

Assignment Explanations:

Both of these assignments have portions, sometimes large portions, of the original taken out so they are quicker to read. These missing portions are denoted with ellipses; I've tried to piece it so the papers still make sense.

Sample 1: Extended Celebrity Tracking Assignment

Originally written as the final paper for Dr. Kahlenberg's class, Media & Society. The assignment was to take an article or two from tabloid magazines and analyze their construction based on course themes.

Sample 2: Creating The Binary: Societal Expectations Affect Body Image

Originally written for Professor Carlson's FYS, Body Dialogues. This was our final paper; we created our own theses based on any of the course readings. I make use the third-gender pronouns "ze" (for he/she) and "hir" (for his/her) towards the end of the piece.

Sample 1:

As if getting dropped by his production company and being labeled crazy due to his antics on Oprah weren't enough, Tom Cruise may have a new reason to be concerned...

The September 22nd issue of *In Touch* features an article entitled "Katie's secret meeting" which focuses on the fact that Katie and her ex-boyfriend, Joshua Jackson, have renewed their friendship. The part that makes the story worth reading? Katie has not mentioned a thing about it to her husband, Tom...

Gamson (1994) discusses the concept of what makes a "good story" and, seeing as Katie and Tom are featured on front page, *In Touch* must have thought they made a good one. Gamson (1994) describes a good story as "a narrative resolution somewhere between promotional "puffery" and "serious" investigation...it allows journalists to pursue commercial appeal..." (p 99). Looking at the details of the Katie and Josh article, readers can see the healthy amount of "puff" to fill in the spaces where there isn't information from "serious" investigation. Once

again, *In Touch* provides its readers with less than a page of written content but places pictures and information boxes, such as the one listing the reasons why it's "no wonder Katie still likes Josh," to create the commercial appeal of a four page article that should contain a lot of scandalous information for the readers. The "serious investigation" that Gamson describes is implied in this article. The subheading of the article reads "Katie Holmes hasn't told her husband...that she recently rekindled her friendship with old boyfriend Joshua Jackson" (*In Touch*, 2008, p 37). This implies that if Tom doesn't even know about the friendship, *In Touch* much have done some serious digging to get the inside story for their readers. The quotes from people known only as "another source" and "the insider" give the impression that this information was supposed to be a secret until *In Touch* started investigating.

As any good magazine editor knows, "It's about money. You need someone who can sell the magazine" (Gamson, 1994, p 66). Katie and Tom are celebrities, human pseudo-events "made by all of us who willingly read about [them]" (Boorstin, 1979, p. 25). Do readers honestly remember the last accomplishment either of these two had? What was the last thing they were in that was not panned by the critics? Katie and Tom are, at this stage of their lives, famous for being famous. They are not celebrated for their achievements; they are viewed by *In Touch* simply as products to be sold for profit. The magazine has to decide between the two of them which one will bring in more attention and readers, and therefore more money. Gamson (1994) describes, that as the 20th century has progressed, celebrities have become "merchandise," "inventory," a "product," "a commodity," while fans [have become] "markets..." The celebrity is an investment..." and this explains why Katie Holmes is the more prominent cover image over Tom Cruise (p. 45). The front page story needs to be able to grab the attention of those women standing in line to pay for their groceries. It would have been relatively easy to spin the story a different way and make it seem as though Katie is being dishonest and untrustworthy by striking

up a relationship with her ex. Instead, the magazine empathizes with her while criticizing Tom for not being around enough. The editors of *In Touch* have to ask themselves, “Could Tom Cruise really sell a copy of this magazine as well as Katie Holmes could?” Cruise is now known more for being highly strung and slightly crazy. Katie is perceived as being a successful mother who is trying new things. The target audience, young adults, is sick of Tom Cruise’s antics – he is so last year. They would much rather read about Katie’s love life, particularly if it is scandalous...

Magazines “have a vested interest in some extent to creating celebrities, because these are the people you’re going to continue to get stories out of” (Gamson, 1994, p 66). *In Touch* is not working on establishing Katie as a celebrity; this feat has already been accomplished. However, they are using this particular story as a set up for others about Katie and Tom’s or Katie and Josh’s relationship. In the November 24th issue of *In Touch*, another article on Katie and Tom’s relationship is featured. The special “couples update” contains the type of information that a reader would expect given the content of *In Touch*’s last article featuring Tom and Katie – namely that Tom and Katie’s relationship is falling apart. According to “friends,” the only reason the two are still together is for the sake of their daughter. In typical tabloid form, the article consists of information from sources referred to only as “friend” or “insider.”

In addition to reusing article topics to save money, tabloids also reuse media, like photographs, to save money. As Bracci (2006) describes, “media access requires economic strength, and those with modest financial resources are disadvantaged...”, and *In Touch Weekly* has some of the most modest of financial resources (p. 124). Bracci’s article discusses possible reasons for forming big corporations and the need for money is at the top of the list. Typically big corporations will own multiple sources of media – a magazine here, a radio station there, a publishing company somewhere else – and be able to reuse topics and material across those

media (Bracci, 2006). *In Touch* is owned by a publishing company that only owns magazines exactly like *In Touch* and therefore can save money by reusing their own media – typically this media consists of the photographs they acquire from the paparazzi. Since they do not have as many sources to spread this media across, it is very easy for readers to notice photographs from years past cropping up in current articles. The supplemental box in the November 24th issue comparing Katie and Tom’s relationship to Tom and Nicole Kidman’s relationship makes nice use of the old photographs of Tom and Nicole’s relationship all the way back in the late nineties.

If Katie should dump Tom and Josh should ditch his current girlfriend, *In Touch* will be able to say that they saw the whole thing coming and further establish their credibility as a celebrity gossip source. ...The tabloids need to convince members of all of these audiences to want to read their magazine. What makes *In Touch* a better source of celebrity gossip than say, Perez Hilton or *OK Magazine*? The answer to this question is authenticity. ...audiences may not share outlooks but they share the requirement of authenticity for the activities that engage them, whether it’s authentic celebrity gossip or authentic construction of that gossip (Gamson, 1994, p. 169). Authenticity is an important part of the relationship between celebrity media sources and their audiences because it is what gains the audience and keeps them coming back for more information. Why would you go read a magazine if it never contained accurate information, if it wasn’t a credible source?

The September 22nd article, while predominantly discussing the relationship between Katie and her ex-boyfriend, also makes sure to include details about Katie’s new project – Broadway. It is mentioned that the reason for Katie being in New York and away from Tom in the first place is due to the fact that she is starring in the production *All My Sons*. As Gamson (1994) states, there are two sets of activities used to increase a person’s notoriety. One of those sets uses “the entertainer as a spokesperson for the project, thereby increasing her recognition

through increased exposure” (p 63). *In Touch* takes time in the article to provide us with pictures of a billboard for *All My Sons* as well as a poster for the show with Katie’s face on it. They also mention the release date of the show and make sure that the readers will know just how hard Katie has been working using a quote from one of their countless “insiders”, “Starring on Broadway is a very big deal for Katie. She is taking this role very seriously...” It is also mentioned that it is so unfortunate sales to the show “have been slower than anticipated and anti-Scientology protesters have threatened to disrupt performances” (*In Touch*, 2008, p 38). *In Touch* appears to be using this story not only to sell magazines but to subtly plug Holmes’ performance and arouse excitement for her show, “the celebrity is the selling tool,” says publicist Janine Rosenblat. Rosenblat continues, “...celebrities not only provide the obvious subject matter but are exploited to sell magazine or build ratings and thus advertising revenues” and *In Touch* is clearly using Katie as the subject matter to sell their magazine, build their ratings and advertise for *All My Sons* all at the same time (Gamson, 1994, p 63).

It is likely that Katie’s publicist or agent, someone who cares about Katie’s success, dropped the news to *In Touch* about Katie and Josh just so they could get the show advertised in a widely known source. Even the smaller, less publicized “couples update” contains a mention of *All My Sons*. “Publicity professionals...supply an “information subsidy,” usable written and visual information that the reporter would otherwise have to spend valuable time locating and writing up...they provide precisely what the media covering them need” (Gamson, 1994, p. 86). The media needs accurate information to gain authenticity and credibility with its audience, and they need it about something entertaining that can be covered for cheap. Publicity personnel can provide this in exchange for press. This is another reason Katie could be the one in the spotlight, her publicist is pulling the strings, not Tom’s...

Sample 2:

A 'normal' person's body image is affected by societal expectations, but even people who do not match social expectations have their body image shaped for them. In fact, society influences the body images of people who are gender confused just as much, if not more so, than any 'normal' person. The term "body image" is one of many that are used often without the user knowing a concrete definition. It is understood that "body image" is a person's feelings about their own body - how they view it and how comfortable they feel in it – but, as Shaun Gallagher, a Ph.D in Philosophy, states, "A body image involves more than occurrent perceptions" (24); it consists of more than just one person's perceptions of their own body. "Social and cultural factors clearly affect perceptual, conceptual, and emotional aspects of body image" as well (24).

...a person's body image is based very much on the "social conception of the individual." Members of a society internalize the social goals of that society in order to not stand out and appear "different" or "abnormal," they cannot separate the social conception of themselves from their conception of themselves. In fact, they are defined by that social conception. In a society, people want to fit the mold of whatever is 'normal,' we can see the expectations of 'normalcy' in a society through the media of it. For the purposes of this essay, "society" will be operationally defined as the population of white, middle-class men and women in America. In her book, *Survival of the Prettiest*, Nancy Etcoff writes "the media channel desire and narrow the bandwidth of our preferences" (4-5). For the men and women of this society, the media has channeled the preference to be of a male or female that fits into the social roles it portrays as reality.

How does the media portray those social roles? Susan Sontag, a seminal feminist writer, wrote that "'masculinity' is identified with competence, autonomy, self-control...[while] 'femininity' is identified with incompetence, helplessness, passivity, noncompetitiveness, being nice" (33). ...Sontag constructs a sphere around each word that contains the societal conception of

what it is to be that word. These spheres, therefore, lay the grounds on which men and women in the society construct their self-image. In the media of the examined society, Sontag's definitions of what it is to be "masculine" and "feminine" appear to hold true. The media portrays men as competent and self-controlled while they portray women as preoccupied with their appearance, passive and kind – and they never let those definitions overlap. Despite gains women have made in the public, working sphere, their "private role of nurturer remains ideologically intact" (Bordo 118). This "private role of nurturer" is something separates men from women, keeping gender ideology and gender identity split into a male gender and female gender...

It is important to notice how people who do not stay restricted to these gender boundaries are treated by the media and the society that surrounds it. Take for example Hillary Clinton's statement at the beginning of the 1992 U.S. presidential campaign. After being asked constant questions regarding her pursuit of a professional career, Clinton stated, "Well, I suppose I could have stayed home and baked cookies and had teas..." This clip was replayed and used in opponents' campaigns as evidence of Hillary's "disdain for traditional maternal values." The way Hillary combated this and proved her "true womanhood" was by producing her favorite cookie recipe (Bordo 121-2). The media was a tool through which Clinton's character was called into question simply because she did not appear to stick to her sphere of "nurturer." The fact that this incident was thought of as an attack shows that the society surrounding that media didn't question it. The society just assumed that because Clinton didn't conform to the role they defined for her, she must be unfit to hold any role. Clinton may have wanted to pursue a career path and stray from her defined role as "nurturer," but she allowed society to shape her body image too. She felt she had to combat society's belief of her by doing something that was "normal" for a woman to do – baking cookies.

...But what about for the people who don't fit into those spheres? Adrian Piper, Ph.D in Philosophy, defines xenophobia as the "fear of the other considered as an alien – someone who does not look the way that one takes to be normal. It's about the violation of boundaries" (P125). Piper recounts for us Kant's theory that if we perceive something that does not "conform to categories of experience", that goes beyond our normal "boundaries", we "essentially have to repress or ignore or dismiss" it (126). What is considered "alien" is a matter of social context; therefore our society would reject those people who do not "conform to categories" of male or female. In our society, people are not allowed to be both genders or neither gender. Society sees its members as one gender or the other based on what genitals they were born with and they are expected to conform to the gender identity that matches those organs. If people do not conform, they and the people around them are fully aware of the fact, thanks to the constant reminders of the media. This awareness affects those people's body image – they have no choice but to think of themselves as "abnormal" and feel uncomfortable in their body.

In Charles O. Anderson and Troy Dwyer's original dance-theater production *CAW*, there are four different story lines. These story lines each focus on a group of people that would be considered "anomalous" in the society they are a part of whether it is due to their ideology, beliefs on race and society or gender identity. In *CAW* though, we do not see the contrasting society those groups are a part of. We only see the effects of that society on the psychology of the characters. We can assume that this society is our own thanks to the playbill. Of particular interest is how the character Xanthara's (a drag queen) concept of self is portrayed in *CAW*. The audience sees how Xanthara views herself and others like her (others like her meaning others that have a gender identity of neither male nor female) and knows that her views have been shaped by society. "They say there's such a thing as one world but that ain't true, there are lots and some of us can't live in any of them...there are rules," Xanthara says. This quote in particular exemplifies how the

audience can see society's effects on the members of the "abnormal" groups' body image. Xanthara views herself and others like her as not being able to even live in her world. Xanthara would never believe that she, or any other person like her, could not live in a society if she had not been taught that by said society. "The world tells you a story and you believe that story so you can live in it," Xanthara must believe *her* story the way society has taught it to her. Her self image is that she is abnormal, that she cannot live in her world or any world. Society ignores and dismisses Xanthara as something beyond their realm of conception. They teach her that she is an anomaly and so that becomes part of her identity... She must deceive herself of who she is because her society had taught her that she was abnormal and therefore an outsider. This deception has effectively become who she sees herself to be –an outsider in the society she was born into.

Tobias K. Davis' "The Naked I: Monologues From Beyond The Binary" lets audiences peek into the thoughts of real people in our society who, like Xanthara, do not have a gender identity that is male or female. The title of the show really says it all - "beyond the binary" acknowledges that there is a binary, an opposition, a separation, of male and female and here are the stories of those that fit neither sphere. The monologues included in the show were written by real people; Davis edited them and adapted them for the stage. One of the monologues was written by a 15 year old female-to-male patient; the patient had been born female and was taking hormones to change into a male. Hir statement, "my vagina defines me as female to society...[but] a whole lot of genitals don't fit well into male or female," echoes Xanthara's even though Xanthara is a fictional character. Like Xanthara, the person who this statement belongs to understands that society tells hir what they should be but ze knows that what ze is "doesn't fit." ...Another monologue from this show was from a person who had been born female and was still in a female body but whose mind was male. Ze insisted that hir body "was a boy's body *because* I'm a boy." This person does not appear to allow society to tell them they should be "feminine"

when they felt otherwise. This person appears to not allow society to shape hir image of hirself – ze insists that hir body is what hir mind reflects. However, ze must be listening to what society is saying if ze has internalized the concept that hir gender identity and hir physical identity have to match. The only way for this person to believe that a boy’s mindset does not match their physical body would be for society to have ingrained that belief into them.

Transsexuals have distorted body images because society expects them to fit into a defined sphere of either male or female. This quote was from a person undergoing male-to-female reassignment surgery, “[The doctor] thinks of me as a cute girl with a penis. His mind seems to reconcile these facts unproblematically. I wish I could do it so easily” (Davis). This person states for themselves that they cannot reconcile their gender identity easily, they state that they have problems thinking of themselves as anything. Why? Because society has taught them a person can’t be a girl and have a penis and “boys don’t have [vaginas], everyone knows that” (Davis).

To qualify with some semblance of an answer to the question of whether societal beliefs affect a person’s body image, they generally do. They affect people with a ‘normal’ gender identity but have an even greater effect on people whose gender identity varies from the majority. As we can see from the monologues that Davis has collected and from the fictional tale of Xanthara that echoes the monologues so closely, men and women whose gender identity does not match with their physical form feel the need to change their physical form to one that coincides with their gender identity. These people would not know that what they felt about themselves was abnormal and something that they should hide or go through major surgery to fix unless society told them so. People with a ‘normal’ gender identity need to change their personality but people with an ‘abnormal’ gender identity need to change their physical structure in order to feel accepted by society.