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Online Publication Date: 01 September 2007
To cite this Article: Mendelson, Andrew L. (2007) 'On the function of the United States paparazzi: mosquito swarm or watchdogs of celebrity image control and power', Visual Studies, 22:2, 169 - 183
To link to this article: DOI: 10.1080/14725860701507230
URL: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14725860701507230

Visual Studies
Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information: http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/title~content=t713689928

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On the function of the United States paparazzi: mosquito swarm or watchdogs of celebrity image control and power

ANDREW L. MENDELSON

One group of media practitioners is consistently viewed more negatively than others – the paparazzi. When the topic of the paparazzi arises, it is usually in reference to their relationship with celebrities and privacy. Rather than examining the celebrity–paparazzi issue through the lens of privacy, the purpose of this article is to reframe the issue by examining it through the lens of self-presentation theory and image control. This requires thinking of celebrities less as individuals whose privacy is threatened and more as entities trying to present the most unified image possible in order to increase their cultural and economic power. Through this frame, the paparazzi fit squarely within a normative model of journalism, and can be thought of as investigative journalists attempting to uncover another ‘truth’ of celebrities.

INTRODUCTION

Recent polls and critical writings suggest citizens view the institution of journalism with very low levels of credibility (Fallows 1996; Sharkey 1997; Gans 2003; News media/communications 2004). One group of media practitioners is consistently viewed more negatively than others – the paparazzi. This group of mostly freelance photographers whose mainstay is the celebrity ‘gotcha’ photograph is denigrated as the worst of the worst. This negative view is held not just among citizens, who may see the paparazzi as a subset of journalists, but also among journalists.

When the topic of the paparazzi arises, it is usually in reference to their relationship with celebrities and privacy. Most often it is an instance in which an ‘innocent’ celebrity has his or her privacy invaded by an overaggressive photographer on the streets of Los Angeles, in a New York restaurant, or in his or her own yard. Celebrities, it is argued, should have the opportunity, like any citizen, to be left alone when not performing or at a public event. They should be allowed to eat out at a restaurant without being accosted by a phalanx of flashes; they should be allowed to walk in their backyard free from the peering eye of a telephoto lens. The tension between the celebrities’ right to privacy and the paparazzi came to a head with the death of Princess Diana and the subsequent hand-wringing by members of the press, the public and governments (Bishop 1999; MacMillan and Edwards 1999; Hindman 2003; Scharrer, Weidman, and Bissell 2003; Howe 2005). Even for people who feel that the paparazzi are well within their legal rights, the issue is nevertheless framed as one of privacy – the celebrities gave up their right to privacy when they went into show business.

Examining the celebrity–paparazzi issue through the lens of the concepts of privacy, however, is only one angle from which to examine this issue. The purpose of this article is to reframe the issue by examining it through the lens of self-presentation theory and image control, concepts rooted in the field of public relations. This requires thinking of celebrities less as individuals whose privacy is threatened and more as entities trying to create the most consistent and unified image possible in order to increase their cultural and economic power. This image, to be believable, must incorporate versions of a ‘private’ life as well as public moments. In this view, paparazzi can be thought of as investigative journalists attempting to uncover another ‘truth’ of the celebrity. This requires moving beyond the traditional conception of the paparazzi as a bastardization of ‘Freedom of the Press’, to think of them as fitting within a normative model of journalism.

To accomplish this task, several areas of scholarly and popular writings will be examined. First, this article will examine who the paparazzi are and how they are positioned within journalism. Second, in order to move this issue from one of privacy to one of image control, it will examine the related literatures of Goffman’s self-presentation theory and ideas of image and reputation management. From these ideas, this research will define what celebrities are, how they are created and positioned and the roles they play in American society.
examine celebrities through the lens of image management, the article will then return to the paparazzi and examine them within this framework.

Some definitions are in order before proceeding. For this article, I draw on Kovach and Rosenstiel’s (2001) definition of journalism: ‘to provide citizens with the information they need to be free and self-governing’ (17), by serving as a ‘monitor of power’ (12) and independent of those they cover. Central to this definition of journalism is the examination of those topics and events which have relevance and significance for society. Under such a definition, journalists are those who serve this end. One type, photojournalists, are those who ‘report visually on the significant events’ of the day (NPPA Code of Ethics 2006; see also Newton 2001). While the images produced by paparazzo appear in journalistic outlets, most mainstream journalists would not consider these celebrity photographers to be journalists, whose work should focus on democratic ideals. It is important to note that some paparazzi do consider themselves to be journalists (Howe 2005).

**WHO ARE THE PAPARAZZI?**

The paparazzi are possibly the most despised media practitioners. Members of this group can be seen on the streets of Los Angeles and New York, hoping to catch an unguarded moment of a celebrity, buying coffee, walking a dog, or doing just about any mundane activity. Certainly, many of these photographers also work the more glamorous events, such as movie premieres and awards shows, but these staged events are not where the candid moments will be found (and thus will not bring as large a monetary compensation from celebrity news outlets).

The word ‘paparazzi’ derives, it is said, from an Italian word for ‘buzzing insects’ and was coined in the Fellini film *La Dolce Vita* (Nordhaus 1999). A mere annoyance may be the nicest thing people have to say about this group. The paparazzi have been referred to as the stalkerazzi, hunters, “‘vultures’ feeding off celebrities’ (Sharkey 1997, 19), a ‘group of evil and officious intermeddlers’ (Smolla 1998, 317), a ‘derelict subset of media’ (Smolla 1998, 317), ‘modern day bounty hunters, ferociously stalking their prey to the bitter end’ (Bodman 1997, 12), and a ‘“global wolf pack”’ of celebrity photographers’ (Richardson 1998, 66).

Photojournalist Porter Gifford (1997) refers to the paparazzi as ‘the dregs of the media world who have only a camera in common with real photojournalists’ (23). It is perhaps an understatement to say this group is not held in high esteem.

Paparazzi photography is a hybrid of photojournalism, documentary, street photography, celebrity photography, ‘which is itself a hybrid of editorial and promotional photography’, and surveillance photography (Squiers 1999, 171; Howe 2005). By its nature, Squiers (1999) argues, paparazzi photography is outside the lines of ‘polite photography’ (271). The paparazzi differ from traditional photojournalists and documentary photographers in their content – celebrities rather than war, politics and social ills – and in their motivation, which is more driven by financial gain than by social responsibility. As Squiers contends: ‘While photojournalism wants to create visions of dignified abjection, paparazzi photography records the abjection of the dignified, reducing them to objects of ridicule and mocking laughter’ (273). Squiers (1999) refers to paparazzi images as ‘visual form of gossip’ (286) and Calvert (2004) places the paparazzi’s images as part of our obsession with mediated voyeurism. Additionally, composition and aesthetics are less important to paparazzi images than to traditional photojournalistic images (Howe 2005). The content and the moment matters most. In fact, an anti-aesthetic seems to exist in the best paparazzi photographs, one that demonstrates the ability of the photographer to capture a fleeting moment under extreme conditions, when no one else could. So the photographs are often grainy, out of focus, poorly lit and poorly composed.

Most of the epithets used to describe them refer to their behaviour, implying that the paparazzi have overstepped an ethical boundary, and perhaps a legal one as well, in their aggressive pursuit of images of celebrities. The paparazzi are viewed as having no ethics; they are only in the business for money and they will do anything to get the photograph that will earn the biggest financial reward (Woodward and Amarick 1997). They are viewed as overly intrusive and aggressive, often not just invading the privacy of celebrities and their families, but also endangering their safety (Nordhaus 1999). The paparazzi are a burden that celebrities must bear. They are powerless victims in the face of the camera, unable to evade their gaze, especially as they become more famous (Woodward and Amarick 1997; Frosh 2001). Through their behaviour, the paparazzi constrain the lives of celebrities, limiting how they live and where they can go (see, for example, Dalton 2000). People often sympathize with the trials individual celebrities face at the hands of the paparazzi, imagining how they would feel in a similar situation.
Particularly after the death of Princess Diana in a Paris tunnel, many Hollywood celebrities clamoured for something to be done to rein in these intrusive photographers who seem to be everywhere. While the paparazzi have been cleared in Diana’s death, many still view them as a major player in the crash. For example, actor George Clooney called for a boycott of any television programme that bought and aired paparazzi still photographs or video. ABC News reporter Robert Krulwich even referred to the war that was being waged by celebrities to regain their privacy rights and those of their families (Krulwich 1997). Most recently, a new law was passed in California increasing the fines on photographers if a celebrity or those accompanying a celebrity are assaulted during the pursuit of a photograph (Reuters 2005).

Many legal scholars have argued that the content of the paparazzi is outside that which should be protected as newsworthy under a privacy tort defence. O’Neil (1999) states that the paparazzi practice is ‘overzealous journalism’, relying on ‘intrusive practices’ to gather ‘potentially embarrassing information about private individuals’ (703; see also Wulf and Levy 1995). Nordhaus (1999) suggests that ‘current privacy law is not structured in such a way as to afford celebrities the proper protection they need’ (289). Dendy (1996/1997) and Crisci (2002) argue that since the information reported by paparazzi does not help anyone better understand their world, they should not receive First Amendment protection. Other scholars (e.g. Morton 1998/1999) recognize that legislating against the paparazzi will have unintended consequences on ‘legitimate’ newsgathering, as well as areas of law enforcement. O’Neil (1999) condemns the paparazzi, dismissing what they gather as news, even as he grants that they have the legal right to do what they do.

Mainstream journalists consider the activity of the paparazzi to be something other than journalism, and the content, celebrities, as not newsworthy (Bird 1992; Kirtz 1997; Bishop 1999; MacMillan and Edwards 1999; Hindman 2003). Since paparazzi focus almost exclusively on entertainment celebrities, many critics feel their work lacks journalistic importance – a focus on the trivial of the world as opposed to the important topics of politics and world affairs (Smolla 1998; Bonner et al. 1999). Scharrer, Weidman, and Bissell (2003) argue that a clear division is drawn by mainstream journalists to differentiate ‘serious’ journalists, ‘whose function is to inform the public of important information related to their health and well being’, from ‘those producers of popular media who allegedly instead jeopardize public health by irresponsible practices and the transmission of potential harmful content’ (93–94). Sharkey (1997) quotes then-Time managing editor Walter Isaacson, who argues ‘that his magazine used only valid news photographs taken in public places, and rejected pictures by “stalking paparazzi invading people’s privacy”’ (21). Or, as Bodman (1997) states it most strongly at the time of Princess Diana’s death: ‘Once again the paparazzi have brought disgrace upon the industry; to call them photographers would be an insult to all professional photographers’ (12). Similarly, Geier (1998), in an article entitled ‘Photojournalists are not Paparazzi’, suggests that her photographer father represented the proper behaviour for photojournalists: ‘He was there when the celebrities wanted him there and he respected them when they did not’ (21). She hopes that ‘the public does not continue to associate the legitimate press with the paparazzi. We need our photojournalists, reporters and news people to tell it like it is’ (see also Soneshine 1997). Saltzman (1998) argued that the focus on Princess Diana represented the ‘sad state of journalism around the world, culminating with the decade’s preoccupation with celebrity journalism’ (65). He further argues that journalists should ‘forget celebrities and freaks and report the news that truly affects us all – news about the economy, about the government, about the environment, about people and issues that affect the way we live and work’ (65). From these descriptions, ethical news photographers are those who focus on serious issues and who do not act too aggressively, being respectful of those they cover. These ideas are also evident in the National Press Photographers Association Code of Ethics (NPPA Code of Ethics 2006).

Within these privacy arguments, there is an undercurrent of image control, in that the paparazzi represent uncontrollable characters in the highly controlled world of celebrity image making. Dalton (2000) argues ‘The effects that the paparazzi have on the lives of celebrities are tremendous. A simple photograph or videotape taken by a paparazzo can be detrimental to a celebrity . . . ’ (124). This, according to Dalton, is reason to sympathize with celebrities, and limit the paparazzi.

However, I argue, the issue of paparazzi and celebrities should primarily be viewed through the lens of image control, and that it is a mistake to consider celebrities through an empathetic lens of how we would feel in the same situation. As will be discussed later, celebrities are not simply individual people, like you and me. As Gomson (1994) argues, ‘The celebrity industry is the scene of constant battles for control’ (85). Here, he is
referring to the battles between producers, distributors and the stars’ representatives for control of a message about a product. But this statement could just as easily be a reference to the control of the image by the paparazzi, searching for uncontrolled moments in the lives of the celebrities, who would prefer to control the visual portrayal of their lives (whether personal or public).

Celebrities are not shy about using versions of their private lives to market themselves and their products. Much of a talk show exchange is spent discussing how the celebrities are spending their vacations, how their families are faring, how they are enjoying their new Labrador puppy. Further, celebrities often release their own photographs of weddings or babies to circumvent the paparazzi and present their own version of their lives. MTV programmes like Crips and Diary bring viewers into the homes of celebrities for an ‘up close and personal’ visit into the private areas of celebrities’ lives. Indeed, the private life of a celebrity is, for most, an integral component of the unified image that he or she is trying to sell. Therefore, given that celebrities are willing to present these ‘private’ aspects of their lives, privacy cannot be the root of the problem. Rather, it is the control of these moments that is at issue. Privacy is raised as an issue only when celebrities are not in control of the ‘private’ image that is portrayed.

To better understand the issue of image control, two areas will be examined: the concept of self-presentation, especially the work of Goffman (1959), and ideas on corporate image and reputation management.

**IMAGE AND SELF-PRESENTATION**

People seek to define the way they are seen in others’ eyes, and generally try to foster a positive image with others. This effort entails emphasizing certain characteristics, through dress, hairstyle, behaviour and/or speech, while hiding or diminishing other characteristics perceived as flawed. Image has been defined as the perceptions of an entity, including real or imaginary characteristics (Kennedy 1977; Haedrich 1993; Benoit 1997; Meijis 2002). Bromley (1993) calls image ‘a social product related only indirectly to what it is supposed to represent, and capable of being manipulated in all sorts of ways’ (13).

For organizations, image flows from everything a company, its employees and its corporate communication strategies do or say, intentionally or unintentionally. Our perceptions of a business are thus based on the sum total of all our experiences. These experiences may occur through direct or personal interactions with the entity, interpersonal descriptions of the entity or mediated representations of the entity (Kennedy 1977; Williams and Moffitt 1997; Deephouse 2000; Dowling 2001). Further, these perceptions may be positive or negative. Every person or business has an image, and the question is who controls the image – is it left to chance or is it created by design? In politics, as Axford, Madgwick, and Turner (1992) state, ‘Parties and leadership figures must either define themselves or be defined by their opponents’ (637). Likewise, Kennedy (1977) argues that ‘However the image is treated it is a property of every company; not managed it is apt to be a liability which none can afford in the present economic climate’ (120; see also Meijis 2002).

Image is only one factor affecting commercial success, but it becomes a necessary aspect of any business (Grunig 1993; Williams and Moffitt 1997). A positive image is an asset for a company or a person (Deephouse 2000), affecting the behaviour of those who receive the image. Most often the ‘right’ image is one that invokes a more positive response from people. In terms of interpersonal interaction, it could mean more friends or a promotion at work. In terms of business, it means increased sales, familiarity, satisfaction, positive attitudes and revenue, and it reduces the perceived risk of buying from a company (Kennedy 1977; Fombrun and Shanley 1990; Deephouse 2000; Nakra 2000; Dowling 2001). As Dowling (2001) states: ‘A good corporate reputation enhances the value of everything an organization does and says. A bad reputation devalues products and services, and it acts as a magnet that attracts further scorn’ (viii). For celebrities, the right image means the ability to attract producers and scripts, and to command larger salaries because of increased ticket sales or greater ratings on TV. A negative image may mean being shut out of lucrative opportunities.

In order to control how they are perceived, people and businesses attempt to manage their images, trying to promote a personally beneficial impression and avoid negative aspects (Grunig 1993). This becomes especially important when there is no direct interaction between the entities (such as viewers and mediated entities like politicians or celebrities). Goffman (1959) uses the term ‘performance’ to refer to ‘all the activity of a given participant on a given occasion which serves to influence in any way any of the other participants’ (15). To maintain an impression over time, people work to maintain consistency in how they present
them themselves to a given ‘audience’. This requires that the audience must not be allowed to observe situations where consistency is not maintained. Similar to Goffman’s (1959) idea of a performance, corporate image management is about gaining, maintaining, and enhancing status, esteem, trust and support among customers (Nakra 2000). For an organization, the performance entails all public presentations of the company’s image.

Goffman (1959) defines two areas that comprise a performance. First is the front region, the area where emphasized characteristics are seen or where the performance occurs. Second is the back region, the place where unemphasized or inconsistent characteristics are kept hidden. In addition, the back region serves as the place where performances are prepared, out of sight of audiences: ‘It is here that the capacity of a performance to express something beyond itself may be painstakingly fabricated; it is here that illusions and impressions are openly constructed. Here stage props and items of personal front can be stored in a kind of compact collapsing of whole repertoires of actions and characters’ (112). In the back region, the ‘performer’ can step out of the performance, out of character.

In order to protect one’s image, the back region must be kept hidden from audiences, as it may call into question the validity of the performance. Thus, protecting the back region and the transition between front and back regions is as much a part of image management as having a coherent performance. It is important to note that Goffman (1959) does not use terms such as public and private. Backstage is a preferred term to private, because aspects that are often considered private, such as family or relationships, may or may not be part of any performance depending on the circumstances; that is, these aspects may appear in a front region.

People, including celebrities, and organizations safeguard their images from challenges through what Goffman (1959) refers to as ‘protective practices’ (13). ‘Destructive information’ describes any information that could ‘discredit, disrupt, or make useless the impression that the performance fosters’ (141). Thus, as he suggests, a basic concern of any performance is ‘information control’, making sure the audience of a performance does not acquire such destructive information. In managing one’s image, consistency becomes central – whether it is consistency over time or consistency by the component parts of an organization. Inconsistency can create confusion among the audience or consumers, which can have a negative impact on an organization’s goals (Berger 1999; Meijs 2002).

Goffman (1959) was writing about self-presentation in an interpersonal context only. Meyrowitz (1985) expands Goffman’s ideas of self-presentation to include media theories of McLuhan, arguing that TV in particular alters our conceptions of situations and expectations for presentation of self. Television creates a world where back-stage and front-stage notions are often blurred, especially for celebrities. As Meyrowitz (1985) states: ‘Because of the high status person’s need to project only the proper image, subordinates must be kept away from any situation where the high status person is likely to display inappropriate behavior’ (66). Meyrowitz even suggests that TV may have an equalizing effect because it allows those lower in social status ‘to gain access to much information . . . by allowing increased opportunities for the sharing of information horizontally’ (322). Citing Meyrowitz, Gamson (1994) argues that the public in a sense has been brought into the backstage region through TV, exposing stars when they are not prepared to be seen. The paparazzi work in a similar fashion, challenging the coherency of the celebrity image by peering into the back region.

If an image, and the consistency of that image, can be based largely on mediated experiences, how do people know that the images are valid? Ideally, people look for evidence based on direct observations, which suggests a consistency between image and actual behaviour (Nakra 2000). With businesses people verify that products or services measure up to the messages the companies present, to see if they are cheating – that is, conveying something that is not accurate about the company (Dowling 2001). For entities with which people do not have direct interaction, they rely on the media to test the images. For example, an important role of the news media is to test whether politicians are living up to the messages they are presenting, since most citizens cannot interact with them (Axford, Madgwick, and Turner 1992; Kovach and Rosenstiel 2001). As this section suggests, image is a malleable concept which people and organizations manage in order to put their best face forward by revealing certain aspects of their life or business and concealing others. It is within an image structure that we will examine the nature of celebrities and the paparazzi. In the next section, I will examine more closely what celebrities are and the roles they play within society. Then I will use this framework of self-presentation theory and image management to interrogate the relationship between celebrities and the paparazzi.
CELEBRITIES AND IMAGE

Celebrities, including actors, musicians and others whose livelihoods depend on being seen by the greater public, are larger than life and yet seemingly personally known. For Boorstin (1961), a celebrity is ‘a person who is known for his well-knownness’ (57). He also refers to them as human pseudo-events. Similarly, Dyer (1986) says celebrities are ‘the ultimate example of media hype, foisted on us by the media’s constant need to manipulate our attention’ (15). Many authors argue that celebrities are all image, that there is nothing real there at all. They are, to use Mitroff and Bennis’s (1989), term, ‘unreality’. Still, there is the complication that these media images are created in relation to an actual person. As Dyer (1998) states: ‘Because stars have an existence in the world independent of their screen/fiction’ appearances, it is possible to believe . . . that as people they are more real than characters in stories. This means that they serve to disguise the fact that they are just as much produced images, constructed personalities as ‘characters’ are’ (20). The denotative aspect of the ‘real’ person naturalizes and camouflages the arbitrary and constructed connotative aspects meant for selling.

Celebrities, as a group, are highly influential, exerting their power through a form of leadership and charisma, rather than a more formal power or control. Mills (1959) outlines what he calls the power elite who make decisions that have a great impact on society, people such as politicians and other governmental officers. In addition to these individuals, Mills adds professional celebrities, people who, while not necessarily decision makers themselves, ‘often have the power to distract the attention of the public or afford sensations of the masses, or, more directly, to gain the ear of those who do occupy positions of direct power’ (4). Celebrity power allows celebrities a certain amount of freedom: freedom to vacation where they want, eat where the want, buy what they want. Marshall (1997) argues that ‘[Celebrities] are allowed to move on the public stage while the rest of us watch. They are allowed to express themselves quite individually and idiosyncratically while the rest of the members of the population are construed as demographic aggregates . . . .’ (ix–x). Marshall (1997) further states: ‘Celebrity status also confers on the person a certain discursive power: with society, the celebrity is a voice above others, a voice that is channeled into the media systems as being legitimately significant’ (x). On a basic level, celebrities have a major impact on society through how they act, what they wear, and the issues they support.5 Gamson (1994) goes as far to suggest, ‘Celebrity is a primary contemporary means to power, privilege, and mobility’ (186).

People interact for the most part with the celebrities through media representations, and not the actual person. Yet the process of celebrity creation allows audiences to think of the image as a real and known person (Dyer 1986, 1998). It is through media, especially visual media such as television and photographs, that people gain insights into the celebrity’s personality, seeing how they dress and behave, who they associate with, the stories they tell. (Brauer and Shields 1999). Just as an organization’s image is based on the totality of experiences with the entity, the image of a celebrity is created through mediated information generated about and by celebrities, including their performances, promotional appearances, publicity materials, advertising, and media/journalism coverage of their work and themselves (Dyer 1986, 1998; deCordova 1991; Harris 1991; Marshall 1997). Rojek (2001, 10) argues that celebrities are ‘cultural fabrications’, trying to present themselves as highly accessible and spontaneous. But celebrities are actually the antithesis of spontaneity – everything is planned to convey a certain image (Dyer 1991).

Where celebrity image management differs from Goffman’s model is that celebrities are trying to sell themselves as a commodity. Celebrities are both commodities as well as the producers of the commodities (Dyer 1986; Gamson 1994). Celebrity status is intimately linked to the idea of consumer capitalism (Marshall 1997). Celebrities encompass all that is possible in our consumer society, the epitome of the American dream. As Marshall (1997) states: ‘Celebrity status became aligned with the potentialities of the wedding of consumer culture with democratic aspirations’ (9; see also Henderson 1992).

Part of this marketing strategy is distinguishing one celebrity from the host of others, in a manner similar to any product in a competitive industry (Klaprat 1985). As Marshall (1997) states: ‘The star has become an individualized corporate entity, with recognizable brand and hoped-for audience loyalty’ (83; see also Henderson 1992). Mitroff and Bennis (1989) argue that celebrity creation is not about an individual but about an institution, an industry. A celebrity is a brand, his or her face a logo. Celebrities are seldom sold ‘as is’ to a market. More often a celebrity is modified to attract a market. As Mitroff and Bennis (1989) state: ‘Since the real life stories of the stars were not always as interesting – or as plentiful – as those demanded by the ever curious
public, many had to be manufactured. Their truth was not necessary, only their believability in the sense that they fitted in with and contributed to the persona, the star image’ (106; see also Gamson 1992).

At least since the beginning of the film studio system in the early twentieth century, there have been processes in place to foster the creation of celebrities (Gamson, 1992, 1994; Ndallanis, 2002). Gamson (1992) refers to actors of the 1920s as ‘studio owned-and-operated commodities’ (5). These stars were manufactured, tested and refined like any commodity (Rein, Kotler, and Stoller 1997), as the movie industry discovered that audiences responded better to a personality than to a movie title. The changing presentation of movie actors is outlined by deCordova (1991): by 1915 it had shifted from a focus on their acting life to a sole focus on the actor as a larger-than-life entity, an image. Studios began to produce their own fan magazines (e.g. Photoplay) in order to present a highly controlled view of the stars, yet give audiences a sense of the ‘real’ person, with articles often ‘written’ by the stars. By the end of the 1950s, with the collapse of the studio system, stars could be considered ‘self-owned commodities’, in control of their image (Gamson 1992, 12; see also Marshall 1997; Ndallanis 2002).

As suggested earlier, the control of one’s image is key. Like organizations, celebrities will have an image regardless of whether they manage it or not; the choice is how to shape the image. Consistency of message is essential across all situations (Rein, Kotler, and Stoller 1997). As Rein, Kotler, and Stoller (1997) state: ‘Given this human factor, celebrity manufacturers go to great lengths to display their products in controlled situations, in order to prevent the audience from viewing any aspect of the person/product that is unappealing or inconsistent with the image plan’ (151).

A central question that consistently arises with celebrities is one of authenticity (Dyer 1991; Rojek 2001), whether we are seeing the ‘real person’. A large objective of celebrity image management is that celebrities are not a manufactured image at all, but are authentic individuals, what Hinerman (1997) refers to as the ‘ideology of authenticity’ (147). Dyer (1986) suggests ‘There is a rhetoric of sincerity and authenticity, two qualities greatly prized in stars because they guarantee, respectively, that the star really means what he or she says, and that the star really is what she or he appears to be’ (11). To be believable, audiences must feel a personal connection to the ‘real’ person who is the celebrity. As with characters’ development in literature, personal details about the celebrities make the subject more real to audiences. Still, stars can be seen fitting into certain general types, stereotypes that are highly conventional and constrained: the bad boy, the vixen, the girl-next-door. These stories help connect with audiences, build and reinforce authenticity/credibility and build interest, regardless of whether the stories have anything to do with the actor’s true past (Rein, Kotler, and Stoller 1997).

Celebrities attempt to blur the public and private aspects of one’s life, offering up pieces of a ‘private’ life, a glimpse into the real (Marshall 1997; Shenk 1997; Bonner et al. 1999; Hilden 2002). This blurring helps build the sense of authenticity that is necessary for audiences to feel closer to the celebrity. For example, talk shows, tabloids and entertainment programs offer audiences the opportunity to see part of the ‘real’ person of a celebrity (Bird 1992). Part of this controlled image is to sync offscreen and onscreen persona (deCordova 1991; Klaprat 1985; Smith 2002), to make the personalities of the role and stars indistinguishable. Gamson (1994) refers to this as syncing the star’s ‘real’ life with his/her ‘real’ life (27), in addition to covering up any controversial or contradictory aspects of his or her life. Viewers can see a more personal and human side, as they react positively or negatively to the stress of the life. Marshall (1997) suggests it is through this sense of the private individual that celebrities are able to turn an image into economic and cultural capital. Or, as Rojek (2001) states: ‘The public presentation of self is always a staged activity, in which the human actor presents a “front” or “face” to others while keeping a significant portion of the self in reserve’ (11).

To create and manage this consistent image, a celebrity must surround him- or herself with an army of assistants; what Rojek (2001) calls ‘cultural intermediaries’. These include agents, publicists, fashion and beauty consultants, talent coaches and security staff. As Sekula (1984) states: ‘The image of a celebrity is an institutional edifice, maintained and protected by armies of press agents, makeup artists, and bodyguards’ (29). It usually falls to the publicist to ensure the consistency and control of the celebrity’s image and to find the means to get that image into the public. As Marshall (1997) states: ‘The publicity agent has continued to assume this role of enlarging the meaning of any actor in the public sphere and expanding the audience’s knowledge and desire for knowledge of the celebrity’s personal life’ (82; see also Gamson 1994; Walls 2000).
Through the publicity staff, a celebrity’s image is brought to the public, preferably in a highly controlled manner (Walls 2000). Often journalists must agree to a variety of conditions in order to gain access to the stars (Friend 2002). Despite these conditions, the publicists usually avoid being seen as involved in the creation of the image, so as not to take away from the illusion of authenticity – that audiences are receiving an unmanipulated glimpse of the real person. As Friend (2002) states about this relationship: ‘It behooves the journalist, because it suggests that he has penetrated a rarefied realm; it behooves the star, because he looks fearless and unattended by handlers; and it behooves the publicist, because it always behooves the publicist if the star is behooved’ (42). This control extends as far as threatening to shut off access to the journalist if a story is not to the star’s liking.

JOURNALISM AND IMAGE-MAKING

Journalism is therefore an essential tool for celebrity image making. If a celebrity story can be disseminated through seemingly independent entertainment journalists, the authenticity of the celebrity is increased. Beyond studio-produced publications, journalistic outlets such as Life, Look, the Saturday Evening Post and, later, People historically gave the celebrity real-life stories a veneer of authenticity and objectivity. According to Gamson (1994), stories in these publications focused on how the celebrities enjoyed their success and surrounded themselves with the best money could buy. Seldom did these publications print anything negative about the celebrities. Walls (2000) states that Dick Stolley, founding editor of People, ‘knew that if People magazine started to burn its subjects – even if it was with the star’s own words – celebrities would stop coming to the magazine with their stories’ (114). Access to the celebrities’ stories was essential to these publications. The images in journalistic publications often were as highly controlled and contrived as the images supplied directly from the studios. Reviewing an exhibit of Sid Avery’s ‘candid’ celebrity photos for the Saturday Evening Post, McKenna (1990) states, ‘His pictures often depict the gods and goddesses of Hollywood impersonating average people by performing humdrum activities – washing their cars, cooking breakfast, gabbing on the phone. . . . Nonetheless, his pictures espouse a kind of fiction that borders on conspiracy’ (21).

Journalists thus confirm the real person behind the image. From this standpoint, the entertainment industry and the tabloids have a symbiotic relationship, playing off each other to improve each other’s profits. This is most often accomplished by presenting positive stories on the celebrities (Bird 1992). Likewise, Gamson (1994) argues that ‘it is a professional and institutional necessity for entertainment media to build and maintain successful working relationships with them’ (89).

Celebrities certainly want their images in the public eye; but only want them displayed on their terms (Zimmerman 1989). Particularly recently, demand for control of interviews and photo shoots has increased (see also Friend 2002; Sternbergh 2004). In addition, there are efforts by celebrities to circumvent uncontrolled portrayals. For example, Dalton (2000) suggests nine ways celebrities can control the paparazzi or prevent them from photographing unwanted situations, including use of disguises, use of bodyguards to shield the celebrity from the camera’s view, selling exclusive images to the celebrity outlets, and choosing to talk with or be photographed by ‘agreeable outlets’ (140). Celebrities are also creating their own websites to present ‘authorized’ facts and pictures (including ‘candids’), as well as to counter any negative publicity (Hass 1999).

Celebrities themselves are hiring photographers to create ‘candid’ pictures under greater control. Sales (2003) discusses ‘a new breed of paparazzo’ who are hired by celebrities to make candid images at openings, parties and other events (176; see also Howe 2005). She presents the case of Kevin Mazur’s agency WireImage, which she suggests supplies over a third of all celebrity photographs displayed in major entertainment, fashion, and women’s magazines (as of October 2002; Sales 2003, 181). This agency promises to never produce negative or embarrassing images of its celebrity clients. As Sales (2003) sees it: ‘Paparazzi now are divided into the invited – event photographers – and the uninvited – street photographers, who still get the type of stolen shot that has become the object of the People and Us bidding war’ (181), with the majority of celebrity images now used in entertainment magazines being of this controlled type. Similarly, Richardson (1998) presents an anecdote of his experience as a paparazzo, trying to photograph Sharon Stone on the street set of a movie: ‘Meanwhile, the set photographer keeps snapping away at Sharon, just to make it extra clear that it’s not being photographed that bothers her so much as being photographed by us. What she wants is photo approval’ (70). This fits with Fowles’s (1992) statement that stars get angry ‘when the truths are contrary to the image the star wishes to promote’ (129).
THE FUNCTION OF THE PAPARAZZI

This brings us back to the function of the paparazzi when examined through a lens of image control. The paparazzi are in opposition to this highly controlled celebrity image machine, creating, in Meijs’s (2002) words, ‘image instability’, and challenging the ‘protective practices’ celebrities and their people establish to foster image control. They offer an alternative narrative to the one presented so flawlessly by the stars, one that may circumvent the handlers and allow viewers backstage, as Meyrowitz (1985) suggests. The paparazzi are the ‘antidote’ to managed photographs by going outside of the handler’s and publicist’s control. It is not fair to say that paparazzi will offer truth about the celebrities through their images, but they will offer a counter image, one not necessarily controlled by the celebrity. ‘The paparazzo’s task’, according to Sekula (1984), ‘is to penetrate that wall’ (29). As Squiers (1997) states: ‘Within this rigid system, the paparazzo is the wild card. Amid all the bashing of paparazzi, it should be noted that they are sometimes – even often – the only journalists who cover celebrities outside the control of publicity agents’ (99). Bird (1992) suggests that ‘photos are often used to belie the image of the famous as always perfect, such as the regular “unflattering candid shots of disheveled beauties, of heroes caught off-guard in a scuffle and of close-ups disclosing warts, wens, wrinkles and overweight”’ (47). Marshall (1997) offers the case of Tom Cruise, a celebrity whose image has been highly controlled. Still, this control has not been perfect: ‘Various celebrity-attended functions, the work of the paparazzi, and gossip columnists, among others, are operating in the space between the film image and the supposed “real” person’ (108; see also Roeper 2005).

According to many authors writing on the purpose of journalism, journalists must be an independent check on power (Commission on Freedom of the Press 1947; McQuail 1992, 2000; Kovach and Rosenstiel 2001). In a consumer culture such as ours, this means more than being a watchdog on political power only. It also includes economic and cultural power – both of which celebrities embody. While many critics may dismiss celebrities as trivial and their coverage by journalists as unimportant, as stated earlier, Gamson (1994) and others view celebrities as holding some significant form of cultural, political and/or economic power within contemporary American society. This is not to suggest an equivalence to other forms of power in terms of impact on society. Celebrity power is demonstrated less through direct manipulation of the economic or political systems than through the more indirect paths of influence, built over repeated patterns of representation. It is within this form of influence that paparazzo images have a role. While a single image of a drunken celebrity may seem trivial, these types of images begin a dialogue within society about the nature of celebrity representations, and about who holds power and perhaps why. Such photographs do not replace coverage of other societal institutions. Still, this examination places these photographs functionally in the same context as photographs of politics or war, serving a journalistic purpose of monitoring and questioning power.

Celebrities are influential, and if they are in media, they are selling something. Lull (1997) argues, ‘The underlying factor in all of this is visibility, wanted and unwanted. When a princess or a president wants media attention, he or she gets it. But if we allow media celebrities – political figures, sports heroes, movie stars, billionaire businessmen, pop musicians and yes, members of the royal family – to limit the context in which they are viewed and pondered, then we would miss out on lots of important history’ (7). If this check on power is an essential role for journalists, the paparazzi represent not the worst of journalism, as suggested by many, but the best of journalism, circumventing image handlers and publicists to find alternative and less controlled images of those in power, challenging any otherwise controlled version of the celebrity’s narrative. If the power of celebrities is real, then the paparazzi have the potential to start a conversation about what is presented by image handlers about the constructed nature of celebrity. The paparazzi reveal that which those in power would rather not have seen. Griffiths (1997) states that ‘Picturing society, warts and all, quickly relegates the photographer to the unpopular role of critic. Unpopular, that is, with those responsible for the warts, popular with those concerned about them’ (26). He also argues: ‘As our minds are increasingly manipulated by imagery intended to subjugate us, the need for independent observers/critics is more compelling than ever’ (27; see also Squiers 1999).

The techniques of the paparazzi are in fact what is normatively expected of all journalists. The charge of journalists is to seek the mismatch between image and reality, to circumvent publicity machines, and to challenge those in power as a critical check on abuse. Assigning power only to government officials is too narrow a way to think about the power elite in our
country, especially in such a commodity culture, with celebrities being both the premiere marketers and users of commodities, as well as commodities themselves. Certainly most journalists would not exclude business abuses from the purview of the press. And as recent coverage suggests, church abuses have been heavily examined. Just as it is by businesses and churches, society’s governance is highly affected by the influence of celebrities, through lobbying for various pet causes, media protection, or other causes of interest, not to mention the cultural influence affecting the citizenry daily through exposure to mass media (including advertising) – what to buy, wear, eat (or not), what to do to one’s body, what religion to become involved in, what to consume.

At their best, paparazzi work within the structure of media scandal, acting as moral light to shine on the celebrity’s behaviour (Bird 1997; Lull and Hinerman 1997; Thompson 1997). Lull and Hinerman (1997) refer to scandal coverage as more than just sensationalism. They refer to it as a ‘vigorous investigative journalism’, challenging those in power. A basic purpose of any tabloid journalism is to reveal what celebrities do not necessarily want public (Connell 1992). Public officials call these scandals private only because they may undermine a previously created image. Still, the paparazzi do not just operate within scandal, but they more broadly test the veracity of any image presented by celebrities. They examine any mismatch between societal values and the behaviour of those in power (Lull and Hinerman 1997; Thompson 1997). Paparazzi images, like any scandal coverage, may undercut the image that the celebrity is trying to present, but that cannot be the priority of the paparazzi, for as journalists, their first responsibility is to the citizens, not the sources (Kovach and Rosentstiel 2001). Connell (1992) suggests that scandal stories in tabloids are in fact political since they focus on those in power, and ‘they focus on the abuses of the rights and privileges that have been granted the heroes and heroines’ (81).

This is not the way most people perceive of the paparazzi, a group normally thought of as representing the worst of the media, taking advantage of the First Amendment in order to harass people. This may not even be the way the paparazzi perceive themselves. We must separate out the functions played by paparazzi and their images and the personal motivations of those involved with the practices. Simply because many paparazzi are motivated by money does not mean their images and their methods do not serve a normative journalistic function within American society.

**COVERING CELEBRITIES**

Journalism, I argue, has four possible options for covering celebrities. First, there is the option of not covering them at all. This choice, at least rhetorically, is the option most mainstream journalists would prefer. As many of the critics mentioned previously suggested, a focus on celebrity is a sign of declining journalistic standards (e.g. Dendy 1996/1997; Bodman 1997; O’Neil 1999; Crisci 2002). They argue the content is trivial and does not help advance democracy. This option ignores the cultural and economic power celebrities wield within American society.

A second option is to cover celebrities as fluff, relegating them to humorous gossip pages in the newspaper. This choice tends to be the way much of the mainstream journalism covers celebrities when they do. There is always a tone of frivolity, to match the apparent trivial nature of this content. Like the first option, celebrity journalism of this manner sends the message that celebrities have no real economic or cultural power within society; celebrities are there merely for amusement and distraction.

A third option is to cover celebrities in a compliant manner, with journalists presenting them in a manner of the celebrity’s choosing. This one puts journalism in the position of being merely an extension of the celebrity’s strategic marketing plan. Most of this coverage presents an image that, as suggested earlier, syncs the on-screen and ‘real’ aspects of the celebrity’s life, attempting to diminish differences between the celebrity and audiences. This option plays into the myth that celebrities are just like everyone else, erasing their role in commodity culture and their status as societal elites.

The final option is to cover the entertainment industry like any other powerful cultural institution in society, with celebrities as the businesses within that industry, each trying to present an image to the consuming public to improve their sales. When viewed in this way, it is logical to see all mainstream journalists following the paparazzi and rigorously testing the veracity of celebrity images. Journalists should look more deeply behind and test image, just as they do for political and business institutions.

**BEYOND CELEBRITY**

Beyond lessons for covering celebrity and entertainment, the paparazzi offer mainstream journalists the opportunity to re-examine how more ‘serious’ news
topics such as politics and business are covered. Journalists focused on topics other than celebrities, building on the example of the paparazzi, should continue to circumvent the professional handlers and publicists used by politicians, businesses and other powerful interests. This is especially important since the line between politics and celebrity has blurred, as many of the celebrity image techniques have migrated to politics. As Gamson (1994) states: 'Citizens continually encounter the stuff of politics as celebrity, both directly and through commentary; the botched lines, the handlers, the gossip, the coaches, the makeup artists, the People covers, the interview strategies, the talk-show appearances, the personal-life stories, the photo opportunities’ (192).

It is not new to suggest that there are problems with journalists’ coverage of politics and business. Reporters often simply echo press releases or the words of the politicians, without challenging their statements, and many critics cite a too-cosy relationship between journalists and those they cover, especially in Washington, DC (see Gamson 1994; Fallows 1996; Bennett 2003). Critics charge that there is often too feeble an attempt by mainstream journalists to seriously challenge the statements made by official sources, to find alternative viewpoints from official sources, or even to tell stories without the assistance of the official sources. Whether it is the effect of deadline pressure, fear of being beat by the competition, laziness, or fear of being shut out, political journalists (word and picture) do not often enough question the images presented by politicians and their staffs. Bennett (2003) argues that journalists do not often test the symbols presented by politicians for validity. Fallows (1996) suggests that the elite journalists often identify with those in power in Washington and see themselves as part of the political process. In the end, this means serving more as stenographers than as watchdogs. As Marshall (1997) suggests: 'Because of the prefabrication of media events, television is often quite compliant in covering them in newscasts; instead of conducting an investigative search for televisial stories, it is often much simpler to take what is provided by politicians, material that is organized to conform to the codes and conventions of what constitutes a news story’ (215).

This is not to say that the techniques of the paparazzi cannot be seen in the realms of politics. Certainly the feeding frenzies associated with any number of Washington scandals demonstrate political photographers working in similar manners (Sabato 1991). But most often political photographers focus on prescheduled events such as press conferences and speeches. Moreover, most feeding frenzies represent the reactive nature of political journalism, with packs of reporters and photographers racing to keep up with a story that has already been revealed. I am not suggesting more pack frenzies in political journalism, but a continued focus away from public, staged events and more toward the enterprise side of investigative journalism that challenges and tests political image-making.

CONCLUSION

An examination of the function of the paparazzi and celebrity image is at the heart of visual studies. A need to examine the construction of what passes for visual truth in our society is important, especially on a subject that relates to issues of cultural capital, and for issues or topics for which all or the majority of our knowledge comes from mediated sources. Most audience members have no way to test the veracity of the information directly.

It is not new to suggest that visuals are constructed (see, for example, Mendelson 2006), with many factors giving rise to the meaning of photographs, factors that are often at odds with each other. Mendelson examines various influences at play that give rise to photographic meaning, including the subjects, the photographer, the institution under which the photographer operates, and the viewer. The present study is informative for pulling apart the nature of the interplay between subjects and photographers, something examined extensively by Newton (2001) in her model of photographic interaction. This interaction can range from what she calls a visual embrace to visual rape. At its core, the examination of paparazzi and celebrities is one of power. In the interplay between subjects and photographer, the focus is often on the power exerted by the photographer (Pryluck 1988; Lutz and Collins 1993; Newton 2001). Often the issue is one of race and class, as well as nationality. The photographer photographic subjects over which s/he has political, economic or cultural power ('photographing down'). In the traditional perspective on the paparazzi, that of privacy, the focus is on the limited power celebrities have over their lives when hunted by the paparazzi. The paparazzi can be seen as extension of a power structure, keeping the celebrities under surveillance (Tagg 1988; Squiers 1999). While not addressing the issue of celebrity, Tagg is highly critical of the role of photography as a surveillance tool of governmental power on citizens.
Celebrities are a case, however, where the subject often has more socio-economical/cultural power than the photographer in shaping photographic content, and this power plays a role in the creation and ultimate meaning of celebrity photographs. In the case of paparazzi, we can see the challenges faced by photographing those with more power (i.e. photographing up). Celebrities, through actual or threat of physical force, legal action or denial of access, have power to control the way they are portrayed. Further, the celebrities’ definition of the relationship is diffused within society, so that audiences internalize the debate from the perspective of the celebrity privacy. People empathize with the plight of the poor celebrities, ignoring the vast resources many of them command.

The intersection of celebrity and the paparazzi is, as Berger (1999) suggests, a ‘terrain of struggle’ (193). These two groups are wrestling for control of the messages that audiences receive, and thus are wrestling for control of meaning and resulting power. Within a normative model of journalism, journalists are constantly struggling with those in power for control of meaning for the benefit of citizens. In the end, as Howard Kurtz (‘The Erosion of Values’, 1998) states, ‘We are complicit, in varying degrees, in the paparazzi phenomenon.’ Perhaps this statement should be taken more seriously as a positive charge, and perhaps journalists should be more complicit in the paparazzi phenomenon. Perhaps we would have better journalism.

Acknowledgements
The author thanks Drs Bonnie Brennen, Carolyn Kitch, Tamra Mendelson and Priscilla Murphy, and an anonymous reviewer for their thoughtful comments on earlier versions of this article.

NOTES
[1] Privacy refers to both an ethical and a legal concept, whose boundary is malleable, but usually refers to those aspects of a person’s life not visible to those beyond friends and family. This article, while touching on legal issues, focuses more on the ethical issues – namely, what journalists and the paparazzi should do. This article is not an exhaustive examination of the legal conceptualization of privacy; rather, it proposes an alternative model regarding the functions of paparazzo images.

[2] This analysis focused mostly on American notions of celebrity and journalism. While similarities exist with other countries, differing legal and social contexts make it challenging to universalize these arguments.

[3] A negative view of photographers is not new with the paparazzi. Jay (1984) argues that the first snapshotners (individuals with the first handheld cameras) were viewed quite negatively at the beginning of the twentieth century. Similarly, Mensel (1991) claims that the creation of laws protecting a person’s right of privacy started in New York State because of citizens’ aggravation over the prevalence and the perceived lack of ethics of users of the new Kodak cameras during the same time period.

[4] Many argue that Diana consistently and consciously courted media attention even before she wed Prince Charles (e.g. Walls 2000).

[5] The role of celebrities as spokespeople in public relations, health communication and advertising campaigns speaks to their rhetorical influences and power (e.g., Friedman and Friedman 1979; Kamins et al. 1989; Kamins 1990; Basil 1996).

[6] The use of the term ‘tabloid’ refers less to the format of the paper and more to the historical and present association of this format with more sensational forms of journalism, beginning in the 1920s (Bird 1992; Becker 2003).

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