications (Sun Media’s *Lloydminster Meridian Booster* and CNN) that also discussed/implicated its reader as potential viewer of the photos and therefore privacy violator. In an editorial for the Lloydminster paper, male(-named) reporter Bryan Myers (2014*) – and here his gender is important as he is calling out male complicity in rape culture – notes the discrepancy between how, say, those who violate music copyright laws are pursued legally versus those who steal women’s private photos: “... those who perpetuate rape culture digitally have yet to be identified or prosecuted. We are accessories to the crime if choose to view the photos.” In her article for CNN, Sally Kohn (2014*) equates looking at the Fappening photos with watching ISIS beheading videos, arguing that viewers’ clicks make them complicit in the moral transgressions themselves and are providing incentive to perpetrators to continue or even push further their violence.

use it.” University of Florida columnist (and journalism major) Robyn Smith’s (2014*) discourse takes this one step further by implicating herself in the discussion, normalizing the taking of nude selfies, contextualizing that within a conversation about intimacy and trust, as well as building empathy across celebrities and non-celebrities:

Maybe I’m being too sensitive but if you actively sought out naked pictures that were leaked without consent, how can I trust you with my own pictures? The answer: I can’t. Your treatment of these leaked naked bodies is indicative of how you’ll treat my own body.

The address to viewers of the pictures is notable in that it acknowledges the widespread and insidious ways that misogyny operates. While certainly it is important to identify and publicly denounce the hackers themselves,⁸² such frames individualize the crime and reinforce the idea that, as noted by Sarah Banet-Weiser (2018, pp. 162-8), hackers and Internet “trolls” are just maladjusted individuals who do not represent a larger, structural reactionary force. By calling out the viewers of the photos, reporters are implicating a much broader population in the perpetuation of online violence against women. This is a remarkable contrast to the reporting from 2007 wherein several journalists sought out Hudgens’ photo for themselves.

The reporting from college newspapers demonstrates a strong understanding of privacy and consent culture. While some of the articles highlighted steps that users can take to protect themselves, most of these did so within the context of a broader argument that the celebrities are not to blame. Students in college at this time (2014) were likely between the ages of 11-15 during the 2007-2008 Vanessa Hudgens and Miley Cyrus photo scandals, which could certainly

⁸² As of August 2018, four hackers have been identified and sentenced to prison in this case, the longest for 18 months: George Garofano, Emilio Herrera, Ryan Collins and Edward Majerczyk (Stephen, 2018). The men were all between the ages of 22 and 32 at the time and based out of the United States (Khandelwal, 2018).

have affected their views on what technological practices are “normal” and “moral” (having escaped or either emerged from the moral panics surrounding sexting at that time). Furthermore, as noted by *Washington Post* reporter Alexandra Petri (2014*), many of the celebrities targeted were in a similar age bracket, having “come of age online,” and thus linked experientially to the young university students reporting on the incident.

At the same time, as noted above, some of the adults reporting in the mainstream news on this incident also reflected this broader shift; normalizing the sharing of, if not nude photos, at least personal (financial) information online. However, one of the most consistent trends across the reporting from 2007 to 2014 was the ongoing use of the term “leak” to describe the dissemination of nude photographs across the Internet. For example, in my search for the term “The Fappening,” the word “leak” was used in 23 out of 40 articles (although two were explicitly challenging the use of the term: Braun, 2014a* and Darer, 2014*). As noted earlier, however, the concurrent and extensive use of the term “hacking” across 2014 is more connotative of the agency of the perpetrators than previously-used terms in 2007-2008 to describe the circulation of such imagery, which erased the agency of the perpetrators (i.e. photos surfacing, emerging, being placed online, etcetera, see previous chapter). While female sexuality is still described as “leaking” and therefore uncontrollable, there is a “hacking” agent (or agents) responsible for this “leak,” which suggests some form of accountability, while also individualizing systemic violence against women.

A particularly interesting frame of reporting – again, through *The Washington Post* whose coverage of this incident and its implications was extraordinary, despite the potential limitations of being owned by a billionaire⁸³ – was a feminist critical analysis, using terms such

⁸³ *The Washington Post* is a highly decorated newspaper that has been recognized for breaking, among other stories, the Watergate scandal in the 1970s. The paper was sold to Jeff Bezos’ Nash Holdings in 2013 and is today routinely

as “ideology” (McCoy, 2014a*); “aggressive masculinity” (McCartney, 2014*) and “white privilege” (Moyer, 2014a*). Although these specific articles were written by (white) men, they each, in turn, provide insight into the gendered and racial dynamics at play in the incidents themselves as well as the public reactions to them. In his article, for instance, Robert McCartney (2014*) points to the “other” scandal of the day: NFL player Ray Rice’s domestic violence caught on camera. Both that, and the celebration of images of women’s bodies circulating without their consent suggests to him that American masculinity is unhealthy for both men and women, and that “we men should encourage one another to be strong and sexual without hurting or misusing women.” Justin Moyer (2014a*), drawing on Sojourner Truth (!),⁸⁴ brings an intersectional lens to his story about the different feminist reactions to Jennifer Lawrence’s stolen photos versus those of African-American singer and actress Jill Scott. The implications of intersectional feminism and hegemonic masculinity were not present in the reporting just a few years earlier, suggesting a shifting discourse and culture that might be exactly what the iCloud hackers were reacting against. While this shift could herald the efficacy of decades of feminist thought and activism, the retrenchment of individualist, neoliberal capitalist values – as demonstrated via the discourses around Apple and other tech companies implicated in this event – suggests other important forces at work.

attacked by U.S. President Donald Trump on his Twitter account for being “fake.” In September of 2014, when most of this reporting occurred, *The Washington Post* website had 42 million unique visitors, 41.4% of which were millennials (WashPost PR, 2014). This means that their coverage of the iCloud hack was likely among the most read across a broad geographical scope.

⁸⁴ Sojourner Truth was a feminist and abolitionist advocate who travelled and spoke across the U.S. in 19th Century. She is perhaps most known for her famous “Ain’t I a Woman?” speech (Truth, 1983).

II. “Just for the lulz”: The Hack as Technological Event

a) Apple

One of the biggest debates around this event was related to, but distinct from, the debate over whether or not the women were responsible for their violation: whether or not Apple (and its specific security weaknesses) was culpable. While the above-discussed articles advised users on how to protect themselves from similar attacks, a much bigger proportion of the reporting on this event was dedicated to the issue of whether or not Apple could have or, perhaps more importantly, should have done more to protect its users.

After the breach was first reported, Apple issued the following statement:

When we learned of the theft, we were outraged and immediately mobilized Apple’s engineers to discover the source. Our customers’ privacy and security are of utmost importance to us. After more than 40 hours of investigation, we have discovered that certain celebrity accounts were compromised by a very targeted attack on user names, passwords and security questions, a practice that has become all too common on the Internet. None of the cases we have investigated has resulted from any breach in any of Apple’s systems including iCloud or Find my iPhone. We are continuing to work with law enforcement to help identify the criminals involved. To protect against this type of attack, we advise all users to always use a strong password and enable two-step verification. Both of these are addressed on our website at <http://support.apple.com/kb/ht4232>. (reported in Billboard Staff, 2014*)

Because it controls the data that was breached, Apple’s investigation and explanation of what happened to these women was the only source of information available to the public at the time. While a few reporters took this statement at face value and emphasized the same angle as Apple

– how users can/should protect themselves – many reporters expressed skepticism, often drawing from technological publications for explanations of what could have happened.

Information Week's report by Charles Babcock (2014*) was among the most skeptical, performing a careful discourse analysis of Apple's public statement, noting that their precise wording ("none of the cases they have investigated" were the result of a weakness on Apple's part) leaves the company some wiggle room: "at that late date, Apple hadn't investigated all the cases. If it had, it's possible one of the cases might incontrovertibly establish there had been a breach" (Babcock, 2014*). Canada's *Postmedia* report by business analyst Jim Edwards (2014*) noted the uncharacteristic use of the term "outraged" in Apple's statement, adding in his analysis that the brand had been "completely sullied by the attack" and that, despite its public denials of responsibility, Apple was likely scrambling behind the scenes.

Washington Post reporter Brian Fung (2014*) was another skeptic, noting – in his headline – that Apple's phrasing was "basically blaming hacking victims for not securing their own iCloud accounts" and "effectively saying users are at fault – even as security researchers disagree." Fung's article was among the approximately 12 stories in my "Apple" corpus (stories about Apple, denoted by the use of "Apple" or "iCloud" in the headline or lede) that spoke to or cited security/hacking experts regarding key flaws in Apple's design and software that could have been the actual cause of the breach.

In fact, I was surprised reading about these specific theories of the violation. While I was following the story at the time, most of the sources I read – and I admittedly was obtaining my information from blogs such as Jezebel rather than hard news sources such as the *Washington Post* – perpetuated the narrative of the celebrities being responsible for this security breach. I was fascinated to learn then, that there was another narrative circulating through the mainstream news

about Apple's culpability, proving perhaps just how powerful multi-billion-dollar brands can be vis-à-vis news reporting. Fung's (2014*) *Washington Post* report cites a security expert who was able, on the Tuesday after the initial release of the photos, to use brute force attacks to get into Apple's system. As noted by *Globe and Mail* reporters Omar El Akkad and Shane Dingman (2014*), on the same weekend of the celebrity hack, two different professional hackers exposed Apple weaknesses at a security conference in Russia. Firstly, Apple's iCloud Keychain function, which serves as "a storage locker for a host of sensitive user data, including usernames, passwords, and credit-card information" (El Akkad and Dingman, 2014*) is set by default to a four-digit code, making it very susceptible to brute-force hacking (combining different numbers until they work). Second, the Find My iPhone App, which allows Apple device users to track other of their devices through GPS locating, has no "lockout" limit, meaning that hackers can try an unlimited amount of password combinations without being locked out of their account.⁸⁵ Despite their public denials of culpability, Apple reportedly (and, in their narrative, unrelatedly) fixed these bugs in the days following the hack (Arpe, 2014*).

Such blatant weaknesses in their system appeared to be surprising for many commentators in the articles, such as *Wall Street Journal* reporter Christopher Mims (2014*) who asks: "How can Apple justify substandard security while simultaneously positioning itself as a luxury brand?" However, others noted that technological companies often have to strike a delicate balance between convenience and security, and Apple has always chosen convenience: "Apple chooses to err on the side of usability to make it easier for the user that gets locked out from their kid's baby photos than to employ strong protections for the high-risk individuals"

⁸⁵ A 2016 report by *Washington Post* reporter Abby Ohlheiser asserts that legal documents in the case against one of the hackers, Ryan Collins, revealed that he used phishing scams to gain access to the celebrities' accounts.

(security researcher Ashkan Soltani, quoted in Sullivan, 2014a*). Some commentators wondered if that was a realistic option with the growing dependence people have on their devices while business analyst Jim Edwards (2014*) argues that the Apple brand loyalty is so strong that users are willing to risk security breaches for usability.

One reader poll conducted by *InformationWeek* in the aftermath of the breach appears to confirm Apple users' brand loyalty, despite concerns about the hack: while 40% of those polled said that they are "less confident" storing photos and data on cloud services, only half that amount (20%) were less confident in Apple's iCloud service (Babcock, 2014*). This slight dip in user confidence as well as the power of the brand is mirrored, respectively, in the stock market drop for Apple after the hack (a 4% drop in share prices the week following the hack, after hitting an all-time high the week before of \$103.74US, [Associated Press and Reuters, 2014*]) and the subsequent success of the iPhone 6, the first product Apple released after the hack (with its record-breaking sales, [Miller, 2014*]). Apple's consistent discourse across these events that users are in control of their data and thus are responsible for protecting it, seems to have been accepted by its fans who continue(d) to support the company across this "scandal," making it into the world's first trillion-dollar company that it is today, with stocks currently valued at over \$200 a share (Davies, 2018).

In September of 2014 Apple CEO Tim Cook stated that the iCloud breach was a lesson to the company about "public awareness" rather than engineering (quoted in Musil, 2014*), again placing the responsibility back onto users, but this time more subtly. Reports like the one published at Bloomberg echo this sentiment that it is people, not technology, that must adapt: "Many consumers are unwilling to use features that tighten security because they make the services harder to use" (Robertson and Satariano, 2014*). The re-framing of this story as one of

user awareness and responsibility – and pitting usability and security as binary interests – bolstered the parallel narrative about people (i.e. famous women) needing to protect their private information, letting Apple off the hook just as it was about to introduce more technological advances into our daily routines.

The iCloud hack occurred, as numerous reporters noted, on the “eve of what was supposed to be Tim Cook’s greatest triumph” (Edwards, 2014*), as he was set to debut the iPhone 6, Apple Pay, and the Apple Watch in fall of 2014. Apple Pay was the company’s first major foray into the world of point-of-sale payments with fingerprint-reading, card free, contactless payment offered through the iPhone. In light of the hack, converting consumers to change payment habits and use the Apple Pay service was, as noted by reporters such as Tamara Franklin, about convincing them that their data was safe, just as much as it was about convincing them that credit cards were inconvenient (Franklin, 2014*). A key contradiction in Apple’s public discourses circulating at the time, then, was that users should trust Apple with financial/credit card information while also being more “aware” of how and what they store on their iCloud. The fact that the Apple Pay system was not as widely adopted by consumers as first anticipated (Skinner, 2018) demonstrates perhaps the weaknesses in Apple’s logic.

The timing of the breach to coincide with the launch of Apple’s latest product lines made myself – and apparently only one reporter (Babcock, 2014*) – wonder whether or not the target of the celebrity breach was Apple itself just as much as the celebrities. Although the disproportionate attack on female celebrities, as well as the spread of the photos through sites such as 4chan and Reddit do point to other power dynamics at play (dynamics that will be discussed shortly), the fact that these photos were likely gathered over a long period of time and then released the week before an Apple launch in a market that they dominate points to a range

of possible motivations and perpetrators of the hack. After another high-profile hacking of Sony Pictures in November of 2014, for instance, cybersecurity stocks soared enough for investment firm Factors Advisors to start an “exchange-traded fund” focused exclusively on cybersecurity [i.e. investors can “play” the cybersecurity stocks rather than betting on individual cybersecurity firms (Egan, 2014*)].

While Sony was another victim of hacking at this time, the dynamics of that attack differed from that of the iCloud breach because, as explained by Caitlin Dewey who was consistently reporting on this story for the *Washington Post*, the former is about “punching up” while the latter is about “bringing down” (Dewey, 2014c*).⁸⁶ In other words, Sony is a multi-billion-dollar corporation and the private emails released revealed what some consider to be important information about the structural (i.e. sexist, racist) decision-making that goes on at the top levels of a media production company (see, for instance, Gail Sullivan’s *Washington Post* article about the newsworthiness of the Sony hack, 2014b*). The Apple attack targeted individual female celebrities in an attempt to humiliate them and lower their symbolic and therefore market value. Although both Sony and female celebrities are sites of privilege, one of them wields much more structural power than the other.

b) 4chan and Reddit

Sony was not the only other multi-million/billion-dollar company that was discussed in the reporting on the celebrity iCloud hack. 4chan, Reddit and Google were all – at some point or another – portrayed as responsible or complicit in the circulation of the women’s private photos.

⁸⁶ In fact, the hacking of customer data from both Home Depot and Target in 2014 were more similar to the iCloud hacking in that all of these incidents sparked conversations about how users/consumers *should* be protected by tech companies and the market/legal effects on those that refuse to do so (Katz, 2014*). However, these other hacks were not as significant in terms of the gendered power dynamics underlying them.

While the debates around Apple focused largely on the security versus usability issue, the debates around Reddit and 4chan, as well as, to a lesser extent, Google focused on broader ethical and philosophical debates that are still occurring over censorship and privacy versus free speech and anonymity in online spaces. Reddit and 4chan, in particular, were often described by reporters as “Wild West,” anarchic, and “dark” places on the web where free speech is prioritized above all other concerns.

These key debates were a focus of – most often, again – the *Washington Post* reporting. In her extensive report on the second site on which the celebrities’ photos were shared (after being posted on the even more obscure site AnonIB), Caitlin Dewey describes 4chan as the “Internet’s bogeyman” (Dewey, 2014d*). Founder Christopher Poole’s identity, according to Dewey, as a 15 year-old white male teenager at the time (in 2003) underpins the site’s no-rules, anything-goes philosophy where a large user group (22 million users per month in 2014) of mostly young, college-educated white men go to “shake off any and all social rules” (Dewey, 2014d*). While “technically” the site’s rules states that “trolling, racism and grotesque imagery” are off limits, they are allowed in certain threads or subforums. Additionally, the total anonymity granted by the site – unlike most websites, users do not have to create an account or username – allows for users’ racism, misogyny, pedophilia, etcetera to be unleashed and go unchecked (there is little information on what or how moderation takes place on the site, with much offensive and violent content easily accessible).

Although Dewey was not the only reporter to get into the complexities of the ethical implications of 4chan’s anonymity and unbridled “free speech” (see also Terrence McCoy, 2014b* for, again, the *Washington Post*), the lack of reporting on what exactly this site is, how it operates and the philosophies underpinning it is notable. Dewey and McCoy both note how

4chan was and continues to be responsible for many trends, memes and pranks across the Internet (including the founding of hacker vigilante group Anonymous) yet remains a mystery to many in broader Canadian and American culture. Leaving this so-called “underbelly” of the Web (McDonald, 2014b*) unexposed in news reporting not only discourages others (i.e. marginalized groups) from entering those spaces and altering the discourses/interactions circulating there but also allows these ideologies to fester and spill out into other online spaces such as Twitter and Facebook where we are now seeing “real world” effects of the free circulation of unmoderated hate speech and false content. Furthermore, as discussed by Baruch College reporter Stephen Elliot (2014*), journalists’ own ignorance around sites such as 4chan speaks to a problematic void as the news tries to keep up with – and often discursively and structurally emulate – a culture and form that it does not fully grasp.

Another site that reporters were more comfortable discussing – perhaps because, as noted by a few reports, journalists often source it for content (Elliot, 2014*; McCoy, 2014a*) – was Reddit, a site similar to 4chan but where users have names and accounts. While this does not guarantee against anonymity – it’s pseudonymous, so users can “hide” behind an account – it has resulted in a clear difference in reputation amongst reporters, reflected both in their probing of the site for news content and in the number of articles dedicated to explaining Reddit to readers in the aftermath of the iCloud hack (as opposed to only a handful about 4chan). After the celebrity photos started circulating on 4chan, a link to the files was shared onto Reddit – a much larger posting forum – by user John Meneses (Dewey, 2014e*). Reddit has a much larger audience, with over 100 million visitors a month, yet is governed by similar (non-) rules as 4chan.

In fact, once the photos were shared to Reddit, there was much controversy about Reddit's decision not to remove them. After the reporting on the hack grew widespread, numerous statements were issued by Reddit, including one from CEO Yishan Wong (as reported in Dalenberg, 2014*):

We uphold the ideal of free speech on reddit as much as possible not because we are legally bound to, but because we believe that you – the user – has the right to choose between right and wrong, good and evil, and that it is your responsibility to do so. When you know something is right, you should choose to do it. But as much as possible, we will not force you to do it. You choose what to post. You choose what to read. You choose what kind of subreddit to create and what kind of rules you will enforce.

Furthermore, this same post – tellingly called “Every *man* is responsible for *his* own soul” (McCoy, 2014a*, my emphasis) – justified not removing the celebrity photos: “We understand the harm that misusing our site dose tot he [sic] victims of this theft, and we deeply sympathize. Having said that, we are unlikely to make changes to our existing site” (McCoy, 2014a*). Reddit's odd statement both admonishes those who would look at the photos while refusing to remove them from its site: its philosophy of users self-policing taking priority over ethical concerns. While most of the reporters quoting these statements, including McCoy and Dalenberg, expressed a critical view on this stance, such philosophies continue to underpin the operation of many social networking sites including – until very recently – Facebook and Twitter's stances that users have responsibility in assessing and filtering information on their own.⁸⁷

⁸⁷ This debate played out prominently in August of 2018 when Spotify, Youtube and Facebook – following Apple's lead – all removed Alex Jones' controversial right-wing show “Infowars” from their platforms (Cellan-Jones, 2018). Despite much protest, Twitter refused to join, saying that it is journalists' responsibility to “document, validate and refute” false information so that “people can form their own opinions” (Jack, 2018).

Certainly, there was debate among Reddit's users and administrators as to whether or not people should be viewing the photos. *Washington Post* reporter Terrence McCoy quotes an unnamed Reddit user who chastises the Reddit community in the aftermath of the "leak":

We're all [jerks] for going crazy over these leaks, there's no denying that. These are private moments for these girls, and they've been exposed for the world to see. However, most of us at least have the slight shred of decency to only discuss the leaks in a place like this. (2014a*)

The user's caveat at the end, suggesting that Reddit is a safe space for misogyny, even if it is bad/shameful, points again to the ways that certain online spaces are not only unwelcoming to women, but also normalize the violation of them. What kinds of self-policing are possible when people know that they are doing the wrong thing, but will do it anyway? For whom are such spaces "democratic" and accessible? Another Reddit user lamented publicly: "You can't let inmates run the asylum and then get shocked when someone smears s**t on the walls. Stand up for standards for a change" (Dewey, 2014f*). In fact, that user was responding to Reddit's own systems administrator Jason Harvey who admitted that, after the iCloud photos were posted, "[w]e hit new traffic milestones, ones which I'd be ashamed to share publicly" (Dalenberg, 2014*).

Of course, traffic drives interest – and capital – to the site. Although Reddit does not use an ad-based revenue model (unlike Google, which had its own incentives not to quickly remove the photos⁸⁸), it does use its large traffic to attract investors: shortly after the iCloud breach, Reddit still managed to raise \$50 million in investor funding at a company valuation of \$500

⁸⁸ And apparently, did not act quickly enough for many of the celebrities who hired attorney Martin Singer to publicly threaten to sue Google on their behalf for \$100 million for violating the Digital Millennium Copyright Act (*The Hamilton Spectator*, 2014a*). As of 2016, 4chan founder Christopher Poole works for Google (Meyer, 2016), demonstrating how interconnected these sites and their interests are.

million (Dalenberg, 2014*). However, when there are possible legal ramifications (thus threatening such investments), Reddit is quicker to act. On September 3rd, just a few days after the iCloud hack, it was reported that American gymnast McKayla Maroney was underage at the time when her nude photo was taken and thus the site was in violation of their own child pornography rules as well as criminal law in the U.S. Reddit immediately shut down the thread and removed the photos (Legal Monitor Worldwide, 2014a*) and they continued to remove celebrity nudes that were placed there in the weeks following (Yahr, 2014a*).

Besides the child pornography law, the female victims of the hack had one other recourse to turn to in order to get their photos removed from Reddit and other Internet sites: copyright law. Although the American Communications Decency Act protects Internet websites from being sued for the content they host, the two exceptions to this law are child pornography and copyright infringement (Dewey, 2014f*). Selfies are simultaneously the property of those taking the photo and those appearing in the photo, thus upsetting the subject-object binary that underlies most traditional conceptions of media production and consumption. Women whose nude selfies are posted online therefore have more legal protections than those who might pose nude for others or appear in a sex tape. While these celebrities were able, through their immense privilege, to mobilize copyright law in their favour (prompting Reddit and Google to remove the images, although they still can be found if one seeks them out) most women do not have such means available when non-consensual images of them circulate online.

Indeed, the celebrity status of the female victims of this hack was notable for numerous reasons. Reddit, as noted by Adrienne Massanari (2017) in her work on toxic technocultures, is a key site of geek/nerd culture: a culture that “valorize[s] expertise and specialized knowledge and [...] often revolves around the acquisition, sharing, and distribution of this knowledge with

others” (p. 332), though the “others” allowed to share in this knowledge and community must properly emulate its codes and values. Furthermore, the celebration of skill and the ethos of meritocracy occlude the privilege that allows and encourages certain demographics to enter and stay in these technological, networked spaces. The gatekeeping – as manifested through their (non-transparent) self-policing of their own spaces – is key in creating sense of community; being able to identify and exclude outsiders gives them the sense of power and agency that can be lacking in offline social situations where their supposed privilege (as white/males) falters.

Despite considering itself to be meritocratic and accessible, geek culture is, in fact, the dominion of white men, who are centered in both the stereotypical conception of the nerd (see, for example *Big Bang Theory*) and their (often revenge-based) narratives, where the nerd “gains power,” “dominates their competitors” (Assanari p. 332) and – if I may extend this trope – wins the “hot” girl (see also *Big Bang Theory*). This culture, as discussed at the outset of this chapter, is key to understanding the social power dynamics that underlie such events as the Fappening: a group of “mis-understood” but deserving men seeing women “succeed” in mainstream American culture, and not, in the end, desiring the nerd, underscores their perceptions of an unjust failure of the supposed meritocratic promise of the “information age.” Their sense of marginalization is continuous, if not amplified in contemporary society, despite common discourse increasingly referring to them as “privileged” due to their gender and, often, race. As noted by Debbie Ging (2017), in many of these online communities (otherwise known as the “manosphere”), the increasing influence of feminism (rather than neoliberal capitalism, precarious work, or the “feminization” of labour/skill) is blamed for this sense of marginalization and injustice, likely in part due to feminist discourses about privilege being so disconnected from their perceived

everyday experiences. It also demonstrates that female sexuality is, for patriarchy, a zero-sum game: the “empowered,” sexual woman leaves in her wake a disempowered, frustrated man.

Jennifer Lawrence, as noted by Massanari, was in 2014 not a public feminist so much as a celebrated “cool girl” whose “self-effacing [...] authenticity and candor” marked her out as a desirable, but unthreatening, object of interest to Redditors, evidenced by her popularity and ubiquity on the site (pp. 335-336). Additionally, her rise as an Academy Award-winning actress, straddling independent features as well as Hollywood blockbusters, added a meritocratic legitimacy to her stardom: she would, under Chris Rojek’s (2001) categorizations of stardom for instance, be considered to have “achieved” celebrity (as opposed to have merely been born into it or having manufactured it). While other prominent victims of the hack could also fall into this categorization of stardom (i.e. model Kate Upton, gymnast McKayla Maroney), the medium of film as a form that straddles the high art/pop culture divide (and Lawrence’s recognition, in the form of numerous award nominations, as being “skilled” in acting) most closely aligns her form of celebrity with the expertise and skill prized by the geek culture Massanari describes. It is no coincidence that her photos were among the most prominently discussed and denounced in the reporting on the iCloud hack. In the next section I discuss the importance of Lawrence’s persona, her white femininity, and her status as a celebrity in analyzing how this incident was framed by news reporters working in the same industry as herself and the other victims of the hack.

III. “Don’t Get Too High and Mighty Ladies”: The Hack as Celebrity Event

a) Jennifer Lawrence: ideal victim

Over 100 female celebrities were victimized in the first of several “leaks” of private nude photos online in September 2014 (Oldham, 2014*). Of these celebrities, none was more high-

profile than 24-year-old actress Jennifer Lawrence, who in 2014 was named as Forbes' highest-grossing actor (Washington, 2014*). Embodying the hegemonically ideal form of beauty (able-bodied, thin, blonde-haired, blue-eyed white femininity), Lawrence has successfully built a multi-genre career alternating between independent, award-worthy productions and multi-million-dollar, Hollywood action franchises (including both the *Hunger Games* and *X-men* series). As noted in the previous section, her success in this industry – she became the top-earning actress in Hollywood at the age of 25 and has grossed over \$2 billion at the box office (Jennifer Lawrence Movie Box Office Results, n.d.), but is also one of the youngest women ever to win an Academy Award for acting – legitimizes her status as a celebrity, succeeding through what is discursively constructed as talent and skill (while also occluding the role that her beauty and white privilege plays in such success), more so than many of the other female celebrities that were targeted in 2014. However, her “authentic” and “cool girl” persona (Massanari, 2017; Petersen, 2014) simultaneously marks her out as “normal” and attainable, making her particularly desirable to audiences (as evidenced by her box office success) as well as, from how she was spoken about on Reddit, geeks. The sheer number of articles written about her at this time (1,058 on Factiva's database, as opposed to fellow victims Gabrielle Union and Vanessa Hudgens with 60 and 51, respectively) points to the power of her name to draw in newspaper audiences (and clicks for advertisers) as well.

While I did not save and analyze the articles about Jennifer Lawrence (the number was too high), she appeared often enough across my other searches for certain themes to emerge in the reporting specifically on her. She was one of the few actresses targeted that wanted, and/or was given the platform, to address the situation at length, which she did in a *Vanity Fair* cover interview released a month after the initial hack. In the interview – which did not itself surface in

my data but was reported on widely across other news sources – Lawrence re-framed the debate using a powerful soundbite: “It’s not a scandal, it’s a sex crime” (Variety Staff, 2014*). While many of the reporters seemingly agreed with this framing (quoting her in full, not challenging that framing), most reports omitted another direct quote from Lawrence more specifically critiquing the reporting on the story. As reported by CNN (the only article I found that quoted this section of the interview), Jennifer Lawrence used direct address to speak to journalists, gossip columnists and bloggers: “You have a choice. You don’t have to be a person who spreads negativity and lies for a living. You can do something good. You can be good” (Leopold, 2014*). Although Lawrence has more visibility and privilege in the media industry than most reporters, she is also their colleague, and relies upon them to promote, critique, and even celebrate her work. It is a mutually constitutive relationship, yet few reporters actually reflected on their role in perpetuating the “scandal” (including the writer of this CNN newswire article that quotes Lawrence on this very topic).

There was however, one college newspaper writer in my corpus that did precisely this; reflecting on the media’s role in initiating and amplifying the so-called “scandal.” The (unnamed) writer critiques the way their fellow journalists and bloggers initially “reported” on the stolen photos: *The Guardian* and PerezHilton.com, for instance were both websites that “haphazardly-masked their shock and excitement” at the photos and then, just a few hours later, admonished their readers who might have clicked on them, “which they told you exactly where to find just a few hours before” (“Leaked celebrity photos”, 2014*). Perhaps this, as well as the more intersectional, feminist awareness of rape culture more broadly (see section one of this chapter) speaks to the effects of media ownership: papers own and run by students and student organizations may be freer to critique the industry and society they comprise.

The broader corporate news media's reporting on this event, however, was of course strategic. Using Jennifer Lawrence's name prominently throughout the headlines and stories about the attack generated clicks, driving traffic and revenue to the sites doing the reporting on the so-called "scandal." Two separate stories demonstrate the success of such tactics, noting that in the aftermath of the hack Jennifer Lawrence was Google's "top trending actress in 2014" (Washington, 2014*) and Ask.com's second most-searched celebrity of 2014 (Bond, 2014*). The fact that Google was accused of being slow to remove Lawrence's photos likely speaks to the traffic that both those photos and stories about the photos were driving to the search engine (*The Hamilton Spectator*, 2014a*).

The November *Vanity Fair* interview, as noted above, re-framed much of the conversation circulating around Jennifer Lawrence in the news from a debate around privacy versus user responsibility to one about consent and celebrity. While at first, the public only heard from Lawrence via publicist, who called the hack a "flagrant violation of privacy" (Oldham, 2014*), her pre-arranged interview with *Vanity Fair*'s Sam Kashner seemed to open the door for more reporters to express sympathy and agreement with the young actress that this was an immoral act and a "sex crime." For instance, in an article for Sun Media's *Lloydminster Meridian Booster* Bryan Myers (2014*) points out that such violations pre-date selfie and cloud technologies, contextualizing the event as part of a broader pattern of how famous women are treated in U.S. and Canadian culture:

[T]en years ago, a paparazzo could make a small fortune for some photos of accidental celebrity nudity, and that was no less a violation of Britney Spears or Paris Hilton's privacy. Perhaps, this is where things started to go sideways. When we took ownership of the image as more important than ownership of the body.

Myers connects the nude photos circulating online to paparazzi images that circulate through news and gossip sites. Few reporters examined the economic implications of the hack; only a handful even mentioned that the photos were initially advertised as being for sale in exchange for Bitcoin (Barbash, 2014*; Darer, 2014*; Dewey, 2014a*; McCoy, 2014b*; Sappenfield, 2014*; Torbett, 2014*; Wang, 2014*), while only one reporter – the *London Free Press*' Liz Braun (2014a*) – explicitly mentions the potential harm such photos could do to the women's careers (and this potential varies depending on the women's relations to success, stardom and privilege). Not only is Myers connecting this issue to the commodification and exploitation of images of women's bodies, he also compares the Lawrence "scandal" to the similar treatment of Paris Hilton and Britney Spears, whose symbolic and cultural capital was diminished through similar kinds of reporting on their private lives (i.e. scandal). The critique of media culture is present, but it is directed toward paparazzi and gossip more than to the news, as though the news is distinct and does not itself play a significant role in the commodification and exploitation of female celebrity. Furthermore, that Spears and Hilton were invoked by Myers as forebearers of this kind of violation speaks to some of the cultural continuities explored more broadly in this thesis.

Some writers were more focused on praising Lawrence specifically for her discourse in the *Vanity Fair* interview. For instance, *Globe and Mail* columnist Cliff Lee (2014*) praises Lawrence as the first celebrity to "publicly relate her mental state" in the aftermath of the hack and that this revealed her to be "a real human being (which, in celebrity journalism, is a quality rarer than it should be)." While one might assume that Lee is referring to the fact that most celebrities are (forced to be) less "authentic" with the (news) media because they must maintain some form of public image and persona, he is also (perhaps inadvertently, as his tone is very

sympathetic and praising of Lawrence throughout the article) affirming that such violations work to “prove” the humanity of the famously privileged; which seems to be precisely what the hackers intended – bringing Lawrence back down a notch.

Of course, one way to do that is to violate her bodily autonomy and then suggest that she is either complicit or at fault because of the work she does. While most journalists were able to articulate the difference between consensually posing nude and having nude photos stolen, a few alluded to or even directly reproduced critiques of Lawrence’s poses for *Vanity Fair*. For instance, in a contradictory article that reveals some of the tensions underlying hegemonic news reporting, *Globe and Mail* columnist Zosia Bielski (2014a*) presents “both sides” of the argument, noting that despite it being a consensual photoshoot, “some did voice feeling conflicted about Vanity Fair’s capitalizing spread, complete with *bobbing breasts*, lips parted, a mysterious cockatoo and the headline ‘Both Huntress and Prey’” (my emphasis). Bielski then links to a mashable.com article, presumably representing the “some” in the quote above (the link is now broken). Her description of the photograph, however, is not in quotes so it is unclear whether she is paraphrasing the mashable.com story or describing the photo herself. This framing, highlighting the subjectively sexual elements of the photo, harkens back to the reporting on the 2008 photo of Miley Cyrus in *Vanity Fair* (perhaps pointing to some tropes in the aesthetics of women being photographed for the magazine) which minimizes the artistic vision and role of the photographers, Annie Leibovitz and, in the case of Lawrence, Patrick Demarchalier, and relies upon a history of sexualization of women in order to be read that way.

What is, in my view, more problematic and may be of more interest to the public than this reading of the cover photo is the fact that *Vanity Fair* is owned by Condé Nast, which is owned by media company Advance Publications (advance.com, n.d.). Advance Publications own

and operate a number of newspapers across the U.S., including the *Star-Ledger* in New Jersey and *The Oregonian* in Oregon (advance.com, n.d.).⁸⁹ Advance Publications is also the largest shareholder of Reddit,⁹⁰ the site through which Lawrence's private pictures were widely distributed across the Internet (reddit myth busters, n.d.). Incidentally, according to Forbes.com, Advance Publications is also a large shareholder in Discovery Inc. (formerly Discovery Communications) which, in 2015, bought a 3.4% stake in Lions Gate Entertainment, the company that produces and distributes the multi-billion-dollar franchise film series *The Hunger Games*, starring Jennifer Lawrence (Merced, 2015). In other words, one white man (Advance Publications CEO Donald Newhouse, whose estimated net worth is over \$11 billion, according to Forbes.com [Donald Newhouse, n.d.]) owns stakes in almost every media company that profited from Jennifer Lawrence and this so-called "scandal." The incestuous relationships across these multi-national media conglomerates (specifically Condé Nast and Reddit, at the time) and the underlying structural power dynamics at work did not arise in a single news story that I examined, despite the fact that I was able to uncover this relationship, through Google, in a matter of moments.

Yet one thing that several reporters did focus on – to my surprise – was the power dynamics underlying what Jen Zoratti (2014*) called a "deliberate, targeted act" against *female* celebrities. While, as noted previously in this chapter, many reporters were quick to frame this conversation within a larger discourse about rape culture and victim-blaming, there were (understandably) fewer complex examinations of the structural power dynamics at play in the

⁸⁹ These newspapers are carried by Factiva but not included for academic searches from the University of Ottawa, as Factiva was most likely unable to secure the licensing fees. I therefore did not analyze how the story was reported in those papers, but that would be worth investigating in future research on this topic.

⁹⁰ Reddit's specific no-rules, self-policing ethos seems to have stemmed from its founders more than its investors and shareholders (and the fact that Reddit's second-largest shareholdings are company employees thus differentiates it from many other media company shareholdings in that most journalists do not also own stock in their company). It would be interesting to see what might happen to news sites if they adopted this model of ownership.

“takedown” of successful women. Despite the attempts by reporters to build empathy with the victims by pointing out how much information we all share, both willingly and not, with our devices, the fact is, as noted by Jen Zoratti (2014*), celebrities are not “just like us.” Female celebrities have “risen” through neoliberal capitalist society – a society that bills itself as a meritocracy and often uses celebrity to do so (see Littler, 2004; 2013) – to be highly visible models of female success. They have symbolic, cultural and economic capital, often built through some form of exploitation of their bodies and images by media companies and producers. The supposed trade-off for this status is a loss of bodily autonomy; their body and image “belongs” to the public just as much as it does to them or to the media companies they work for.

Zoratti’s analysis breaks down these relations in her feature-length article for the *Winnipeg Free Press*, one of the few major urban newspapers in Canada to operate outside of the two news conglomerates PostMedia and Sun News.⁹¹ In her discussion of celebrities and their bodily autonomy, Zoratti notes that there are different rules for different genders (and, I would add races and sexualities, while various abilities and ages for instance, do not even get to play the game):

[Famous women] live in bodies that are publicly—and constantly—critiqued, ranked, shamed, scrutinized, objectified, policed, sexualized and so on. When a celebrity chooses to keep something about her body to herself – be it a pregnancy or a surgery or an illness or a change in weight—it’s tellingly referred to in headlines as a “secret.” The entitlement on display is breathtaking. And it’s easy to dehumanize a famous woman because, for many people, she represents an ideal. A fantasy. A hypothetical. A sex object.

⁹¹ As will be discussed in the next chapter, PostMedia and Sun News merged in 2015.

However (as will be discussed further in the next chapter), there is a marked difference in this attitude when a woman is a sexual object/fantasy created and circulated through legitimized media formats that represent an ideal of meritocracy, exploiting women's bodies for capitalist gain, versus when a woman positions herself as a sex object and profits directly from that positioning. Neither one is more deserving of having her bodily autonomy violated, but the media's outrage is only palpable when a certain kind of body is violated, as reflected in this stand-alone sentence in Zoratti's piece: "Jennifer Lawrence's body is nobody's body but hers." The other hundred or so celebrity hacking victims are erased in that part of her discussion.

However, another name that does arise both here and in a story by *Washington Post* reporter Soraya Nadia McDonald is that of gaming critic and #Gamergate target Anita Sarkeesian. Both reporters connect the iCloud hack to broader instances of what Sarah Banet-Weiser and Kate M. Miltner (2016) call networked misogyny, the online targeting of successful and feminist women (as well as the targeting of women in online spaces). In her report, McDonald writes that the nude photos were a "calculated effort to humiliate celebrity women who dared take X-rated selfies for themselves, or their lovers, or whomever—it doesn't really matter, because it's not any of our business" (McDonald, 2014b*). By subsequently connecting the celebrity status of these women to Sarkeesian, and paralleling sexual autonomy with feminist critique, both (female) reporters are illustrating the ways in which visible and "loud" women threaten masculinity either directly, in the content of their speech, or by having control over their bodies and sexuality enough to both enjoy and/or profit off them.

In September of 2014 these two seemingly disparate "threats" to masculinity/patriarchal power converged when *Harry Potter* actress Emma Watson gave her "feminist speech" at the United Nations and was subsequently the target of a threat to release nude photos. Several of the

stories in my corpus covered this event, which was eventually revealed to be a hoax, but rarely did the writers examine the fairly obvious connections between Watson's status as a celebrity, the content of her speech, and the subsequent threat to her bodily autonomy. McDonald's reporting on the incident, as discussed above, was one of the few that made this direct connection ("the message [from hackers], of course, being, If you dare do or say something we don't like, we'll expose you in return" [McDonald, 2014b*]) but a report from the *York Daily Record* out of York, Pennsylvania also echoed this sentiment. In her short (182 word) piece, Ann Tatko-Peterson sarcastically observed that the threat to Watson occurred immediately after the feminist speech: "Imagine that – a nude-photo-leaking hacker who feels threatened by an empowered woman" (Tatko-Peterson, 2014*).

Of the five stories about Watson that were included in my corpus,⁹² three of them (including two by CNN reporter Lisa Respers France) thought it necessary to state that it was unclear whether or not nude photos of Emma Watson actually existed (Respers France, 2014a*; 2014b*; WENN, 2014a*). I found this inclusion, though worded in typical "objective" journalistic fashion, to be quite jarring: why would or should Watson confirm or deny the existence of nude photos of herself? Denying that she has them reinforces victim-blaming scripts that stigmatize the use of digital technologies in sexual relationships (and several other celebrities in fact, did this in the aftermath of the hack, see Tina Fey quoted in Neumaier, 2014*; Anna Kendrick quoted in Tilley, 2014*), while affirming the existence of such would mark her out as an even more desirable target for hackers. Yet, even if photos did not exist, the message behind the hackers' threat is that they could materialize, that it is beyond her control: a working, famous woman is always and particularly susceptible to violation (and broadcaster Erin

⁹² Articles that were sorted and categorized as being about the Celebrity element of this event.

Andrews' being unknowingly filmed by her stalker while alone and naked in a hotel room in 2008 underscores this).

Feminist writer and academic Roxane Gay interprets such messages to Watson and other female celebrities as a way to “remind women of their place”, as discussed in her piece for *The Guardian* (quoted in Zoratti, 2014*).⁹³ Gay argues that the photos are meant to set an example for women more broadly:

Don't get too high and mighty, ladies. Don't step out of line. Don't do anything to upset or disappoint men who feel entitled to your time, bodies, affection or attention. Your bared body can always be used as a weapon against you. You [sic] bared body can always be used to shame and humiliate you. Your bared body is at once *desired* and *loathed*. This is what we must remember. Women cannot be sexual in certain ways without consequence. Women cannot pose nude or provocatively, whether for a lover or themselves, without consequence. (my emphasis)

This quote particularly well summarizes the complex and contradictory relations that patriarchal capitalism has with women's bodies: the desire for them propels billion-dollar industries, as does the loathing of them (both in the form of self-loathing through the beauty industry and the loathing of women's bodies as displayed by “gossip” and other celebrity reporting). However, there is a fine line between those whose bodies are considered violable and those who are already tarnished beyond scandal.

Part of this lies of course, in the “good girl”/ “bad girl” dichotomy (also often framed as virgin/whore) that underlies female celebrity. As noted by *Globe and Mail* reporter Zosia Bielski (2014b*), certain female stars like Lawrence behave like “good girls” in the face of scandal, as

⁹³ *The Guardian* was not included in the Factiva corpus; I excluded source materials from outside of the U.S. and Canada and *The Guardian* is a U.K.-based publication.

reflected by her admission in the *Vanity Fair* interview that her first instinct (although abandoned) was to apologize. Bielski notes that “There is a good-girl urge in these apologies, to clarify and account for yourself at all times, even when viciously attacked” (2014b*). Although Lawrence did not apologize, she does contextualize the photos as part of a monogamous, “loving” and long-distance relationship, thus calling upon certain acceptable forms of female (hetero)sexuality to excuse her transgression. Furthermore, as noted by Ann Helen Peterson (in McDonald, 2014a*), Jennifer Lawrence’s “cool girl” persona helped her to survive this scandal precisely because she seems to many like the kind of girlfriend who would not be too “pure” or “innocent” to send nude selfies to her boyfriend (i.e. unlike Vanessa Hudgens in 2007, who was known for playing “squeaky clean” Gabriella in *High School Musical*).

At the same time, however, the very act of posing nude for a selfie sullies Jennifer Lawrence’s “legitimacy” as an actress who is supposed to be more successful for her “talent” than for her beauty or sex appeal. Here, her inclusion in the hack with less-valued forms of celebrity (models, singers, reality television stars) mars her status, and this is both reflected by and perpetuated through the specific words used by reporters to describe the photos in ambiguous terms, suggesting that she is at much at fault as those stealing the photos. For example, the photos are, in turn, described as “inappropriate photos” (A. Ryan, 2014*), the double meaning of which suggesting that it is both the public presence of the photo and the existence of the photo itself that are inappropriate; “randy shots” (Hutchinson, 2014*), which can again be read doubly as suggesting that Lawrence is “randy” and/or that the photo inspires randy thoughts in those that view them; “naughty leaked images” (Neumaier, 2014*) which here combines the negative moral judgment (the existence of the photo is bad, naughty) with the preferred term to describe out-of-control (Internet-bound) images of famous, nude women whose

wet and slippery sexuality cannot be contained. By using the platform offered by *Vanity Fair* to contextualize these “randy” photos within the context of a monogamous heterosexual relationship, Lawrence was able to shift the framing of her own – but not all celebrities’ – photos as a “normal” and private part of contemporary sexual relationships and recover from the scandal that very briefly tainted her public image: Lawrence continues to star in high-profile films and out-earn most of her peers.

b) “Other” Celebrities: not-so-ideal victims

As reporter Zosia Bielski (2014b*) notes, not all celebrities want or need to apologize for scandal, especially when their image/fame is built upon transgressing proper femininity. Here Bielski’s chosen examples, including Rihanna with Courtney Love and Marianne Faithfull, is revealing: transgressive femininity is a large part of musical stardom, but also problematically associated with Black female stardom. Rihanna has never been embroiled in the kind of sex and drug scandals that surrounded Love and Faithfull, but her nude photos – released in the same batch as those of Lawrence – received scant attention, suggesting that her “leaking” sexuality is not as transgressive as that of Jennifer Lawrence. While, again, this could be due to the varying forms of stardom they inhabit – Lawrence’s status as a film star marks her as being more “distant” to audiences than musicians who are often imagined to be performing an “authentic” self (see Auslander, 2006; Marshall, 1997) – it also speaks to the differing racial dynamics underlying female sexuality. As noted by Patricia Hill Collins (2000), Black women are often viewed through the lens of controlling images like the “jezebel” whose “function was to relegate all Black women to the category of sexually aggressive women, thus providing a powerful rationale for the widespread sexual assaults by White men” (p. 81). Rihanna’s “exotic”

Caribbean roots often amplify this interpretation of her imagery (Morgan, 2015) and thus might explain the lack of response/outrage, on the part of news media, to nude photos of her surfacing (as well as the problematic response by *Philadelphia Daily News* reporter Howard Gensler to be discussed shortly, see page 232 of this chapter).

However, more reporting on such violations does not necessarily demonstrate concern or outrage on behalf of the victims and can often re-victimize the celebrities, as they are forced to read about or answer questions on the photos repeatedly, as well as the fact that the reporting can also remind or inform readers of the hack and inspire them to search out the photos which are still traceable online. Even reporters with the best of intentions often rely upon tropes that “bring these women back down” to their humanity, as though empathizing with them as successful/famous/visible human beings is not possible. While the posting of private photos works to “bring down” celebrities to “our” level and requires an underlying gender power differential, male celebrities are not entirely immune to this tactic either. One of the more high-profile “attacks” on male celebrity that occurred at this time involved allegedly doctored photos of (at that time) boy-band member Liam Payne (WENN, 2014b*). The photos portrayed One Direction’s Payne engaging in gay oral sex with an unidentified man (Payne denied the veracity of the photos). The targeting of Payne demonstrates the ways that homophobia and patriarchal oppression can also act upon men in order to remind them of their proper place in the patriarchal order (i.e. either preying on or protecting women, see Guillaumin, 1995, pp. 198-199), particularly when their success is built upon the idolization, and, indeed, the sexual objectification of them by young girls and women.

In the same batch of photos released on Reddit in late September 2014 two other prominent Black women’s nude photos were circulated online, Meagan Good and Gabrielle

Union. Good is an actress whose two-decade career spans both film and television series. At the time of the hack, Good was starring mostly in films such as *Anchorman 2* and the *Think Like a Man* film series. After the hack, however, she secured a lead role on the FOX television series *Minority Report* (which lasted one season) suggesting that the photos were unable to hinder her career as she continues to work across film and television to this day (although one cannot know what roles might have been offered to her had the hack not occurred).

Gabrielle Union was a more prominent star than Good when she was also victimized in 2014. Union's high-profile career – also spanning two decades across film and television – saw her starring and/or appearing in hit films such as *Bring It On* (2000), *10 Things I Hate About You* (1999) and *Bad Boys II* (2003). Union has also had recurring roles on several popular television series (*7th Heaven*; *Sister, Sister*; *Ugly Betty*), and at the time of the hack was starring as the lead titular character on the BET series *Being Mary Jane* (Gabrielle Union IMDb, n.d.). Although both Union and Good reacted publicly to the 2014 violation (via public statements and social media), Union's response – and why she was chosen to comprise this case study – was unique in that she, like Lawrence, used the platform of a magazine to address the event at length. Additionally, Union brought an intersectional framework to her feminist discourse against victim-blaming, thus marking out the reporting on her response (or relative lack thereof in comparison to Lawrence) as being particularly relevant.

In 2014 Union penned an essay about the photo hacking for *Cosmopolitan*'s December issue and appeared at the magazine's Fun Fearless Live conference in November. At the conference, Union spoke about her victimization, noting, as discussed above, that there are varying levels of victimhood perceived in incidents like this. However, she places herself and her peers as “bad” victims who are less sympathetic in this situation because of their celebrity status:

“if these women weren’t celebrities, there would be much more outrage, but because we’re female celebrities, ‘we weren’t good victims and we enjoyed it, all PR is good PR.’ That’s what they say” (A. Lee, 2014*). However, this statement is undermined in the same talk where Union says that both the people she loves and respects, as well as the paparazzi expressed sympathy with her: “When the paparazzi says it’s messed up, [it’s messed up]!” (A. Lee, 2014*).

Her lament about the lack of outrage on behalf of celebrities demonstrates an underestimation of her privilege and the very platform from which she speaks, as is evidenced by the sheer amount of reporting on this incident. However, public outrage does not necessarily directly correlate to amount of news coverage, as the interest on the part of the public could be inspired by numerous reactions including curiosity, titillation, and glee. That being said, Union’s assessment that there are “good victims” and “bad victims” in relation to “PR” seems to be confirmed by the contrasting reporting on Kim Kardashian versus Jennifer Lawrence in relation to the hack. Certain kinds of stars are framed as being dependent upon scandal to maintain their success while others are distanced from or “above” it because of their supposed talents.

When the photos were first released, Gabrielle Union and her husband NBA player Dwayne Wade issued a joint statement that condemned the hackers, contextualized the attack within a history of gender and racial oppression in America, and expressed solidarity with other victims. Of the five news stories in my corpus that reported on the statement, only three of them included this powerful inclusion from Union: “I can’t help but to be reminded that since the dawn of time women and children, specifically women of colour, have been victimized, and the power over their own bodies taken from them” (Roberts for Postmedia, 2014*; Yahr for the *Washington Post*, 2014a*; WENN, 2014c*). Although the *Washington Post* had run a story about the lack of intersectional analysis in response to the first set of photos being released (see

Moyer, discussed above in section one), they did not offer any such analyses in light of Union's statement, as quoted in Emily Yarr's article; instead the article merely offers more background facts.

In fact, the lack of feminist response overall was raised by Union in her *Cosmopolitan* essay (which was only reported on in four stories in my corpus): "Where are all the women's groups, the feminists, demanding justice in this case? The silence is deafening. Any time you lose control over your body, it's a violation and a crime" (in *New York Post*, 2014a*). Union joins Lawrence in re-framing the "scandal" as a crime, drawing an even starker parallel with people's reactions to her being raped at gunpoint at the age of 19 (A. Lee, 2014*). Union's awareness of the celebrity news cycle in which she is embedded is clear when she "smartly" observes, as described by *Washington Post* reporter Alyssa Rosenberg (2014*), that "wishing for relief means hoping for someone else's victimization." The fact that Union's essay and public remarks were given much less coverage than Jennifer Lawrence not only reflects their disparity in stardom, but also perpetuates it. Furthermore, it absolves reporters of the responsibility to discuss and analyze some of the more complicated issues raised by Union in her critiques of sexual violence as well as the roles played by media and technology companies who profit from these violations (specifically Google and Apple). It also suggests that Union, in comparison to Lawrence, is a "bad" victim whose violation need not generate as much outrage.

Similarly, the reporting on Vanessa Hudgens 2014 (or lack thereof) also positions her as a deserving/bad victim. Again, it is worth noting that reporting on the issue is a double-edged sword in that more attention also perpetuates the "scandal" and likely encourages the perpetrators, yet those who receive the majority of reporting (i.e. Jennifer Lawrence) get to more frequently be framed as innocent victims whose careers should not (and do not) suffer from the

violation. While the shifting understanding of child pornography and sexting is reflected in the reactions to McKayla Maroney's picture in 2014 versus that of Vanessa Hudgens in 2007, this understanding seems to have also been retroactively applied to Hudgens' earlier violation: of the 44 articles in my Vanessa Hudgens 2014 corpus (Factiva search of "Vanessa Hudgens" and "nude"), only three mention her 2007 violation, and one of those is (by a college newspaper) in the context of a critique of how that was handled at the time. Additionally, the reporters in 2014 recognized the hack as a privacy violation much more than they did in 2007. Of the 44 articles about Hudgens in relation to the 2014 hack, 33 (or 75%) use the term "victim" (either in relation to her or to the celebrities more broadly). In contrast, only one out of 156 articles (0.006%) about Vanessa Hudgens' stolen nude photos across 2007-2008 describe her as a victim (and that itself was an article from PR Newswire [2007*], a public relations wire and not a newswire).

However, even though there was more understanding of stolen nude photos as a sexual privacy violation in 2014, there were still ways that Hudgens was constructed as an already-tarnished victim. In particular, the reporting repeatedly associated her with the inviolable Kim Kardashian who was often framed as benefitting from the "scandal" because of her previous incidents of "leaked" sexuality. Of the 44 Vanessa Hudgens articles, Kardashian is mentioned in 39 of them, or 88.6% of the articles. In comparison, actress Kate Bosworth, who was also included in the same batch of photographs and whose career peaked at a similar time as Hudgens, was only mentioned in seven of the 44 articles (15.9%). By constantly associating the racialized and previously violated Hudgens with Kardashian and, notably, Rihanna (27/44 or 61.3% of the articles) rather than Bosworth or model Amber Heard (10/44 or 22.7%) – both of whom embody idealized forms of white femininity (thin, blonde-haired, blue/green-eyed) –

Hudgens' victimhood is constructed as "belonging" with Rihanna and Kardashian's "tainted" and/or racialized womanhood rather than Bosworth's or Heard's "purity."⁹⁴

As noted earlier, two mainstream news reporters – quite problematically, I would argue – mention both Hudgens' previously stolen nude photo "scandal" and Kardashian's "leaked" sex tape when reporting on the 2014 violation, as though their past public imagery,⁹⁵ consensual or not, has any relation to their status as victims.⁹⁶ The first of these stories appeared in Annapolis newspaper *The Capital* (2014*, no author credited) and makes an effort to connect the 2014 violations to those of 2007 by calling them all "hacking" incidents (it is rare that Kardashian's sex tape is referred to as being "hacked" rather than the more ambiguous and feminine term "leaked"). The story ends by reminding readers that Hudgens was "embroiled in a nude photo scandal in 2007 during her Disney days" (*The Capital*, 2014*), thus linking Hudgens' "scandal" to the most high-profile/successful point in her career. Although the report never specifically articulates a victim-blaming stance (and does not purport to offer readers ways to "protect themselves"), ending the piece with a reminder that both Kardashian, star of "Keeping Up with the Kardashians" and Hudgens, star of "High School Musical 2" had been targeted before, could be read as a subtle suggestion that they either did not learn a lesson from their past victimization or perhaps even benefitted from it. Here, the inclusion of the titles of both of their most famous texts supports such a reading, especially considering that, of all the High School Musical movies

⁹⁴ Other white, blonde-haired light-eyed actresses who were violated in this hack but less associated with Hudgens than Kardashian include Scarlett Johansson (8/44 or 18.2%), Jenny McCarthy (4/44 or 9.1%), Mary-Kate Olsen (8/44 or 18.1%) and Hayden Panettiere (14/44 or 31.8%).

⁹⁵ Alexandre Baril (2018) has written on this issue in relation to mediated images of trans* people's bodies, questioning whether it is possible to mobilize feminist conceptions of ongoing consent in relation to images that are often permanently publicly accessible.

⁹⁶ Although the next chapter will engage in a more thorough discussion of the reporting on Kardashian's sex tape, it is worth noting that while only two stories in this corpus of 44 mentioned Hudgens' 2007 photos, seven mentioned Kardashian's sex tape (of the 39 that mention her at all).

to mention, the author chose HSM2 which had been released on the eve of Hudgens' photo "scandal."

The second article to discuss Hudgens' 2007 violation took a much more direct approach: the headline for the *Philadelphia Daily News* piece by Howard Gensler (2014a*) reads "One way to avoid hacked nude shots? Keep your clothes on." The white male author (who according to his Twitter bio, no longer works for the *Daily News*) jokingly assures his readers that there are no nude selfies of him anywhere and that he finds it both "bizarre and fascinating" (Gensler, 2014a*) that such things might exist for famous women, despite them being conditioned to and often economically reliant upon imaging themselves as objects of sexual desire. He goes on to lament the "commotion" over the hack, noting that "It's not as if there's anything new here" (Gensler, 2014a*): Kim Kardashian "had a sex tape," Vanessa Hudgens' nude pic "was all over the Internet years ago" and Rihanna is "basically naked in most of the pictures she does release." Gensler mentions no other victim – not Lawrence, Bosworth, or Heard – in this article which concludes by admonishing *these* famous women (racialized, previously nude, or both) to stop taking "so many darn selfies. We see *too much* of you as it is" (Gensler, 2014a*, my emphasis).

While Gensler's sentiments might be echoed by many reporters in relation to Kardashian (as discussed in the Kardashian chapter), the fact that it is here contained to just a few stories about certain celebrities (and the fact that he no longer is employed in this commentator role) suggests that the public empathy toward the celebrity victims, either despite or because of their status, outweighed the urge to blame victims for their own privacy violation, especially in an era of increasing technological dependence. The most famous women's careers did not obviously suffer as a result of the hack and, although their public humiliation may have been gratifying to the perpetrators of this violation, their ability to use their platforms to shift the public discourse

was particularly noteworthy in contrast to the ways in which female celebrity “scandals” were reported on across 2007/2008. Of course, not all celebrities share equal access to such platforms or to success overall (as will be discussed in my chapter on “sex tape stars” Kim Kardashian and Paris Hilton), but the shifts in discourse reflect a culture that is grappling – and coming to terms with – the growing public power of feminist discourse, politics and movements, especially as they relate to women’s place in relation to technology, media, and media industries.

Conclusion

In this chapter I examined the news reporting that occurred in the short-term aftermath of the 2014 iCloud hack, also referred to as “The Fappening.” I first examined the incident in terms of broader cultural debates about the uses of technology in our private lives and sexual relationships. A clear difference emerged in the reporting by university newspapers, where such uses were normalized, versus mainstream news reporting that often framed the hack as a cautionary tale about users’ vulnerability rather than technology companies’ responsibility. I then examined the reporting in relation to the technological companies involved, including Apple, 4chan, and Reddit. The vast majority of the financial reporting on this story focused on Apple, as though its potential losses outweighed those of the celebrities who were violated. Furthermore, reporters were much more comfortable discussing the implications of the hack vis-à-vis Apple policies, products and profits than they were in relation to 4chan or Reddit: two of the most influential yet mystified Internet sites today. The valorizing of “free speech” and self-policing on these spaces works to elevate certain voices in the community and isolate or gatekeep against “outsiders” including, often, the reporters discussing and analyzing these very sites. This perhaps speaks to some of the broader disconnects between mainstream news reporting in the West and

the “alternative” (-fact) communities emerging on these and other sites of the so-called “manosphere.” Finally, I examined the reporting that framed this issue particularly in terms of celebrity. While certain celebrities were given the platform necessary to re-frame the discussion and minimize the damage done to their image, others’ victimization was illegible or dismissed because they did not fit into reporter understandings of “ideal” victims and/or celebrities. Overall certain trends emerged in the data that have even more significance when considered in comparison to the 2007-2008 reporting on the stolen and nude photos of Vanessa Hudgens, Lindsay Lohan and Miley Cyrus discussed in the previous chapter. Firstly, the amount of coverage was significantly higher, which reflects both the cultural attitudes about privacy violation as well as the sheer magnitude of the iCloud hacks. As demonstrated by the recent sexual assault cases against comedian Bill Cosby and physician Larry Nassar, oftentimes dozens of women have to come forward (if not hundreds) before such victimization is considered newsworthy or criminal.

However, the reporting on the Fappening, in particular, across several award-winning publications (*Washington Post*, *Boston Globe*) as well as media-industry publications, (*Hollywood Reporter*, *Variety*) and financial and technological papers (*Business Journals*, *CNet news*) demonstrates the vast range of stakeholders implicated by such breaches of privacy and an effort to understand and take these debates more seriously. Furthermore, the use of specifically feminist discourse about consent, structural violence, hegemonic masculinity, and intersectionality reflects a broader cultural shift in theorizing women’s relations to technology and to sexuality. In fact, this precise shift may have been exactly what the hackers and Redditors were pushing back against in their non-consensual circulation of the images. At the same time, despite the emphasis in many news stories on structural violence against and oppression of

women, many journalists also drew on frames that individualized this event: placing responsibility on users for protecting themselves from similar violation and/or pathologizing the hackers/websites that circulated the photos.

While college newspapers were less likely to draw on frames of individualization and more likely to connect the hack with broader conversations about rape culture, consent and digital sexual intimacy, those papers also likely had a smaller circulation and younger readership. The “mainstream” newspapers studied here were more likely to invoke either direct or subtle victim-blaming scripts but at the same time expressed empathy for the victims most easily positioned – because of their relation to “talent” and privilege – as “innocent.” As noted in this chapter, The *Washington Post*’s reporting on the event was remarkable for both its feminist defense of the victims as well as its responsabilization of technology companies. Assigning a handful of reporters to cover the story over a period of time – something that less and less news organizations have the resources to do – provides readers with more context and analysis of the issues being discussed.

Because many of their readers – and society at large – may not have encountered the stolen photos themselves, the only access they had to the “scandal” was what was reported on in the mainstream media, thus merging the discourse about the event with the event itself. Additionally, this could apply to the celebrities: many readers of such newspapers may not watch Jennifer Lawrence’s films or know who Kate Upton is and so the discourse that circulates about them also comprises their star image. Celebrity reporting then, takes on importance as a force that perpetuates, critiques, and mediates these issues for a broader public more than any single one of these celebrity texts can. Although ownership of the news media is consolidating (and therefore minimizing the amount and quality of work that journalists produce), individual

journalists still have a certain amount of agency within the broader system, as reflected in the reporting on this story. While male reporters did express feminist viewpoints, and female reporters anti-feminist ones, a significant amount of the reporting that both normalized women's engagement with technologies and provided critiques of the ongoing exploitation *and* shaming of the female body came from young, female, and racialized reporters, thus demonstrating the importance of including diverse voices in news and media as much as possible.

Chapter 6 “Kashing In”: Sex tape stars, Sexualization and Cynicism in the News

Introduction

During the 2008 U.S. presidential campaign, Republican candidate John McCain ran a political ad making an unfavourable comparison between his opponent – U.S. Senator and Democratic nominee Barack Obama – to other “celebrities” like Paris Hilton and Britney Spears. Paris Hilton responded with a satirical ad of her own, touting her qualifications and platform (including a nuanced energy policy) as a “hot celebrity” ready to turn the White House pink. While this ad was intended and apparently received as a joke (Armstrong, 2008c*; M. Robinson, 2008*), it foreshadowed the presidential run of fellow reality star and eventual U.S. president Donald Trump. In fact, Trump and Hilton share a very similar trajectory vis-à-vis privilege, inheritance, wealth and public renown. However, up until recently one of them was publicly discursively constructed as a “reality star” and the other, a businessman. While Paris Hilton may have today faded from the public spotlight, an examination of the gendered discourses around her stardom, especially in the context of the economic and political upheaval of the 2007/2008 era, could reveal some of the contributing factors that led to the rise of Trump and today’s “reality politics.” Furthermore, the “fall” of Hilton that coincided with the “rise” of fellow socialite-turned-reality/sex-tape-star Kim Kardashian comprises a broader shift in values that underlies neoliberal capitalism, and the reporting on both stars signaled the impending journalistic crisis that has come to characterize contemporary American news media. Paris Hilton in many ways served as the canary in the coal mine of American culture, while Kim Kardashian – like fellow heir/reality star Donald Trump – continues to pose a significant challenge to the gatekeeping forces of mainstream American and Canadian news media.

Whereas Chapter 4 looked at feminine failures of meritocratic “success,” this chapter deals with the ways that the media react to and discursively frame the apparent failures in meritocracy itself, as embodied in the sex-tape/reality television celebrity. I examine the news reporting on Paris Hilton and Kim Kardashian at two critical eras: 2007-2008 when Hilton was sentenced to jail for her DUI while Kardashian’s sex tape was released and her family’s reality television program debuted; as well as 2014 when Kardashian’s star power had long surpassed that of Hilton’s. In particular, including this later era allows for a comparison of the narratives around Kardashian’s unexpected longevity as well as the media’s self-reflective cynicism towards its own role in perpetuating that stardom (a cynicism that might account for the increasing sense of distrust being exploited by Trump in the U.S. and Premier Doug Ford in Ontario in their rallying against so-called “fake news”).

Instead of structuring this chapter chronologically, I build my discussion around three key themes: (1) *success policing*, a term I constructed to describe the reification of narratives of meritocracy that are threatened by the emergence of new and gendered forms of stardom; (2) cultural changes, which comprises both the sexualization/pornification of culture as well as the rise of reality television; (3) the news media coverage of other media coverage, or what I call *meta-coverage* of these stars. I compare and contrast the discourses from these two time periods (2007-2008 and 2014) in relation to each of the themes in order to answer my research questions: How do “old” news media frame Paris Hilton and Kim Kardashian in relation to their “leaked” sex tapes? What discourses do they circulate about privacy, labour, fame, and economic reward? I find that, despite these women’s privilege and potentially appealing neoliberal skillsets, they are often contained and undermined in the news reporting. They are additionally and paradoxically both assigned more agency than they each have in shaping broader culture (i.e.

changing the terms of “success,” particularly for women in America), and stripped of agency in relation to their own stardom and image (i.e. having no skills that underpin their public “success”). The news reporting uses gatekeeping frames to reinforce traditional media formats as more “legitimate” (i.e. work- and talent-based) than new media, while also undermining their own profession through the cynical reporting on superficial celebrity culture, amplifying rather than merely reflecting the broader public attention paid to these women at these moments.

I. Success Policing and Textual Containment

Paris Hilton has been described, in recent scholarship as, the “ultimate example of post-modern identity” (K. Fairclough, 2008, para. 13) and is thus, potentially, an ideal case study to examine the emergence of the so-called “post-truth” state of news coverage today. This state of “post-truth,” defined by the Oxford dictionary as “[r]elating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief” (post-truth, Oxford Dictionaries, n.d.), can be connected to a confluence of cultural trends in America, including the rise of reality television formats (which favour the affective realm over the rational/objective one), as well as the increased visibility and veneration of wealth, consumption, and “success” in neoliberal economies. These related trends are both traceable via the public paths and discourses around two of America’s most famous heir celebrities of the 2000s: Paris Hilton and Donald Trump.

Much like Donald Trump, Paris Hilton was born into wealth. However, Hilton vastly outperformed Trump in growing her fortune from a relatively modest \$5 million (compared to his \$200 million) to approximately \$100 million by the age of 34 (Cromwell, 2015). As discussed in a 2007 feature-length profile story on famous women’s mothers in *Vanity Fair* by

Judith Newman, Paris Hilton is the great, great granddaughter of hotelier Conrad N. Hilton. Both Conrad and his son, Paris' grandfather, Barron Hilton believed in a "strong work ethic" (Newman, 2007*) and, upon passing away, limited the inheritances for their children, giving much of their wealth away to charity instead. This left many – including profile writer Newman – skeptical of the net worth of Paris Hilton's immediate family, noting that her father, Rick, worked as a real estate broker in the Los Angeles area and likely earned a mere \$400,000 per year from the Hilton family fortune. Hilton's mother Kathy's own brief history dabbling in acting and reality television was invoked in this same profile to bolster the narrative of a money-hungry family willing to do whatever necessary for fame and attention. (Newman, 2007*).

Despite this narrative, a few of the stories about Paris Hilton that appeared across 2007-2008 did dedicate space to unpacking, and sometimes even highlighting the many ways in which Hilton had grown her own fortune over the years. While it could be, and often was, argued that the leaked sex tape of Paris Hilton and then-boyfriend Rick Solomon provided the platform that enabled Hilton to amass other business successes, the labour and skill necessary to expand one's wealth and success (and the potential "team" of people – Apprentices, perhaps? – that assisted Hilton in that endeavor) were most often occluded in the reporting on Hilton. That made the approximately 15 articles (out of 163 total in my corpus) about her businesses and philanthropy endeavors stand out from the others.

Four of these articles, however, were written in the context of a documentary about Paris Hilton that appeared at the 2008 Toronto International Film Festival and would likely not have otherwise appeared in the news. The remaining 11 articles discussed Paris' affiliated labels (including fashion and fragrance lines), her inheritance from her family, and her other ventures into non-reality television media, including a few brief stints in modelling and singing.

Comparatively speaking, it is not unusual for Americans who inherit wealth and/or fame to spin that publicity into a personal brand and media career. What is more remarkable are the ways that the framing of such a public career is shaped by gender, such that when two heirs (Hilton and Trump) enter into the domain of reality television, for instance, the white female heir is corralled into a fish-out-of-water narrative where her privilege is cynically presented as snobbery and, at times, even contempt for the less privileged (Fox's *The Simple Life*) while the white male heir is legitimized and offered authority as host of his own "business" show where he – and only he – has the acumen to adjudicate the skills and qualifications of people who are, for the most part, much more educated and qualified for the job than he is (NBC's *The Apprentice*).

a) *"Sluts" and dangerous men: constructing transgression via race and sexuality*

The reporting on Hilton's career endeavors do not examine the implications of gender on public legitimacy. The few defenses of Hilton I found draw upon the same common frames of her as "useless" and lacking "talent" or "skill," but point out that this phenomenon – in terms of female celebrity at least – is not new or unusual. For instance, in a feature-length report from *The Washington Post*, carried also in the *Ottawa Citizen*, Robin Givhan (2007*) writes about the "It" girl throughout modern history as an admired yet "wispily insubstantial" embodiment of her era. "It" girls have long existed publicly, Givhan argues, to serve no purpose other than embodying a "cultural mood." They do this by being famous for no particular reason other than "pedigree" and by attending famous parties (setting up a kind of chicken-or-egg scenario: what comes first, the fame or the parties?). What Hilton has going against her, in the eyes of this particular reporter, is the bad timing of her public partying ways (note that this is right around the time of the global economic recession): "[Hilton] is the golden-haired embodiment of all that seems to

have gone wrong in the culture. She is an uncomfortable measure of decadence, indifference, and selfishness” (Givhan, 2007*).

Such is her public persona at least. Despite the potential appeal of such traits as decadence, indifference, and selfishness in the neoliberal era, the media often draw upon these traits when it comes to discussions of Hilton (and Kardashian, as will soon be discussed) to engage in what I call *success policing*. By this term I mean that journalists often use language that undermines the skills and talent needed to market oneself in today’s “economy of visibility” (see Banet-Weiser, 2018, discussion from Theoretical Framework). They pass judgments on what constitute legitimate forms of success versus illegitimate ones, with the use of one’s sexuality for one’s own profit being exemplary of the latter. This can be observed in Givhan’s article. While she notes that Hilton’s high-profile partying contributed to her success, Givhan provides no comparison to, for instance, other socialite party-goers in Los Angeles who are unable to parlay that into a “brand” spanning several genres and formats, including film, television, fashion and fragrance lines (the latter of which alone generated for Hilton approximately \$2 billion in sales [Medina, 2014*]).

While other female celebrities make their ways to similar levels of fame and/or privilege through more “traditional” media (i.e. acting roles or music videos), Hilton ended up in the same place without apparently putting in the requisite “work,” or at least the kind of labour that can be perceived as working on a craft. Across numerous stories, Hilton is mentioned in the same sentence, paragraph or story as contemporaries Britney Spears and Lindsay Lohan (for instance, MacInnis, 2008*; Peyser, 2007*; Ridley, 2007*), despite her comparatively small output in terms of cultural products/contributions. The news media used this framing not to legitimize

Hilton, but rather to delegitimize Spears and Lohan, who both represented similar kinds of out-of-control privileged white femininity (as will be discussed more in section 2 of this chapter).

Rather than unpacking these narratives – perhaps exposing the ways in which film and television stardom depends, for young white women particularly, upon the performance and upkeep of a sexualized but innocent (sexually and otherwise) public persona (see K. Fairclough, 2008; Projansky, 2014; Chapter 4 of this thesis)⁹⁷ – the news media often reaffirmed its investment in narratives of meritocracy through its success policing. Journalists are just as immersed in such narratives as others in Western neoliberal capitalist societies. Like most career-driven people, journalists working for mainstream news organizations train for years for their profession, likely work in unpaid internships somewhere along the way with long overtime hours, and often rely on informal networks and hiring practices in order to secure and rise through jobs in what is, in many ways, a creative industry (see Connor et al., 2015). Much like those working in the tech industry discussed in the previous chapter, it is certainly possible that journalists like to imagine themselves as having “earned” their job/security through hard work and skill rather than privilege (privilege to be able to attend university, to be able to work precariously for extended arduous hours when starting out, to be able to “freelance” in the contemporary environment, thus foregoing employer benefits/insurance⁹⁸). Furthermore, as more and more citizens/audiences are called on to participate in news production, feeding news organizations with footage and/or tips, journalists become less and less the gatekeepers over content itself (Higgins-Dobney and Sussman, 2015). Because of this, journalists likely have either a conscious or unconscious investment in maintaining the media as a site of privilege,

⁹⁷ An exception to this is the *Newsweek* article by Abigail Jones (2014*) discussed later in this Chapter.

⁹⁸ As argued by James Fallows (1997), the movement of journalists themselves up the socio-economic ladder has produced a disconnect from working-class audiences and values, and increasingly, their discourse thus reflects attitudes and views that align with the more privileged in society.

exclusion and glamour in the eyes of the general public. Sorting others into “worthy” and “unworthy” celebrity categories helps to uphold this system.

Journalists are not the only ones invested in this success policing and they are surely not the only ones who benefit from it. As the income gap increases and more wealth amasses into the hands of fewer and fewer people (Duggan, 2003; Kroll, 2018), the media, which is increasingly owned by the billionaire class, invests in narratives that legitimize such wealth through the myth of meritocracy. Of the top 5 billionaires of 2018, according to *Forbes* magazine, three were media/tech moguls who hold significant power over the symbolic economy: Jeff Bezos, CEO and founder of Amazon; Bill Gates, founder of Microsoft; and Mark Zuckerberg, co-founder and CEO of Facebook (Kroll, 2018; The World’s Billionaires – Wikipedia). While newspaper owners specifically might not comprise the top 10 billionaires in the world (save for Bezos, who owns *The Washington Post*), they do increasingly own a larger portion of the news, thus shaping who and what gets reported on. For instance, Canada used to have two competing news conglomerates, Postmedia and Sun Media, but in 2015 Postmedia bought out Sun Media’s 175 newspapers for over \$300 million (CBC News, 2015). Paul Godfrey, a white, octogenarian man, served as president and CEO of Postmedia from 2010-2019, and was replaced in January (2019) by another white male (slightly younger) in Andrew MacLeod (Kolm, 2019). In 2016 Godfrey made \$1.66 million from Postmedia while the company laid off hundreds of workers and closed a printing plant in London, Ontario (Bradshaw, 2016). In February of 2019 MacLeod appeared on a TVO political affairs show to defend a Postmedia columnist’s racist rhetoric about refugees (TVO, 2019). The production and circulation of narratives about earned success, as well as the ongoing fearmongering toward minority groups, supports the current distribution of power and economics and shapes what stories get told and how in the news.

Even celebrities themselves are invested in the media's gatekeeping apparatus, taking advantage of their platforms to distinguish their own "accomplished" and "legitimate" fame from the more frivolous version embodied by stars like Hilton. For example, "media heiress" Lydia Hearst (who likely would cringe at that descriptor used in the *New York Post*) admonishes those who might compare her to Hilton: "I am a supermodel and have the award to prove it, and [Hilton] is a celebrity. There's no comparison" (*New York Post*, 2008*). Here Hearst's choice of invoking her supermodel career as exemplary of her legitimacy instead of her family's media dynasty demonstrates just how aware the billionaire class of owners is of the importance of meritocratic narratives. These narratives trickle down to all classes and levels of fame. "Former Miss USA" Shanna Moakler laments the lessening of achievement (in apparent comparison to beauty pageants) embodied by Hilton: "That's not talent and it sure doesn't deserve fame." (WENN, 2008c*).

While models and beauty pageant winners may not make the most effective critics of Hilton, writer and comedian Tina Fey holds more esteemed credentials in terms of "skill" and "talent." After berating Hilton in a radio interview with Howard Stern, Fey apologized for her language but held onto her sentiment: "Paris Hilton is a terrible role model and a *terrible young woman*. She needs to be ignored" (WENN, 2007c*, my emphasis). While it would be difficult to argue that Hilton is a great role model, the equation of bad role model with bad person/woman here is noteworthy. Fey herself benefits from certain privileges that have allowed her to build a strong public profile and lucrative career. Consciously or sub-consciously, passing judgment on how other women "succeed" helps to bolster her own claims to legitimate success which further entrenches her privilege. It also pits women against one another, feeding into larger narratives about generational clashes and "feminist" versus "anti-feminist" women.

My focus here is, however, on the news media's particular role in this relationship. In order to maintain its ability to police (women's) success, the news media often use what I call *textual containment* (see Patrick, 2017) – a pushback against or negation of any efforts made by Hilton to legitimize or extend her public presence by appearing in more reality shows (which entails, at the least, an element of affective labour) or by launching other product lines (which involves more traditionally-recognizable labour). For instance, in 2008 MTV tried to cash in on the Hilton phenomenon by producing a show called *Paris Hilton's my new BFF* [Best Friend Forever], wherein non-celebrities would compete for the titular position. In a write-up for the Marysville, California *Appeal-Democrat* newspaper, Josh Kendrix (2008*) gleefully describes the lack of interest in MTV's casting call for the new show: "Poor Paris Hilton. *Nobody cares* about having a shallow, *no longer relevant* socialite for a friend" (my emphasis). Although the tone is one of jest, journalists admitting to reporting on things that "no one cares about" and are "no longer relevant" is a recurrent theme across the reporting on Hilton that arguably sow seeds of distrust among their readers (can we trust them to report on relevant news when they are admitting to us that they are reporting on irrelevant news?) while chastising the readers who might, in fact, care about Hilton (why else would they be reading this gossip column?).

In a particularly derisive piece for the *New York Post*, Andrea Peyser (2007*) calls upon a long tradition of slut-shaming vocabulary and stereotypes to denounce the fame of Hilton in a 463-word article. Making no mention of her own role in perpetuating Hilton's stardom precisely through articles like this, Peyser calls her a "useless, talentless, directionless and pantyleless [sic] skank" who "contributes nothing – except for disease and driving summonses" (2007*). In fact, Peyser's article is one of the few in my Hilton corpus that so blatantly relies upon this figuration of Hilton as a wanton slut: "Her career was launched by a starring role in a blurry sex tape, in

which Paris engaged in energetic, barely legal intercourse with a man, *not her husband*” (my emphasis). Hilton was not married at the time, so the inclusion of this qualifier – the man in her sex tape was “not her husband” – serves not to clarify the identity of her male partner (in fact, Rick Solomon is not even once named in this piece) but rather to underline a key element of her transgression in the eyes of Peyser: promiscuous, public, unmarried sexuality.

This idea of the sexed-up heir having non-marital sex leading to fame and fortune inspired some reporters to ruminate on precisely how fame has changed in recent years, thus echoing the framing by some academics of Hilton as a “post-modern” star whose public persona demonstrates a noteworthy shift in celebrity (Fairclough, 2008; Hillyer, 2010). In contrast to the earlier-discussed piece by Givhan (which argued that famous-for-being-famous women have always existed), a feature for *The Toledo Blade* in Ohio dedicates over 900 words to analyzing why exactly Hilton, along with best-friend and reality co-star Nicole Richie as well as model Anna Nicole Smith are famous. Author Ryan E. Smith (2007*) starts off by speaking to industry “experts” to find out why fame has gone from being “earned through your accomplishments” to now being “predicated on how you look, how you act, and whether you’re an interesting story, regardless of accomplishment.” Although he then contradictorily claims that this is not “new,” and then goes on to juxtapose a history of “accomplished” people (i.e. men: Charles Lindbergh and John Glenn to be precise) to the “fame without particular achievement” of, for example, Zsa Zsa Gabor and Farrah Fawcett (both women), no mention is made by Smith of this gendered divide. Why is it that women are celebrated (or celebritized) for how they look or act and whether they are “an interesting story”? Why does the proliferation of media platforms – underlined by Smith as being a central force behind this “new” era of fame – afford the opportunity for more women specifically to become famous? These questions are not raised, let

alone answered by the male writer of this story. Here it is possible to trace a shift to “post-truth” news: a reporter’s sense that the terms of fame for women have changed is favoured over the facts provided in his own article suggesting otherwise.

Not all journalists displayed this interest in analyzing the contemporary state of stardom. Perhaps because their subject matter is generally much different, film critics demonstrated less anxiety over Paris Hilton when reviewing her appearances across several films at the time. For example, in a 2008 review of the film *The Hottie and the Nottie*, *Chicago Daily Herald* “Film Critic” Dann Gire (as stated in his byline) argues that Hilton is, in fact, the best part of this terrible film: “Amazingly, Hilton acquits herself nicely as Nat’s lip-glossed fantasy girl,” noting that her character’s similarities to her own public persona likely aided in her believability (Gire, 2008*).

In fall of 2008 Hilton received even more attention from film critics due to the documentary *Paris, not France*, premiering at the prestigious Toronto International Film Festival. Featuring interviews with many of her contemporaries – including Donald Trump (Daily Camera, 2008*) – the film follows a year in the life of Paris Hilton and was directed by Adria Petty, daughter of rock musician Tom Petty, thus lending a legitimacy to Petty’s artistry and the project. This legitimacy is reflected in the reviews of the film. For example, Associate Press “movie writer” (according to his byline) David Germain (2008*) asserts that the film offers a “lively, sympathetic glimpse” into the life of Hilton and shows her to be much more “self-possessed and well-spoken” than her public persona suggests. Hilton is quoted in the story, discussing how the “dumb-blond” “airhead” persona was suggested by the network executives at Fox, looking to cultivate a cross between *Legally Blonde* and *Green Acres* for their *The Simple Life* reality show (Germain, 2008*). Instead of mocking or questioning this central argument of

the film, the reviews in my corpus merely reported on it. Perhaps this is because film critics are generally less immersed in Paris Hilton news – and less required to report on her – than those whose central duty is entertainment and celebrity coverage. This comparative distance displayed by film critics is further highlighted once Hilton is arrested and the more “serious” journalists are forced to report on her, apparently undergoing somewhat of an existential crisis as will be discussed in Section 3 of this chapter.

While there was little overall effort to report on Hilton’s other business endeavors, as well as a tendency to undermine any labour that she did perform, another tactic of what I call success policing can be found at a more micro-analytic level: the descriptors used by journalists. These descriptors fall into two categories: the derision of her celebrity status (and/or skill, talent, smarts) and gendered language highlighting Hilton’s presumed sexual promiscuity, much like the previously-discussed article by Peysner for the *New York Post* wherein the public display of sexuality is enough in-and-of-itself to connote promiscuity and therefore transgressive/aggressively visible female sexuality. Examples of the former, as well as their sources, are summarized in table 6.1, below.

Descriptor	Journalist	Newspaper/Source
“celebutard” and “bubblehead”	Li, 2007*	<i>New York Post</i>
“spoiled brat” and “vacuous so-called star”	Ridley, 2007*	<i>New York Daily News</i>
“useless, extravagant human being” who has “contributed nothing”	Carroll, 2007*	<i>Indiana Daily Student</i>

Table 6.1 Descriptors of Hilton’s celebrity

Whether one considers these descriptors to be accurate or not, they do discursive work in policing success, marking out who and what is considered to “contribute” to society and who is nothing but a “spoiled brat.” Even more insidiously, however, these descriptors undermine the

journalistic profession, suggesting to readers that news reporting itself is illegitimate and superficial.

The other kinds of terms used to describe Hilton focus on her transgressive sexuality. These derogatory terms appeared in stories about Hilton’s stolen personal photos and videos from her storage locker, thus positioning her as a “slut” whose privacy/sexuality cannot be violated because it is already tainted. As a privileged, blonde-haired, blue-eyed, young thin woman, Hilton benefits from having an assumed purity to transgress. The double transgression on Hilton’s part – not only *being* too sexual but also *flaunting* it and even *using* it to her advantage (and not disguising that use through a more traditionally acceptable pursuit of, say, acting) – inspires extremely harsh pushback from reporters. Some examples are included in Table 6.2, below, along with the news sources from which they were culled.

Descriptor	Journalist	Newspaper/Source
“bamboo-legged bimbo”	Haskins, 2007*	<i>Columbia Daily Tribune</i>
“self-pimper”	Sutherland, 2007*	<i>Kitchener-Waterloo Record</i>
“walking blow-up doll”	No author	Canwest News Service, 2007*
“acts like a drunken slut”	Gensler, 2007a*	<i>The Philadelphia Daily News</i>

Table 6.2 Descriptors of Hilton’s sexuality

The anger and derision displayed by such reporting was not as apparent in the reporting on Kim Kardashian, who was just emerging into the limelight at that time. While one could assume that, because she was following in her former friend’s footsteps, Kardashian was not as transgressive, I would argue that her family background, her aesthetic, and her personal life read as much more racially ambiguous and, therefore, also lack the assumed sexual purity of her blonde-haired, blue-eyed contemporary.

The Kardashians often make reference to their Armenian heritage, including within my dataset (for example, Lo, 2007*; *New York Post*, 2007d*), particularly in explaining their physical appearance. While that does not make them racialized (Armenia is located in Eastern

Europe – the Caucasus region to be precise and, therefore, Caucasian), their dark features and voluptuous curves represent an exoticized, although no less unattainable form of mainstream beauty than that of the stick-thin, blonde-haired, blue-eyed Hilton. As I have discussed elsewhere in relation to Italian-American identity on *Jersey Shore* (Patrick, 2017), there has long existed in America a hierarchy of whiteness, wherein certain European identities and ethnicities are (discursively) constructed as more “white” because of their invisibility (see also Deliovsky, 2010; Dyer, 1997; hooks, 1992). Normative whiteness not only prioritizes the Northern/Western European physical features (blue eyes, blonde hair), but also insists on the erasure of ethnic difference across categories of whiteness. In publicly “celebrating” their Armenian heritage, then, the Kardashians “perform” non-whiteness in ways that complicate their racial status as white women.

Additionally, the Kardashian sisters’ involvement with men of colour – and, in particular, Black men – not only associates them with Blackness, but also with sexualized imagery (and, in particular, Kim’s participation in husband Kanye West’s music videos strengthens such associations). Furthermore, their connection to the infamous O.J. Simpson murder trial, in which their late father Robert Kardashian was both friend and counsel to Simpson, also associates them with Blackness. Across the introductory news reporting on Kardashian from 2007-2008, 17 stories make mention of her connection to former NFL star O.J. Simpson in order to contextualize her stardom. Kardashian may come from almost as privileged a circle as Hilton, but her family’s legacy is rooted in a scandalous murder trial (to be discussed further in Part 2 of this Chapter) rather than a luxury hotel brand.

However, the majority of articles – both in 2007 and in 2014 – instead emphasize the role of her infamous sex tape when contextualizing Kardashian’s stardom. For instance, a 2007

Washington Post article, which contrasts the rise of Kim and the fall of Paris, immediately mentions Kardashian's sex tape, describing her as "another of those pretty rich girls who've learned the hard way that love does not last forever, but those sex tapes do" (de Moraes, 2007*). Seven paragraphs into the story, De Moraes provides more details about the Kardashian family, including the names of all sisters, and the fact that mother Kris is married to "former Olympian Bruce Jenner [sic]". Finally, Robert Kardashian is mentioned as Kim's father, with a note that he was part of O.J. Simpson's legal defense team. That this piece of information is often buried or unmentioned in the reporting on Kardashian at the outset of her fame (17 articles out of 101) helps to legitimize the narrative that she comes out of nowhere with a sex tape (when the reality is that she is well-connected and runs in some of the most privileged circles in California).

In fact, Kim's sex tape with singer Ray J had apparently been shot several years prior to its release leading up to the premiere of her reality show in 2007. The emerging "scandal" around the sex tape and the use of said scandal by E! in its promotional discourse (as will be discussed in the next section), points to at least some complicity or strategy in aligning its release with the premiere of the TV show. Multiple stories from World Entertainment News Network (although admittedly this is not the most reputable news source) suggest that the sex tape was filmed and sold to Vivid Entertainment as far back as 2003 (Associated Press, 2007*; WENN, 2014d*), with trailers for the film being leaked online in 2006 (WENN, 2007d*). Despite the fact that at the time of the tape's filming and release (across 2003-2007), Ray J was the more famous participant – younger brother to singer Brandy and a singer with his own recording and acting career – the outrage was predictably gendered, targeting Kim and berating her efforts to extend herself publicly. The "scandal" affected Ray J – a 26-year-old Black man – quite differently than it did Kim, who, either despite or because of the sex tape, transcended the scandal and built

unanticipated media longevity. While initially celebrating the tape, and saying it was good for his career, Ray J's stardom soon faded, as he was first dropped from Jacksonville's Christmas parade and then, later on (by 2014), was most often referred to as her sex tape partner and not a star in his own right.

Ray J's fall from grace illustrates an interesting phenomenon wherein the concern over the (d)evolution of American/celebrity culture is rooted in the increased visibility of sexuality. As noted above, Ray J's sex tape was cited in a news story about how he was dropped from the Jacksonville parade wherein he was supposed to appear alongside his sister Brandy (Associated Press, 2007*). When news of Ray J's attendance sparked outrage, city officials claimed that he was never booked alongside Brandy and reassured everyone that it would only be her serving as grand marshal: "Our goal wasn't to offend anyone. It's a Christmas parade. It's about families, the birth of Jesus Christ" (Associated Press, 2007*). The Associated Press article also notes, however, that Brandy had "also battled negative publicity" that year as she was potentially being charged with vehicular manslaughter after her Land Rover hit another car killing the driver, a 38-year-old wife and mother. The sexual transgression by Ray J – who, again, was a Black man having sex with a white woman on camera, a relation that has inspired decades of racial anxiety and violence in America – is, in city officials' view, worse than Brandy's fatal collision, even though this incident could have sparked similar outrage as the arrests of Hilton and Lohan for dangerous driving. The greater transgression, as created through this discourse and event, is sexuality. In the next section I examine the anxiety surrounding Hilton and Kardashian as an example of the "sexualization" of American culture and thus aligns them with Lindsay Lohan and Britney Spears as post-feminist figures of loss and nostalgia for a better, more "innocent" time for (white) women and girls.

b) Tech mogul or too much?: Kim Kardashian and the game of exposure

Before delving into the implications of a cultural shift signified by Hilton and Kardashian, however, it is worth briefly examining how textual containment and success policing operate discursively in relation to Kim Kardashian at the height of her fame. While the reporting on her in 2007 as her reality show was launched did not seem to anticipate the impact she would have, by 2014 her star power had managed to surpass Hilton's (and looks to be in no danger of fading soon). While it is problematic to attribute this longevity and success to any single point in her career (including the sex tape), it would be difficult to deny that at least some of Kardashian's ongoing appeal is rooted in her use of new media technologies to engage with her fan base. In 2014 a pertinent example of this kind of engagement became apparent via the success of her blockbuster app *Kim Kardashian: Hollywood*.

In fact, the game did well enough to inspire several news stories about its economic and cultural significance in 2014. Often framed in terms of surprise – how could someone like Kardashian be behind a successful tech venture? – there were varying attempts to downplay her role in creating the game or to deride the game itself. An example of the latter is found in a story for the *Knoxville News Sentinel* by Ina Hughs, who starts off her article by partaking in some success policing, noting that Kardashian is usually in the media “for doing nothing. And wearing nothing” but that “recently she has been up to something” (Hughs, 2014*). This “something,” Hughs notes, will earn her an expected \$200 million that year. Hughs goes onto describe the app as a game “in which players are challenged to do nothing as well as [Kardashian] herself has done nothing.” Presumably the description is tongue-in-cheek, as a game would necessarily require the player to do something, but there is no indication in the article that Hughs actually

tried out the game. Shortly after her description Hughes notes that her information was retrieved from CNN.com, suggesting that perhaps a tech reporter might have been able to provide a more accurate description of the game.

Deena Douara's (2014*) *Globe and Mail* pop culture column includes commentary on the cultural implications of Kardashian's game where the aim of the game is to become famous. Douara notes that the ways to succeed in the game (i.e. become famous) include "wearing the right clothes, hitting the right clubs and flirting with the right men" (2014*) while also pointing out that "A winning in-game strategy does not appear to involve education, hard work or innovation. If young people were to model themselves after Kim Kardashian, would they start with a sex tape? A Playboy shoot?" While I have not played the game myself, I could not find any confirmation that the game suggests or makes possible for players to "start with a sex tape" and/or "Playboy shoot," despite those events seemingly leading to "real life" success for many women. Furthermore, the comparative field of video games, wherein extreme violence is the "winning in-game strategy," makes this game seem much more innocuous, especially for young people.

While Douara's was the only of nine articles in my corpus that spoke to a user of the game, who was described as a "24-year-old entrepreneur," the concern of the effects of this game on "young people" is a frame employed in both Douara and Hugh's articles. Despite Hughes' observation in her article that the game requires real in-app purchases that would necessitate access to a credit card (and then suggesting that parents would have to provide the credit card are, thus, somewhat responsible for whether and how young people consume the game), she still attributes the success of the app to kids: "As sales evidently indicate, kids are finding the new app 'totally addictive'" (Hughes, 2014*). Without citing supporting evidence, Hughes asserts that

kids are the “target market” of the game. The 24-year-old entrepreneur quoted in Douara’s article might suggest otherwise, praising the game for “allow[ing] you to have a dual life, while still incorporating things that you enjoy such as the gaming aspect, social media, love and relationships and career-building” (2014*). No journalist offered comparative descriptors of other games “targeting” kids that incorporate relationships and career-building based on authentic in-app purchases linked to existing credit cards.

One article offering a more nuanced analysis of the game and its (potentially self-aware) commentary on our current culture appeared in the magazine *The Atlantic*. *The Atlantic* is a U.S.-based journalism magazine providing commentary and analysis on current events (A 160-Year Tradition, n.d.). It has a relatively high circulation rate: 516,754 in 2017, according to the Alliance for Audited Media (AAM: Total Circ., n.d.) and thus is likely more widely read than most of the newspapers in my corpus. Its publisher and VP is a woman, Hayley Romer, and since 2017 it is majority-owned by the Democrat-leaning Emerson Collective, a foundation created by Laurene Powell Jobs (Robbins, 2018). Powell Jobs is Steve Jobs’ widow and heir (Jobs was co-founder of Apple). Before joining *The Atlantic* in 2012, Hayley Romer worked for Condé Nast as Executive Director of Corporate Sales (Hayley Romer, SVP and Publisher, n.d.).

While these relations may seem inconsequential, the Kardashian-friendly publications (including, as will be discussed in part three of this chapter *Paper* and *Vogue* magazines) are all connected via the media conglomerate that is Condé Nast. I have not been able to uncover economic or personnel links between Condé Nast and E! Network (which airs *Keeping Up With the Kardashians*), but the support for Kardashian expressed through these publications must be examined in the context of an environment that profits off her continued presence in the media. Further, there need not be a connection between E! television and Condé Nast in order to

demonstrate an economic bias towards Kim Kardashian, as her stardom is spread out onto several platforms, of which E! receives only a portion of the profit. It is also worth noting that several of the Kardashian-friendly publications (and foundations) are run by women, who might be more sympathetic to Kardashian's ambition and strategies than others in positions of power within the media.

Much like the other news articles about Kardashian's app, the piece for *The Atlantic* is written by a culture commentator rather than a technological one. Unlike the other journalists, however, Megan Garber (2014*) uses her 1,659-word article to highlight Kardashian's role not only in relation to the game (ascribing her agency along the way), but also in relation to our culture and consumer capitalism more broadly. Before delving into the specifics of the game, Garber dedicates a large portion of the article to contextualizing Kardashian's stardom. While the sex tape is mentioned,⁹⁹ it is treated as an aside, rather than the central cause of Kardashian's fame: "Kim gives an age newly obsessed with self-documentation a perfectly vacant-stared mascot. Her preferred medium, the TV show and the sex tape notwithstanding, is the photograph" (Garber, 2014*). In an article that fairly clearly analyzes the system rather than the individual, Garber muses:

Knowingly or not, Kim takes Hollywood's basest expectations about women—its treatment of them as, essentially, walking sex dolls—and doubles down. Was this what you wanted? Kim's Spandex would like to know. Kim is self-satirizing, certainly, but it's an especially cutting form of satire. By laughing at herself, she also laughs at a system that allows for a Kim Kardashian to exist in the first place.

⁹⁹ All of the articles in my corpus include a reference to the sex tape, as that was one of the search terms. For comparative purposes I also conducted a search across the same time period (2014) without using "sex tape" as a search term. In total that returned 5,616 articles. Therefore, articles that mention the words "sex tape" make up only 4.7% of the articles about Kim Kardashian in 2014, demonstrating that she was often able to escape that framing.

This description of Kardashian, in the midst of hundreds of articles about her vapidness and uselessness, is surprising. That it was connected to an article about her tech venture – and cleverly headlined, “Kapitalism, With Kim Kardashian” – reinforces the link to a specific skillset and therefore works to bolster the author’s claims that there is perhaps more to Kardashian than meets the eye.

As noted throughout this thesis, the marketing of and profiting from women’s sexuality is not unique to the era of social media, but Kardashian’s ability to entrepreneurialize her sexuality, to operate outside and alongside the traditional structures that ensure those profits are corralled into the hands of producers, directors, and studio executives, presents a potentially drastic threat to the corporate mainstream media business model. Kardashian’s extended symbolic power, that is, her longevity as a pop culture figure, marks her out as different from Paris Hilton, whose descent into jail and scandal followed a much more predictable path. The reporting on Kardashian’s “use” of her sexuality and, in particular, her willingness to appear naked in some instances (notably, ones where she maintains some form of control/profit) mark her as an illegible victim when violations of privacy occur.

Like the hundreds of other female celebrities targeted in August of 2014, Kardashian’s private nude photos were stolen and released onto 4chan and Reddit. Unlike the reporting on, for instance, Jennifer Lawrence, Kardashian’s nude photos received little coverage in the news.¹⁰⁰ Of the 115 Kardashian articles written in 2014 that comprise my data, only eight stories (or 7%) were about the hack.¹⁰¹ Of those eight, three articles clearly articulate a victim-blaming stance,

¹⁰⁰ Her name did come up many times in the data examined for the last chapter, mostly in the context of lists of celebrities who were violated, demonstrating the importance of including her name (perhaps generating clicks) in the news reporting on that issue. On the other hand, in the data culled for this chapter, in which “Kim Kardashian” was a key search term, fewer stories about the iCloud hack were returned, demonstrating the lack of attention this issue was given in relation to other stories about the star (including her marriage and various magazine covers).

¹⁰¹ This parallels the coverage given to Hilton’s stolen photos (and other possessions) from 2007 wherein only 13 out of 163 articles discussed the violation.

although one of them (Justin Moyer writing for the *Washington Post*¹⁰²), presents that argument in order to critique it (Moyer, 2014b*).

Perhaps a more notable discursive maneuver than making Kardashian responsible for her own violation was how she was made responsible for all privacy violations. In his article for the *Los Angeles Daily News* columnist Doug McIntyre (2014*) laments the death of privacy at the hands of technology with a not-so-subtle jab at Kardashian: “While we still believe we have the right to our own personal space, especially those intimate moments that are nobody’s business except you, your partner *and the camera crew you’ve hired to document the event*, reality is very different” (my emphasis). Although the reference here is clearly to reality stars – the frame employed suggesting that those who agree to be filmed in one context lose their right to privacy/consent – McIntyre further extends this ethos to all engagements with technology: “The most chilling aspect of this story [the celebrity hack] is not just how vulnerable we’ve become to snoops, spies and hackers rather [sic] how *willingly* we’ve punted away our private lives for digital access” (McIntyre, 2014*, my emphasis). The exchange of privacy for digital access – an access that makes possible new forms of profit and success for (certain) women – is a more “chilling” prospect to this male writer than the malicious attacks and motivations of hackers.

This binary relation between technology and privacy – a relation that is discursively constructed by the news media in this kind of reporting – breaks down when a different form of privacy violation causes an uproar. Although it is only mentioned in two articles in my corpus, another big news story in the fall of 2014 was the unauthorized addition of the U2 album “Songs of Innocence” onto Apple user’s devices. As reported by Sun Media’s Liz Braun (carried in the

¹⁰² This is the same journalist who, in another story about the iCloud hack, quotes Sojourner Truth in providing an intersectional analysis of the differing responses to the white celebrity victims versus the Black celebrity victims (see Moyer, 2014a*).

Ottawa Sun), the uproar over the promotional intrusion into people's iClouds – the album was added to all Apple users' iTunes library, but not downloaded into their devices – prompted immediate action from the multi-billion dollar company, who “create[d] a dedicated page that lets irate non-listeners remove the album quickly and easily” (Braun, 2014b*). In this report the distinction between consent and non-consent is upheld: “*innocent* music fans are said to be hysterical over the discovery that a new U2 album, *Songs of Innocence*, has been added to their iTunes library *without their consent*” (Braun, 2014b*, my emphasis). In this case, the user of technology is innocent (as opposed to “willing”), their consent is violated, and their backlash is justified. Listening to music on iTunes, or even owning an iPhone with its automatic use of the iCloud, is not framed as a “risky” engagement with technology. Certain uses of new media technology are thus common-sensically framed as dangerous (i.e. women's use of technology to document/monetize their lives on reality shows and/or to present or engage with their sexuality) while others are “normal” and come with an expectation of privacy (i.e. listening to music and, as seen in the previous chapter, conducting financial transactions).

The policing of women's “proper” use of technology marks out a terrain wherein certain performances of neoliberal post-feminism become undesirable and even immoral. As noted by Jessalynn Keller in her discussions of Tyra Banks (2014) and Tavi Gevinson (2015), women who embrace entrepreneurialism, a post-feminist sense of empowerment (valuing individual choice and femininity), and “authentic” self-presentation through new media formats are often celebrated by the media and culture at large. What differs in the entrepreneurialism of Hilton and Kardashian specifically is their addition of (non-“empowering” versions of) sex into the equation. In the next section, I examine how this sexual entrepreneurialism was contained on both sides: on the one hand, by feminist-like discourses critiquing the sexualization of women by

our society and, on the other hand, by a media industry unwilling or unable to condemn men for the ways in which they too profit from, and maintain, such sexualization.

II. Cultural Shifts: Sexualization, Pornification and Reality Television

a) Sexualization, Pornification

As was seen in the Disney chapter (4) of this thesis, a recurring theme across the reporting on celebrity culture in 2007-2008 is the anxiety over young, famous women not performing “success” properly. This framing draws upon and reinforces post-feminist narratives that position privileged white women as simultaneously equal to men and free to make life choices, yet unable to manage this new freedom (McRobbie, 2007; 2009). Paris Hilton, Britney Spears, and Lindsay Lohan, because of their racial and class privilege (the latter one applying to Hilton), were supposed to comprise the “can-do” girls of the post-feminist generation (see Harris, 2004): reaping the rewards of a second-wave fight for choice, economic equality and sexual freedom. Their inability, however, to balance that delicate line between “empowered” sexuality and out-of-control sexuality demonstrates the impossible “double-binds” of post-feminist logic (Fairclough, 2008; McRobbie 2007). Kim Kardashian, on the other hand, emerges right at a moment where, one could argue, post-feminist ideologies shift into what Sarah Banet-Weiser (2018) refers to as “popular feminism”: a resurgence of (white, liberal) feminist discourses into the mainstream. The repudiation of feminism is over, as it is increasingly revealed to be relevant in a world in which gender inequity is vastly demonstrable. Kim Kardashian represents that ongoing inequality: instead of marketing a neoliberal, post-feminist sense of empowerment, Kardashian embraces patriarchal/capitalist logic and sells those ideals back to her audience. As described by Megan Garber (2014) for *The Atlantic* article above, “Kim

takes Hollywood's basest expectations about women—its treatment of them as, essentially, walking sex dolls—and doubles down.” Kardashian thus becomes a site of both hegemonic ideals and a target of feminist critique.

This is perhaps why Hilton, Spears and Lohan are often conflated and separated from the image of Kardashian. While Kardashian thrives off success, Hilton, Spears and Lohan are destroyed by it (as signified through their respective arrests, hospitalizations and trips to rehab, none of which have yet occurred with Kardashian). What aligns Hilton with Spears and Lohan is not their paths to renown (i.e. meritocratic fame) but their transgressive white womanhood. Together, Hilton, Spears and Lohan serve as examples of the dangers of “empowered” white feminine success and (sexual) excess, to the extent that one could argue that these two terms often converge: the dangers of female *sexcess*, perhaps? (MacInnis, 2008*; Skenazy, 2007*; Verini, 2007*). Not only are these women conflated and invoked by journalists as a sign of the dangers of success, their use – and loss of control – of their sexuality becomes symptomatic of a broader concern over the shift in media itself from an industry that rewards merit to a site in which “uselessness” and “pointlessness” abound (Thomas and Piazza, 2007*). The paradox of the reporting on this new *sexcess* for women, of course, is that their use and point is precisely their sexuality and that female stardom based on sex appeal is not new, only the ways that it is managed and monetized are. Kardashian, on the other hand, embraces and makes visible this management and monetization of sex: posting more and more nude photos rather than trying to counter or change that public image of herself. In the process, she also distances herself from hegemonic (chaste) white femininity, as do journalists in their constant discursive separation of Kardashian from Hilton (who is repeatedly mentioned alongside Spears and Lohan, with whom she has much less in common).

In that sense, there is a reasonable argument to be made about sexuality becoming more visible – and therefore more profitable – in popular culture at these particular moments. Several feature-length stories in both eras examined this trend; some displaying much more anxiety about the shift than others. In a 1,220 word feature for *Esquire* magazine¹⁰³ in 2008, for example, Stephen Marche (2008*) laments today's "culture of instant accreditation" wherein "[h]omemade pornography is do-it-yourself celebrity." Marche, a Canadian white male "novelist" (according to his *Esquire* profile) in his 30s, suggests that this culture is particularly appealing to "young Americans" but does not include any interviews with said young people.

In a piece for the *New York Times*, reporter Stephanie Rosenbloom (2007*) does interview a series of young pre-teens and finds that they do not, in fact, hold such DIY celebrities in as high esteem as the news media assume (perhaps precisely because the news media regularly call them "useless" "sluts" and "bimbos"). 10-year-old Jamie Barton asserts that Hilton "spends all this time acting like everyone else doesn't mean anything" and that "It's just me, me, me." When asked about Hilton, 12-year-old Diamond Martin says: "I don't see her as a role model. I'm not sure what she's really ever done actually" (Rosenbloom, 2007*). The same story, however, contains many ominous quotes from adults contradicting the kids' claims, such as Dr. Richard Gallagher, director of the Parenting Institute at the Child Study Center of New York University, arguing that despite the tweens' apparently sensible judgment in relation to these celebrities, "there may be a delayed effect" on them. CosmoGirl editor in chief Susan Schulz says that "every kid is trying to have a Paris Hilton kind of night at their prom" without qualifying what, exactly, a "Paris Hilton kind of night" is (extravagant partying? Making a sex

¹⁰³ *Esquire* magazine is owned by the Hearst company – founded by William Randolph Hearst III, whose father, William Randolph Jr., is the elder brother of Lydia Hearst's grandfather, Randolph Apperson Hearst. Lydia Hearst's name came up earlier in this chapter when she objected to being compared to Paris Hilton, noting that she was a "supermodel" while Hilton was a "celebrity."

tape?) or reflecting on her magazine's role in the contemporary culture. Rosenbloom's article was one of the few in my corpus of 163 articles about Hilton that actually spoke to young people, despite several others lamenting the influence that sexualized "do-nothing" celebrities are having on that group.

In 2014 those sentiments did not seem to be waning. In another of the few articles that spoke to young people (and parents) about this trend, *Newsweek* magazine delved into the potential causes and ramifications of sexualized culture for young women in 2014 (before the iCloud hack). This article mirrors an earlier one that also ran in *Newsweek* in 2007 discussed in my Disney chapter, although this feature is three times longer at 10,825 words. As noted previously, *Newsweek* circulates widely in the US, with approximately three million subscribers in 2006 (Matsa, 2013). This means that this story was likely one of the most widely read of those in my data and, as the earlier *Newsweek* article does, ruminates on the dangerous influences of (female) celebrity on young girls. Seven years later the media is still grappling with what is happening in celebrity culture and inciting panics about young women and girls.

Notably, the 2014 article written by Abigail Jones takes a similar point of entry to my own research using a diachronic analysis: interviewing the same group of girls in 2009 when they are all young tweens and then again four and a half years later, when they are sophomores in high school. Both sets of interviews with the girls suggest that the media and cultural disapproval of celebrity antics are being absorbed: in 2009 the girls "unanimously agree[d] that Miley Cyrus is a bad influence," while in 2013, they "*hate* Kim Kardashian, who they say is only famous for making a sex tape" (Jones, 2014*, my emphasis).

Despite the apparent media literacy of young women, the article demonstrates ongoing anxieties about the impact of celebrity culture, and more specifically about the role of celebrity

culture in sexualizing young women, rather than the role of lingerie, cosmetics, clothing or other industries profiting off said sexualization. For instance, despite Madison's (then 11 years old) assertion at the outset of the story that she would like to be "either an archeologist or a Victoria's Secret model" one day (Jones, 2014*), the company's obvious efforts to market to little girls is given scant attention across the article (mentioned two times) compared to both Cyrus (mentioned five times across the article) and Kardashian (mentioned four times). Nor does the author discuss the company's annual fashion show which airs on prime-time network television.

What is given shared responsibility with female celebrities in the sexualization of young women, however, is new media. Citing statistics suggesting that girls spend eight to 12 hours a day being exposed to media (and providing no corresponding number for boys), Jones argues that girls are increasingly spending their time "communicating, posting photos, playing games, surfing the web, watching videos and socializing," past-times that might seem innocuous or even necessary skills to develop, but here are presented as dangerous: "When TV, music, social media and the Internet are used as baby-sitters – when adults don't ask girls questions or encourage them to think critically (and even sometimes when they do) – a *dangerous* scenario emerges: The media start to parent" (Jones, 2014*, my emphasis). No consideration is given of girls' potentially empowering (and even feminist) uses of new media, as discussed by, for instance Keller, Mendes, and Ringrose (2018) in their analysis of girls' use of Twitter to challenge sexist dress codes (see also Banet-Weiser, 2018, pp. 138-139). In the news, girls' use of technology is repeatedly framed as inherently risky: a victim-blaming and online-space-policing discourse that has been echoed numerous times throughout the reporting analyzed in this thesis.

A clear difference between this article and that from *Newsweek* seven years earlier is the framing of social media as playing a key role in the sexualization of girls (despite similar

concerns circulating in the pre-social media era), letting parents off the hook for both the increased sexualization of girls (who is buying them their Victoria Secret lingerie?) and their access to media (who is providing/paying their cell phone plans?). Quotes from parents imply that media access is inevitable: “The kids are FaceTiming all the time” laments Monica, mother of 10-year-old Hayley who “uses FaceTime, Instagram, Snapchat and Vine” (Jones, 2014*), though one might assume that Hayley has not herself purchased the devices and plans necessary for all this connectivity. Similarly, 10-year-old Samantha’s father Dave laments “The Internet and cell phones – you can’t get away from anything now” (Jones, 2014*).

Speaking with several psychologists and researchers, Jones notes that girls are developing earlier and are becoming sexually active at an earlier age. This assertion counters the statistics presented in the 2007 *Newsweek* article, which, despite the discursive panic, presented evidence that the age of sexual activity was rather stagnant, and that teen pregnancy was on the decline (Deveny et al., 2007*).¹⁰⁴ In 2014, new media seems to be the critical difference. A direct link is made between the growth of social media/reality television stars and sexualization, even though the girls themselves are making a different, perhaps more important link: the one between women’s appearance and their success. As stated by Cat, who in 2013 is 15 years old, “you only see successful women who are successful for being pretty [...] you never hear people say, ‘Oh, I want to be like Blake Lively because she’s such a good actress’” (Jones, 2014*). Perhaps the biggest danger presented by social media, then, is removing the last bits of pretense that a woman’s success is at all related to being a “good actress.”

¹⁰⁴ Within this 2014 article there is a contradictory view presented: that of Amy Astler, editor-in-chief of *Teen Vogue*, who asserts that across her time at the magazine she has seen a shift in her largely female audience from being interested in “the fluff of fame” towards more serious considerations of their future, including a focus on ambition, leadership and education (Jones), although the “good news” portion of the article was a relatively small one page out of 17.5 pages. This affirms Banet-Weiser’s (2018) assertion that today feminist discourses about women’s rights/issues are becoming mainstreamed.

This *Newsweek* article did not contain interviews with young men, despite the girls' clear statements that girls at school "do slutty things" for the purpose of attaining approval from boys (Jones, 2014*). There were, however, a couple of feature stories in relation to this cultural shift toward sexualization that did interview or discuss men. In a feature on porn, part of a series of articles for the *Los Angeles Times* (which was also carried in the *Windsor Star*), Reed Johnson (2008*) interviews Hollywood filmmakers about the crossover careers of female porn stars, particularly two that were recently tapped by respected auteur directors to star in their films. The quotes from the directors – who are not framed as being responsible for the trend they are perpetuating with such casting and content – are particularly noteworthy in their celebration of how willing female porn stars are to do whatever is asked of them. Academy Award-winner Steven Soderbergh says of Sasha Grey starring in his film *The Girlfriend Experience*: "It certainly didn't seem like there was anything I could suggest that she couldn't handle" while Kevin Smith savours his freedom (in comparison to "regular" actresses, one might assume) to ask his young star Katie Morgan to take her clothes off for his film *Zack and Miri Make a Porno*: "there's no sort of, 'Gee, shucks, can you take your top off?'" (Johnson, 2008*). While Paris Hilton's name is invoked in this article to signify the pornification of America (in fact, here she is specifically named by Soderbergh), Steven Soderbergh and Kevin Smith's names do not come up in other news stories about the dangers of an over-sexualized culture vis-à-vis young, impressionable Americans.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁵ Soderbergh's 2009 film *The Girlfriend Experience* grossed a marginal \$695,840 at the box office, a substantially smaller figure than his other films such as the *Ocean's* series or *Erin Brockovich* (Steven Soderbergh Movie Box Office Results, n.d.) and thus might escape charges of influencing mainstream American culture at the time. However, Smith's film *Zack and Miri Make A Porno*, starring Seth Rogan and Elizabeth Banks, was the director's second-highest grossing film upon release, out-earning his "cult classics" such as *Chasing Amy* and *Jay and Silent Bob Strike Back* (Kevin Smith Movie Box Office Results, n.d.)

A few men whose names did arise in relation to this trend, however, were the key figures involved in the filming and “leaking” of Paris Hilton’s infamous tape: her sexual partner appearing in the film with her, ex-boyfriend Rick Salomon, and the producer/distributor of the tape Kevin Blatt, both of whom could be said to have profited from the tape as much as, if not more, than Hilton. While neither Blatt nor Salomon were named specifically in any of the (several) feature-length stories lamenting the rise of pornography in American culture, there were other contexts where not only do reporters frame them as being responsible for the “leak” (as opposed to Hilton, however she may have profited), but also highlight them in relation to the “shady” business of stolen sex-tape/porn distribution more broadly. Two separate articles from World Entertainment News Network (no authors listed) single out Rick Salomon as being responsible for Hilton’s earlier tape going public, noting, in one report that it “was brought to the public’s attention in 2004 by ex-boyfriend Rick Salomon” (WENN, 2007e*), while another more direct description notes: “Hilton was caught on camera by her then-boyfriend Rick Salomon, *who later released* the explicit footage, entitled *1 Night in Paris*, in 2005” (WENN, 2007f*, emphasis mine).

In other instances, the news media specifically make an effort to frame both Salomon and Hilton as complicit in the tape’s release. For example, a story in the *Washington Post* does suggest that Salomon was behind the “leak,” but follows with the sentence: “Instead of fighting to stop it coming out, [Hilton] allegedly made a deal with him, which meant she could keep a cut of the profits from the subsequent DVD release” (Argetsinger and Roberts, 2007*). Salomon’s name came up often in the reporting on Hilton across 2007-2008. Several stories in my original corpus (that were removed for not being about Hilton) followed his brief courtship of and marriage to actress/model Pamela Anderson in 2007-2008, as well as one story about how he

would like to “make more sex tapes” (WENN, 2008d*). That he was unable to parlay his role in the sex tape into more steady celebrity was not often remarked upon, as that would require a gendered analysis of how fame operates and possibly even consideration that there is more to Hilton’s stardom than merely the tape itself.

While Hilton’s sexual partner receives a small portion of the blame in the “leak” of her sex tape, the subsequent release of more of Hilton’s “personal” photos and videos is met with scorn on the part of journalists. In what seems to be clearly a crime – there is no indication in the reporting that this violation was intentional or strategic on Hilton’s part – her private belongings were stolen from a storage locker in January 2007 and put up for sale online at a website called *parisexposed.com* (Gensler, 2007a*). The man who purchased the stolen belongings and put them up for sale for a reported \$20 million – David Hans Schmidt, the “Sultan of Sleaze” (*Edmonton Journal*, 2007a*) – is not even mentioned in the news reports until after his suicide in September of 2007, after facing charges of extortion for trying to blackmail Tom Cruise (A. Myers, 2007*). Again, Hilton becomes symbolic of a culture (of women) that share too much, while the men who might profit from her violation are discursively erased.¹⁰⁶

While most journalists expressed outrage at the violation – either out of sympathy for Hilton, or more nefariously, out of an aversion to seeing even more of her “private” self – there were a few reports that revealed some of the anxieties that Hilton stirs up more broadly. “How can one intrude upon Paris Hilton’s privacy?” asks Howard Gensler, noting that Hilton walks red carpets, appears in reality shows, and, of course, appeared in a sex tape (2007a*). In their summary of Hilton’s response to the violation, the *Kitchener-Waterloo Record* (2007*) asserts

¹⁰⁶ His name must have been publicly available at the time, because it does appear in one article in my corpus from the time of the crime, though in a different context. However, that report misspells his name (*Winnipeg Free Press*, 2007*).

that “Nobody *exploits* Paris but Paris!” (my emphasis), demonstrating precisely what I argue, is Hilton’s transgression in the eyes of the news: profiting off her own sexuality.

The reporting on Kardashian’s profiting off her own sex tape parallels this framing. Even though Vivid Entertainment executive Steven Hirsch played a key role in distributing her sex tape, his name came up almost exclusively in the context of a different sex tape “scandal” when he publicly threatened to release a video of what would reportedly have been an underage Iggy Azalea engaging in sex acts (Gensler, 2014b*; Legal Monitor Worldwide, 2014b*; WENN, 2014e*). In the 16 reports on Kardashian’s lawsuit against and then settlement with Vivid Entertainment from 2007, not one outlines exactly how much money Hirsch received or the structure of the deal in relation to his company. Only Kardashian’s \$5 million settlement is discussed (WENN, 2007g*; WENN, 2007h*). Another (older) white man profits from the so-called “pornification” of culture while Kardashian and Hilton become the symbolic, publicly disdained faces of such pornification.¹⁰⁷

Kardashian’s settlement apparently worked to undermine her claims that the sex tape with Ray J had been stolen. As “beneficiary” of this publicity, Kardashian cannot claim to have had her tape stolen in the eyes of many. For a few journalists, the money itself (via the settlement with Vivid) was evidence enough that Kardashian had orchestrated the release of the tape. However, the taking up of the sex tape into the 2007 promotional discourse for the family’s E! reality television program further entrenched the belief that she had benefitted from the tape and, therefore, could not also possibly be a victim. There were several stories on *Keeping Up With the*

¹⁰⁷ A college newspaper piece also emerged in the search on Kim Kardashian that is worth noting here. The article argues that “what celebrities care about most is money,” and then goes on to list four examples of stars negotiating for money: all of whom are women (Moore, 2007*). As demonstrated recently in discussions around #MeToo and #TimesUp, women make disproportionately less money in Hollywood (Zarya, 2018), as they do elsewhere, yet the narratives about greedy female celebrities abound.

Kardashians in which the writers specifically quoted from E! network's provocative description of the new program's star:

[Kim is] a model, businesswoman, spoiled socialite and big sis. And with the hottest junk-in-the-trunk since J.Lo, she's in demand by Playboy, the Pussycat Dolls and the paparazzi. Oh, and that sex tape? Whatever. This savvy player always comes out ahead, on the fast track to fame and fortune" (Multichannel news, 2007*).

It is understandable that the mention of the sex tape in this context would provoke suspicion among journalists about the role Kardashian played in its release. However, the additional information included here suggests just how problematic the terms of success are for women in media more generally: having a "trunk" (or backside) like Jennifer Lopez's; appealing to Playboy or the Pussycat Dolls (neither outlet being notable for developing women's talents); and desirable for the paparazzi as someone whose private and personal life is available for consumption. That Kardashian fits all of these criteria – as evidenced by her sex tape – perhaps points to her suitability for fame rather than her illegitimacy. While the news media perpetuate the narratives of meritocracy, young girls (at least those interviewed by Jones for *Newsweek*) seem to see through it: women in today's culture are famous for being pretty, not for being good actresses (see quote above from page 266). The constant dismissal of the terms of fame offered to pretty women by sex tapes, reality shows and paparazzi serves to legitimize other media careers, including that of the journalist.

b) Reality Television

In 2007, as Paris Hilton's stardom was fading and Kardashian's was growing, another heir-turned-reality-star had his stardom legitimized by being awarded a star on the Hollywood

Walk of Fame (Gensler, 2007b*). At this point in his media career, Donald Trump had published 13 books (nine of which were co-authored), had made several film cameos and Wrestlemania appearances, and had hosted the competitive reality show *The Apprentice* on NBC for four seasons (Bibliography of Donald Trump, n.d.; Donald Trump Wikipedia, n.d.). Despite this less-than-impressive set of media accomplishments, there was no success policing in the one report (from my data) on this Walk of Fame Event. The piece, part of a larger gossip column by Howard Gensler (2007b*) for the *Philadelphia Daily News*, simply jokes: “Donald Trump received a star on Hollywood’s Walk of Fame Tuesday. He was probably expecting an entire galaxy.”

While there may have been expressions of outrage at Trump’s inclusion into the Walk of Fame elsewhere, my dataset across both eras of analysis (2007-2008 and 2014) demonstrate ongoing anxieties about the state of media, legitimacy and talent vis-à-vis reality television more broadly. Across my corpus from 2007-2008, there were three feature articles breaking down the background and impact of reality television, some displaying more anxiety than others. The biggest clash between this “new” kind of TV and more traditional formats played out in the form of the Writer’s Guild strike of 2007-2008. In one of the few articles that discussed the strike, *Orange Country Register’s* report by Peter Larsen (2007*) described it as a dispute over “how writers should be paid for the new ways we consume our entertainment – DVDs, the Internet, video iPods and so on.” While this report does not specify reality television as a part of the “new ways” entertainment is consumed, and thus does not frame reality TV as a cause of the strike, it is presented as an effect: “Does the average consumer care? Well, when ‘24’ cancels its season and all you can find on the dial come January is Donald Trump’s ‘Celebrity Apprentice,’ you tell me” (Larsen, 2007*). In fact, the strike did necessitate a rise in production of non-scripted

television, and the *Apprentice* spinoff launched at that time, solidifying Trump's legitimacy as a businessman and amplifying his symbolic power as he now had the ability to "hire" and "fire" other famous people (with their own various levels of symbolic power) at will. The fact that this show replaced the regular version of the *Apprentice* entirely could point to Trump's own perception of its higher value to his brand and (political?) ambitions.

A striking contrast in the reporting on reality television – although there were only a few articles following this pattern and therefore not necessarily representative of a major trend – was found in the origin stories circulating in 2007 versus those in 2014. At the height of Hilton's fame (2007), the trend of reality television was traced, in a lengthy "cover story" for *USA Today*, to the MTV *Real World* franchise and the producers behind that franchise, Bunim/Murray productions. In his 2,118-word article, Bill Keveney (2007*) quotes MTV chief Brian Graden in describing the *Real World* as "quite simply the undisputed granddaddy of modern, commercial television," noting that the show first premiered in 1992 and at this point – 15 years later – was still going strong. Keveney traces the show's influence:

[It] can be seen in eavesdrop-style filming in a group house, common to such shows as *The Bachelor* and *The Apprentice*, and creation of the TV confessional, standard fare on *Big Brother* and *Survivor*. Another BMP show, *The Simple Life*, was ahead of the merger of tabloids and TV, making Nicole Richie a star and Paris Hilton a supernova.

This article does not carry the usual anxious undertones regarding the influence of reality television on stardom. Keveney's description of the show's influences above, including the references to Richie and Hilton, are made in a neutral tone without any suggestion that the two stars were undeserving of their fame and/or lacking talent. In fact, the quotes from MTV and the descriptions of Bunim/Murray productions draw on frames of hard work, important and timely

content (from the *Real World* franchise in particular), and legitimate success due to trend-setting media production. Interestingly, the article also points out that Bunim/Murray is the production company behind the (then brand new) series *Keeping Up With the Kardashians*, although Keveney could not predict that Kardashian's stardom was about to explode into Hilton-like "supernova" status.

However, in 2014 at the height of Kardashian's fame, a different origin point for reality television emerged: the infamous 1994 trial of O.J. Simpson (which unfolded two years after the *Real World* premiered on MTV). The first article, written by *Washington Post* reporter Emily Yahr (2014b*) under the headline "14 reality stars who *exist* today because of the O.J. Simpson trial" (my emphasis), names numerous people as part of "the Kardashian web," including Kim's infamous exes Kris Humphries (the NBA star to whom Kardashian was married for 72 days in 2011) and sex tape partner Ray J, whose "stock went up just by being involved with Kardashian" (p. 59). Only two of the 14 stars who "exist" because of the O.J. Simpson trial are not related to the stardom of Kim Kardashian.

In a much longer analysis for *Vanity Fair* (again, a Condé Nast publication), writer Lili Anolik (2014) chronicles the events on the twenty-year anniversary of the infamous trial, calling it "TV's first reality show." Noting at the outset that 95 million Americans watched O.J. Simpson's white Bronco being chased by the LAPD, while 150 million tuned into the live verdict, Anolik also outlines the ways that the popular and public spectacle melded tabloid news with the "staidest and snootiest" of journalism. Simpson, however, is not usually listed with Lohan, Hilton, or Kardashian in the news' commentary on the contemporary state of culture and/or the media.

In fact, Anolik notes, Simpson's post-trial ambitions marked him out as quite similar to those above-named stars who often served in the news as signifiers of the ills contemporary culture. According to Simpson's manager Norman Pardo (cited by Anolik in this report), Simpson had tried to "get in on the reality-TV craze" by pitching himself as a contestant in season two of Donald Trump's *Celebrity Apprentice*. Unfortunately for Simpson, the network apparently was not interested; perhaps the public view of him too soured from the revelations of the trial as well as his alleged (and by then convicted) criminal history between 1994 and 2008, including his armed robbery charge. In fact, Simpson's post-1994 convictions for violent crimes point to a potentially much darker influence on our culture than that of Hilton and Lohan, who were both arrested and publicly shamed for driving under the influence. By repeatedly linking Kim Kardashian to O.J. Simpson specifically, the media reinforces a racialized connection to violence and scandal.

Despite her discussion of his violence, these frames are evidenced in Anolik's article which concludes with some ominous statements about Simpson's influence on culture, again in terms of "spawning" reality television rather than the normalization of, for instance, domestic violence among NFL players:

Were it not for the [Simpson] case, it's unlikely E! would have green-lit a series called Keeping Up With the Kardashians—keeping up with the who?—in 2007. Though, in fairness, Kim did have a popular sex tape to her credit by then.

While the reporting on the show's debut suggests otherwise – the media did, in fact, have to sell us on "keeping up with the who?" – Kardashian (and her whole family) is framed as a beneficiary of the murder trial, as much as, if not more so than Simpson himself or the industries that profited from it. In a particularly distasteful ending to the piece, Anolik laments that the jury

in the O.J. Simpson case got it wrong and turns her address to the violent criminal: “you [do] have blood on your hands. You killed popular culture.” Such framing is echoed in the earlier *Washington Post* article by Emily Yahr (2014b*) which presents Simpson’s greatest infraction not as violence, but as instigating the “wave of infotainment and a new obsession with Hollywood stars” that is now being “taken advantage of” by “reality TV stars.”

In relation to this admonition of Simpson as being responsible for the creation of “unworthy stars,” the news media more broadly was quick to indict other media platforms for their role in perpetuating Hilton and Kardashian’s stardom. In the next section, I explore some of the ways that journalists’ reporting on these women reflect a sense of professional crisis: first, when having to report on Paris Hilton’s 2007 DUI arrest and jail sentence and then, seven years later, the same anxieties are expressed when reporting on Kardashian’s marriage to rapper Kanye West as well as her notorious cover shoots, particularly the one for *Paper* magazine in which she appeared naked in order to “#BreakTheInternet.”

III. Meta-Commentary and Cynicism in the News

a) Hilton’s 2007 arrest: news coverage of celebrity scandal

As reflected in Anolik’s distasteful quote above wherein she makes light of the murder of Nicole Brown Simpson and Ron Goldman, journalists commonly frame celebrities as responsible for, rather than reflections of, broad cultural shifts. This framing of celebrities-as-responsible was evident in the earlier data from my research, particularly when the news media had to report on Paris Hilton’s 2007 arrest and jail stint. A central theme that emerges among the reports is concern over the state of the news media itself (what does it mean for journalists to have to cover this event? Should they be covering this event so much? Etcetera). In this section I focus

explicitly on how the news cynically critiques the motivations of other media outlets, including newspapers and magazines, and how these discussions might reveal or even have caused some of the issues that are currently plaguing American and Canadian journalism. The rise of the term “fake news” to describe, for example, news coverage that speaks back to power (the same powers that usually own and control the news), invokes a distrust that, I argue, was sown by journalists themselves in their celebrity news coverage: coverage that can often be traced to the growing corporatization of news media organizations and the imperative on journalists to provide content that generates advertising revenue more than awareness about critical public interest issues (see Higgins-Dobney and Sussman, 2013).

Providing a perfect microcosm of this crisis, Paris Hilton herself chastises the media for its coverage of her tribulations in 2007. In one of only two stories in my corpus that quoted her on this issue, *Indiana Daily Student* (a college newspaper) writer Colleen Carroll (2007*) describes Hilton’s comments as “perhaps her first self-aware moment ever.” Hilton reportedly said that she hopes the media “will focus on more important things, like the men and women serving our country in Iraq, Afghanistan and other places around the world” (Carroll, 2007*). The *Washington Post* is the other newspaper that reported this quote. In a 1,379-word feature in which Howard Kurtz (2007*) struggles to defend journalists from “whacking” on “every side,” even O.J. Simpson, who is here presented as an insightful critic, has something negative to say about the coverage of Hilton: “When Paris Hilton was going to jail last week, more people knew about that than knew that we were sending people into space that day. It has replaced what is real news.” Kurtz notes that some of the critiques against journalism are well-founded, but also blames Hilton for “gorg[ing] on the fruits of self-created celebrity,” without noting the irony of

such a statement being made in an article about Paris Hilton: celebrities do not exist in a vacuum, they are constituted by news media reporting on them.

This mutually constituted relationship with Hilton seemed to pose a professional and ethical dilemma to some of the most prestigious and serious news organizations in America at this time. In early 2007, right around the time of Hilton's arrest, the *Associated Press* announced in an article that they would not be running any Paris Hilton stories for a week. *Philadelphia Daily News* reporter Howard Gensler (2007c*) asserted in his report on that very announcement that "no one noticed" until the announcement was made, thus their attempt at denying Hilton the status of newsworthiness instead brought her name into a conversation that might not have existed otherwise. In fact, several "serious" (i.e. non-entertainment) reporters articulated their struggles in having to report on Hilton, particularly in the context of her arrest.

While a few reporters displayed some level of reflexivity vis-à-vis their own roles in Hilton's publicity machine (for example, columnist Clarence Page [2007*] lamented having to write about "the ironies of Paris Hilton" after mistakenly thinking he could avoid the subject), others focused their frustration on other journalists reporting on Hilton. This meta-commentary (journalists writing about other journalists' coverage of Hilton) was exemplified well in an article by Irene Haskins (2007*) for the *Columbia Daily Tribune*. Haskins, a white, female humour columnist, lambasts Fox, CNN and MSNBC for their nonstop coverage of Hilton's trip to prison, noting other important news of the day that was shelved or minimally covered: "Everything else was put on hold to bring us a tear-by-tear report of her impending and much anticipated breakdown." Another version of the same sentiment was echoed by Eugene Robinson (2007*) in his editorial for the *Washington Post*, noting that Hilton's life is reported on "not only by the supermarket tabloids but also by cable networks and respectable newspapers—which

seem a bit embarrassed about the whole thing.” The reporter exhibits this same embarrassment with his admonition at the outset of the article:

Warning: This is a column about Paris Hilton. Those who are trying to ignore the travails of the famous-for-being-famous hotel heiress might want to avert their eyes. The rest of you, join me in horrible surrender. We have *no choice* but to pay attention. (E. Robinson, 2007*, my emphasis)

Notwithstanding the tongue-in-cheek tone of these articles, the suggestion that those *writing* the news have “no choice” but to write about her (perhaps their editors are forcing them to in order to attract readers?) minimizes the structural power that the news media wield and sows cynicism in their audience.

Even the revered *New York Times* is not immune to such cynical sentiments. In her article summarizing Hilton’s post-prison appearance on Larry King’s CNN show, Alessandra Stanley (2007*) gleefully points out TV journalists’ hypocrisy when reporting on Hilton:

It was *delicious* to watch Anderson Cooper sneer at the young celebutante’s frivolity, then piggyback his show to Mr. King’s and devote an entire hour to Ms. Hilton’s jailhouse conversion. And all week, news media analysts, law professors and image consultants scuffled like paparazzi for the chance to go on television and deconstruct Ms. Hilton’s latest escapade. (my emphasis)

Stanley then proceeds to dedicate another 350 words to deconstructing Hilton’s appearance on King’s show without including any reflection on her own role in this cycle, either as journalist or as audience of King’s show. In fact, over 3 million Americans reportedly tuned in to Hilton’s CNN interview (E. Lee, 2007*). This was three times the normal audience for King’s show suggesting that, not only were Americans actually interested in what was happening with Hilton,

but also that the news media agenda is (increasingly) being driven by what people want to see (audience numbers, advertising dollars, profit margins) more than serving their role as “fourth estate,” holding power/governments accountable and serving the public interest. This move away from public interest reporting to increasingly ad-driven, scandal-focused coverage (and again, this particular trend is reflected in the move away from “objective” reporting to the “post-truth” presentation of feelings/affect as fact) has been chronicled by analysts for decades (Fallows, 1997; Wasburn, 1995), and we are, I would argue, now experiencing the drastic results of this erosion of trust reflected in the popular discourses, politicians, and ideologies of today.

b) 2014 Kardashian invasion: news coverage of celebrity non-scandals

Such trends are traceable in celebrity news coverage from 2007 to 2014. By 2014 Paris Hilton’s fame had dramatically faded, but Kardashian’s was going strong. While most of the stories on Kim Kardashian at that time circulated in and through the more frivolous, gossipy news sources (such as the *NY Daily News*), a few events made the rounds in the more serious publications. It is worth noting that these Kardashian stories, including her wedding, were not nearly as “newsworthy” as Hilton’s arrest and jail sentence (i.e. much less scandalous), thus demonstrating the broader, advertiser-driven shift in news content in even the most “serious” of publications. Again, these reports often employed meta-commentary, by which I mean to suggest that journalists were commenting on other journalists’ coverage of the event, with little reflection on their own role in the system.

A notable example was a sarcastic wedding announcement from the *New York Post* (2014b*) that was amusing enough to induce some celebratory meta-commentary from other,

“more serious” publications. Their announcement, under the headline “ALERT (yawn): Kimye weds,” reads in full:

Two jackasses got married in Italy Saturday. Sex-tape star Kim Kardashian, 33, wed egotist Kanye West, 36, in a wedding opulent enough for Florence’s Medici dynasty and tacky enough for reality TV. They were betrothed at Florence’s 16th-century Fort di Belvedere castle. Olympic athlete Bruce Jenner [sic] walked Kim down the aisle. The republic still stands. (*New York Post*, 2014b*)

The *Peterborough Examiner* (2014*) and the *Edmonton Journal* (2014*), both Canadian papers, ran abridged versions of the announcement, with the former calling it a “fitting tribute” and the latter saying that the NY Post was “telling it like it is.” As I have previously outlined in relation to this coverage of Kardashian (see also Patrick, 2016), this sort of humour – no matter how much it might resonate with journalists frustrated that they have to cover such frivolous matters – fosters a sense of cynicism toward the news media and perpetuates the ever-present derision of female celebrities in the public eye. It also contributes to the erosion of trust in the news (both the content itself, as it is *not* newsworthy, and the cynical tone that breeds mistrust), as reflected in recent surveys of both Canadian and American consumers (Government of Canada, 2016; Pew Research Center, Trends and Facts on Newspapers, 2018).

The second major news story for Kim Kardashian that year, which was much more widely reported on in my corpus than the wedding, was her photo shoot for *Paper* magazine, likely because her nude photoshoot invoked for reporters memories of her 2007 sex tape. In late 2014 *Paper* magazine, a modest publication with about 125,000 monthly subscribers at the time (Mantikas, 2014*) featured photos of a fully nude Kardashian as well as a shot of the star – clothed – balancing a champagne glass on her behind, with the hashtags #BreakTheInternet.

Although the tongue-in-cheek reference to “breaking the Internet” was highly mocked, as was Kim – particularly as a mother – for her nude appearance, the spread received 34,147,700 unique pageviews, more than double the website’s usual traffic received across an entire year (Thompson, 2014).

At least 15 stories in my corpus discussed the *Paper* magazine photos in detail. Some of the most polarized opinions on the shoot were published in college newspapers, with four articles lamenting the influence that Kardashian has in our contemporary culture (again, with no reflection on the role that such articles play in perpetuating the cycle), while two writers came to her defense. For example, in an article for Baruch College’s *The Ticker*, Anjelica Mantikas (2014*) calls Kardashian a “smart businesswoman” even though Mantikas laments that it would be nice if a woman could be “breaking the Internet because her intelligence has readers searching her name” rather than a nude photo. In an article for the Suffolk University’s *Journal*, Thalia Yunen (2014*) defends Kardashian’s choice to appear nude, even (or especially) as a mother. However, Yunen does take issue with how Photoshopped and unrealistic the photos are, as well as the “racial undertones of the recreated Beaumont photos she took.” (Yunen, 2014*). Yunen was one of the few writers in my corpus to mention this angle (see also *The Hamilton Spectator*, 2014b*), noting that photographer Jean-Paul Goude’s problematic history in relation to images of Black women perhaps was not known to Kardashian. Goude was reportedly re-creating his own portrait “Carolina Beaumont” (also known as “Champagne Incident”) with Kardashian for *Paper* (B. Butler, 2014*), although his name came up in only six stories in my corpus, thus downplaying his role in the so-called “scandal.”

In a 1,029-word article for the *Washington Post*, Alyssa Rosenberg discusses this issue of race without making reference to the famous photographer’s earlier work. Rosenberg quotes

from Blue Telumsa's article for TheGrio outlining the parallels between the Kardashian image and racist depictions of Saartjie Baartman "whose large buttocks brought her questionable fame and caused her to spend much of her life being poked and prodded as a sexual object in a freak show" (quoted in Rosenberg, 2014b*).¹⁰⁸ Although Rosenberg does not mention the earlier Beaumont photos, she does note the problematic representations and fetishization of Black women's behinds by linking the story to Telumsa's analysis of Baartman (the blog post did not come up in my results). Kardashian's use of this imagery, whether aware of the historical connotations or not, rightfully upset many Black feminist commentators. Unfortunately, Rosenberg's article was the only mainstream news publication in my corpus to include any such analysis of the photos, which could have sparked a larger and more critical discussion in the media. That those discussions are happening on blogs outside of the mainstream news media is perhaps another reason that audiences are increasingly fracturing and turning away from the mainstream news.

In her article, Rosenberg (2014b*) also examines the complexities of Kardashian's fame, noting that despite its origin, she is "not so different from the actresses profiled in the New York Times this weekend who have turned to lifestyle businesses to bolster their incomes as the quality of available parts has declined, along with the salaries that come with those roles."

¹⁰⁸ In her analysis of Kardashian, Sastre (2014) specifically links her to Baartman (in the title of her article) by calling her "Hottentot in the age of reality TV" and asserts that Kardashian "exploits" the interstices of taxonomies of race and reproductive, commoditized heterosexuality for profit. Here I would note, again, the use of the term "exploit" to describe a relation wherein Kardashian displays herself and make money from that display, as opposed to a different form of exploitation that occurred with Saartjie Baartman in the 19th Century, who did not have the agency of Kardashian, nor could she reap the kinds of profits that Kardashian gains from her use of this imagery (and here she was exploited in the capitalist sense of generating profits which were not shared with her, but she was also violated and abused). This is not to say that Kardashian's use/monetization of this imagery is not problematic, but to point out the ways that the very use of the term "exploit" in describing what she does occludes critical differences in power relations and it is important to delineate the ways in which women's bodies – which are constantly objectified and often "Othered" – are differently mobilized (including by themselves) in today's economy of visibility.

Rosenberg makes an astute observation on the power imbalances inherent in female celebrity: when parts dry out for the “legitimate” actress, she often must reinvent herself in ways that align with the neoliberal, entrepreneurial values that are very much visible in the stardom of Kardashian (and the focus on beauty and appearance in the product lines for, say Gwyneth Paltrow’s Goop or Jessica Alba’s Honest Company is not incidental). Rosenberg, much like her *Washington Post* colleague Caitlin Dewey discussed in the previous chapter, is able to provide a structural critique of the environment in which Kardashian thrives, rather than chastising her for using the system to her advantage or blaming her for the decline of our culture.

Demonstrating the increasing drive for news organizations to present “both sides” of the story, the *Washington Post* also ran commentary on the photos by Jonathan Capehart (2014*). Capehart describes the photoshoot as exemplary of Kardashian’s “lust for attention” and notes that “the public at large can’t get enough of Kardashian.” He does exempt himself and his reader (“Okay, maybe not you and definitely not me”) without justifying in the 396 word piece either why he is writing the story if he has had enough of the star, nor why his reader might be reading the story if they too have had enough of her. If his readers are interested in Kardashian, they are admonished for it while Capehart keeps her name in the headlines of a major news publication, despite his insistence that it is Kardashian – and not newspapers catering to advertising dollars – that “never misses an opportunity to seize an opportunity.”¹⁰⁹

Despite the mockery that the phrase received, “Break the Internet” was a memorable (and meme-able) phrase that has now become a regular feature section of the publication. *Paper*

¹⁰⁹ Although it is beyond the scope of my thesis and data, I would argue that extensions of this kind of reporting are apparent in the coverage of Donald Trump during both his campaign and presidency. While the news media focus on “outrage” reporting on his trivial missteps (for instance, his January 2019 hosting of the college football national champion team wherein he served them fast food), the issues that affect his constituents and/or are more complex receive much less coverage in the media. Journalists drive their readers’ attention to certain stories over others merely by writing about them. Trump, much like Kardashian, has been able to use this to his advantage, and this might therefore be a “skill” that can be traced to and through reality television stardom.

magazine is an “independent” fashion and lifestyle magazine operating out of New York that in 2017 was acquired by Tom Florio and Drew Elliot (Fernandez, 2017). While Drew Elliot is known for his recent work – like Kardashian – in reality television (as advisor and judge on the recent re-boot of *America’s Next Top Model*), Tom Florio has had a long career in media, most notably his position as senior vice president publishing director for *Vogue*, a magazine owned by media giant Condé Nast (“Tom Florios”, n.d.). Condé Nast, as noted in my previous chapters, also owns *Vanity Fair*, which was the center of controversy for Miley Cyrus in 2008, as well as the forum in which Jennifer Lawrence addressed her stolen nude photos in 2014. That same year another of Condé Nast’s publications was at the heart of a Kardashian controversy when, to the chagrin of many, “fashion bible” *Vogue* magazine featured Kim and Kanye on the cover of their April 2014 issue.

The most notable and common sentiment across the critiques of this decision was the idea that – unlike previous cover girls Kate Moss and Gisele Bündchen (who model clothes for a living) – Kim Kardashian has no “discernable” talent (Sarafian, 2014*; J. Lee, 2014*). For example, again the reputable *Washington Post* weighed in on the topic with a feature article (952 words) on the subject by Cara Kelly (2014*). Kelly, a young white female reporter who, in many ways, fits the exact hegemonic beauty ideal embodied by Moss and Bündchen (slim with blonde hair and blue eyes), notes that although the fashion magazine has shifted in recent years from featuring models to “actresses or ‘it’ girls,” the cover feature was always significant for underlining women’s achievements: “an acknowledgment of accomplishments ranging from break-out roles to notable awards.” Kardashian, in Kelly’s account, does not merit such a position, as she does not “encompass a palatable sense of worthiness” unlike Blake Lively and Sienna Miller (both of whom Kelly does note, “fill more of the waif super model position than

role model”). “Does a reality TV show and an impressive social media following rise to this [worthiness] bar?” Kelly asks. “Is Vogue telling people that a sex tape and a gig with E! are desirable goals for young women?” In comparison to Blake Lively’s acting roles (which, notably, the teenage girls interviewed earlier suggest do not, in fact, comprise an impressive achievement), Kardashian’s public image and businesses are framed by Kelly as worthless. The last line of the article suggests that, despite the E! gig and the sex tape, Kardashian has no agency, motivation or influence of her own: “For a woman to *rest on her fiancé’s ambition and connections*, and still make it to one of the most coveted spots in pop culture is the insult to injury for those who expect more from the ‘fashion bible.’” (Kelly, 2014*, my emphasis).

This odd portrayal of Kardashian – who is usually described as overly-ambitious and calculating – is available to Kelly because Kardashian is featured on the cover with someone who has more recognizable “talent,” husband Kanye West. In fact, Kelly suggests that not only was the cover West’s doing, but that Kardashian’s entire look and relation to the fashion world is due to the influence of West. This sentiment is echoed, but with less derision, in a piece for the University of Notre Dame’s *Daily Observer*. Matthew Munhall (2014*) notes that West has been vocal about his desires for him and his wife to be accepted by the fashion world:

West has spent the better part of the past year giving interviews railing against the classist and elitist mechanisms he has faced in the fashion industry. There still exists a tendency to cling to antiquated notions of what is considered ‘high art.’ The truth is that rap music and reality television are legitimate forms of entertainment that have dominated the cultural conversation of the 21st century. West and Kardashian use their platform to obliterate these divisions between high and low art.

While Kanye West verbally challenges the elitist gatekeeping of the fashion and entertainment industries, Kardashian is much less critical of these structures. West then gets the credit for the decision to feature the two on the cover of *Vogue*, as well as their invitations to the MET gala (see Kelly, 2014*). Very few articles ascribe agency to Kim in this feature, nor do they analyze the role of photographer Annie Leibovitz (who was also the photographer behind the controversial Miley Cyrus photos for *Vanity Fair* in 2008).¹¹⁰

One woman whose role in this story was not downplayed was *Vogue* Editor-in-Chief Anna Wintour. In fact, despite the controversy, most commentators commended her business acumen in choosing the controversial couple to feature. For instance, journalism major Taylor LaPuma (2014*), writing for Ohio University's *The Post*, argues that Wintour's choice of "Kimye" was "a business move I agree with, because they are just as influential in the fashion industry as the supermodels themselves." Another college publication – Louisiana State University's *The Daily Reveille* – echoes this sentiment, noting that "[*Vogue*] creates trends instead of following them. So taking two of the most talked-about celebrities and their baby and dressing them up for an article was done in a way only *Vogue* would think of" (Ryan, 2014*). In fact, the majority of college newspapers covering this event defended *Vogue* against the backlash, while only two of six articles expressed outrage.

This resonance with younger audiences might have been what Wintour had in mind when choosing Kardashian and West for the cover, as suggested in a report by Melissa Hoffman (2014*) for *Adweek* magazine. After quoting Wintour's own explanation at length, in which she positions *Vogue* as a publication that features "those who define the culture at any given moment, who stir things up, whose presence in the world shapes the way it looks and influences

¹¹⁰ One article from *Adweek* does mention that Leibovitz, along with *Vogue* editor Anna Wintour, did receive social media backlash (Hoffman, 2014*).

the way we see it,” Hoffman notes the recent decline in sales numbers for the “influential” magazine and that the move to feature less models and more popular culture figures “may be evidence of a shift in target audience toward younger, more socially connected readers.” Despite all of the media coverage, sales figures released at the end of the year indicated that the April 2014 issue sold less copies than April of 2013, which featured then first lady Michelle Obama on the cover (Iredale, 2014*). The reporting on this issue, much like that of the *Paper* magazine cover and Kardashian’s marriage to Kanye West, amplified the attention given to these events, rather than merely reflecting it. This trend can be seen in other important “debates” circulating in the news today such as, for instance, the news media’s dedication to elevate and amplify the voices of climate change deniers, thus making it seem like an equally valid and widely held perspective to that of scientists who study and warn of changing global temperatures.

Conclusion

This chapter examined the news reporting on two “sex tape” reality television stars across two time periods. The reporting in 2007-2008, at the height of Paris Hilton’s fame and the launch of Kim Kardashian’s fame, reflected tensions around what I called female *sexcess* in an age of burgeoning social media. Journalists struggled to comprehend and report on the impact that celebrity culture was having on their own industry, an impact rooted in the increased corporatization of the news media itself. Seven years later, at the height of Kardashian’s fame, the media exhibited these same struggles, with a newfound assurance of the “bad” influences that new media specifically was having on women (of all ages), meritocracy, and culture more broadly. The “success policing” of women like Kardashian and Hilton served to undermine their celebrity and, in the case of Kardashian specifically, her skill and savvy in navigating today’s

economy of visibility. Such reporting was not seen in the case of men who appeared in my dataset (i.e. Steven Soderbergh, Donald Trump, O.J. Simpson). In fact, both Trump and Simpson's worst transgressions seemed to be, not their own existence/emergence into the public sphere (and the violent misogyny they brought with them), but rather their roles in launching or perpetuating the stardom of less worthy people.

Kardashian was often singled out as unique from Hilton, who was much more likely to be discursively connected to Britney Spears and Lindsay Lohan as a figure of out-of-control femininity. Kardashian, because of her longevity, her ongoing profitization of sexuality, and her ability to escape the pathologies of gendered stardom, serves as a unique figure on the contemporary media landscape. Despite these distinctions, Kardashian was often linked with Hilton specifically in narratives about the pornification of culture as well as the decline in merit signified by reality television. Reporters, who are themselves invested in meritocratic narratives, were hesitant to examine the structural implications of new media technology developments, although they did demonstrate a willingness to critique journalism at a systemic level. As argued throughout this chapter, the cynical and sarcastic commentary circulating in and through celebrity news coverage contributes to the shift to a "post-truth" discourse and, in turn, a wider erosion of trust in the mainstream news. A news media that is increasingly chasing "clicks" and advertising dollars, and one that is increasingly part of multi-media conglomerates run by the billionaire class, will likely continue to cater to the interests of the elite at the expense of performing its duty of holding accountable those in power. The Internet may or may not be broken, but the news industry clearly is.

Conclusion

I. Summary of Findings

This thesis set out to investigate the relations between women, sexuality, new media technologies, and neoliberal capitalism. Using the female celebrity sex “scandal” as case study, I conducted a discourse analysis on news reporting in the United States and Canada at two pivotal moments. The first was across 2007-2008 in the immediate aftermath of the global recession, political upheaval (with the election of Barak Obama in the U.S.), and technological and cultural change, as signified by the smartphone and social media development, as well as the “crisis” in white femininity exemplified through celebrity culture. At that time several Disney and former Disney stars were the subject of much anxiety and outrage in the media. Additionally, Paris Hilton was at the peak of her fame as she was arrested and sent to jail for driving under the influence. The second key moment was 2014, a year in which hundreds of female celebrities’ private iCloud accounts were hacked, and their nude photos were stolen and posted online. 2014 also marks a new point in the cycle of reality television stardom wherein the stardom of Hilton has been usurped and surpassed by her former assistant Kim Kardashian. These women came to signify an apparent crisis of meritocracy in the media, but also embody a shift in mainstream news reporting that increasingly answers to, rather than holds accountable, institutional power structures.

In the early chapters of this thesis, I summarized the relevant academic work in two separate but related spheres: feminist discussions about the relations between women, sexuality, and technology, as well as celebrity studies scholarship on the gendered dimensions of success in neoliberal capitalist democracies. I then outlined my theoretical framework, which combined feminist materialist analysis (particularly of women’s place, labour and sexuality in capitalist

patriarchy), with reception studies and post-structuralist approaches to power and discourse. I then used that framework to justify my choice of news and discourse analysis as methods, as well as the specific case studies I chose to investigate my research questions.

My first set of research questions were as follows: How did “old” news media frame the hacking and leaking of celebrity photos in 2007 compared to the iCloud hack of 2014? What frames were used when (and if) describing the Internet/communications companies implicated in the hacks (Apple, Google, Reddit, etc.) and those charged with containing and punishing the offenders (the FBI)? How were specific celebrities’ photos (Jennifer Lawrence, Gabrielle Union, and Vanessa Hudgens) reported on in relation to their race, age, class, as well as the media formats from which they emerged (i.e. old versus new media)?

In order to answer these research questions, I first examined the news reporting on Vanessa Hudgens’ and Lindsay Lohan’s stolen nude photos from 2007-2008. As I gathered my data, the emerging themes pointed me in a slightly different direction, as the proportion of reporting on both Miley Cyrus’ nude portraits for *Vanity Fair* and Lindsay Lohan’s nude portraits for *New York Magazine* suggested that these events were considered much more newsworthy. While many comparisons can be drawn, particularly across the reporting on the Cyrus’ and Hudgens’ images, there were several key differences in the so-called “scandals.” For instance, while Hudgens’ was blamed for not being able to contain her sexuality to the private realm, Cyrus – and, more often, her parents – were criticized for their greed and ambition. This framing, I argued, reflected Cyrus’ class position in relation to her growing sexual capital: a capital that would not be containable to the (exploitation of the) Disney machine. Lindsay Lohan, on the other hand, was often invoked as an example of what happens when such sexual capital is “set loose” and goes “off the rails.” The reporting on her, particularly in relation to Marilyn

Monroe as a nostalgic figure of meritocratic/feminine loss, represents a point of “crisis,” not in femininity but rather in post-feminist narratives assuring young women of their empowerment, while re-orienting them toward cruelly optimistic promises that success, economic mobility, and proper displays of sexuality will lead them toward the “good life.” The pathologizing of these successful failures helps to occlude the ways in which the system itself falls short of its promises, allowing us all to reinvest in important, yet increasingly fallible narratives of meritocracy.

Disney emerged as a critical site in this process: producing idols of American femininity that are held to impossible standards, perhaps because of their enormous, growing symbolic power.

The reporting on Hudgens’ stolen photo more specifically allows for diachronic comparisons to be made in the reporting from 2007 at the early onset of new media technologies such as the smartphone and social media, versus 2014 when these technologies have permeated everyday life for most Canadians and Americans. In both instances the structural misogyny at play was under-emphasized, either through no discussion at all of the institutional powers/the law and/or punishment (in the case of Hudgens) or the individualization and pathologization of the perpetrators (in the case of the iCloud hack). While in 2007 Hudgens is, for the most part, made entirely responsible for her violation (through re-victimization when journalists looked at the photos and reported on them; victim-blaming discourses circulated by parents, Disney, young audiences, and journalists; and the use of passive language to describe the hackers’ actions), this framing shifts in 2014 when the iCloud hack occurs. Because of the visibility of the event and its victims (which is crucial to its mechanism to punish and humiliate the victims), the iCloud hack received much more substantial and sympathetic coverage. Jennifer Lawrence, in particular, as a white, blond-haired, blue-eyed, Academy Award-winning actress in a monogamous relationship,

emerged as the “ideal” victim against which others were measured (and often erased), thus demonstrating the importance of class, race, merit, and sexuality in media frames.

While there was additionally much more feminist pushback in the news against victim-blaming discourses in 2014, there was also a related and concerted effort to assuage consumer concerns (and therefore secure a billion-dollar industry) about new media technologies versus ongoing privacy debates. However, the prominence of public feminist discourses against victim-blaming and rape culture is arguably exactly the cultural shift the hack was pushing back against. The release of the photos on the so-called “dark web” and/or “manosphere” is not incidental but rather central to understanding the gender politics that are centered in these debates. The hesitation on the part of journalists to engage with these websites signals an increasingly critical deficiency in their understanding and contextualization of online culture. The most responsible and contextual reporting was offered, for the most part, by young white women and young women of colour, demonstrating the importance of intentionally including diverse viewpoints and marginalized perspectives in news media reporting and not merely assuming that those voices will rise in a supposedly meritocratic industry.

My second set of research questions relatedly considered the specific role of journalists in perpetuating myths of meritocracy and the sensationalizing of news content. In Chapter 6 of this thesis I investigated the following questions: How do “old” news media frame Paris Hilton and Kim Kardashian in relation to their “leaked” sex tapes? What discourses do they circulate about privacy, labour, fame, and economic reward? How is Hilton’s whiteness framed in comparison to Kardashian’s? Are there differences in the news reporting on these stars across 2007-2008 and 2014?

The news media – itself a gatekeeping site of privilege and institutional power – engaged in what I call *success policing* of Kim Kardashian and Paris Hilton, two stars whose fame depends upon new media technologies and new relations between audiences and celebrity-products. Their ability to profitize their sexuality directly, rather than channeling it into the more traditional modes of media production and consumption, was undermined in the reporting that insisted on connecting them back to their “leaked” sex tapes and ignored the other skills and savvy they demonstrated in navigating today’s economy of visibility. Additionally, reporters paradoxically denied them agency in successfully navigating this economy, while assigning them agency for larger (negative) cultural shifts including the sexualization and even pornification of culture.

Kardashian was often singled out as unique from Hilton, who was much more likely to be discursively connected to Britney Spears and Lindsay Lohan as a figure of out-of-control femininity. Kardashian, because of her longevity, her ongoing profitization of sex, and her ability to escape the pathologies of gendered stardom, serves as a unique figure on the contemporary media landscape. Furthermore, Kardashian’s ties to Black men – both through her romantic relationships with Black men, as well as her father’s role in the infamous trial of O.J. Simpson – were commonly evoked in the news’ discourse about the star and connected to wider skepticism about her privacy violations and motives than seen in the reporting on Hilton.

Paris Hilton, however, invoked much existential rumination on the state of journalism more broadly when her 2007 arrest and jail sentence led numerous “serious” publications into the world of celebrity gossip-reporting. This moment of crisis, I argue, serves as somewhat of a canary in the coalmine of American public discourse, signaling a point at which the news’ drive toward “click-bait” and advertising revenue, as a result of increased corporatization and

consolidation, shifts into the “post-truth” state in which charges of “fake news” are taken seriously. As it is increasingly being bought and run by the corporate, billionaire class, the news media have less and less incentive to hold such powers accountable. The frustrations of journalists are corralled into their sarcastic and cynical reporting on the “frivolity” of celebrity culture. This shift is traceable in the media sources included across my dataset: in 2014 many more “serious” newspapers (i.e. *The Washington Post*, *Financial Post*, *The Globe and Mail*) were reporting on celebrity culture compared to 2007-2008.

Amongst this reporting, a binary relationship between “gossip” and “news” is reinforced, wherein journalists are not encouraged to question or analyze the ways that celebrity gossip itself – if approached as a structural issue – provides a forum through which ongoing oppression and marginalization can be analyzed, disputed, and contextualized as part of the broader neoliberal capitalist project. Journalists often individualized events, using gendered, classed, and racialized frames to pass moral judgment against whichever celebrity they were reporting on. What does it mean about the contemporary state of journalism when stars themselves are leaving that ecosystem for greener pastures (i.e. the immediacy and accuracy of social networking sites for communication; the rise of celebrity-on-celebrity profiles such as when Jennifer Lawrence interviews her friend Emma Stone for *Elle* magazine)? Now, more than ever, journalists need to re-think their place in this changing system and fight back against the ideologues taking advantage of the broad mistrust brewing in Canada and the United States. The frustration that everyday people are feeling ought to be contextualized and directed toward the sources of ongoing wealth inequality, job insecurity, and global instability rather than marginalized peoples. Celebrities – who are certainly not marginalized – may be reflective of these trends, but they are not the causes of them.

Despite this fact, evidence presented in my data suggests that audiences may be absorbing such messages. My third research question was interested in examining audience positions and was stated as follows: How does the broader audience – as evidenced in the data and as constructed by journalists – react to the discursive frames used by the news media in their reporting on female celebrities? For the most part journalists presented audience views that supported their own frames, whether negative or positive toward the celebrity (or celebrity culture). There were, however, a few examples of parents that did not display an adequate or similar level of outrage toward celebrity antics as the view expressed by the journalists. Additionally, the young women and girls interviewed by journalists generally exhibit a similar critical distance toward celebrity culture. The letters from young women to *Teen Vogue* quoted in Chapter 4 support this assertion: the writers expressed disappointment in these so-called role models. Fears that girls and young women are absorbing and/or emulating celebrity values seem to be exaggerated, but still, as I argued in relation to Disney in particular, these moral panics and constructions of transgression do important discursive work. They help to individualize and pathologize systemic issues so that structural critiques can be avoided. This, in turn, feeds back into the news' cycle where events are decontextualized and trivialized, affecting potentials for a broader understanding of our world and current power structures, thus ensuring ongoing inequality.

While journalists may be less and less inclined to examine those in power (as they increasingly have to answer to them), scholars – particularly those concerned with social justice – ought to make visible these relations. Examining the marginalized can provide crucial insight into how power operates, but it does not provide the full picture. Additionally, the invisibilization of power and privilege, even in scholarly work, can function to reify those forces.

This thesis not only demonstrates that celebrities themselves are worthy of feminist concern – what does it mean when the women who have risen to their highest possible potential in capitalist society are still always susceptible to sexual violence? – but also the importance of examining the ongoing connections between patriarchy’s sense of entitlement to women’s bodies, the means of production, and the terms of success.

II. Reflections

The design of this research project allowed me to collect and compare a vast range of newspaper publications, including college newspapers which themselves often provided a differing and more progressive view on celebrity culture. This certainly could be due to the fact that college newspapers are not beholden to corporate interests or wealthy owners, but also reflects the shift from a post-feminist media climate to one in which discourses of (certain kinds of) feminism abound (Banet-Weiser, 2018). The shift in news coverage of celebrity “scandal” – from more tabloid-like sources to “hard” news sources – across 2007-2014 would not have been traceable had I chosen a few select sources to deal with. Furthermore, my choice of case studies led me to unanticipated streams of analysis, particularly in Chapter 4 of this thesis, as I had not intended to examine Disney-specific stars.

However, because of this broadened scope, I necessarily had to shift my focus. I thus did not specifically analyze audience reactions to the news stories discussed (in the form of comments on the articles posted online), and this would certainly be a fruitful avenue to analyze broader reactions to frames employed by the news. Again, however, noting the ways that online commentary can mirror the lawlessness of “free speech”-valorizing sites, these forums might elevate the voices of a selected and extreme few that are not necessarily reflective of broader

audiences. Toward that end, more direct work with audiences in the form of focus groups and/or interviews might be more insightful.

On the other hand, existing research with focus groups as discussed throughout this thesis indicates that audiences – particularly young female ones – are internalizing the messages and “critical readings” of female celebrity that circulate in the media (see Keller and Ringrose, 2015; Vares and Jackson, 2015). This is also shown to be the case with sexuality and technology more broadly. As shown by Salter (2017) in his focus groups discussing revenge porn and other non-consensual sharing of images, young people often mirror the victim-blaming discourses of the media and express disproportionate concern for the perpetrators’ futures when facing punishment (p. 119). Such studies also demonstrate the social prerogative (especially in focus group settings) to mirror the common-sensical discourses circulating more broadly, including those in the news media, and thus should be brought into conversation with analyses such as mine, to think through the multitude of ways that norms are constructed and policed.

My thesis also contributes to a recent surge of scholarship more specifically on the iCloud hack of 2014 (see Lawson, 2017; Marwick, 2017; Massanari, 2017). While Lawson (2017) and Marwick (2017) in particular, take similar starting points to my own by analyzing reporting on the event, there are some critical distinctions to be made. Firstly, there is a key distinction to be made methodologically. My focus here on “traditional” news sources allowed me to examine the framing of this event by, for the most part, *trained journalists*. In focusing on blogs or online news sites rather than traditional news, Lawson’s (2017) analysis demonstrates how new platforms are increasingly providing the structural analysis and context lacking in mainstream news reporting, thus perhaps demonstrating a key disconnect today. The use of feminist discourse to defend the celebrities was noteworthy and supports my findings that the age

and demographic of news reporters themselves affects how they framed incidents of sexting, privacy violation, and websites like Reddit.

Additionally, Marwick's (2017) study of popular press coverage of the iCloud hack included some "traditional" news sources (i.e. *The LA Times*), but also included platforms that were not part of my corpus. Much like Lawson, Marwick traced a strong feminist stance in the discourse, which differed from much of my findings where there remained, in a significant amount of the reporting, a pronounced tendency to blame the celebrity women for the violation, particularly when framed in terms of user-privacy in relation to technology (and therefore threatening Apple's reputation and profits). This difference is significant in that by analyzing more news articles and less editorials (which, in the case of Marwick's data, included several editorials by prominent feminist writers such as Roxane Gay and Jessica Valenti), I was able to see how individual journalists employed patriarchal, victim-blaming frames across numerous facets of their reporting on a variety of stories (such as the work of former *Philadelphia Daily News* reporter Howard Gensler). Such discourses are normalized as "common-sense," "objective" perspectives of the news (their discursive position, as outlined by Jäger and Maier [2009], see Methodology chapter), rather than serving as "guest" voices who might have less influence on the everyday discourse of a particular media site.

Another key difference between my study and those above is that my use of this case study was part of a larger research project examining news discourses in relation to celebrity success, talent, and sexuality more broadly. While this event itself is certainly noteworthy, and likely will be the deserving subject of much feminist (and other) inquiry in the future, it gains new meaning when situated in the broader context of female celebrity, nudity, technology, and profit. Examining the specificities of this event – both in terms of its cultural moment and in

terms of the various celebrities violated – reveals the key ways that victims are made discursively legible in relation to their “talent” and “exploitable” labour. Jennifer Lawrence is a site of massive privilege, reflected in the voice she was given after the violation, but she also represents numerous stakeholder interests. The fact that one man owns shares in both the platform on which she was violated as well as the platform in which she was given a voice to challenge that violation (not to mention his shares in her film career) reveals the ways that celebrity sexuality is easily commodified and exploited according to both misogynist and feminist logics: the market does not care if she is selling “empowerment,” as long as she is selling herself. Once she entrepreneurializes that sale, however, she oversteps her welcome and is undermined and contained by the media, as evidenced by the reporting on Kim Kardashian who has been much more equivocal with her relationship to feminist politics (Ivie, 2017).

Finally, this thesis sought to investigate the news media as a site of normalizing discourse. While the reporting on specific incidents illuminates certain trends, there is much more work to be done on how celebrity reporting specifically contributes to the erosion of trust that is plaguing news sources today. While reporting may be a zero-sum game – if a journalist is covering Kim Kardashian, they are not covering a different event – the constant invoking of this fact sows a distrust and cynicism toward the news that has been capitalized on by celebrities and politicians (and both) alike in their endeavors. Much more work needs to be done to contextualize the state of news media today in relation to the celebritization of culture more broadly, and the shifts in journalists’ individual capacity to adequately report on the news. The rise of the scare-mongering term “fake news” as well as the very real manipulation of news content by social media networks is fracturing the public into increasingly disparate groups with

competing interests, while channeling people's outrage and frustration into visible symbols of ongoing inequality (i.e. celebrities) rather than the underlying causes of it.

III. Implications

Women's uses of technologies – particularly in capitalist societies – have long been policed and contained by patriarchal forces. The neoliberal age in which new media tools are mobilized toward economic ends have somewhat shifted the playing field: a playing field which was never even to begin with. In the contemporary environment, women who fit certain standards of femininity (beautiful, able-bodied, and most often white) are able to entrepreneurialize their engagement with media. No longer reliant upon the gatekeeping forces of traditional male-run media (i.e. no longer having to be “chosen” by producers, directors), certain women can now directly sell and recuperate the profits of their sexual selves. Furthermore, they make visible this labour, providing an example to other women of how they can (if they are lucky enough to fit the mould) monetize their own sexuality in today's economy of visibility.

These shifts have resulted in extreme pushback from the traditional media in which narratives of meritocracy are both created and experienced by some of the most privileged people in society. Panics around the shifting terms of “success” reveal ongoing anxieties about women's place and potential amassing of various forms of capital in patriarchal societies. Furthermore, the apparent failings of success – the living examples that so-called “success” for women may not be desirable and may, in fact, be toxic – reveal the instability of an economic system that relies upon a diminishing faith in an impossible reality. As neoliberal policies are taken to the extreme and the so-called “good life” falls further out of reach for most people

(while the amassing of wealth by the few is celebrated, if discussed at all in the media), their frustrations are increasingly scapegoated onto, alternately, the few sites of extremely visible wealth in America (celebrities) as well as some of the most marginalized populations in the world (immigrants and refugees). The news media – as a site of institutional power that is increasingly aligned with the corporate elite – necessarily participate in that scapegoating. How can they hold accountable those who tell them what to write about?

These issues are reaching critical importance today. When I began work on this thesis approximately four years ago celebrity culture, journalism, feminism, and politics were generally considered to be quite disparate issues. Over the past several years they have converged, as is evident in the 2016 election of heir-turned-reality-star Donald Trump as President of the United States. Scholars can no longer afford to silo celebrity out of the “mainstream” into a niche and superfluous realm of inquiry. Celebrity culture increasingly *is* culture, and as depressed and cynical as that may make some folks (especially journalists), it is also a reality that scholars (and especially journalists) will have to face. The good news is that feminism is also increasingly just as important in these cultural debates. While it can easily be commoditized and appropriated into neoliberal logic, the proliferation of platforms and technologies has amplified new voices and perspectives into the mainstream; voices that are often progressive, feminist and increasingly radical. While there will always be pushback to progress, I look forward to the day when wealthy, privileged, mediocre, white men are considered irrelevant, or at the very least, as “useless” and “talentless” as the female celebrities that have so long carried such labels. Kim Kardashian may try repeatedly to #BreaktheInternet with her antics, but she is not the one breaking journalism, job security, government supports, or democracy. When those powers are held accountable, to use Paris Hilton’s infamous catchphrase, “that’s hot.”

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