

**Exposing Celebrity Scandal:  
How Journalism, Fame, and Audiences Coincide**

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## **Abstract**

### **Exposing Celebrity Scandal: How Journalism, Fame, and Audiences Coincide**

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This thesis explores the world of celebrity scandal, investigating what happens when journalists report on star transgressions that disrupt prevailing codes of behaviour. The central assertion of this thesis is that in circulating controversy, journalists ultimately strive not to inform or to educate the public, but rather to gain audiences and sell papers. The analysis, intertwining cultural and political-economic viewpoints, is guided by two overarching goals: to address the elements that give celebrity scandal its resonance within contemporary culture, and to clearly delineate how these elements are mobilized to reap the full economic benefits of scandal. Three case studies, involving Kate Moss, Lance Armstrong, and Charlie Sheen, are examined to expose the mutually dependent relationship between the key players in scandal stories: those reporting (journalists), those being reported on (celebrities), and those responding (audiences). Concentrating on what drives scandal news circuits and who benefits from these stories, this study aims to open the door to wider explorations of journalistic practices in times of controversy.

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## Chapter One – Disseminating Provocative Content

On October 26, 2014, the CBC released a cryptic statement announcing that it had terminated its relationship with famed radio host Jian Ghomeshi. Hours later, Ghomeshi's team of advisers declared a \$55-million defamation suit against his former employer and hired a leading crisis public relations firm, while the radio star published a carefully-worded post on Facebook that described a "jilted ex girlfriend" and "freelance writer" coming together to frame what had been an "ongoing consensual relationship" into "something nefarious."<sup>1</sup> That same evening, the *Toronto Star* published a story featuring allegations from three unnamed women who attested that Ghomeshi had been physically violent to them during sexual encounters, without their consent.

In the weeks and months that ensued, a scandal unfolded on the Canadian media stage, headlined by one of the most high-profile figures at the nation's public broadcaster – the soft-spoken, eloquent, and highly charismatic long-time host of CBC's cultural affairs radio show *Q*. Ghomeshi's pre-emptive strike to get ahead of the story was soon revealed to be questionable. Women began going on record to substantiate further allegations of sexual assault, and the Toronto Police launched an investigation into the case, calling on victims – of any assault – to come forward. What started as an unexplained dismissal from the CBC led to Jian Ghomeshi being charged with seven counts of sexual assault and one count of overcoming resistance by choking. Facing criminal charges, he was forced to defend himself in a court of law.

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<sup>1</sup> Joseph Brean and Jake Edmiston, "Jian Ghomeshi Reveals Details of Sex Scandal after Threatening to Sue CBC for \$50 Million," *National Post*, October 26, 2014, accessed March 22, 2015, <http://news.nationalpost.com/news/canada/jian-ghomeshi-reveals-details-of-sex-scandal-after-threatening-to-sue-cbc-for-50-million>.

Reactions to the allegations against Ghomeshi rippled into a nationwide discussion about abusive conduct towards women and harassment in the workplace. Its effects extended to Parliament Hill, where female MPs and staffers came forward with their own experiences of sexual assault and harassment.<sup>2</sup> Ghomeshi's story, which had essentially begun as gossip from anonymous sources, gained traction and a credibility that spread it across media outlets. Fuelled by audiences, this made-in-Canada star scandal has raised a moral panic around the much wider question of sexual assault and violence against women.

This thesis delves into the world of celebrity scandal, investigating what happens when stars experience publicized transgressions that challenge social, political, and cultural norms. While the phenomenon of celebrity scandal has developed over decades, its rampant prominence in contemporary media stardom reflects a digital age where increased competition in the marketplace of information has led to a greater focus on selling entertainment.<sup>3</sup> In their proliferation, digital technologies not only support but favour sensational stories and provocative images. Inherent in this environment is a rapid increase in the speed at which information is created, distributed, and consumed; in times of controversy, this necessitates swift and calculated responses from those with public images to protect. This study asserts that in the realm of media stardom and celebrity culture, scandals reported by journalists are circulated not so much to inform or to educate the public, but rather to nurture and sustain audiences as commodities to be bought and sold by advertisers.

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<sup>2</sup> John Ivison, "John Ivison: As Aftershocks of Ghomeshi Scandal Hit Parliament Hill, a Sense of Change Begins," *National Post*, November 5, 2014, accessed March 22, 2015, <http://news.nationalpost.com/full-comment/john-ivison-as-aftershocks-of-ghomeshi-scandal-hit-parliament-hill-a-sense-of-change-begins>.

<sup>3</sup> Chris Peters and Marcel Broersma, "Introduction," in *Retelling Journalism: Conveying Stories in a Digital Age*, ed. Chris Peters and Marcel Broersma (Peeters: Leuven, 2014), xv.

In order to effectively address how and why celebrity scandals generate so much interest, the thesis examines in detail three widely reported cases: the September 2005 scandal involving Kate Moss that erupted after the British tabloid the *Daily Mirror* published incriminating photos allegedly showing the supermodel using cocaine; the January 2013 scandal involving Lance Armstrong where the former professional cyclist sat down in a televised interview with Oprah Winfrey, after years of vehemently denying drug use, to admit to doping throughout his career; and the March 2011 scandal involving Charlie Sheen that saw a tirade of purposefully publicized erratic behaviour and resulted in the actor's termination from his lead role on CBS's television sitcom *Two and a Half Men*.

As rich, empirical descriptions of real-world events, such cases may be taken as discrete instances that serve as contrasts and extensions to current theory.<sup>4</sup> In their wide circulation and the traction they generated with consuming publics, the scandals involving these three celebrities spanned the worlds of fashion, sports, and entertainment, each a vast domain of contemporary popular culture in its own right. Representativeness was an important consideration in selecting the cases; however, the primary concern was each study's potential for learning and suggesting intricacies for further investigation.<sup>5</sup> Following this reasoning, the three scandals mobilized for this study were selected for their particular ability to illuminate and extend relationships and logic among constructs.<sup>6</sup> In other words, Moss, Armstrong, and Sheen's respective controversies are valued for their unique effectiveness in bringing out and building upon the theoretical insights established in the central argument of this thesis.

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<sup>4</sup> Robert K. Yin, *Case Study Research: Design and Methods* (London: Sage Ltd., 2009), 10.

<sup>5</sup> Robert E. Stake, "Case Studies," in *The Handbook of Qualitative Research*, ed. Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc., 2000), 448.

<sup>6</sup> Kathleen M. Eisenhardt and Melissa E. Graebner, "Theory Building from Cases: Opportunities and Challenges," *Academy of Management Journal* 50, no. 1 (2007): 27.

It is worth observing that all three scandals began by following a similar trajectory: the star was exposed in an action that went against social norms, and as a result, suffered career damage. At this point, the scandal trajectories branched off: Moss went on the defensive, keeping out of the media spotlight and quietly going to rehab; Armstrong chose the offensive, publicly admitting to his wrongdoings on television; and Sheen opted to be conducive, shamelessly propagating his own transgressions. In the end, their paths converged towards the same goal: rebuilding their respective public personas to maintain a marketable celebrity image, whether as an international supermodel, a world-class athlete, or a bad-boy partier.

The Kate Moss and Lance Armstrong cases saw the scandals originating from the news media; Charlie Sheen's case, however, saw perpetual scandals often originating from the actor himself. In a compelling manner, where Moss and Armstrong's indiscretions were "caught" and "revealed," Sheen, to this day, continues to embrace and design his own misdemeanours. All three controversies saw moral positioning of the celebrity as a crucial component in assembling the reading public to react to its full potential. Moss was faulted as a bad mother; Armstrong was shamed as a cheater and a liar. Sheen's embracing of his own moral failings seemed to elicit from the consuming public amusement, sympathy, and a value in audacity. The study asserts that regardless of where a celebrity scandal originates, its circulation follows a formula that consistently involves the news media enticing strong audience reaction to keep the story alive for as long as possible, with the primary goal of reaping monetary gains from the sales.

This study explores the world of celebrity where fame and fortune often go hand in hand; success is measured in terms of money and recognition. The research builds on the notion that the public balances between a simultaneous desire to achieve the lavish rewards of celebrity and

the need to be impressed by their unattainable perfection.<sup>7</sup> It acknowledges that the superficial elevation of a person from obscurity to celebrity forms recognizable and influential public figures who are revered almost religiously. By captivating audiences and moving them through performance, these celebrities establish public personas with great communicative power and possibilities of immense mobilization.

Here it is underlined that the authority of celebrities is accepted and welcomed, with their prestige being admired and adored. This thesis takes the position that celebrities become role models as objects of imitation that provide people with a focus for identification. Furthermore, it argues that when stars are distanced from the self-likeness of their perceivers, it makes them fictionalized and more easily able to be judged. This observation holds particular currency in times of scandal, when a star's public image is sharply shifted to a more volatile position as her or his pedestal begins to teeter. Such spaces of oscillation form important platforms for the public, the press, and the celebrities themselves to enter into a critical dialogue, one where participants can negotiate individual and collective ideas of identity, achievement, and morals.<sup>8</sup>

The name and face of a famous person is not just embedded with strong cultural value — it also holds significant economic influence. A clear example in contemporary consumer culture can be found in celebrity endorsements, where companies financially compensate well-known figures to act as spokespeople for their products. Driving this market phenomenon is interest in, and fascination with, celebrity: brands aim to boost sales by tapping into consumers' emotional attachments to easily recognizable faces.<sup>9</sup> At the surface, this type of commodification reduces

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<sup>7</sup> Carlin Flora, "Seeing by Starlight: Celebrity Obsession," *Psychology Today*, July 1, 2004, accessed April 30, 2014, <http://www.psychologytoday.com/articles/200407/seeing-starlight-celebrity-obsession>.

<sup>8</sup> Sean Redmond and Su Holmes, *Stardom and Celebrity: A Reader* (London: Sage Publications, 2007), 5.

<sup>9</sup> Christine M. Kowalczyk and Marla B. Royme, "The Moderating Role of Celebrity Worship on Attitudes towards Celebrity Brand Extensions," *Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice* 21, no. 2 (2013): 211.

the star to their image alone. Undeniably, the reduction to surface features puts significant weight onto the celebrity's mediated persona so that brands, like the news media, have an invested interest not just in the particularities of a celebrity's image, but moreover in the type of attention it receives.

This study is guided by two overarching goals: to address the elements that give celebrity scandal its resonance within contemporary culture, and to clearly delineate how these elements are mobilized to reap the full economic benefits of scandal. Acknowledging the complexity of both these objectives necessitates engaging in a multi-dimensional approach. As such, the research analyzes the objects of study from two standpoints, seeking common ground between them: a cultural view that examines how and why audiences respond to celebrity scandal, and a view drawn from the political economy of media that asks how and why news organizations and celebrities themselves stand to benefit. In this context, a central feature of the thesis is to expose the relationship between the news media, the celebrity, and the audience. Identifying these three key players in the phenomenon of reportage on celebrity scandal, the study explores what is at stake for each. Who is using whom, who benefits, how, and why? This central, multi-layered question is addressed by thoroughly investigating the evolution of the Moss, Armstrong, and Sheen scandal stories with respect to those involved in their circulation: the journalists reporting, the celebrities being reported on, and the audiences responding.

It is argued here that in reportage on celebrity scandal, the news media utilize sensationalist story-telling and rapid, wide-reaching digital technologies to tap into a deep cultural fascination with celebrity, with the ultimate aim of reaping audiences for advertisers. Journalists take advantage of the celebrity's ability to garner attention and the audience's appetite for distraction. It is in a journalist's best interest to expose a scandal and to continue

churning provocative, scandalous content because regardless of a story's outcome, the news media as a whole benefit. A similar set of conditions applies to celebrities: between themselves and the news media, they share in the rewards gained from the public's attention.

Building from the central concern of economic and cultural benefits, this thesis addresses a series of research questions with the intention of deconstructing the dominant discourses that arise when journalists place celebrity scandals in the public arena. What is the importance of a celebrity's exchange-value for themselves, audiences, and the news media? How does media spotlight on star personas reflect the notion of journalists not only as conveyors of information but also as producers of culture? Do journalists attempt a balance between exposing celebrity scandal and holding celebrities socially accountable for their actions? Do people enjoy seeing celebrities shamed? Why do they, at times, even forgive them? How do audiences make sense of celebrity scandals in ways that reflect their own identity politics?

Rooted in discourses of disgrace, these concerns force us to think about how star scandals disrupt prevailing codes of behaviour, and how these publicized transgressions form into battles over moralities. By establishing and disseminating star personas, popular culture, and dominant moralities, the press mediates the "icon" and imbues it with a distinctive aura to be presented to the public. This study seeks to reveal that behind the icon lies the central element of celebrity production and consumption: stars are valued for the attention they can generate and their ability to attract an audience – which, ultimately, is the commodity being sold.

In an exploration of the modern facets of the celebrity scandal circuit, the study set out to investigate how a known phenomenon is distinctively shifting in terms of the intensity of its exposure and circulation. Fame, created and propagated by the media, does not exist without the means to transport it. To be famous assumes having a widespread reputation, and in today's

digital age, generating attention is possible on a near instantaneous level. Pervasive paparazzi capture “real” and “exclusive” photos of celebrities in their day-to-day lives – buying groceries, going to the gym, frolicking on the beach. Rapidly transmitted to online or television audiences, star images are heightened with celebrity news rhetoric: a distinctive language punctuated by sensationalist capitalization, exclamation points, witness reports, and words such as “shocking” and “never-before-seen.”

These titillating headlines and provocative images permeate celebrity gossip and entertainment news; the goal is to attract the most eyes in the quickest time. Acting in symbiosis, the imagery, rhetoric, and technology feed scandal reporting to propagate the celebrity gossip cycle. Today’s celebrity blogs and news sites – TMZ, Perez Hilton, Jezebel – are able to produce, within moments, information that took several days to craft and publish in traditional gossip magazines; online, they also enjoy less editorial censoring on commentary.<sup>10</sup> The emphasis is on sensationalism, manifested in the form of provocative content that aims to capture and hold audience attention. Controversy that throws into question the moral values of a celebrity baits strong reader reaction: shock, excitement, obsession, jeering, desire, repulsion, admiration. Simply put, scandal sells.

Why are we so fascinated with celebrity and scandal? This thesis proposes that the answer plays into deeper feelings of *schadenfreude*, understood as the pleasure derived from the misfortune of others.<sup>11</sup> Based in one of the primary characteristics of human behaviour, people’s motivation to view themselves positively, *schadenfreude* comes to light when a negative

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<sup>10</sup> Kerry O. Ferris and Scott R. Harris, *Stargazing: Celebrity, Fame, and Social Interaction* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 2.

<sup>11</sup> Fritz Heider, *The Psychology of Interpersonal Relations* (New York: Wiley, 1958), 294.

experience of someone else elicits a positive emotion to reinforce self-esteem.<sup>12</sup> This public fascination with stars, in both their high moments and their lows, scratches at the surface of the economics of attention.

The Moss, Armstrong, and Sheen case studies serve to illustrate how such a focus on peaks and downfalls is rooted in a deeper societal concern over status and achievement. Celebrities, whether possessing “real” talent or simply known as “famous for being famous,” are set on a superficial pedestal. By virtue of being well known, they are given prestige and stature through exclusion and differentiation. Yet the detailed case studies analysed show that once celebrities are knocked down from their positions of superiority, their title of role model comes under strong questioning – not just by journalists, but also by consuming publics.

This thesis, therefore, reflects deeply upon the role of journalism in the continuous construction of certain cultural norms. Set against the backdrop of today’s digital landscape, the research finds itself in compelling surroundings, where almost anyone can post a story online with the potential of reaching thousands of people in minutes. How does this affect the credibility of journalism? Directing this wide-reaching concern to the specific issue of celebrity scandal, this thesis asks: In what ways does the landscape of entertainment reporting affect how we distinguish between fact-checked news and gossip? The study takes the position that celebrity gossip should not be simply dismissed as unfounded speculation, but rather critically studied as reflective of wider social and cultural tendencies.

A celebrity scandal making headlines across media circuits provides ample material for communal gossip. These “water cooler conversations,” where people convene to comment on events and discuss morals, point to the understanding of scandalous news as pleurably useful,

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<sup>12</sup> Wilco van Dijk and Guido M. van Koningsbruggen, “Self-Esteem, Self-Affirmation, and Schadenfreude,” *Emotion* 11, no. 6 (2011): 1445.

where media morality tales allow people to come to terms with their own moral values while enjoying themselves.<sup>13</sup> The study argues that stories about high-profile figures have the ability to cross cultural, socioeconomic, and geographical boundaries. As such, it draws upon understandings of celebrities as “common currency in our socially fractured world.”<sup>14</sup> With this basis, the thesis establishes a celebrity news matrix where the benefitting agents include not only the media and the celebrity, but also the audience. Here, significant agency is given to consuming publics, who hold a distinctive part in the circulation, perpetuation, and evolution of a certain story.

This study critically interrogates how such public obsession with celebrity plays a defining role in shifting the news-obtaining processes of scandal reporting, specifically within the contemporary context of today’s digital mediascape. The research contends that desire for the “inside scoop” on famous faces, combined with rapid and mobile digital-recording devices, have created a lucrative market where images of celebrities sell stories. Their producers, denounced as intrusive and aggressive stalkers, are known as the paparazzi. Strapped with zoom lenses and driven by high potential cash rewards for exclusive content, these photographers have become a prevalent profession in the business of celebrity, especially within the tabloid press.<sup>15</sup> The Kate Moss scandal, where the smoking gun came in the form of video footage from a digital mobile recording device, is a clear example of how visual material can provide the basis for threatening the commodity reputation of a multi-million dollar earning celebrity.

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<sup>13</sup> S. Elizabeth Bird, “What a Story! Understanding the Audience for Scandal,” in *Media Scandals: Morality and Desire in the Popular Marketplace*, ed. James Lull and Stephen Hinerman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 111.

<sup>14</sup> “Seeing by Starlight: Celebrity Obsession.”

<sup>15</sup> Richard J. Curry, Jr., “Diana’s Law, Celebrity and the Paparazzi: The Continuing Search for a Solution,” *Journal of Computer and Information Law* 18, no. 4 (2000): 946.

Here it is observed that the awe behind catching a glimpse of a famous face is most often followed by the need to capture the snapshot on film. Fans camping outside hotels, relaying messages via social media on celebrity whereabouts, make the process of entertainment reporting all the more real-time, participatory, and engaging. At the same time, this environment democratizes the celebrity image; it allows for a certain volatility where in an instant, the carefully constructed persona of a star can be distinctively undermined, undoing the efforts of agents, managers, lawyers, stylists, publicists, and all those associated with a star's success. The personal Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram accounts of stars only add to the overwhelming volume of online celebrity material to be divulged and discussed. Accounting for these compelling social and technological tendencies, the study situates itself in an intriguing and multi-layered contemporary landscape.

This thesis puts forth the proposition that our allure with celebrity is cultivated by a compelling tension between feeling superficially close to a star's image, yet genuinely distant from its reality. Notwithstanding those who seek physical interactions, stars as mediated personas are visible to the vast public almost exclusively through mediated forms of communication. If we have never seen the supermodel Kate Moss in person, we know what she looks like from her presence on television, in magazines, or on billboards. In a compelling manner, if Moss's persona is defined by her reluctance to give interviews, this subsequent absence of mediated representation in fact adds to what the media tells us about her life: she is a private individual. No comment is a comment. As it is the news media who articulate what the story is for the reading public (and vice versa, relaying the audience's reactions back to the celebrity), the press act not only as a conveyor of messages, but also as a filter.

In this manner, journalists touch almost every aspect of celebrity scandal stories, and for this reason, it is in the best interest of the news media to continuously churn provocative content so that the narrative is kept alive and more money is made from its sales. The matrix of media, celebrity, and audience is a defining component of this study. It establishes the basis for the research and acts as a foundation for understanding the intricate processes behind reporting on celebrity scandal. Interrogating both the intentions behind and the effects of circulating controversy, this thesis uses cultural and political economic standpoints to dig deep into the realm of media stardom. This intertwining allows for a thorough analysis of how publicized transgressions of the rich and famous establish certain values and beliefs, as well as to whom benefits are distributed when scandals are exposed.

Journalism within the context of media stardom is a relatively unexplored field in academic scholarship, yet it has a demanding presence in contemporary popular culture that makes it worthy of critical engagement. In the ensuing chapter's exploration of the literature that links together journalism and celebrity culture, this thesis lays out four distinctive themes: image and reality, audience and identity, economics and attention, and technology and tabloidization. It justifies the legitimacy of the research by contending that these articulated themes are pivotal elements of the discussion, and must be studied both independently and in relation to each other. Further on, it highlights that a critical discourse analysis intertwining both political economic and cultural standpoints is necessary in order to engender a deep understanding of the crucial components of celebrity culture, ones that revolve around power relations and ideological processes. This thesis takes a definitive step towards uncovering celebrity scandal, ultimately aiming to dig deeper into the complex news-making processes involved in the circulation of controversy.

## Chapter 2 – Theorizing Journalism Within the Context of Celebrity Culture

In order to build our understanding of how the practices of journalism work vis-à-vis celebrity scandal, the thesis mobilized key concepts from seminal theoretical works in the fields of communication, cultural, social, and linguistic theory. For clarity, the literature was organized into four distinctive themes: image and reality, audience and identity, economics and attention, and technology and tabloidization. The theme of image and reality explores the proliferation of representation in the context of celebrities as mediated personas. The theme of audience and identity looks at audience agency with respect to the cultural messages of scandal, as well as the role that identity plays in the hierarchy of celebrity culture. The theme of economics and attention analyses the exchange-value of celebrity, the notion of audience as commodity, and consumer desires. Finally, the theme of technology and tabloidization critically engages with technological determinist stances on celebrity scandal, as well as with debates on tabloidization.

This thesis takes as its backdrop the era of postmodern reproducibility, where the celebrity is a carefully constructed persona and the authenticity of the image is at stake. Here, mediated representations proliferate. Jean Baudrillard's exploration of the "death of the real" provides a conceptual foundation for the study. In his philosophical treatise on the relationship between reality, symbols, and society, Baudrillard contends that in postmodern culture, society had become so reliant on imitation that all contact with the original has been lost; reality itself merely imitates the replica.<sup>16</sup> In this experience, a hyper-reality has been created, one that may no longer have any relationship to the actual. This thesis acknowledges such an environment of spectacle, but goes beyond the super-realist position that assumes that things are just what they

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<sup>16</sup> Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation* (Paris: Éditions Galilée, 1981), 2.

appear to be on the surface without deeper meaning or signification. Further departing from Baudrillard, this study makes the point that the reliance on simulation is less a choice than a necessity because direct, physical access to a celebrity is lacking. This position reflects a dialectic inherent in the notion of stardom – the balance between proximity and distance, where the star is both “intensely familiar, yet strangely remote.”<sup>17</sup>

Such a defining feature of celebrity finds its roots in Walter Benjamin’s earlier work on the notion of the aura, a concept which he believed was lost in the age of mechanical reproduction. Discussing the shift in perception in the age of modernity with the advent of film and photography, Benjamin boldly contested that the aura only existed outside of commodity production: he posited that “the whole sphere of authenticity eludes technological – and of course not only technological – reproduction.”<sup>18</sup> This thesis adapts his seminal work in the context of this topic – the contemporary age of consumer capitalism and mass-media communication – and challenges it through the cultural value of the celebrity image in contemporary social life. Here, the thesis argues that there is an obvious tension between new modes of perception and the “loss” of the aura, because no matter how much a star’s likeness is reproduced, the aura of a celebrity remains – and not only that, it can even be intensified the more the star’s image proliferates. Authenticity, therefore, is measured by the inauthenticity of the replicas; the duality is a necessity because one does not exist without the other.

Providing a conceptual foundation for the study, Baudrillard and Benjamin’s seminal theoretical interventions coalesce in the digital context, where new technologies with

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<sup>17</sup> Darrin M. McMahon, “Intensely Familiar, Yet Strangely Remote,” *Wall Street Journal*, accessed June 30, 2014, <http://online.wsj.com/news/articles/SB20001424052748704288204575364012825114890>.

<sup>18</sup> Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility, and Other Writings on Media” in *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility, and Other Writings on Media*, ed. Michael W. Jennings et al. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008), 21.

instantaneous capabilities to reproduce and disseminate are able to sustain aura at a breathtaking pace. The aim here is to illuminate underlying power relations and ideological processes by addressing how meaning in circulation – manifesting in images as well as in language – gains the aura of truth. Thus, the research draws upon one of Roland Barthes’s semiological works, his reflections on mythologies, where he explored how a myth acted to naturalize a concept and could transform history into nature.<sup>19</sup> This attention to the complex intertwining of simulation and signification is crucial to dig deeper into the realm of celebrity culture where mediated representations proliferate.

Celebrities as mediated personas are visible to the public almost exclusively through the media. In effect, a star whose image is not circulated through some kind of medium cannot exist. While analyzing images of stars may suggest an interest in studying visual representation, the notion of “image” is not just about the visual. The study appropriates Richard Dyer’s inter-textual analysis of celebrity to discern how a range of textual materials construct the mediated identity of a star; for the purposes of this research, the notion of “star image” is understood as the complex configuration of visual, verbal, and aural signs depicting a celebrity in all kinds of media text.<sup>20</sup>

This particular delineation is used to investigate how Kate Moss, Lance Armstrong, and Charlie Sheen’s respective star images were subverted by scandals that disrupted their respective well-established public image systems. The line of inquiry aligns itself with Dyer’s notion that star images (more specifically, their mediated personas) function crucially in relation to

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<sup>19</sup> Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1972), 129.

<sup>20</sup> Richard Dyer, “Stars as Images,” in *The Celebrity Culture Reader*, ed. P. David Marshall (New York: Routledge, 2006), 153.

contradictions within and between ideologies, which they seek variously to manage or resolve.<sup>21</sup> From this point of view, and at a fundamental level, it is proposed that the image systems of stars are reflective of cultural values and attitudes: celebrities reproduce, displace, and reconcile audience values within particular cultural formations. The ongoing scandal involving former CBC radio host Jian Ghomeshi, a national media treasure now facing eight criminal charges for sexual assault, clearly reifies this notion.

Interacting with a world where representation serves as a signifying practice, this thesis draws from the work of the eminent cultural theorist Stuart Hall, who stressed that visual representation, in engaging with emotions and mobilizing anxieties, operates at deeper levels than just common sense.<sup>22</sup> The notion of drawing emotive, cross-cultural meaning from visual imagery can be traced back to early scholarship on news practices. Robert E. Park's "Natural History of the Newspaper" discusses how newspapers, especially those with images, were central to the assimilation of non-English speaking immigrants into North American culture. Immigrants unable to read native-language daily newspapers would buy a Sunday paper to look at the pictures, and the press would respond by providing more images and simple explanatory language.<sup>23</sup> In this respect, the first community newspapers were used as devices for organizing gossip: particularly picturesque or romantic incidents were reported and treated symbolically for their human interest, giving readers an escape from the dullness of their daily routines – a "flight from reality."<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 162.

<sup>22</sup> Stuart Hall, "The Spectacle of the 'Other,'" in *Representation: Cultural Representation and Signifying Practices*, ed. Stuart Hall (London: Sage, 1997), 226.

<sup>23</sup> Robert E. Park, "The Natural History of the Newspaper," *American Journal of Sociology* 29, no. 3 (1923): 275.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 286.

In a much more sophisticated manner, contemporary celebrity culture and the tabloids of today echo the practices of the earlier press. The research suggests that sensationalist stories and provocative images, disseminated to the public through instantaneous digital technologies, create a realm where readers across all boundaries can construct common ground through establishing certain kinds of emotive meanings. This is common to forms of gossip. The notorious gossip columnist and radio broadcaster Walter Winchell, who was widely credited for making the journalistic discovery that “people were interested in people,” profoundly affected American culture of the twentieth century by helping give rise to a more energetic, personality-oriented press.<sup>25</sup> Yet Winchell’s contribution went beyond just popularizing the modern gossip column: he sought to prove that gossip was much more than “journalistic voyeurism” – it was a weapon of social empowerment.<sup>26</sup> This study reveals how publicly exposing the secrets of a celebrity not only knocks them off their pedestal, but also humanizes them in revealing that they harbour the same weaknesses as others.

Here it is posited that while forms of gossip can be sources of scandalous exposures, they can also provide negotiated exclusives. The dependence of tabloids on celebrity coverage sees content being openly purchased from celebrities themselves in a type of “cheque-book” journalism; the research shows that the tabloid sector is highly dependent upon the promotional industry for a steady supply of stories, images, and interview material.<sup>27</sup> In effect, celebrity as a concept and set of cultural practices finds its roots in the growth of the public relations and promotions industries from the beginning of the twentieth century.<sup>28</sup> Today, marketing a celebrity generally involves some commercial alignment between their news items and the

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<sup>25</sup> Neal Gabler, *Winchell: Gossip, Power and the Culture of Celebrity* (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 552.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, xiii.

<sup>27</sup> Graeme Turner, *Understanding Celebrity* (London: Sage Publications Ltd., 2004), 73.

<sup>28</sup> Anita Biressi and Heather Nunn, *The Tabloid Culture Reader* (New York: Open University Press, 2008), 135.

promotional needs of major entertainment industry organizations. In this respect, and following the thesis triangulation, there is a mutually beneficial relationship between the news media and the star, where tabloids are used for their commercial power as the quickest route to the consumer of celebrity.

Hall's scholarship in reception theory is useful in understanding the processes at work when people interact with stories on celebrity. Hall used a tripartite schema to give distinctive categories to how audiences receive messages: through the dominant-hegemonic viewpoint (operating inside the dominant code), the negotiated viewpoint (operating with exceptions to the dominant code), or the oppositional viewpoint (operating outside the dominant code).<sup>29</sup> The research indicates that scandal stories are given traction through such frictions, where active engagement on the part of audiences keeps the narratives going.

The cultural anthropologist Rosemary Coombe notes that celebrities provoke reading publics to reflect upon their relationship to the historical and social circumstances in which star images are embedded.<sup>30</sup> This helps to explain why Charlie Sheen's bad-boy, no-holds-barred persona continues to have meaning, resonance, and authority today. Sheen's continuous flaunting of convention elicits both admiration and derision from those attuned to his destructive behaviour; in one way or another, the celebrity became an avatar for audience feelings of rebelling against the machine. Coombe hypothesizes that the audience selects from the complexities of the images and texts they encounter to find in stars significant values that speak to their own experiences.<sup>31</sup> She makes it clear that celebrity names and images are not simply

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<sup>29</sup> Stuart Hall, "Encoding/Decoding," in *Media and Cultural Studies: Keywords*, ed. Meenakshi Gigi Durham and Douglas M. Kellner (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2001), 171.

<sup>30</sup> Rosemary Coombe, "Author(iz)ing the Celebrity," in *The Celebrity Culture Reader*, ed. P. David Marshall (New York: Routledge, 2006), 732.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 726.

commodities; perhaps, more importantly, they provide meaningful resources for the construction of identity and community.

In stark contrast, Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer attributed much less power to those whom they perceived as passive receivers of text. In their work on the culture industry, Adorno and Horkheimer described an environment filled with products of a commercial character through standardization and mass production.<sup>32</sup> With culture serving the sole purpose of entertainment and distraction, audiences became passive and without agency; genuine dialogue was lost and variation was meaningless. This thesis departs from the assumption that both meaning and individuality are lost within the current context of consumer capitalism, and instead deploys scandal to mobilize the concept of “strength in numbers.” It shows how audiences receiving news on a scandal through mass forms of communication, and reacting with generally aligning views, often form the conditions to create a powerful dialogue. In the case of Lance Armstrong, this saw a distinctive line being drawn between right and wrong, forcing the celebrity to be held socially accountable for his deceitful actions.

The study aims to identify the undercurrents of media influence in forms of daily life, which necessitates investigating the audience’s vital role in the circulation of celebrity scandal. Here it is argued that not only does reader engagement legitimize the impact of narratives disseminated by the news media, but such reader investment is the very reason why journalists seek out, establish, and feed scandal stories. Contemporary scholars have argued for the value of dramatic, narrative news in everyday life, noting that scandal news stories have had appeal throughout history by being cast as morality plays to be discussed and personalized by audiences. Their argument goes that in struggling to make sense of a story, people involve others

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<sup>32</sup> Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, “The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception,” in *Dialectics of Enlightenment*, ed. Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno (New York: Verso, 1997), 121.

in the negotiation of meaning through a participatory, personalizing, and pleasurable process.<sup>33</sup>

This understanding that media morality tales allow people to come to terms with their own moral values while enjoying themselves speaks to the symbiotic triangulation established in the study.

Where the audience utilizes scandal as a form of entertaining discussion, the news media benefit by raking in more sales of the story; the celebrity enters this triangulation as the subject gaining a certain amount of attention. The case made here is that the icon of celebrity, especially in times of scandal, is able to reach across social and cultural boundaries to draw substantial emotive reactions. This ability to cross such barriers is facilitated by the established authority of stars, which allows for their demanding presence to transcend their respective industry. In line with this assertion, Lance Armstrong's celebrity in the time of his scandal mobilized more than just the cycling world; the effects of Kate Moss's cocaine exposure were not limited to the fashion industry; and Charlie Sheen's questionable antics went beyond the entertainment business. When the reading public engaged with each of these star scandals, they positioned the celebrities as influential role models and thus saw their actions as both reflecting and affecting society at large. Recognizing such positioning opens the door to wider discussions on the role that hegemony plays in the construction of social order within celebrity culture.

It is presupposed that stars, set on a pedestal and given prestige through respect and admiration, possess superior qualities. In engaging with this observation, the study draws from the theory of the leading German sociologist Max Weber, who explored social structures and normative orders in his foundational work *Economy and Society*. Examining the different foundations for social authority, Weber focused on the personal characteristic of charisma, which he understood as "a certain quality of individual personality by virtue of which he is considered

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<sup>33</sup> Bird, "What a Story!" 111.

extraordinary and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities.”<sup>34</sup> While Weber had been speaking within the context of political power, his work can effectively be adapted to understand the cultural authority of celebrity. Here, a useful distinction is made between instrumental charisma (linked to the realm of action, especially political and military) and intrinsic charisma (as the outcome of skilled performance and representation, associated with celebrity).<sup>35</sup> In the realm of star scandals, this skilled performance often manifests itself in a concerted effort to maintain an established public persona in the face of a publicized transgression.

Speaking to this aspect of representation with a specific focus on identity, the influential American sociologist Erving Goffman contended that we do not expose our true identity to others; instead, he understood identity as performance – a virtual identity played out in our lived experiences. In *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, Goffman describes performance as “all the activity of an individual which occurs during a period marked by his continuous presence before a particular set of observers and which has some influence on the observers.”<sup>36</sup> Goffman’s distinction between “front stage” and “back stage” behaviour is deployed to value scandal as the catalyst that brings private actions to the public eye. It posits that in times of scandal, the curtain between audience and celebrity is lifted; back stage behaviour is brought to the front stage and elements impinging on a star’s fabricated persona, previously carefully hidden, become publicly exposed. When the commercially constructed persona is knocked off its pedestal, the remaining image is left to be democratized by the viewing audience. In this manner, celebrity is

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<sup>34</sup> Max Weber, *Economy and Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 241.

<sup>35</sup> Leo Braudy, “Secular Anointings: Fame, Celebrity, and Charisma in the First Century of Mass Culture,” in *Constructing Charisma: Celebrity, Fame, and Power in Nineteenth-Century Europe*, ed. Edward Berenson and Eva Giloi (New York: Berghahn Books, 2010), 170.

<sup>36</sup> Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (New York: Doubleday, 1999), 22.

always seen as a performance, as well as an exclusive and hierarchical phenomenon no matter how much it proliferates. Paralleling Weber's political charisma, a cultural charisma can be identified within celebrities and their ability to fascinate and garner attention.

As a form of abstract capital, attention is understood here as self-reproducing in the logic of celebrity production. Robert van Krieken, sociologist and author of *Celebrity Society*, explains this in terms of the Matthew effect: it is not so much that celebrities are well known because of their well-knownness, it is that being famous can generate even more fame.<sup>37</sup> Pop artist Andy Warhol, for example, understood the notion that a person could be "famous-for-being-famous" as directly related to aura and his exchange-value as celebrity: "Some company recently was interested in buying my 'aura.' They didn't want my product. They kept saying, 'We want your aura.' I never figured out what they wanted. But they were willing to pay a lot for it."<sup>38</sup> Warhol's musings are ever present in this study, where they are used to build upon Benjamin's notion of the aura and link it to discourses surrounding icons. In a fascinating manner, Warhol's images had the power to form cults around celebrities, all the while reducing them to consumable, disposable items.<sup>39</sup> His work presents a crucial concept, one to keep at the forefront of the analysis: that the aura surrounding an icon largely determines its commodity value.

Celebrities as famous-for-being-famous ties into the commonly held notion that all press is good press. Stars, with their existence channelled almost exclusively through mediated forms of communication, are packaged with a distinctive and manipulated aura to be presented to the public. Such packaging might position the celebrity as the most obvious commodity being sold; however, this thesis goes beyond that assumption to argue that ultimately, the commodity being

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<sup>37</sup> Robert van Krieken, *Celebrity Society* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 55.

<sup>38</sup> Andy Warhol, *The Philosophy of Andy Warhol (From A to B and Back Again)* (London: Pan Books, 1975), 75.

<sup>39</sup> Daniel Herwitz, *The Star as Icon: Celebrity in the Age of Mass Consumption* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 37.

sold is audience attention. In focusing on the economic dimensions of celebrity production that organize both attention and consumption, stars stand at the intersection between commerce and culture. Celebrities are mediators between the public's desires and needs, influencing the cycle of economic production and consumption that both responds to and creates such audience behaviour.<sup>40</sup> The study builds upon this to illustrate the numerous ways in which public perceptions are influenced by fame. Advertisements that associate stars with brands, like Kate Moss's extensive array of international fashion campaigns from past to present, provide a clear example of these processes at work. Celebrities do not just make a product more visible; they make it more desirable.

This thesis reflects deeply upon the economics of attention, investigating how celebrities, audiences, and journalists are intertwined in an environment of consumer capitalism and mass-media communication. In such a saturated space, images and texts are consumed with an increasing rapidity that necessitates an equally high speed of branding.<sup>41</sup> This rapid turnover presents a challenge for journalists and celebrities alike in keeping the power of the star persona and its aura intact.

A characteristic feature of contemporary post-industrial information societies presents another challenge, where a wealth of information creates a poverty of attention and increases competition. As noted by James T. Hamilton, this scarcity leads to a distinctive "race to the bottom" where more attention is paid to soft news. Aiming to illustrate how news is shaped by market forces and the particular economics of information goods, Hamilton contends that the increased focus on stories pertaining to celebrity culture is better explained, from the position of news-makers, as arising from economic choices rather than misplaced values. He believes that

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<sup>40</sup> van Krieken, *Celebrity Society*, 53.

<sup>41</sup> Herwitz, *The Star as Icon*, 138.

“those making efforts to improve media markets need to recognize that news emerges not from individuals seeking to improve the functioning of democracy but from readers seeking diversion... and owners searching for profits.”<sup>42</sup>

Hamilton’s focus on news economics shows how profit-driven news coverage conflicts with ideals of what news should be. Communications researcher Stephen Barnett writes that the shift to digital technologies, which has increased the speed of access to events and provided an array of news outlets, pressures journalists to produce more news more quickly, leading to a greater reliance on PR-generated content that is often more entertainment-oriented.<sup>43</sup> While celebrity stories are popular, the motivation for their production is that they are cheap and profitable, especially when “churnalism” recycles press releases provided by PR companies without charge.<sup>44</sup> With the market pressures of supply and demand, news is understood here not as a mirror image of reality, but rather as a commodity.<sup>45</sup> This marketplace echoes the assertion that celebrity stories and scandals are reported not with the primary focus on informing or educating the public, but rather with the aim of gaining audiences and increasing profit margins.

The notion that consumer desires are rooted in audiences seeking diversion speaks directly to the established triangulation of this study; its complementary angles include celebrities seeking attention and journalists seeking economic gains. In order to fully address the components that both hinder and encourage the goals of each actor, today’s digital media landscape must be treated as an essential element. To this end, Neil Postman’s writing on the audience’s limitless appetite for distraction is most useful. In *Amusing Ourselves to Death*,

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<sup>42</sup> James T. Hamilton, *All the News That’s Fit to Sell: How the Market Transforms Information Into News* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 6.

<sup>43</sup> Stephen Barnett, “Dumbing Down or Reaching Out: Is It Tabloidisation Wot Done It?” *The Political Quarterly* 69, no. B (1998): 86.

<sup>44</sup> Janet Jones and Lee Salter, *Digital Journalism* (London: Sage Publications Inc., 2012), 17.

<sup>45</sup> Hamilton, *All the News That’s Fit to Sell*, 7.

Postman explored the advent of television as a peril to society and argued that as a strictly visual medium, it turned people into viewers and forced upon cultural life an epistemology of entertainment. Postman's work speaks to a focus on meaning in language, how news enters our lives as sensational headlines that demand constant replacement, so that we are endlessly entertained but hardly affected.<sup>46</sup> This notion is echoed by Chris Hedges in his book *Empire of Illusion*, where he describes life as a permanent state of amnesia that forces us to search for new forms of escapism and quick, sensual gratification.<sup>47</sup>

By building knowledge through contemporary case studies rooted in the current era, this thesis argues that the rush towards escapism and gratification has accelerated through advancements in technological practice. In his time, Postman stressed the impact of television as immeasurably more pervasive than any medium before it. The problematic impact was “not that television is entertaining but that it has made entertainment itself the natural format for the representation of all experience.”<sup>48</sup> Postman's significant attribution to the influence of a specific medium saw a ricochet effect occurring between television and print media: “whereas television taught the magazines that news is nothing but entertainment, the magazines have taught television that nothing but entertainment is news.”<sup>49</sup> He warned that with both the form and content of news becoming entertainment, we would be led to a dystopia where public business became a vaudeville act.<sup>50</sup> In a compelling manner, this thesis shows how Postman's predictions with respect to mediated image and text are perhaps even more evident today, with the advent – and increasing proliferation – of social media and digital mobile devices.

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<sup>46</sup> Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death* (New York: Penguin Books, 1985), 77.

<sup>47</sup> Chris Hedges, *Empire of Illusion: The End of Literacy and the Triumph of Spectacle* (New York: Nation Books, 2009), 48.

<sup>48</sup> Postman, *Amusing Ourselves*, 87.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 110.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 155.

The study observes that in contemporary culture, Postman's dystopia is reified in celebrity scandals that are set on a stage where the private lives of public figures are played out with major dramatic effect. As scandals such as those involving Kate Moss and Lance Armstrong unfold, they show a shocking and absorbing world distinctively at odds with the images projected of it, revealing that the lives of the rich and famous are entrenched in the same temptations, desires, and weaknesses as those of ordinary people. This thesis makes the case that in today's age of mediated visibility, celebrities are known to the public primarily – if not exclusively – through the media; this means that communication has the power to make visible actions or aspects of the self which compromise the image that celebrities seek to project of themselves.<sup>51</sup> In this respect, the work of Pierre Bourdieu is helpful in understanding the interplay of various forms of capital as relations of power. In exposing scandal, the news media stand to gain monetary benefits (through increased readership) and symbolic prestige (through breaking the story), while the celebrity risks damage to reputation (symbolic capital) and possible loss of earnings (economic capital).<sup>52</sup>

This qualitative exploration of how such a phenomenon has increased in terms of the speed of cause and effect gives distinct regard to technological-determinist stances in the literature surrounding the topic. John B. Thompson proposes that the emergence of scandal, its developmental logic, prominence, consequences, and the ways in which scandals are experienced by both participants and non-participants, are all shaped by mediated forms of communication.<sup>53</sup> Stating that the media create distinctive forms of visibility and publicness, Thompson assigns

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<sup>51</sup> John B. Thompson, "Scandal and Social Theory," in *Media Scandals: Morality and Desire in the Popular Culture Marketplace*, ed. James Lull and Stephen Hinerman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 46.

<sup>52</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, "The Forms of Capital," in *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, ed. John G. Richardson (New York: Greenwood, 1986), 241.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 49.

them a great deal of importance in their ability to create or reshape social relations between celebrities and their audiences. This contention, which argues that scandal is always shaped and given force by the technological means through which information is transmitted to the public, can be directly linked to Marshall McLuhan's seminal work on the medium as the message.<sup>54</sup>

Such technological-determinist stances speak to an acknowledgement of technology's significant role in the circulation of scandal, and further the argument that a star without some form of mediated circulation cannot exist. At the same time, cultural influences cannot be ignored. The thesis reflects deeply upon the role of journalists in the continuing construction of certain cultural norms, contending that news media practitioners have a distinctive position in the creation and perpetuation of celebrity, and hold an important responsibility in influencing how stars are depicted. Scholarship focusing on tabloids discusses how these forms of journalism attempt not only to bring to light private actions that impinge on a star's public image, but also to uncover the truth behind the misconduct. Media scholars such as Stephen Hinerman have explored how, by playing on the private and public dichotomies of authenticity, tabloids can stand in for readers to pass judgment on the star.<sup>55</sup>

In his discussion of the proliferation of celebrity journalism in tabloid newspapers, cultural studies scholar Graeme Turner references Habermas's theory of the public sphere to explore the democratic potential of star scandals in addressing moral issues. Alluding to the "demiotic turn," Turner looks at how the opportunity of celebrity is spreading beyond the elites through new sites of media production (including digital mobile recording devices) that allow for

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<sup>54</sup> Marshall McLuhan, "The Medium Is the Message," in *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, ed. by Marshall McLuhan (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1994), 7.

<sup>55</sup> Stephen Hinerman, "(Don't) Leave Me Alone: Tabloid Narrative and the Michael Jackson Child-Abuse Scandal," in *Media Scandals: Morality and Desire in the Popular Culture Marketplace*, ed. James Lull and Stephen Hinerman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 149.

DIY consumer-citizens and increased powers of self-determination.<sup>56</sup> He balances between viewing tabloids as both threatening the professional survival of the celebrities they expose and providing them with unparalleled personal visibility.<sup>57</sup> Turner argues that sliding into a moralizing political critique of the forms of celebrity, or the artificiality of cultural status that it appears to confer, greatly underestimates the complexity of these forms. As this thesis argues, it further undermines the varied cultural and social functions that stars serve in the construction of identity.

Contributing to the reassessment and revision of the current normative standards within the field of journalism, Henrik Örnebring and Anna Maria Jönsson argue that throughout the history of journalism, tabloids (synonymous with “bad” journalism) have proved to serve the public good, and in many cases have done as well as, if not better than, journalism considered to be more respectable.<sup>58</sup> They suggest that tabloid journalism as a journalistic “Other” can act as an alternative public sphere by positioning itself as an alternative to the issues, forms, and audiences of the journalistic mainstream. While Örnebring and Jönsson take a revisionist stance, they equally acknowledge criticism of tabloid journalism that includes discussion of sensationalism and class-based self-interest. The strength of their work lies in calling for a greater openness when making normative judgments about tabloid journalism and its effects.

Such explorations give a solid conceptual foundation to critically analyze how the respective scandals involving Kate Moss, Lance Armstrong, and Charlie Sheen transpired in their Western entertainment news contexts. Crucially, they allow us to investigate what such

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<sup>56</sup> Graeme Turner, “Celebrity, Tabloid, and the Democratic Public Sphere,” in *The Celebrity Culture Reader*, ed. P. David Marshall (New York: Routledge, 2006), 498.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 491.

<sup>58</sup> Henrik Örnebring and Anna Maria Jönsson, “Tabloid Journalism and the Public Sphere: A Historical Perspective on Tabloid Journalism,” *Journalism Studies* 5, no. 3 (2004): 283.

cases can tell us about journalism on a wider scale. With a focus on four key themes – image and reality, audience and identity, economics and attention, and technology and tabloidization – this thesis aims to add to the discussion a compelling analysis of reportage on specific high-profile controversies. By investigating these three scandals in an inter-dependent articulation that links together the news media, the audience, and the celebrity, a valuable, multi-dimensional model with which to further scholarship on journalism and celebrity culture is both developed and presented.

### Chapter 3 – Analyzing Discourses in Times of Scandal

In critically analyzing star scandals, this thesis focuses on three key actors: the audience, the news media, and the celebrity. The line of inquiry follows the understanding that the news media, as both a conveyor and a filter between the audience and the celebrity, hold a central position in the rhetorical messaging that runs for the duration of a scandal. The decisive position that journalists occupy in this matrix means that they are linked to every aspect of a scandal story, passing information from the celebrity to the audience, and back again. For this reason, the study argues that it is in the best interest of news media practitioners to keep celebrity scandals alive for as long as economic benefits can be reaped. The subject of reaped benefits, however, is not limited solely to journalists; here it is demonstrated how the other two key players in the news matrix also use the churn of scandalous news to their benefit, where the celebrity seeks attention and the viewing public seeks distraction.

The complexity of this audience-media-celebrity triangulation is best delineated through the concept of articulation. As a theoretical practice, articulation can be understood as transforming cultural studies “from a model of communication (production-text-consumption; encoding-decoding) to a theory of contexts.”<sup>59</sup> In Stuart Hall’s writing, it implies a structured but flexible connection between two or more seemingly unrelated parts, and is frequently employed to avoid the reductionism and essentialism associated with deterministic views of Marx.<sup>60</sup> Articulation can be further understood as a methodological framework; this is the focus with

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<sup>59</sup> Lawrence Grossberg, “Cultural Studies and/in New Worlds,” *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 10, no. 1 (1993): 4.

<sup>60</sup> James Procter, *Stuart Hall* (London: Routledge, 2004), 48.

respect to the study's methodology. As Jennifer Daryl Slack has written, articulation is not just a connection, but rather a creative process of creating connections.<sup>61</sup>

Taking from Hall the notion of articulation as a practice of thinking of unity and difference, of “difference in complex unity, without becoming a hostage to the privileging of difference as such,”<sup>62</sup> Lawrence Grossberg similarly sees articulation as the “production of identity on top of differences, of unities out of fragments, of structures across practices.”<sup>63</sup> In Grossberg's understanding, articulation “links this practice to that effect, this text to that meaning, this meaning to that reality, this experience to those politics. And these links are themselves articulated into larger structures, etc.”<sup>64</sup> Articulation is especially useful in explaining the forces at work in the audience-media-celebrity triangulation because it establishes a clear relationship between the three actors, one that acknowledges both their independence from each other and mutual dependence on one another. Audiences seek distraction, relying on the news media to provide engaging material; the news media seek economic gains, needing celebrities to fill the role of story subjects; celebrities seek attention, depending on audiences to provide it. And so this cycle – albeit a more interwoven version – continues.

These links are established within a social constructionist worldview, where meaning is understood as complex, subjective, and negotiated socially both through interactions with others and through cultural norms that operate in the lives of individuals.<sup>65</sup> With this premise, the language we use does not neutrally reflect the world around us; rather, discourses take an active

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<sup>61</sup> Jennifer Daryl Slack, “The Theory and Method of Articulation in Cultural Studies,” in *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies*, ed. David Morley and Kuan Hsing Chen (London: Routledge, 1996), 114.

<sup>62</sup> Stuart Hall, “Signification, Representation, Ideology: Althusser and the Post-Structuralist Debates,” *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 2, no. 2 (1985): 93.

<sup>63</sup> Lawrence Grossberg, *We Gotta Get Out of This Place: Popular Conservatism and Postmodern Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 54.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>65</sup> John Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Traditions* (London: Sage Publications, Inc., 1998), 21.

part in creating and altering our personal identities and social relations. The study thus mobilizes a specific method that focuses on the social character of texts, acknowledging the shifting relations between discourses, groups of people, and social positions. In this respect, the methodology stems from a qualitative textual analysis that understands language as a form of social practice.

The research is largely based in post-structuralist linguistic philosophy, where it follows that access to reality is always through language, and meanings of signs can shift in relation to one another according to their context. Moving beyond Ferdinand de Saussure's sharp distinction between *langue* and *parole* in his structuralist understanding of language as a stable, unchanging entity, this thesis takes the post-structuralist view that in concrete language use, we are able to create, reproduce, and alter structure.<sup>66</sup> Following this framework, the collected data included not just written language on the part of journalists, but also spoken utterances of the celebrities themselves.

Discourses, as connected series of utterances, form patterns in the way that language is structured. The study strove to pull these patterns to the forefront by engaging with the complex, competing meanings that arise within the hyper-real context of mediated celebrity culture. Reportage on star scandals magnifies and amplifies controversy, creating and sustaining chatter through audiences, news media, and celebrities. The discursive struggles that result are emblematic of the notion that no discourse is a separate, closed entity but rather is constantly transformed through interaction with other discourses.<sup>67</sup> Analyzing language from a social perspective that considers ideologies and power relations necessitates an intertwining of cultural

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<sup>66</sup> Marianne Jorgensen and Louise Phillips, *Discourse Analysis as Theory and Method* (London: Sage Publications Ltd., 2002), 11.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

and political economic standpoints within the research. This complex, interdisciplinary approach is best achieved through critical discourse analysis.

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) was first developed by the Lancaster school of linguists, whose most prominent figure was Norman Fairclough, formerly professor of Language in Social Life at Lancaster University. CDA critiques mainstream linguistic approaches for “taking conventions and practices at face value, as objects to be described in a way which obscures their political and ideological investment.”<sup>68</sup> In its own right, critical language study analyzes social interactions by focusing upon their linguistic elements with the aim of uncovering connections between language, power, and ideology. A critical awareness of the power of language marks a movement away from the merely descriptive towards the interpretative, taking into account not just the objects of text that we can hear and see, but also the processes of their production and interpretation.<sup>69</sup>

To this end, Fairclough’s understanding of discourse analysis is mobilized, wherein “the formal properties of a text can be regarded... on the one hand as *traces* of the productive process, and on the other hand as *cues* in the process of interpretation.”<sup>70</sup> Viewing discourse as inclusive of the whole process of social interaction – of which text is just a part – propels us to analyze the relationship between texts, interactions, and contexts. Linking to these three dimensions of discourse, Fairclough distinguishes between three stages of critical discourse analysis: *description*, concerned with the formal properties of text; *interpretation*, concerned with the relationship between text and interaction (seeing text as a product of production and a resource in interpretation); and *explanation*, concerned with the relationship between interaction and social

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<sup>68</sup> Norman Fairclough, *Discourse and Social Change* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992), 7.

<sup>69</sup> Norman Fairclough, *Language and Power* (New York: Longman Inc., 1989), viii.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

context (the social determination of the processes of production and interpretation, including their social effects).<sup>71</sup>

To aid in the construction of this knowledge, case studies are used to establish experiential and contextual accounts.<sup>72</sup> Real-world media events were analyzed in detail to give the research currency within the modern context of the press. Three cases were chosen for the analysis: Kate Moss's 2005 cocaine scandal, Lance Armstrong's 2013 blood doping scandal, and Charlie Sheen's 2011 public meltdown. Involving a supermodel, a former professional cyclist, and a Hollywood entertainer, these cases were purposefully selected not just for their richness as individual instances, but also for their ability to offer valuable theoretical insight within the collective research.

The eminent scholar Robert Stake notes that collective case study demonstrates how a particular phenomenon exists within separate and specific instances, and while conclusions drawn on the differences between any two cases may be less accurate than those drawn within one, the depiction across several exemplars can provide valuable and credible knowledge.<sup>73</sup> In preparing for the analysis, it was taken into consideration the overarching similarities and differences between how each star handled their respective media storm. Moss chose a defensive stance: her response was characterized by silence and time spent in a rehabilitation facility. Armstrong took a reactive stance, harshly attacking his whistle-blowers before admitting to his wrongdoing with a televised apology. Sheen opted to be conducive, propagating his own scandal with erratic behaviour across all possible media outlets. With these characterizations in mind, the study expected a dynamic combination of cases to probe.

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>72</sup> Robert E. Stake, "Case Studies," in *The Handbook of Qualitative Research*, ed. Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc., 2000), 448.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

The case studies capture three specific moments of star indiscretions to critically interrogate the ideological function of celebrity, aiming to better understand how manipulated discourses surrounding celebrities dramatically disrupt or reconcile contradictory ideas about identity and values. Engaging in this dialogue puts forth a critical question: Why do we care about visibility and fame? The study addresses this concern by seeking to understand how the phenomenon of celebrity contributes to our notions of success, failure, and individualism in modern capitalist society. It focuses specifically on scandals because it is these moments in a celebrity's trajectory of fame that distinctively challenge the cultural and economic value of visibility. It is also these moments that heighten controversy, providing valuable opportunities for journalists to engage a wider audience. Ultimately, these moments form compelling areas for critical inquiry into news-making processes.

In this context, a distinct attention is paid to the control of meaning in relation to the development of hegemonic power. How are discourses around star transgressions used to create platforms for advantage? In order to address these concerns, the study mobilizes the concept of terministic screens, understood as collections of terms we use to perceive reality, ones that direct attention to some channels rather than others and thus inevitably affect our observations. According to the American literary critic Kenneth Burke, in shaping the quality and character of our discourse, terministic screens also shape the quality and character of our experience.<sup>74</sup> Burke posits that “even if any given terminology is a *reflection* of reality, by its very nature as a

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<sup>74</sup> Paul Stob, “‘Terministic Screens,’ Social Constructionism, and the Language of Experience: Kenneth Burke’s Utilization of William James,” *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 41, no. 2 (2008): 142.

terminology it must be a *selection* of reality; and to this extent it must function also as a *deflection* of reality.”<sup>75</sup>

Acknowledging that language constructs rather than simply reflects knowledge, the methodological approach sought to capture the manner in which discursive practices manipulate and are manipulated by the actors involved in the dissemination of celebrity scandals. Each case study was analyzed with a distinct critical awareness of language as symbolic action in order to point out and question how meaning was controlled in the reportage of Moss, Armstrong, and Sheen’s respective scandals. The study observes how frames were used to position each celebrity’s transgression in the context of wider societal values and thus tap into broad moral concerns, where Moss was shamed as an unfit mother, Armstrong was vilified as a cunning cheater, and Sheen was ridiculed as an out-of-control maniac.

The data collected encompassed the visual, verbal, and aural representations of the three celebrities surrounding their respective scandals. The Moss, Armstrong, and Sheen case studies were selected to span the worlds of fashion, sports, and entertainment for three reasons: to delineate the widespread nature of celebrity, to allow for a spectrum of reading publics, and to give depth to the research within the broader field of journalism studies. In each case, whether the celebrity in question was a supermodel, a professional athlete, or a Hollywood entertainer, the focus was on the star’s failings in their fortunate position as an elevated member of society given prestige through fame and fortune. The study clearly demonstrates how media narratives played an integral role in the creation of each scandal by amassing a certain kind of public

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<sup>75</sup> Kenneth Burke, “Terministic Screens,” in *Language as Symbolic Action: Essays on Life, Literature and Method*, ed. Kenneth Burke (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966), 45.

opinion. In this respect, stress is placed on the crucial need to understand that “scandal is not a real event as reported in the press; it is a press report of a real event.”<sup>76</sup>

Moss, Armstrong, and Sheen’s infamous misdeeds were selected after falling under both of the following categories: a recent turning point in the star’s career where attention on them soared, and an action that threatened not just their income but also their reputation. Thus, the three celebrities were analyzed at defining moments when wide public scrutiny forcibly jeopardized each of their images. Whether permanently or temporarily, positively or negatively, these publicized transgressions were, at their core, notoriously affective in relation to the stars and the trajectory of their fame.

The three scandals were analyzed as reported by news outlets in the U.S. and U.K. This decision was made primarily in order to situate the celebrities in their cultural contexts, where their actions would be widely commented on by invested journalists and audiences. It was also taken into account that focusing on British and American news sources would allow for the data to be collected from the two leading countries in Western tabloid news culture. This ensured a compelling context in which to engage with the templates of language and meaning deployed as part of the systems that are central to tabloid journalistic practices, where such style of reportage speaks with a particular voice (bold incendiary headlines and stories using short, simple language) to a particular audience (those willing to invest attention as a distraction) for a particular purpose (to generate sales and increase profits). By recognizing these specific patterns, the study established rich parameters to open the way for a critical engagement with wider trends in Western entertainment journalism.

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<sup>76</sup> Johannes Ehrat, *Power of Scandal: Semiotic and Pragmatic in Mass Media* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011), xiv.

The data collection process began by identifying the defining moments in each scandal. The scandal involving Kate Moss had a clear point of eruption: it broke on September 15, 2005, when the British tabloid the *Daily Mirror* published front-page photographs showing the supermodel cutting lines of white powder, alongside the titillating two-word headline “Cocaine Kate.” The Lance Armstrong scandal was punctuated by two events. The first caused his case to gain significant traction, occurring in October 2012 when the United States Anti-Doping Agency released a thousand-page report detailing Armstrong’s involvement in “the most sophisticated, professionalized and successful doping program that sport has ever seen.”<sup>77</sup> The second, three months later in January 2013, saw the disgraced cyclist appear in a televised interview with American talk-show host Oprah Winfrey, where he publicly – and finally – confirmed allegations that he had doped throughout his seven Tour-de-France wins. The most notorious scandal of Charlie Sheen’s recent years snowballed from his February 24, 2011 rant on the radio program the *Alex Jones Show*, an outrageous tirade that led to CBS suspending, and later firing Sheen from, his hit TV-show *Two and a Half Men*.

It is important to note that the study included discourses that remained in circulation long past the parameters of the formal study period, as more recent developments were considered valuable to the overarching narrative by giving the discussion currency up to the present day. Further, prior events were referenced because of their influence on the way that each of these scandals unfolded, and to better inform the post-scandal material in the sampling. This set the groundwork for a more thorough understanding of the motives and traits behind each actor in the audience-media-celebrity triangulation.

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<sup>77</sup> “Statement from USADA CEO Travis T. Tygart Regarding the U.S. Postal Service Pro Cycling Team Doping Conspiracy,” *USADA*, October 12, 2012, accessed December 4, 2014, <http://cyclinginvestigation.usada.org>.

After defining the parameters of each scandal, the study selected major American and British newspapers from which to collect a sampling of articles that would be representative of wider entertainment news culture. Given the thesis's focus on the digital context of news production, only online sources were considered. Further, to ensure the reading public's easy access to web-based content, only publications without paywalls were taken into account.

The first criterion in newspaper selection was high online circulation rates. For U.S. sources, circulation statistics were obtained via the Alliance for Audited Media. Digital circulation numbers of the top twenty-five U.S. daily newspapers from March 2013 (the most recent date on file) provided a numerical list to follow.<sup>78</sup> Newspapers were chosen in succession from this list according to the second requirement: extensive entertainment news / celebrity gossip columns. The newspapers selected were the following: *USA Today*, *New York Daily News*, and the *New York Post*. These U.S. dailies were supplemented by TMZ to include one of the most influential American celebrity scandal sources of the last decade. Labeled "a unique and controversial mix of scandal mongering and investigative journalism," TMZ has been characterized as having an audacious brand at the forefront of an efficient and disruptive business.<sup>79</sup> Notably, TMZ has cemented a reputation across celebrity news circuits for "combining sheer hustle with digital expediency, sharp elbows, tough skin and mordant wit."<sup>80</sup> Online traffic statistics for U.K. newspapers were obtained via the Audit Bureau of Circulations. Following the same criteria, the following three newspapers were selected: the *Daily Mail*, the *Daily Mirror* and the *Guardian*.

<sup>78</sup> "Top 25 U.S. Newspapers for March 2013," *Alliance for Audited Media*, accessed October 7, 2014, <http://www.auditedmedia.com/news/research-and-data/top-25-us-newspapers-for-march-2013.aspx>.

<sup>79</sup> Anne Helen Petersen, "The Down and Dirty History of TMZ," *BuzzFeed*, July 25, 2014, accessed October 7, 2014, <http://www.buzzfeed.com/annehelenpetersen/the-down-and-dirty-history-of-tmz#3sfbgvf>.

<sup>80</sup> Paige Albinak, "TMZ's \$55 Million Brand: Moving Far Beyond the 30-Mile Zone," *Broadcasting and Cable*, August 12, 2013, accessed October 7, 2014, <http://www.broadcastingcable.com/news/news-articles/tmzs-55-million-brand-moving-far-beyond-30-mile-zone/114726>.

An online database search was then conducted on the websites of the chosen news sources. The keywords for each case study were based around a combination of the following: the celebrity's name, the word "scandal," and the most common word used to describe their individual transgression – "cocaine" for Moss, "doping" for Armstrong, and "meltdown" for Sheen. Approximately thirty articles were collected per case study, based on their relevance to their respective scandal. The aim was to obtain a variety of news article types (including editorials, news items, and features) in order to analyze factual information as well as opinionated commentary.

As a discourse analysis involving both qualitative and quantitative aspects, the study interpreted these sources on various levels. It considered not just the surface meanings of the texts but also their underlying intentions, aiming to bring out a dynamic range of valuable interpretations. Because the study concerned a prevalent contemporary topic (specifically the reporting of three widely circulated celebrity scandals), there was an abundance of material for analysis. This allowed for a complex and comprehensive collection of discourses to be revealed and investigated. The analysis undertaken for each case study followed a clear path: sift through the sampling to identify dominant phrases (quantitative) and mobilize these discursive patterns in a deeper investigation of attempts to generate a specific truth (qualitative), ultimately comparing and contrasting the three media events as reflective of cultural, social, and economic tendencies.

The study's quantitative element also included tracking audience reaction to substantiate the correlation with celebrity-generated discourses. Circulation and viewership numbers were collected to show the link between audience interest and economic advantage for the papers, as well as between audience interest and recognition advantage for the celebrities. Various methods were employed to gather this data: the Kate Moss case necessitated directly contacting the

Circulation Manager at the *Daily Mirror*; the Lance Armstrong case required tracing statistics released by Oprah Winfrey's OWN network; and the Charlie Sheen case involved compiling web analytics from various online sources, most notably Ustream and Internships.com. These measures brought forward clear evidence of both sales and interest increasing as the respective scandals heated up in news coverage.

In a qualitative aspect, each media text on the nature and the repercussions of the celebrity's actions was analyzed with the understanding that language is a distinctive type of symbolic action that constructs knowledge. Thus, in addressing the research questions, the thesis specifically sought to bring to the forefront the underlying presence of controlled meaning in each of the Moss, Armstrong, and Sheen scandals. The study placed importance on identifying and categorizing discursive patterns inherent in the exposure of celebrity wrongdoings; this is what led to the choice of employing a critical discourse analysis.

In engaging with such patterns that circulate constantly within the established audience-media-celebrity triangulation, an overarching chain of logic was hypothesized. Celebrity news culture profits from sensationalizing and simplifying a scandal to stir emotional response and controversy; journalists continuously feed this specific type of rhetoric to an audience willing to be distracted, with the ultimate aim of generating readership and acquiring monetary gains. The tabloid that broke Kate Moss's scandal used her cocaine exposure to position the supermodel as a destructive addict who had publicly claimed to be clean but was privately hanging around with junkie musicians and lying about her drug use. These discourses constructed "Cocaine Kate" through registers of corruption and morality, framing the supermodel as a hypocritical manipulator of her own image. This example clearly showed a scandal based on an exploitable

moment at a celebrity's expense, where journalists were using *schadenfreude* to sell more papers and keep the story going.

This hypothesis builds from each of the four identified literature themes: image and reality, audience and identity, economics and attention, and technology and tabloidization. The literature established a critical foundation to allow for an informed, effective, and thorough examination of the celebrity news matrix. It mobilized key concepts from the scholarly fields of communication, cultural, social, and linguistic theory in order to help explain how and why the Moss, Armstrong, and Sheen scandal stories gained as much traction as they did. Each literature theme was viewed as integral to comprehensively address the research questions. For this reason, the thesis had a clear intention to include in the analysis of each case study all four identified themes. Not only did this take into account the multi-dimensional nature of the discursive practices central to celebrity scandal reporting, it was also advantageous in helping to structure the analysis.

Thus, in the textual analysis of each article, the analysis specifically looked for patterns of discourse that stemmed from these major themes in the world of entertainment news. The following four sets of questions guided the inquiry:

- How does the article frame the star's "image" prior to the scandal? Does the description align or misalign with the "reality" once the controversy was brought to light?
- Which members of the public are mentioned? What are their reactions to the scandal?
- What is said about the scandal's impact on the celebrity's reputation and earnings?
- Does the article sensationalize the scandal? If so, how does the news medium work in tangent with this goal?

This qualitative method reduced the data through a process of coding. Each article was read thoroughly, with meaningful segments highlighted and related to one or more themes. Relations were noted among the variables to build a logical chain of evidence that was compared and contrasted with the original hypothesis. In this manner, the process of inquiry followed Fairclough's stages of critical discourse analysis (description, interpretation, and explanation), moving from the formal properties of the actual text to the text as a resource in understanding its social effects.

Prior to undertaking the case-by-case analyses (including data collection and results in the ensuing chapters), the research set out an overview of expectations regarding the reportage of the Moss, Armstrong, and Sheen scandals. This served to outline the starting focus points for each case study and was also a useful recording tool to aid in comparing initial thoughts with resulting findings. Here, the aim was to identify overarching discursive patterns in each scandal, touch upon their affective natures, and anticipate how each actor would use them. This overview set the organizational pattern for the findings by discussing each scandal in line with the four literature themes.

### Overview of Cases

For Kate Moss, a British supermodel hailed for pioneering the edgy style of “heroin chic,” her image prior to her scandal was already inherently misaligned. It was built from a clear hypocrisy in the fashion world: a disconnect punctuated by the fact that models are expected to maintain waif-like, under-fed figures all the while leading healthy and wholesome lifestyles. With this in mind, the study searched for traces of a suspension of disbelief in the narrative surrounding her cocaine use. As the editor of British *Vogue*, Alexandra Shulman, commented when Burberry, Chanel, and H&M dropped their campaigns with Moss in the wake of the

controversy: “Everybody knew that they were buying into the Kate Moss bad-girl thing, and then suddenly it’s like, ‘Actually, we can’t be seen doing this.’”<sup>81</sup>

This element of Moss’s scandal story was mobilized to evidence that the consuming public, by subscribing to a nihilistic vision of beauty, was equally involved in the hypocrisy. The thesis takes the position that the audience was a knowing subject in the “Cocaine Kate” narrative. Here it is suggested that the consuming public suspended its belief that Moss’s underweight and under-slept look was actually achieved with drugs. Denying this reality would make the response to the surfaced images all the more intense. It was anticipated that when the audience ceased to give Moss the benefit of the doubt, their reactions would provide the basis for a moral panic. This, in turn, could be conveniently picked up and packaged by journalists to turn into a media storm, positioning Moss as a neglectful mother and a poor role model to young women. Bringing these discourses and others to the forefront would clearly show how journalists manipulated meaning around Moss’s transgression in their attempts to position her as a hypocrite and drug addict.

The supermodel’s characteristic silence – in this case, remaining tight-lipped apart from a delayed public apology – added fuel to the fire. Initial research showed that media texts cynically positioned the supermodel’s “too little too late” confession as a PR ploy,<sup>82</sup> and stressed that fashion houses only dropped Moss after receiving massive public backlash.<sup>83</sup> Focusing on the theme of economics and attention, it became clear that Moss’s defensive response only worked to her advantage; it gave her time to formulate a calculated response, and allowed for her to

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<sup>81</sup> Vicky Ward, “The Beautiful and the Damned,” *Vanity Fair*, December 2005, accessed September 2, 2014, <http://www.vanityfair.com/culture/features/2005/12/kate-moss-cocaine-scandal>.

<sup>82</sup> Graham Brough, “Kate’s Cocaine Apology,” *Mirror Online*, September 23, 2005, accessed September 2, 2014, <http://www.mirror.co.uk/3am/celebrity-news/kates-cocaine-apology-558580>.

<sup>83</sup> “H&M Drops Kate Moss after Drugs Scandal,” *Mail Online*, September 20, 2005, accessed September 2, 2014, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/tvshowbiz/article-362941/H-M-drops-Kate-Moss-drugs-scandal.html>.

retain the seductive aura of mystery integral to her public persona. Five years after the scandal, Moss's agent confirmed the veracity of the statement "all press is good press" by revealing that her client had since doubled her annual earnings from £2 to £4 million.<sup>84</sup>

In breaking the story via a camera-phone video that shot around the global media circuit in seconds, the "Cocaine Kate" scandal provided rich material for the theme of technology and tabloidization. It was a clear example of how digital mobile recording devices and the tabloids can enter into a compelling, mutually beneficial relationship, one that fuses both their propensities towards quick, sensational images and simple, provocative content. The original *Daily Mirror* article, relying on video stills and emphasizing sensory observations, followed conspicuous journalistic techniques intended to shock and excite. This was a scandal fit for the tabloids.

Lance Armstrong's public image prior to his doping scandal painted a picture of a mythical figure. He was celebrated as a world-renowned American cyclist – winning the Tour de France a record seven consecutive times from 1999-2005 – and as a heroic cancer survivor who founded the Livestrong foundation, giving hope and support to millions of cancer patients. Yet it was subsequently revealed that Armstrong was the face of a hypocritical cycling industry, similar to Moss in modeling, where the use of the banned and undetectable red blood cell booster EPO was almost universal. Initial research showed that Armstrong, bearing the brunt of allegations of illicit drug use, consistently imposed his own narrative in retaliation. In 2001, a Nike commercial

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<sup>84</sup> "Kate Moss Doubled Her Income after Cocaine Shame," *Mirror Online*, October 11, 2010, accessed September 2, 2014, <http://www.mirror.co.uk/3am/celebrity-news/kate-moss-doubled-her-income-after-253241>.

featured the cyclist delivering a clear public statement: “Everybody wants to know what I’m on. What am I on? I’m on my bike, busting my ass six hours a day. What are you on?”<sup>85</sup>

It was clear that Armstrong was notorious for openly and vehemently attacking those who questioned the integrity of his sport, including his closest friends and teammates. After his cycling team’s masseuse, Emma O’Reilly, went public in 2003 with a book that sought to expose Armstrong’s drug use, he demonized her as a prostitute with a drinking problem and sued her for libel.<sup>86</sup> On August 24, 2012, when the United States Anti-Doping Agency stripped Armstrong of all his titles and gave him a lifetime ban from cycling, the disgraced athlete issued a public statement in which he labeled the two-year federal criminal investigation an “unconstitutional witch hunt,” calling the agency’s process “unfair” and “one-sided,” and its claims “outlandish” and “heinous.”<sup>87</sup> In contrast to Moss, who was silent (on the defensive) as she permitted the furor to fill up the empty space until the controversy blew over, Armstrong was blatantly aggressive (on the offensive) as he attempted to fill the space himself and control the discourses around his transgressions.

The study focuses on this furious, relentless, and reactive discursive pattern as the central hypocrisy in the Armstrong doping scandal. At the core, Armstrong’s behaviour embodied a lie repeated over and over. By following words in specific context, like the cyclist’s brazen denials, particular patterns were detected that aimed to position Armstrong as a deceitful bully. It was evident that Armstrong strove to assume full control over his own image by consistently

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<sup>85</sup> “WATCH: Lance Armstrong Gives Anti-Doping Message in 2001 Nike Commercial,” *Daily News*, December 4, 2014, accessed September 25, 2014, <http://www.nydailynews.com/blogs/iteam/watch-lance-armstrong-anti-doping-message-2001-nike-commercial-blog-entry-1.1632330>.

<sup>86</sup> Mary Pilon, “Armstrong Aide Talks of Doping and Price Paid,” *New York Times*, October 12, 2012, accessed September 25, 2014, [http://www.nytimes.com/2012/10/13/sports/cycling/lance-armstrong-aide-talks-of-doping-and-price-paid.html?pagewanted=all&\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/10/13/sports/cycling/lance-armstrong-aide-talks-of-doping-and-price-paid.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0).

<sup>87</sup> “Statement from Lance Armstrong,” *CNN*, August 24, 2012, accessed September 25, 2014, <http://news.blogs.cnn.com/2012/08/24/statement-from-lance-armstrong/>.

attacking anyone who challenged his narrative – knowing full well the veracity of their claims. With this dichotomy in mind, it was observed that the news media’s representation of the doping scandal set a clear opposition between Armstrong and his whistle-blowers. It is important to note that such a deliberate focus on contrasts, with two active sides each on the offensive, creates a strong and simple juxtaposition to frame such stories. This means that up to the point of resolution, a constant push-pull is in effect as each side attempts to establish their truth claim. In Armstrong’s story, such a division of public opinion positioned audiences in a debate over which side had greater pull. It is argued here that this particular feature of the scandal aided in its wide circulation across media outlets and audiences.

The point of resolution in this doping story arrived towards the denouement, and it coincided with a turning point in the narrative: Armstrong’s television interview with Oprah Winfrey that aired on January 17 and 18, 2013, where, after more than a decade of stringent and brazen denial, the disgraced cyclist publicly admitted to doping. The incredible story that had romanticized him into an international cultural icon and humanitarian was finally revealed to have simply been an elaborate myth. The thesis argues that incredulity surrounding the story – a cancer survivor going on to not only complete, but win, seven Tour de France titles – speaks to audiences’ willingness to believe a beautiful lie more than the ugly truth. Armstrong’s story built him into a celebrity. Here it presumed that he understood the power that came with it, and used it to his advantage to keep his narrative alive.

Compared to the Moss and Armstrong cases, controversy surrounding Charlie Sheen reinforces an alignment between his image in the media and the reality of his experience. Since the 1980s, his trajectory of fame has coincided with a slew of notorious charges involving prostitution rings, alcohol and drug abuse, and domestic violence. The actor’s well-established

bad-boy, hard-partier, and no-holds-barred aura undoubtedly means that scandals involving him may come across as less shocking for the very reason that the public expects trouble. At the same time, it is fascinating to observe that Sheen's perpetual proclivity towards bad press reinforces his rogue image, thus managing to leave his reputation relatively unscathed.

Sheen's ability to bounce back from his indiscretions, becoming essentially "scandal-proof," suggests that his persona has been able to gather, over the decades, an audience accustomed to his reckless behaviour.<sup>88</sup> Among Sheen's more recent noteworthy troubles, his public meltdown beginning in February of 2011 displayed new levels of necessary damage control. It was in a questionable mental state, beyond reason, where the actor chose to spread erratic and offensive rants against his *Two and a Half Men* bosses across a variety of media outlets. He booked his own interviews and ultimately led his long-time publicist Stan Rosenfield to resign, leaving no one to mitigate losses to reputation. Yet could it be expected for Sheen to be concerned with any real damage to his career? Time and time again, there proved to be an audience standing by, ready to watch his bewitching, high wire circus act.<sup>89</sup>

The entertainment value of Sheen's 2011 meltdown was rooted in its sheer spread across pop culture, measurable by a handful of voraciously mimicked one-liners coined by the actor ("Duh, winning!" and "I got tiger blood, man.")<sup>90</sup> The simplicity, hilarity, and incredulity of Sheen's buzzwords translated to pre-packaged headlines for the press. By inventing a bizarre narrative in disorganized appearances across major television networks, Sheen acted to spread

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<sup>88</sup> Jo Piazza, "Why Scandals Don't Faze Charlie Sheen's Career," *CNN*, December 30, 2009, accessed October 5, 2014, <http://edition.cnn.com/2009/SHOWBIZ/TV/12/28/charlie.sheen.image/>.

<sup>89</sup> Brian Lowry, "Goodbye, Charlie," *Variety*, March 8, 2011, accessed October 5, 2014, <http://variety.com/2011/tv/news/goodbye-charlie-1118033504/>.

<sup>90</sup> Melissa Maerz, "The Charlie Sheen Dictionary: A Totally Gnarly, Bi-Winning Guide to the Actor's Best Quotes," *Los Angeles Times*, March 1, 2011, accessed October 5, 2014, <http://latimesblogs.latimes.com/showtracker/2011/03/the-charlie-sheen-glossary-a-totally-bitchin-bi-winning-guide-to-the-actors-best-quotes.html>.

his own scandal. Interestingly enough, where Armstrong sat down with Oprah to convince the audience to believe his remorse, Sheen seemed to be testing not only the limits of his audience's belief, but also the limits of their support.

The digital context in which Sheen publicized his own meltdown offered the actor freedom outside of his network-broadcasted interviews. Impulsively establishing self-made webcasts in a web series called *Sheen's Korner* (the tagline: "You're either in Sheen's Korner or you're with the trolls!"), the troubled star was able to connect directly with fans by giving them unprecedented, real-time access to his expletive-filled thoughts. In essence, Sheen pioneered a new genre of "meltdown-as-miniseries."<sup>91</sup> In contrast to the tactics of Moss, on the defensive, and Armstrong, on the offensive, Sheen was generative: he actively stoked the fires of his own bad-boy persona. His invitation to the public to participate in his antics spoke to his understanding of the growing bonds between technology and the spread of scandal, with the former serving to reinforce the latter. The fascinating digital mobile culture of contemporary society in which Sheen found himself was one that fostered a new dimension of sensationalism – where scandal spread instantly as it happened.

Here it is demonstrated that the richness of the Kate Moss, Lance Armstrong, and Charlie Sheen cases provide ample ground on which to identify discursive patterns that circulate in the celebrity scandal news matrix. The ensuing three chapters present the findings of each case study. The in-depth analyses focus on critically analyzing the manipulation of meaning against the backdrop of the identified four key themes in the world of entertainment news. This multi-layered approach gives strength in uncovering how news media, audiences, and celebrities are

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<sup>91</sup> Christine Kearney, "Charlie Sheen Sparks New Era of Cyber Celebrity Meltdowns," *Reuters*, March 9, 2011, accessed October 6, 2014, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2011/03/09/us-charliesheen-internet-idUSTRE7287AT20110309>.

involved in such an affective type of reportage. Each of these actors plays a determining role in the construction of scandal stories. In unique yet intertwined ways, audiences, journalists, and celebrities drive these narratives to keep the controversy alive.

## Chapter 4 – The Kate Moss Case: When Silence Adds to Seduction

The grainy images of Kate Moss published on September 15, 2005 by London's *Daily Mirror*, which claims to be "Britain's brightest tabloid newspaper," sparked an instant scandal across news media outlets.<sup>92</sup> Visual evidence from a camera-phone video recording, taken during an undercover investigation, purported to show the British supermodel sorting and snorting cocaine. The "shocking," "exclusive," "extraordinary," and "remarkable" images that resulted ran on the tabloid's front page, with an accompanying article written by Stephen Moyes.<sup>93</sup> Dubbing the British supermodel "Cocaine Kate," the *Daily Mirror's* drug exposé attempted to set into motion a discourse that would brand Moss's image as tainted and her career as destroyed.

A critical discourse analysis of the data detected a compelling pattern in Moss's reaction to the scandal that worked to her advantage. It followed a phrase that ex-lover Johnny Depp had once told her: "Never complain, never explain."<sup>94</sup> Moss and her handlers seemed to have taken Depp's advice by employing a strategy of laying low and letting the furor fill up the empty space until the controversy blew over. This calculated move gave her team time to craft a thought-out media response. Further, such a defensive stance fell in line with Moss's notorious aversion to being interviewed, conveniently matching her public image of seductive silence.

By charting the development of the scandal's various discourses, a clear battleground emerged where "truth" was being formed discursively through the control of meaning as each side attempted to create milieux for advantage. The tabloids were crafting negative discourses to

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<sup>92</sup> "About Us," *Mirror Online*, accessed October 20, 2014, <http://www.mirror.co.uk/about-us/>.

<sup>93</sup> Stephen Moyes, "Exclusive: Cocaine Kate," *Daily Mirror*, September 15, 2005, 2.

<sup>94</sup> James Fox, "The Riddle of Kate Moss," *Vanity Fair*, December 2012, accessed October 20, 2014, <http://www.vanityfair.com/hollywood/2012/12/kate-moss-naked-emotions>.

exploit a moment at Moss's expense, calling her out on a lie about her drug use and attempting to make it into something bigger. The supermodel and her team were pushing back with a communication strategy that mobilized various tactics to uphold an image at odds with the one generated by the news media. In the end, Kate Moss came out on top. Not only did she survive the scandal by successfully arraying a firm media response to her critics, but she also thrived, turning the publicity into net financial gains.

Beginning with an examination of Moyes's exposure, thirty news items were gathered from three daily newspapers in Britain: the *Daily Mirror*, the *Daily Mail*, and the *Guardian*. The articles were sorted and numbered in chronological order to achieve a proper delineation of the scandal's progression. A thorough quantitative analysis of the sampling identified dominant phrases that papers repeatedly used to discredit Moss and fuel the story. The initial sifting established the parameters for a deeper qualitative analysis that used key themes (see Appendix A) to detect patterns of exposure and dissect how language was manipulated in the discursive struggle between Moss and her detractors.

The "Cocaine Kate" scandal, surrounded by a mediated cacophony, had spun around its subject's consistent silence; through all of the noise, Moss had remained quiet. Fourteen of the thirty reports referenced the mystique of Moss's closely guarded personal life. Of these, six were specific to the supermodel's handling of her cocaine scandal, whether it was avoiding media questioning or declining to provide an explanation when interviewed by officials. A register of entitlement accompanied this theme: subsumed within the evidence were insinuations that Moss felt she was above the law, or inherently deserving of special treatment. Expectedly, the least regard given to Moss's silence was from the tabloid that laid claim to the scandal's exposure; the *Mirror* gave the supermodel a clear voice in detailed transcriptions of the undercover video and

other incriminating “proof.” By circulating certain aspects of plausibility to create a “truth,” the paper showed a clear attempt to hold discursive control over Moss’s image and propagate a scandal.

Because the wider story centered on drug abuse, it should not be surprising that specific stories sampled Moss’s cocaine use and its effects. Twenty-seven of the thirty articles talked at length about her drug use; the remaining three pieces referred to the illicit substance briefly, employing words such as “crack,” “cocaine,” and “drugs.” The contrition narrative of rehab – an archetypal part of any drug scandal story – appeared in two-thirds of the total articles. The tabloids made it known that Moss had used drugs in the past, and this current revelation showed that her previous stints in rehab had clearly not made lasting effects on her wellbeing. Here, the news media were mobilizing a register of morality by portraying Moss as a damaged liar who claimed to be clean but was in fact guilty of abusing illicit substances. Her visit to rehab in response to this scandal was simply perpetuating the lie – a publicity stunt to restore her reputation.

Moss’s inability to resist temptation was an integral frame used by the news media. It unflinchingly manifested itself through a register of corruption in reportage of the tumultuous love affair with her then-boyfriend, 27-year-old Pete Doherty, a bad-boy rocker widely known for his addiction to heroin. Not only was the Babyshambles front man seen to exacerbate Moss’s wild side, but he was also painted as a ticking time bomb that could explode at any moment, collapsing the wall Moss had built between her private life and the media. Doherty’s presence in the sampling was largely focused around his troubling drug use, which was detailed in eleven of the thirty articles; seven more reports briefly acknowledged him either simply as Moss’s boyfriend or more explicitly as her “junkie lover” and a “crack addict.”

A relationship prior to Doherty had left Moss with a two-year-old daughter, Lila Grace. This simple fact was packaged and distributed by journalists through a register of motherhood to attribute more weight to Moss's actions. Of the total sampling, sixteen articles mentioned Lila Grace in alluding to the supermodel's primary responsibility as mother of a young child. An additional eight articles, while not remarking on Lila Grace specifically, addressed wider issues concerning Moss as a poor role model to young women. Emerging from the furor of Moss's cocaine scandal were hints of an attempt to create a moral panic over her influence, with news media outlets laying the groundwork to hold the celebrity socially accountable for her actions.<sup>95</sup> This widespread anxiety involved both London's Metropolitan Police Service and the international fashion industry.

At the time of the cocaine scandal, the British supermodel was at the top of her trade. Yet a crucial part of her rise to fame, her being credited with popularizing the "heroin chic" look, riddled Moss's career with controversy from the beginning. This persona glorified addiction, self-destruction, and rebellion. For the papers, it conveniently linked her to drug abuse well before the cocaine scandal broke, making the "Cocaine Kate" story all the more believable. The *Mirror's* grainy images painted Moss as an obvious drug addict: her link to illicit substances was now real and truly problematic. If only temporarily, her exchange-value as a model drastically dropped. The reportage showed a discernible fluctuation in her modeling contracts and earnings; this discourse was found in twenty-six of the thirty articles. Intertwined throughout was another story relayed through the register of corruption: the hypocrisy of her industry, which had once capitalized off her drug-addicted look. Moss's counter to the *Mirror's* crafted attack, publicly

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<sup>95</sup> The term "moral panic" originates from sociologist Stanley Cohen, who observed that societies go through periodic moral panics where persons or groups become "defined as a threat to societal values and interests" by being "presented in a stylized and stereotypical fashion by the mass media." Stanley Cohen, *Folk Devils and Moral Panic: The Creation of the Mods and Rockers* (London: MacGibbon and Kee Ltd., 1972), 1.

going through rehab on a short and calculated path to redemption, salvaged her reputation. Her image was further boosted by support from friends in the industry, whom her team likely enlisted to change the conduit of information from one discursive formation to another.

The news media's circulating registers of entitlement, morality, motherhood, and corruption reinforced one another and created key discursive patterns within the factual reporting of Moss's wrongdoing. The papers had selected, deflected, and privileged aspects of reality to construct Moss as a drug addict, a liar, an unfit mother, and a spoiled hypocrite. According to them, Moss was stringently refusing to address the allegations – she felt above the law and her silence could only mean that she was guilty. Moss had claimed to be clean after previous stints in rehab – she was a liar who had publicly renounced drugs while still privately using. Moss hung around with junkie musicians – she was weak and unable to resist temptation. Moss had a two-year-old daughter – she was an untrustworthy, toxic mother and a poor role model. Constituting powerful perspectives, these registers were mobilized by the news media to portray the supermodel as a deceptive manipulator of her own image. In revealing the unfortunate “truth” behind Moss's persona, the tabloids were attempting to both generate and exploit the feeling of *schadenfreude* (taking pleasure in another's misfortune), ultimately aiming to keep the scandal alive and sell more papers.

Journalists had a clear strategy to own the story, and Moss took a calculated risk by staying silent without knowledge of what other “evidence” might surface. Even without real coercion, the news media were deploying aspects of hegemonic practice by appealing to latent biases that dealt with Moss's apparent moral decrepitude and its effect on social norms. Contrary to conventional PR damage control advice, Moss had opened the doors for her image to be crafted by her opposition. Yet her crisis management team was undoubtedly aware that given

their client's established reticence, such a decision would not be taken as unusual. The precarious strategy worked: waiting before getting ahead of the story gave Moss enough time to formulate a well-designed response and successfully turn the scandal around. The subsequent in-depth analysis examined the development of the scandal's discursive patterns to illustrate how the news media and the supermodel entered into a struggle over the control of meaning. Ultimately, each side was aiming to influence the audience into consuming a particular mediated image of Kate Moss's celebrity.

The *Daily Mirror*'s "Exclusive: Cocaine Kate" article gave the reading public the first words it would hear of the supermodel's cocaine scandal. The writer, Stephen Moyes, presented a play-by-play description of the events captured by the camera-phone video recorder. The three-page report, entitled "High as a Kate," went into great detail to paint Moss as a seasoned user:

THIS is supermodel Kate Moss snorting a fat line of cocaine during a debauched drugs and drinking session with junkie lover Pete Doherty.

As the white powder induces a sudden rush to the brain, she rocks back in her seat and laughs hysterically. The coke is kicking in.

Within seconds she leans forward and again sniffs into a tightly rolled-up £5 note, hoovering every last grain of the Class A drug.

It is clear from these extraordinary images, captured during a *Mirror* undercover investigation, that the 31-year-old catwalk queen is a practiced user.<sup>96</sup>

In the factual relaying of the "debauched drugs and drinking session," the tabloid loaded the evidence with innuendo to present Moss as a hardened drug user ("rush to the brain," "within seconds," the reference to the five-pound note, and the stress on the legal reference to a prohibited "Class A drug") – and even convincingly spelled out the characterization in bald language. Interspersed throughout the rest of the article to identify Moss were brief and bold mentions of her success: "31-year-old catwalk queen," "model icon worth £30 million," "mother

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<sup>96</sup> Moyes, "Exclusive: Cocaine Kate," 2.

of a two-year-old daughter,” “the face of Rimmel, Chanel, Calvin Klein and Christian Dior,” and “10 times a Vogue cover girl.”

The clear juxtaposition punctuating the first two thirds of Moyes’s article established an uncomfortable friction: a grim personal life and a luminous professional career were unlikely to coexist. In the company of “junkie lover” Pete Doherty and his “crackhead friends,” Kate Moss was headed towards an imminent downfall. The supermodel was given a voice in the last third of the article, selected from her past utterances, but not any that defended her case. Rather, it reprimanded (and provided evidence for) her current transgressions by deploying a morality register to recall past confessions that she “had spent much of the 90s drunk,” with her drug habits leaving her “in the depths of despair.” Here, the mention that she “never admitted [to] using cocaine” and “claimed to have cleaned up her act” added another layer to a story that while appearing to cast Moss as a hypocrite, seemed to have expected it from her. The final words of Moyes’s article quoted Moss from two years prior to the scandal, suggesting that a past evil was still lingering in the present: “Drugs enhanced all the misery and I got into this spiral. I still drink but I don’t do drugs.”

Aiming to hold on to every reader whose interest had been piqued, the *Mirror*’s breaking story encouraged its audience to pick up the next day’s edition for more “amazing revelations.” A second part to the “Cocaine Kate” exclusive was published the following morning; the tabloid again used Moss as their involuntary, worse-for-wear covergirl. Headlined “The Day Drugs Wiped Me Out,” day two’s exclusive boasted confessions from the supermodel and more “amazing pictures.” To confront the supermodel in person on the same day that the cocaine images surfaced, Moyes had partnered with another *Mirror* reporter, Ryan Parry, in New York,

where Moss was attending New York Fashion Week.<sup>97</sup> Moyes and Parry's report from the encounter in New York recounted that Moss "let fly with a tirade of foul-mouthed abuse" at the press encircling her:

As the beauty threw a hissy-fit, crackhead Doherty tried to calm her down. Pulling her away as the couple ran towards the Mercer Hotel where they were staying, he urged: "Come on, we'll read it tomorrow anyway... deal with it then." Then he squared up to our reporter, but Kate pulled him away, saying "f\*\*\*ing leave it". Even inside the hotel, away from the chaos outside, Moss refused to listen to our questions. We wanted her to respond to the drug claims sensibly. Instead, she lost it again, ran into the lobby area screaming at the top of her voice.<sup>98</sup>

Portrayed as wild, enraged, and entitled, the supermodel was characterized as a drug abuser acting in any way but sensibly. In fact, the *Mirror* clearly suggested that she was both physically and mentally unstable, and inferred that she would likely need a fix to keep her from reeling out of control. The paper's encounter with Moss was concisely summarized in bold, capitalized letters that took up the larger part of a page: "F\*\*\* off! F\*\*\* off! F\*\*\* off! F\*\*\* off! Just f\*\*\* off! – Kate Moss yesterday." The exposé's focus on Moss's tumultuous behaviour put forward a scandal whose subject was out of control; there was no telling where this story would lead, but surely, it would be somewhere captivating.

According to the Circulation Manager at the *Daily Mirror*, the "Cocaine Kate" scandal story gave the tabloid a hundred thousand increase in copy sales over a three-day period.<sup>99</sup> It also won the writer, Stephen Moyes, Scoop of the Year at the British Journalism Awards in 2006. Speaking to Britain's *Press Gazette*, organizer of the ceremony, Moyes described eight months of late evenings, early mornings, unpleasant encounters, frustration, and disillusionment until he

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<sup>97</sup> Ryan Parry is a London-based journalist familiar with investigative endeavours. In 2003, Parry spent eight weeks masquerading as a footman at Buckingham Palace to expose the palace's security failings ahead of U.S. President George Bush's state visit. His piece "Intruder at the Palace" was awarded Scoop of the Year at the 2003 British Journalism Awards.

<sup>98</sup> Stephen Moyes and Ryan Perry, "The Day Drugs Wiped Me Out," *Daily Mirror*, September 16, 2005, 2.

<sup>99</sup> John Howard, e-mail message to author, November 17, 2014.

got an outcome: “Of course, when that came to fruition it was very, very satisfying. I think [Moss] thought it was never going to happen and she went to a lot of extremes to make sure it was never going to happen, which is why it was so difficult.”<sup>100</sup>

This struggle over visibility between reporter and celebrity is based in relations of power. Moss’s case exemplified that in disseminating information and laying value judgments, it was the journalist who held immediate discursive control over the star image. The *Mirror* had crucial incentive to break the story: a few months prior, its Sunday sister paper had been forced to pay Moss “substantial” libel damages after publishing defamatory allegations that claimed the supermodel had collapsed into a cocaine-induced coma in Barcelona in 2001.<sup>101</sup> Whether in retribution or not, the *Mirror*’s undercover investigation made it clear that a certain type of symbolic capital was awarded to reporters involved in going beneath the surface to break an important story. The prestige manifested itself not just in industry respect, but also personal achievement. As Stephen Moyes commented, “I have a romantic vision of having a great scoop, running to the newsagents and seeing it on the front page. That’s why we do it, I guess. That’s a great feeling.”<sup>102</sup> Ironically, the reporter who had exploited a story about drug use was describing it as a “high.”

This sentiment on the part of reporters echoes the investigative thrill of both revealing the truth behind clandestine conduct and holding an authoritative voice on the matter. The Kate Moss example shows how such incentives encourage Moyes and other tabloid journalists to go to great lengths for a scoop that catches a high-profile celebrity off-guard. The more illicit the

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<sup>100</sup> “How Being Mr Nice Guy Led to the Scoop of the Year,” *Press Gazette*, April 15, 2007, accessed November 12, 2014, <http://www.pressgazette.co.uk/node/37316>.

<sup>101</sup> Claire Cozens, “Sunday Mirror Apologises over Moss Cocaine Story,” *Guardian*, July 27, 2005, accessed November 12, 2014, <http://www.theguardian.com/media/2005/jul/27/sundaymirror.pressandpublishing>.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*

behaviour, the greater the impact, and a chain reaction ensues. As the story that broke Moss's cocaine scandal, Moyes's article set a precedent for the news media frenzy that followed. Employing specific registers to tell the story, it made several things clear: Moss had been caught abusing drugs; this revelation wasn't going to go away overnight; and it would undoubtedly affect both her personal and professional life. Ready in the sidelines to sustain the story's sensation was a cadre of other journalists eager to pick apart Moss, her actions, and their consequences.

Thus began the media storm. On Sunday, September 18, 2005, the *Guardian's* sister paper, the *Observer*, published an article entitled "Has the Shine Come Off the £30M Model?" that focused on interviews with young admirers of Moss at her former high school. Quotes from current female students described Moss's influence as legendary: "She's one of those people that everyone copies."<sup>103</sup> The supermodel was clearly a fashion icon among the younger generation: many of the schoolgirls emulated Moss's edgy, rocker-chic style in their own skinny jeans, ballet flats, and waistcoats – all items that Moss had pioneered. Her contagious, enigmatic popularity among the girls was further heightened by her relationship with Pete Doherty; young fans "avidly [followed] the pair's tempestuous, soap-opera style love affair" as covered by the London tabloids. The article's stress on teenagers adoring both Moss and Doherty, despite the drugs, established an underlying air of anxiety around the effects of Moss's "cool" hard-partying lifestyle.

Responding to the news of the supermodel's cocaine use, the young girls interviewed confirmed the central irony of the scandal: the drug allegations against Moss were not surprising, considering her image had been originally marketed as "heroin chic." While they could relate

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<sup>103</sup> Lucy Rock and Katy Weitz, "Has the Shine Come Off the £30M Model?" *Guardian*, September 18, 2005, accessed November 13, 2014, <http://www.theguardian.com/media/2005/sep/18/pressandpublishing.drugs>.

(“Drugs are everywhere... Young people experiment - that’s normal”), they were concerned about Moss’s influence on her daughter Lila Grace, who was two years old at the time: “[Moss] should have grown out of it at 31 because she’s a mum and she can’t go too far. That girl of hers is going to grow up thinking all of that is OK.”<sup>104</sup> The report’s focus on Moss’s influence on the younger generation – a responsibility to her child and to her fans – pointed towards a moral panic on its way to gathering traction. The successful model, who had been marketed an aura of “cool” and “heroin chic,” was now directly linked to drugs. In an insidious manner, she threatened the wellbeing of those who looked up to her.

This social tension filled a space left empty by Moss and her press representatives. The *Guardian* reported that her modeling agency, Storm, was keeping quiet in light of the scandal, stating only: “Kate never makes public comments to the media about her private or personal life.”<sup>105</sup> At that point, Kate Moss had not given an interview for nearly five years; journalists commented that this only added to her charisma. To give material depth to the scandal, reporters had searched for other sources, like seeking out fans of Moss at her former high school. The outward appearance of the young girls suggested that the cocaine exposure was unlikely to affect the supermodel’s status as style icon; however, their words to the *Guardian* made it clear that the scandal had cast a troubling light on Moss’s cultural influence because of the motherhood issue.

The newspaper continued to report on Moss’s scandal with an article published on September 21, 2005, headlined “Fashion Chain H&M Sacks Moss from New Ad Campaign.” Hadley Freeman reported that the Swedish retail giant, which in the immediate days following the scandal had chosen to stand by Moss, had revised its decision and instead dropped the model from its upcoming advertising campaign. The company stated: “After having evaluated the

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

situation, H&M has decided that a campaign with Kate Moss is inconsistent with H&M's clear dissociation of drugs."<sup>106</sup> The reporter's mention of H&M's young consumer base (in contrast with the more expensive brands Moss represented, like Chanel, Roberto Cavalli, Christian Dior, and Burberry) suggested that the company dropped Moss's multi-million dollar contract out of a sense of social responsibility. However, if that were the case, it would likely have done so as soon as the scandal broke. Freeman also clearly stated that H&M was criticized for having initially retained the supermodel's services – a crucial point. As a business, H&M's "evaluation of the situation" must have weighed costs against benefits, likely reaching the conclusion that leniency with Moss's drug scandal would have a great and negative impact on sales.

Highlighting the irony that designers had once exploited and fetishized Moss's "heroin chic" look in their advertising campaigns, the *Guardian* reporter accurately noted that the supermodel's image had been tied into scandal from the outset. If there was a world of difference between seeming to be on drugs and actually being on them, the hypocrisy of the industry might be justified. Yet the industry had clearly capitalized on Moss's image prior to the scandal, and that image had promoted a drug-addicted look. By glamorizing Moss's persona and then denouncing her when it became a reality, the industry was a knowing actor in the hypocrisy. Furthermore, it is crucial to note how the papers used reportage of Moss's lost contracts to add to the controversy that they were selling: journalists were not only able to mobilize a register of morality by calling out the hypocrisy, but they were also introducing a register of corruption – one which revealed that up until business interests were harmed, industry leaders had been looking the other way.

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<sup>106</sup> Hadley Freeman, "Fashion Chain H&M Sacks Moss from New Ad Campaign," *Guardian*, September 21, 2005, accessed November 14, 2014, <http://www.theguardian.com/media/2005/sep/21/clothes.advertising>.

If not permanently damaged, Moss's reputation was widely tainted. The day following H&M's announcement, the *Guardian* reported that Burberry was cancelling its planned advertising campaign with Moss, and Chanel had decided to abandon the renewal of her contract.<sup>107</sup> At this point, the supermodel had lost three of her biggest contracts and a sizable chunk of her earnings, which were reportedly between US\$5 million and \$9 million a year.<sup>108</sup> The market value of Kate Moss's image had drastically decreased: the *Guardian* article quoted a PR expert who labeled her career as "rapidly disintegrating." It was evident that companies that had used the supermodel to sell their products were now avoiding commercial damages by association. Moss was reported to have split up with Doherty in an attempt to salvage her career, but in a snowball effect, her financial troubles were matched by legal ones. The Metropolitan police commissioner, Sir Ian Blair, had order an investigation into Moss's alleged drug use to address its effects on "impressionable young people"; this measure was likely intended to curb a potential moral panic.<sup>109</sup>

A week after the *Daily Mirror*'s exposure, Kate Moss finally issued a public statement. Taking "full responsibility" for her actions, the supermodel apologized to all those whom she had let down and promised to take the necessary steps to address "various personal issues" – but stopped short of admitting to any drug use, protecting her innocence.<sup>110</sup> In his article entitled "Kate's Cocaine Apology," the *Mirror*'s Graham Brough showed a clear disdain for Moss's carefully-worded statement and its timing; employing a clear register of entitlement, he added

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<sup>107</sup> Vikram Dodd, "Chanel and Burberry Drop Moss as Police Start Inquiry," *Guardian*, September 22, 2005, accessed November 15, 2014, <http://www.theguardian.com/uk/2005/sep/22/drugsandalcohol.vikramdodd>.

<sup>108</sup> Vicky Ward, "The Beautiful and the Damned," *Vanity Fair*, December 2005, accessed November 15, 2014, <http://www.vanityfair.com/culture/features/2005/12/kate-moss-cocaine-scandal>.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

<sup>110</sup> Graham Brough, "Kate's Cocaine Apology," *Mirror Online*, September 23, 2005, accessed November 15, 2014, <http://www.mirror.co.uk/3am/celebrity-news/kates-cocaine-apology-558580>.

that if she entered rehab, it would be a “cynical PR ploy to save her career.”<sup>111</sup> Quoting PR experts, Brough stressed that Moss’s apology was too little and too late for an act that was damning in light of her refusal to sue the *Mirror* over its allegations. This reportage relayed the belief that silence meant guilt. On Moss’s end, however, the legal advice she had undoubtedly received gave just enough to the public. By avoiding a clear apology, she hoped to avoid charges, and while minimal and delayed, her statement gave her a necessary presence in the midst of the furor.

On September 28, the *Daily Mail* published a Moss-sanctioned interview with Sarah Doukas, the supermodel’s agent who had discovered her at age fourteen. Entitled “‘Devastated’ Kate May Quit Britain,” the article featured a more revealing look inside the mind of Kate Moss. While it came from her side, the details were from a spokesperson rather than Moss herself. The supermodel’s agent shifted the focus from the drug allegations to the vicious nature of the British tabloids, saying, “[Kate] loves England. But I’m sure she’s feeling concerned about living here again.”<sup>112</sup> Doukas relayed Moss’s sense of betrayal – her privacy had been violated in her own country. The agent’s words further implied a threat: if Moss wasn’t left alone, she would leave and take her personal cachet and financial capital with her. Doukas also suggested that Moss’s drug-addicted lover Pete Doherty was another cause for concern: “When somebody’s in love with someone like that, they’re not going to listen to anything anyone says.”<sup>113</sup>

Doukas’s selection and deflection of the story’s components positioned her client as the victim of a drug scandal. This attempt to control meaning acted to shape the experience of the reading public; it offered a distinctive competing angle to the “Cocaine Kate” story, one that was

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<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

<sup>112</sup> “‘Devastated’ Kate May Quit Britain,” *Daily Mail*, September 28, 2005, accessed November 17, 2014, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/tvshowbiz/article-363719/Devastated-Kate-quit-Britain.html>.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

plausible if not strictly true. Alluding to the supermodel's notorious reticence, Doukas stressed that Moss had never wanted to be a celebrity. Here, the angle equated silence with modesty. Moss's job – which she loved and would never jeopardize – was to model, and the intense schedule did not allow for a drug problem. Instead, Moss had been derailed by a scandal. The controversy proved to be detrimental to her finances and it had called into question her ability to take care of her two-year-old daughter. But according to her agent, Moss was on the verge of signing a new deal with a luxury perfume brand, and she was a “fantastic” mother who would continue to provide care for her child. Doukas was employing a register of victimization and focusing on the supermodel's devastation and professionalism in order to change the dominant discourse; the greater issue at hand, according to Doukas, was the pernicious environment propagated by ruthless British tabloids.

Moss's agent was not the only one mobilized to craft a competing discourse. In an interview published by the *Guardian* on October 8, British pop star Robbie Williams labeled the news media hypocritical, claiming that he had taken cocaine with the same journalists who were now viciously attacking the supermodel for her drug exposure. He called for reporters to put away their knives: “We're talking about a woman who has never harmed anyone... and who has never pretended to be anyone she isn't. What she does in her private life should be her private life.”<sup>114</sup> The registers of morality and hypocrisy, established by the news media at the outset of the scandal, were being effectively turned against journalists by a support system of mediated character witnesses, recruited by Moss's team to speak in her name, while the supermodel continued to remain elusive.

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<sup>114</sup> Riazat Butt, “Robbie Williams Calls Journalists Hypocrites for Criticising Moss,” *Guardian*, October 8, 2005, accessed November 18, 2014, <http://www.theguardian.com/uk/2005/oct/08/pressandpublishing.arts>.

On October 22, the *Daily Mail* reported that more celebrities were voicing their support for Kate Moss: the world-renowned fashion photographer Mario Testino came forward to defend the supermodel's professionalism. It had been made apparent that following her official public apology, the model had exiled herself to a rehabilitation clinic in Arizona. Testino said that he had never seen her debauched or out of control: "Since 15 [years old] until today, she's never not been there on a shoot, never said to me, 'I'm tired, I don't want to work' – never. She works from eight in the morning 'til 12 at night if need be."<sup>115</sup> Testino acknowledged that the stress of the industry was immense and the desire to escape or let loose was not uncommon. His empathetic words painted a clear picture, where a moment of Moss's life was being judged and unjustly amplified to a destructive level. Changing the channel from one discursive formation to another, Testino was part of a network of supporters manipulating the language around Moss's scandal to undoubtedly ensure their own benefit from her continued success.

Following the standard scandal trajectory, Moss had spent a month in therapy at the Meadows Clinic in Arizona. Upon her checking out, a spokeswoman for her modeling agency, Storm, issued the following statement: "Kate is in excellent spirits and looking forward to getting back to work. She would like to thank everyone for their messages of support as they have played a major part in helping her."<sup>116</sup> Moss and her team had waited for the scandal story to begin to lose momentum, and were now hitting back hard with a strong communication strategy that was cleverly crafted to be a combination of passive-then-active. The supermodel had laid low in rehab for an appropriate amount of time and was now ready to re-establish her image with sympathetic support from friends in high places. As proof that the process was already

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<sup>115</sup> "Testino Defends Moss over Drugs Claims," *Daily Mail*, October 22, 2005, accessed November 19, 2014, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/tvshowbiz/article-366211/Testino-defends-Moss-drugs-claims.html>.

<sup>116</sup> "Kate Moss Checks Herself Out of Rehab Clinic," *Daily Mail*, October 28, 2005, accessed November 19, 2014, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/tvshowbiz/article-366789/Kate-Moss-checks-rehab-clinic.html>.

underway, Moss's spokeswoman added that her client had imminent jobs lined up in Paris, Los Angeles, and New York. If Moss's stint in rehab seemed perfunctory, her representatives were aiming to package a comeback story that would restore public confidence in the Kate Moss brand. Yet had Moss gone far enough away to come back?

In November, the British supermodel appeared on the cover of *W* magazine under the headline "Fashion's Kate." In the early days of the month, the *Daily Mail* reported that more cultural leaders were supporting the style icon. Actor Johnny Depp, whom Moss had previously dated for four years, was "appalled and shocked" at the reaction to the *Mirror*'s pictures: "She's a good mum and she just happens to be human and the press wouldn't allow that, and that's unforgivable."<sup>117</sup> The creative director of Burberry, Christopher Bailey, was also cited: "Is Kate still part of our family? Absolutely. Yes, she has some issues that she probably needs to resolve, but don't we all?"<sup>118</sup> The supermodel had been on a pedestal, but where the reporters of the Kate Moss story had built her up to vindictively break her down, her mediated character witnesses sympathetically took her to a humanistic level. Reported in the very papers that had attempted to bring her down, both framings of Moss – one *schadenfreude*, the other relatable – were packaged to be sold to the widest audience possible.

If Kate Moss might have disappeared for a short term following the scandal, it was not long before her lucrative brand re-established its place at the top of the market. On November 12, 2005, less than two months following the cocaine exposure, the *Guardian* described Moss as a "potent drug," with fashion houses "proclaiming [their] undying love" for the supermodel.<sup>119</sup> In a

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<sup>117</sup> "Depp Leaps to Defence of Former Flame Kate," *Daily Mail*, November 12, 2005, accessed November 20, 2014, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/tvshowbiz/article-368446/Depp-leaps-defence-flame-Kate.html>.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

<sup>119</sup> Imogen Fox, "Fashion Houses Still Hooked On Kate Moss," *Guardian*, November 12, 2005, accessed November 26, 2014, <http://www.theguardian.com/uk/2005/nov/12/clothes.lifeandhealth>.

crass way, the news media that had denounced Moss's association with drugs were now using the same terminology to analogize her unwavering appeal to a different sort of "addiction." Packed within this was an allusion to the insidious relationship between drugs and the world of fashion. In reality, it had taken just a short period to determine that Moss's worth within her industry made it highly difficult for the cocaine scandal to have long-term detrimental effects on her career. Louise Chunn, editor of the fashion magazine *In Style*, was quoted by the *Guardian* as saying: "It's partly that she is too big to drop, but also everyone loves a comeback. She is such a great chameleon, which is an incredibly valuable thing in modeling."<sup>120</sup> Chunn's words made it apparent that the underlying power of Moss's image was not rooted in a "heroin chic" persona, but rather in an ability to shift according to her clients' (and the public's) desires.

In December, *Vanity Fair* magazine featured Kate Moss on its cover under the headline "Can She Come Back?" In reality, she had never truly left. That month's French *Vogue* featured her as guest editor; she also modeled for the same issue's four different covers. On December 12, the *Daily Mail* reported that Moss was staying in the United States to avoid facing the Scotland Yard criminal inquiry in Britain. Moss's evasive strategy undeniably helped avoid detrimental publicity, but more importantly, it avoided potential criminal charges, which, among other repercussions, would make it difficult for her to work abroad. In its report, the newspaper alluded to a moral panic behind the £250,000 seven-month police probe, quoting a police source who said: "The Moss investigation has opened a real can of worms. While everyone has always known that the showbusiness [*sic*] world and drugs go together, the sheer extent of the criminal

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<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

infiltration is worrying.”<sup>121</sup> Here it was insinuated that the entertainment business, in the grander scheme of things, was organized crime.

Six weeks later, after a 142-day self-imposed exile, Moss returned to Britain to be interviewed by the police. When questioned about the drug allegations, she declined to provide any explanation. Six months following Moss’s return, in June 2006, the Crown Prosecution Service announced that there was “insufficient evidence to provide a realistic prospect of conviction” against her.<sup>122</sup> Because the prosecution could not provide beyond reasonable doubt the legal category to which the substance being used belonged, the case had been dropped.

Kate Moss had escaped criminal charges, but this development was again reported through a clear register of entitlement, and thus met with widespread condemnation. The *Daily Mail* reported that British politicians and anti-drugs campaigners were branding her a “drug pusher” who had been let off because of her celebrity. A representative of the National Drug Prevention Alliance discredited her, stating: “The message to young people is that they can get away with it by arguing the finer points.”<sup>123</sup> This publicized leniency was especially problematic in light of the fact that youth are often the most vulnerable to celebrity “endorsement” of drug-related lifestyles. A *Guardian* article also disseminated such sentiments of societal anxiety, featuring excerpts from a UN report that blamed celebrities for their drug-use and authorities for their failure to properly enforce the law; both parties were criticized for encouraging the idea that

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<sup>121</sup> Ben Taylor and Nicole Lampert, “Moss Stays in America to Avoid Police Quiz,” *Daily Mail*, December 12, 2005, accessed November 16, 2014, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/tvshowbiz/article-371382/Moss-stays-America-avoid-police-quiz.html>.

<sup>122</sup> “Kate Moss Escapes Drug Charges,” *Guardian*, June 15, 2006, accessed November 18, 2014, <http://www.theguardian.com/uk/2006/jun/15/drugsandalcohol>.

<sup>123</sup> Stephen Wright, “Kate Moss Branded Drug Pusher,” *Daily Mail*, June 16, 2006, accessed November 18, 2014, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/tvshowbiz/article-390714/Kate-Moss-branded-drug-pusher.html>.

illegal substances were socially acceptable.<sup>124</sup> In an article entitled “‘Cocaine Kate Is Killing My Country,’” the *Daily Mail* quoted Colombia’s vice-president Francisco Santos, who denounced the supermodel’s glamorization of cocaine, claiming that she was responsible for fuelling conflict in his country and helping finance its drug war.<sup>125</sup> To give weight to the notion that by being rewarded for her troublesome behaviour, Moss was sending the wrong message to youth, the article reported that the supermodel had been recently hired for a reported £3 million to create designs for the retail giant Topshop.

To many, Kate Moss was trivializing the impact of drug use. Yet on her end, she was simply following a quick and quiet road to business recovery – and the fashion business was ready to have her back. Nine months after the cocaine allegations, British fashion house Burberry launched their autumn/winter campaign with the supermodel as its focus. This public endorsement, however, was missing a public statement to explain why the brand (which, after the allegations surfaced, had cancelled a planned project with Moss and removed giant posters of the supermodel at its flagship store) had taken her back on.<sup>126</sup> But Burberry was following the same formula as it had in the past: sustain and increase profits. In the end, no one shifted merchandise faster than Kate Moss, and with the right direction behind her, her intensely newsworthy lifestyle had given her image even more currency. The *Daily Mail* reported that Moss’s modeling agency, Storm, had received requests from a hundred and fifty advertisers in recent months to hire her; she had landed lucrative campaigns with Nikon, Calvin Klein, Virgin

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<sup>124</sup> Haroon Siddique, “UN Attacks Celebrity Drug Use,” *Guardian*, March 5, 2008, accessed November 18, 2014, <http://www.theguardian.com/news/blog/2008/mar/05/docelebritiesmakedruguses>.

<sup>125</sup> “‘Cocaine Kate Is Killing My Country,’” *Daily Mail*, November 2, 2006, accessed November 21, 2014, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/tvshowbiz/article-414102/Cocaine-Kate-killing-country.html>.

<sup>126</sup> James Tozer, “Nine Months After Drug Claims, Kate Is Back in Burberry,” *Daily Mail*, June 27, 2006, accessed November 21, 2014, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/tvshowbiz/article-392633/Nine-months-drug-claims-Kate-Burberry.html>.

Mobile, Stella McCartney, Versace, Dior, and Rimmel, among others. It was estimated that her earnings in 2006 alone had tripled to £11 million.<sup>127</sup>

When her contracts had been falling off a short while earlier, Moss was forced to drop her drug-addicted lover Pete Doherty. It was expected that distancing herself from his rocky presence would help clean up her own public image, and to an extent, it had worked. But when the fashion houses came back, so did Doherty. In August 2006, the *Daily Mail* announced that Moss and Doherty were again an item; a conspicuous ring on her wedding finger sparked rumours that the pair may have even gotten engaged. Resurfacing with this report was the register of corruption and underlying anxiety surrounding Doherty's toxic influence. Moss's mother was mentioned as "devastated," and a friend was quoted as saying: "She may be off the cocaine but Pete is like a drug for her – he's an addiction she can't cure herself of."<sup>128</sup> Yet by this point, and almost regardless of the status of her relationship with Doherty, the drug allegations had solidified Moss's notoriety; they made her stronger than ever.

In September 2006, exactly a year following the *Daily Mirror's* drug exposé, Kate Moss appeared in a record fourteen advertising campaigns. The cocaine scandal had run the risk of unfolding to Moss's detriment, but the shrewd response crafted by her team of advisers successfully directed the controversy to their advantage. The supermodel exited the scandal more popular and more employable than before – and with heightened brand recognition. The sheer number of brands that Moss was able to embody proved that the power of her image could be successfully defended, in part because its edgy and unstable allure worked in step with an industry that was constantly changing with every new season.

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<sup>127</sup> Liz Jones, "Kate Moss and the Wages of Sin," *Daily Mail*, July 7, 2006, accessed November 18, 2014, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/tvshowbiz/article-394481/Kate-Moss-wages-sin.html>.

<sup>128</sup> Nicole Lampert, "Moss Back with Junkie Doherty," *Daily Mail*, August 14, 2006, accessed November 22, 2014, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/tvshowbiz/article-400378/Moss-junkie-Doherty.html>.

That month, an article in the *Guardian* quoted a New York retail analyst who commented on Moss: “She’s like the goose that laid the golden egg. Everybody wants her.”<sup>129</sup> In November, the British Fashion Awards named her model of the year, celebrating her contributions to the modeling world in a period that encompassed the time of her scandal. The *Guardian* reported mixed feelings over the decision, questioning whether it was a step in the right direction for an industry that had been accused of hypocrisy only a year earlier, or simply another instance of fashion acting as a poor influence on young women.<sup>130</sup> This tension between Moss’s professional and personal life, a recycled disapproval never quite resolved, was being continuously mobilized by journalists to fuel wider anxieties into the scandal churn.

Kate Moss might have been back at the top of her profession, but the news media were not letting the scandal’s controversy fall too far behind her. In February 2007, the *Daily Mail* reported that because of the supermodel’s well-publicized connection with a class-A drug, American authorities had told her that an application for a work visa would be denied without a drug test.<sup>131</sup> The article mentioned another of Moss’s questionable decisions – “Imagine what they’d do with Kate’s boyfriend Pete Doherty” – before tapping into the rumour mill surrounding the pair’s tumultuous relationship: were they getting married or breaking up for good? The same girls interviewed at Moss’s former high school, when the cocaine scandal first broke, would likely be following the story.

In an effort to catch Moss with drugs again, or to piggyback off her infamous cocaine exposure, the *Daily Mail* published a paparazzi-led, photo-heavy article on the model in May

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<sup>129</sup> “Kate Moss: All Publicity Is Good Publicity?” *Guardian*, September 18, 2006, accessed November 22, 2014, <http://www.theguardian.com/media/orgngrinder/2006/sep/18/katemossallpublicityisgoo>.

<sup>130</sup> Hadley Freeman, “Controversy as Moss Wins Fashion Oscar,” November 3, 2006, accessed November 26, 2014, <http://www.theguardian.com/uk/2006/nov/03/shopping.fashion>.

<sup>131</sup> “Kate Must Take Drug Test before Visiting US,” *Daily Mail*, February 16, 2007, accessed November 24, 2014, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/tvshowbiz/article-436595/Kate-drug-test-visiting-US.html>.

2007. Following the typical scandal story formula, it loaded facts with innuendo to spark suspicion. The article – entitled “Mystery White Marks on Moss’ Jeans... Has She Been Powdering Her Nose Again?” – recounted the pursuit of Moss on her ride home from a London restaurant: for unexplained reasons, the drive reportedly took hours longer than expected, and the supermodel staggered out of the vehicle with specks of what appeared to be white powder on her jeans.<sup>132</sup> A register of morality was again employed to question whether Moss was continuing to lie about drug use. As the original *Daily Mirror* exposé had proven, however, it would take more than just images to lay serious charges. In the meantime, it was still a story.

This was a story that had gone on without its subject. Throughout the progression of events, “Cocaine Kate” had ostensibly done and said almost nothing at all. Moss’s crisis management team had manipulated discursive formations to craft an astute media response that mobilized its client’s elusiveness (a characteristic fundamental to her longevity) in order to turn the tide of the scandal, and it had worked. A 2011 article in the *Guardian* likened Kate Moss’s narrative to an “accidental fairy tale gone wrong”: the supermodel had been able to give “the impression that she stumbled into this whole adventure” and was “just along for the ride.”<sup>133</sup> The forces at work on Moss’s side of the discursive battle had successfully turned the negative press around to generate positive publicity – all the while making it seem effortless.

In an interview published by the *Daily Mail* five years after the scandal, Moss’s agent Sarah Doukas confirmed that Moss’s fees had not gone down during the drug controversy. Doukas explained her strategic view of the situation, where she had reassured fashion brands that

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<sup>132</sup> “Mystery White Marks on Moss’ Jeans... Has She Been Powdering Her Nose Again?” *Daily Mail*, May 4, 2007, accessed November 27, 2014, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/tvshowbiz/article-452450/Mystery-white-marks-Moss-jeans--powdering-nose-again.html>.

<sup>133</sup> Viv Groskop, “Kate Moss: The Very Model of a Female Icon,” *Guardian*, March 13, 2011, accessed November 28, 2014, <http://www.theguardian.com/theobserver/2011/mar/13/viv-groskop-profile-kate-moss>.

“you can’t believe everything you read and, unfortunately, all press actually is good press in this world we live in.”<sup>134</sup> Doukas, along with Moss’s PR and legal advisors, understood that it was necessary to control the discourses surrounding the scandal in order to be able to use them to their advantage. It was not about the “truth”; rather, it was about crafting (and circulating) a plausible version of it. Not only had this strategy succeeded in keeping Moss afloat, it had ended up convincing audiences that the supermodel was even more real and alluring than before – a shift in perception that manifested itself in profits for Moss’s bottom line.

Continuous reports rode the tail end of the “Cocaine Kate” scandal. In 2011, the supermodel married British guitarist Jamie Hince, from the indie rock band The Kills, but the news media continued to hold onto controversy surrounding her previous bad-boy rocker relationship. In October 2013, the *Guardian* reported that Pete Doherty had been blackmailed by a friend with a private video taken in Moss’s home; Doherty claimed that he was forced to buy the film to prevent the potentially liable footage from being leaked to the press.<sup>135</sup> Publication fascination with the couple, an appetite both satiated and generated by the tabloids, had strained Doherty’s relationship with the supermodel in the past. The article quoted Doherty during their time as a couple: “[Kate’s] quite sussed when it comes to the media... I think she was so paranoid about being screwed over and being made to look stupid in public because of my actions.”

Kate Moss’s “suss” with the media was an acute awareness of how to handle publicity, and in the end, this did not go without due credit. On January 16, 2014, Moss’s fortieth birthday,

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<sup>134</sup> “Drug Scandal Helped ‘Cocaine Kate’ Moss Earn More Money, Says Her Agent,” *Daily Mail*, October 10, 2010, accessed November 29, 2014, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/tvshowbiz/article-1319258/Kate-Moss-told-model-agent-drug-scandal-All-press-good-press.html>.

<sup>135</sup> Sean Michaels, “Pete Doherty Allegedly Blackmailed with Private Kate Moss Video,” *Guardian*, October 9, 2013, accessed November 29, 2014, <http://www.theguardian.com/music/2013/oct/09/pete-doherty-alleged-blackmail-with-kate-moss-video>.

the *Daily Mirror* – the same tabloid that had viciously attacked her in their creation of the “Cocaine Kate” scandal – published an article to commemorate the supermodel’s achievements and praise her silence. This full circle encompassed just how successful Moss’s post-scandal campaign had been. The *Mirror*’s Dean Piper, a former showbiz and entertainment columnist for the paper’s Sunday edition, commented on Moss’s unique ability to keep the public from knowing too much, remaining a “true enigma” in an industry filled with celebrities who used social media to sell their personal lives: “It’s the best thing she could have ever done.”<sup>136</sup> No longer was the *Mirror* framing Moss’s silence as an admission of guilt or as a sense of entitlement; rather, it was a reflection of her grace and intelligence.

In the week of Moss’s fortieth birthday, other writers denounced her for “letting things go,” but Piper contested that the supermodel’s constant refusal to bow down to body image and age with a “truckload of disgusting surgery” proved her enduring cool. The *Mirror*’s register that had once positioned her as weak and damaged, corrupted by drugs and junkie musicians, was disregarded; Moss was level-headed and effortlessly chic, as she had always been. Her embodiment of a dangerous, toxic mother and poor role model was nowhere to be seen. Instead, the article brought a deeply maternal instinct to the forefront. Piper had previously met Moss’s daughter in person and had nothing but kind words from the encounter (“She’s one of the politest kids going and extremely well brought up.”) On top of that, the *Mirror*’s reporter revealed the support Moss had given to the young Cara Delevingne, sending the fledgling model to see her own skin specialist when Delevingne, after being forced to cope with overnight fame, began suffering from the stress-induced skin condition psoriasis. It seemed that Kate Moss, who was once deemed to be a horrible influence on young women around the world, was motherly.

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<sup>136</sup> Dean Piper, “Happy 40<sup>th</sup> Birthday to the Queen of the Catwalk Kate Moss,” *Mirror Online*, January 16, 2014, accessed November 30, 2014, <http://www.mirror.co.uk/3am/celebrity-news/dean-piper-kate-moss-40-3027823>.

Splattered on the front pages of British tabloids, the discourses that had once discredited Moss were now being used to commend her. They spoke volumes about Moss's "rehabilitated" image, and showed how far the celebrity and her team had come in refashioning the scandal's dominant discourses. At the outset, the news media had managed to create a furor by attacking Moss's mediated persona, building grounds for *schadenfreude* by calling her out on a question of basic morality. Journalists had achieved a portrayal of Moss as a deceitful manipulator of her own image, but they did not hold their immediate discursive control for long. The strategy devised by Moss's professional team proved to dominate, and the story was successfully manipulated to their benefit. Ultimately, their version of the "truth" gained currency and achieved hegemony.

Instead of focusing on the news media's shaming, Moss's professional team had shifted the conversation to empathy. This discourse circulated with the help of well-known mediated witnesses. In their view, the grainy footage claiming to show Kate Moss taking cocaine may or may not have reflected her reality – but either way, don't we all have issues that we're trying to address? The supermodel's advisors levelled this with a British cultural appreciation for a "stiff upper lip" to maintain that regardless of any derailment, scandal or otherwise, Moss would be ready to get back to work. To some degree, her team must have also understood that the culture's history of aggressive and sensationalist reporting, dating back to the eighteenth century, meant that societal anxiety around the issue of unfit motherhood or drug use would likely not form a true moral panic. This prediction proved to be true.

There would still be scandalous churn around Moss's involvement with drugs, aimed to rile up audiences into more moral disputes. In October 2014, the *Mirror* posted an article quoting a "shocking" new book on Moss, which claimed that in the supermodel's wild days, she

“shovelled up so much cocaine and vodka friends nicknamed her ‘The Tank.’”<sup>137</sup> But this media narrative was ambient noise with no lasting impact. The real sound that had captivated audiences was Kate Moss’s apparently effortless silence. This in-depth investigation dug deeper to reveal that behind Moss during her cocaine controversy was a professional team mobilized to turn the furor around. Her representative team understood the scandal as a *press* report of a real event, and successfully showed how negative publicity could be turned to advantage with cleverly crafted positive discourses. In the end, it was a struggle over the control of meaning: the news media had not been interested in ruining Moss’s career, but simply in stirring controversy. This case had proven that scandal sells, and done right, so does silence.

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<sup>137</sup> Doug Wight, “Kate Moss ‘Shovelled Up So Much Cocaine and Vodka Friends Nicknamed Her THE TANK’,” *Mirror Online*, October 4, 2014, accessed November 30, 2014, <http://www.mirror.co.uk/3am/celebrity-news/kate-moss-shovelled-up-much-4378250>.

## Chapter 5 – The Lance Armstrong Case: Crafting a Conspiracy

In August 2012, the United States Anti-Doping Agency announced that it was stripping the world-renowned American cyclist Lance Armstrong of all his seven Tour de France titles, and giving him a lifetime competitive ban “for doping violations stemming from his involvement in the United States Postal Service Pro-Cycling Team Doping Conspiracy.”<sup>138</sup> The USADA’s blow sparked two events that would define Armstrong’s doping scandal: the agency’s subsequent release of a one-thousand-page dossier in October 2012 detailing its findings, and the disgraced cyclist’s interview with Oprah Winfrey in January 2013 when he publicly admitted to cheating.

This doping conspiracy surrounded an individual who, unlike in the “Cocaine Kate” case, had acted openly and aggressively to manipulate his scandal’s narrative. Where Kate Moss solidified an astute, defensive silence to combat negative discourses, Lance Armstrong met them with a hubristic, offensive rage. Doping allegations had abounded throughout his career, and for years, he had fuelled the media furor himself by bullying and vilifying those accusing him. His ruthless attempts to control the utterances around his own misdeeds worked towards establishing and maintaining an indomitable truth that eliminated all other variations. But this strategy held up only as long as his lie was believable. In light of the USADA’s revelations, Armstrong’s version crumbled. News reports characterized his story as a “mendacity mélange,” a “falsehood fiesta,” and a “fabrication proliferation.”<sup>139</sup>

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<sup>138</sup> “Lance Armstrong Receives Lifetime Ban and Disqualification of Competitive Results for Doping Violations Stemming from His Involvement in the United States Postal Service Pro-Cycling Team Doping Conspiracy,” *USADA*, August 24, 2012, accessed January 3, 2015, <http://www.usada.org/lancearmstrong-receives-lifetime-ban-and-disqualification-of-competitive-results-for-doping-violations-stemming-from-his-involvement-in-the-united-states-postal-service-pro-cycling-team-doping-conspi/>.

<sup>139</sup> Chuck Culpepper, “Where Does the Truth about Lance Armstrong Lie?” *USA Today*, October 10, 2012, accessed January 3, 2015, <http://www.usatoday.com/story/sports/cycling/2012/10/10/lance-armstrong-doping-tour-de-france/1625773/>.

Curated by one of sports' most lucrative athletes, the larger-than-life, in-your-face celebrity of Lance Armstrong, this was revealed to be a lie that had hidden in plain sight. In effect, many of the strongest doping allegations had been said and published years before the USADA presented enough evidence to bring the conspiracy down. Yet there had been a consistent and wilful denial – not just from the cyclist, but from his supporters as well – of anything that might undermine the beautiful lie and reveal the ugly truth. Here, the essence of the audience-media-celebrity triangulation is made clear: the news media played a crucial role in facilitating a suspension of disbelief to benefit from the controversy, and while Armstrong had deceived his fans, they were willing to be fooled. The cancer survivor's mythical story of overcoming cancer to win seven Tour de France titles was profitable for his sponsors and attractive to those who rooted for him. To everyone, it was addictive.

A critical discourse analysis of thirty articles from three U.S. dailies (the *Daily News*, the *New York Post*, and *USA Today*) provided a substantial body of work to investigate the collapse of a myth that had managed to circulate in the public eye for over a decade. Echoing the Kate Moss case analysis, articles were sorted and numbered in chronological order to properly chart the discursive patterns that constituted Lance Armstrong's precipitous fall from grace. An initial quantitative examination identified key phrases that came up repeatedly in reportage of the scandal. These main themes (see Appendix B) were then mobilized to develop a deeper qualitative analysis of the discursive struggle between the shamed cyclist and his whistleblowers.

The doping controversy was fuelled by the force of its subject's persona. While Lance Armstrong had receded from the public eye following the release of the USADA report, his decade of ruthlessly vilifying those who had been telling the truth was not forgotten. Twenty-seven of the thirty articles overtly labelled Armstrong as either a bully, a liar or a cheater. Years

of aggressive tactics to keep his myth alive had left little sympathy for his ruin. Analogous to the “Cocaine Kate” case, where subsumed within reportage of Moss’s silence was a register of entitlement, this theme was relayed through a register of egoism. New media reports portrayed Armstrong as defiant sociopath willing to do anything if it benefited his own interest. Framed as a villain, Armstrong was condemned and doomed. His mediated persona tainted any attempts at rehabilitating his public image, and ultimately led to a downfall without redemption.

This scandal had as its backdrop the issue of doping in sports. It was therefore presumed that mentions of banned performance-enhancing drugs would be widespread. As expected, all of the articles in the sampling referenced doping to describe the charges against Armstrong, with the issue of cheating-with-drugs framed through a register of morality. Crucially, the analysis showed that the question of morals was more prominent in discussions of the cyclist’s outright lack of honesty about his actions. Armstrong had failed tremendously in doing the right thing: not only had he blood doped and used banned drugs, but he had lied about it until he got caught. This fact was clearly laid out in news media reports, and it fed into why the contrition narrative of his drug scandal story was so poorly received. Just as Moss’s visit to rehab was framed as a PR stunt to restore her reputation, Armstrong’s confession on Oprah was ultimately seen as a continuation of his self-serving myth. He was not sorry he cheated, he was sorry he got caught.

Armstrong’s smoke-and-mirrors act deployed his well-publicized fight against testicular cancer as an effective shield against accusations. By directing his narrative to create a sympathetic persona largely defined by charitable work in support of cancer research, he manipulated public trust and support. Twenty-six of the thirty articles referenced the cyclist’s link to cancer, either through his battle with the disease, his Livestrong charity, or evidence tied to his treatment. The prevalence of this theme illustrated the extent to which Armstrong’s

celebrity as an athlete was intertwined with that of a humanitarian. Few people in sport divided public opinion like Lance did; he was an international cultural icon with an incredible story that was literally hard to believe. Even after the issue of whether or not he had doped was settled, his myth continued to spur controversy, with some questioning if the hope he had given to millions could justify – or at least forgive – his sins.

These sins were thoroughly uncovered in the USADA's report, the scandal's smoking gun. Evidence incriminating the cyclist was mentioned in twenty-four of the thirty articles; of these, half quoted witness statements at length. Once a plausible truth of misdeeds was presented to the public, fallout from the evidence, as in Moss's case, included lost sponsorships. But the larger impact on Armstrong's financial worth came from litigation. Discussion of Armstrong's legal disputes (both those prior to the scandal and those resulting from it) punctuated fourteen articles. This theme supported his immoral, aggressive, and dishonest behaviour. At the height of his powerful myth, Armstrong used guerrilla tactics to attempt to intimidate the media or silence accusers, unleashing shotgun blasts of litigation before quietly dropping the suits. In his downfall, journalists mobilized the gravity of his offences (committing perjury, defrauding the government out of millions of taxpayer dollars, and successfully suing those who he knew were telling the truth) to reinforce the scandal subject's no-holds-barred, tenacious character.

Lance Armstrong's carefully constructed myth tapped into deeply rooted social currents of American life: the culture's win-at-all costs mentality, and the nation as a land of second chances. Overtly referenced in fourteen of the thirty articles, these cultural discourses had fuelled Lance's story since he first arrived on the international stage in 1999. Having beat cancer and received a second chance at life, nothing could stop him. What resulted (or rather, what Armstrong projected) was nothing short of a miracle. With journalists helping to spread an

infectious hope across audiences, Armstrong must have been well aware that the news media played a decisive role in creating and sustaining his American tale of exceptionalism. These cultural discourses defined Armstrong's rise to fame and helped explain why his story gained as much traction as it did. But in light of the cyclist's downfall, where anti-doping officials were directing the story's facts, these discursive formations were re-appropriated. They were to reflect a new era of cycling: fighting for the truth and cleaning up the sport.

These recurring themes showed that control over the story had transferred from the cyclist's hands to those of the news media and whistleblowers. Analogous to the "Cocaine Kate" scandal, journalists mobilized clear registers in the reportage of Armstrong's doping conspiracy. By emphasizing aspects of factual evidence, the press positioned him as a brazen bully, a manipulative liar, a doping mastermind, and a disgraced anti-hero. Armstrong attacked those who accused him of cheating by vilifying their truth-telling efforts or suing them for slander and defamation – he was a shameless intimidator with no concern for those he trampled. Armstrong maintained that he had never tested positive and the USADA was on a vendetta to seek publicity at his expense – he was a cunning liar who deceptively painted himself as an unjust target. Armstrong used sponsorship money to finance an extensive doping program – he was the head of a corrupt regime who would do anything to win. These powerful registers were used by the news media to bury Armstrong as a villain who had disgraced a nation. In breaking down the myth, the news media appealed to strong cultural undercurrents that had fuelled the scandal from its outset, repositioning them to keep the story alive.

Unlike Moss, Armstrong failed in his efforts to regain control over the discourses that surrounded his scandalous actions. The evidence gathered against him had built an irrefutable case where mitigation of damage necessitated a remorseful confession. His crisis management

team implemented a careful strategy for their client's admission: open up just enough to appear honest and apologetic, but avoid admitting to anything that might lead to further incrimination. But the attempt at redemption was largely unsuccessful. Armstrong's new version of the truth was received as more dishonesty, completely void of contrition, and like Moss's visit to rehab, a publicity stunt to restore reputation. The supermodel had managed to mobilize support within her industry to turn the tide, but the disgraced cyclist had lost his backing; a decade of deception had put him past the point of no return. The subsequent qualitative analysis investigates this scandal's discursive patterns to show how journalists and whistleblowers tore down Armstrong's myth, ultimately using his abrasive egoism against him.

In the days before the United States Anti-Doping Agency revealed the scandal's smoking gun, Armstrong's lawyers pre-emptively attacked the agency's case, calling it a "farce" that was defaming its client with evidence from "serial perjurers" and witnesses who had been coerced through "threats and sweetheart deals."<sup>140</sup> A few months prior, Armstrong had pleaded no contest to the USADA's charges, triggering automatic sanctions as per the conditions of his cycling license. He belligerently declined the agency's offer to be part of the solution, publicly taking an "enough is enough" stance and claiming to have given up his fight against unfair doping accusations.<sup>141</sup> But his representative team persisted in its aggressive tactics to intimidate and silence whistleblowers. The first article of the analysis, entitled "USADA on Armstrong: Evidence Will 'Speak for Itself,'" introduced an organizational pattern present throughout the sampling: a clear dichotomy between two sides of a discursive struggle, each on the offensive.

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<sup>140</sup> Brent Schrotenboer, "USADA on Armstrong: Evidence will 'Speak for Itself,'" *USA Today*, October 10, 2012, accessed January 5, 2015, <http://www.usatoday.com/story/sports/cycling/2012/10/09/lance-armstrong-doping-case/1622699/>.

<sup>141</sup> Juliet Macur, "Armstrong Drops Fight Against Doping Charges," *New York Times*, August 23, 2012, accessed March 23, 2015, [http://www.nytimes.com/2012/08/24/sports/cycling/lance-armstrong-ends-fight-against-doping-charges-losing-his-7-tour-de-france-titles.html?\\_r=2](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/08/24/sports/cycling/lance-armstrong-ends-fight-against-doping-charges-losing-his-7-tour-de-france-titles.html?_r=2).

Journalists mobilized this tension between Armstrong and his whistleblowers to infuse the scandal story with a distinctive push-pull, one that worked to pull in audiences and heighten reader engagement.

The USADA's "reasoned decision" for its sanctions was released on October 10, 2012; the *Daily News* labelled it "explosive" as "the most extensive and damning indictment of Armstrong to date."<sup>142</sup> The "overwhelming" evidence of over a thousand pages gathered sworn testimonies from twenty-six witnesses (including fifteen riders with knowledge of the USPS team's doping activities), as well as email correspondences, financial payments, scientific data, and lab tests to prove that Armstrong used, possessed, and distributed performance-enhancing drugs. The product of the investigative efforts, directed and assembled by CEO Travis Tygart, was specifically crafted to reach a wide audience. According to Tygart: "We knew we could win the legal battle, but we knew we had to win the PR battle because that was about people's minds and public support. The report had to be substantive, but it also had to be readable. We needed to show people that this was a slam-dunk case."<sup>143</sup> Tygart's focus on the public nature of the case reflected how deeply Lance Armstrong had embedded himself into the hearts of the American people. This trust was garnered in large part by the Texan's successful battle with cancer, after which he established one of the most popular charities in the country. It had helped to inspire a cultural shift in the way the world viewed those affected by cancer: they were not victims, but fighters and survivors.

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<sup>142</sup> Michael O'Keeffe, "Lance Armstrong Not Only Used Performance-Enhancing Drugs, Cyclist Pushed Banned Substances on Teammates: U.S. Anti-Doping Agency Report," *Daily News*, October 11, 2012, accessed January 5, 2015, <http://www.nydailynews.com/sports/i-team/usada-calls-evidence-lance-overwhelming-article-1.1179148>.

<sup>143</sup> Mark Curriden, "The Lawyer Who Took Down Lance Armstrong Is on a Mission to End the Culture of Cheating," *ABA Journal*, October 1, 2014, accessed January 5, 2015, [http://www.abajournal.com/magazine/article/thou\\_shalt\\_not\\_cheat\\_the\\_lawyer\\_who\\_took\\_down\\_lance\\_armstrong\\_is\\_on\\_a\\_mission](http://www.abajournal.com/magazine/article/thou_shalt_not_cheat_the_lawyer_who_took_down_lance_armstrong_is_on_a_mission).

Armstrong likely understood the power of his crafted persona, and relied on the support of the news media to maintain his heroic status and circulate his humanitarian efforts. In contrast to Moss's world of modeling, Lance Armstrong's highly competitive world of professional sports was founded in rooting for people to win. The cyclist was propelled to the top, and the rigor with which he pursued his goals when the odds seemed against him made his achievements all the more outstanding. Such a heroic stature came with a quaint expectation: be a good role model. Armstrong, proving himself to be an opportunist, advantageously tapped into his connection with cancer to offload the more humble responsibilities of his influence. His experience with the disease, compounded with his charitable work, added a layer to his celebrity that worked to justify its admiration and idealization.

This heroic narrative was upheld by journalists who used its momentum and romanticism to generate and sustain audience interest. The news media, standing to profit from the controversy in the long term, played a crucial role in propagating Armstrong's story by maintaining a certain suspension of disbelief that allowed for his myth to circulate.<sup>144</sup> Journalists invested in Armstrong's mythical tale by acting as conduits of his plausible – and cleverly convincing – version of events. Among countless examples over Armstrong's professional career, this included a statement the cyclist gave to CNN in 2005, predictably responding to a doping accusation: "If you consider my situation: a guy who comes back from arguably, you know, a death sentence, why would I then enter into a sport and dope myself up and risk my life

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<sup>144</sup> Coined in 1817 by the English poet and literary critic Samuel Taylor Coleridge, the term "suspension of disbelief" was appropriated in the era of modern communication to describe the reception process in film and other modes of mediated imagination. In cultural studies, and in this context, it addresses the concept of how audiences willingly suspend their judgment concerning the implausibility of a fictional narrative, as long as the story is of human interest and holds some semblance to the truth. Anthony J. Ferri, *Willing Suspension of Disbelief: Poetic Faith in Film* (Plymouth: Lexington Books, 2007), 28.

again? That's crazy. I would never do that. No. No way.”<sup>145</sup> In reality, the endurance athlete was blood doping (using the red-cell booster EPO to increase his oxygen-carrying capacity), and taking growth hormones that included testosterone and cortisone.

As Armstrong would later explain to Oprah, it was his fight until the death mentality against cancer that fed his ruthless desire to win at all costs. The *Daily News*'s Michael O'Keeffe reported on the Anti-Doping Agency's document by painting a clear picture of a bully: Armstrong was not just a cheater who had used performance-enhancing drugs, he was a “dope pusher” who had headlined his team's pervasive, illicit drug business. The power of his celebrity and persona helped establish a business backed by deep pockets and friends in high places. Given the weight of the USADA's evidence, O'Keeffe questioned why a two-year federal investigation into Armstrong's longstanding drug allegations had been dropped eight months prior without any explanation; the turn of events suggested that Armstrong's influence had reached the ranks of the federal government. It appeared that only the USADA had been steadfast in its pursuit. A preface to the agency's report, written by CEO Travis Tygart, decisively stated: “We focused solely on finding the truth without being influenced by celebrity or non-celebrity, threats, personal attacks or political pressure because that is what clean athletes deserve and demand.”<sup>146</sup>

The USADA's investigation into the U.S. Postal Service cycling team had started in the spring of 2010, when the agency's CEO received a phone call from Floyd Landis, a former teammate of Armstrong's. Landis had won the 2006 Tour de France (the first after Armstrong initially retired) but was stripped of his title shortly after and charged with using banned

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<sup>145</sup> Alanne Orjoux, “Armstrong on Newspaper's Accusations: ‘This Thing Stinks,’” *CNN*, August 26, 2005, accessed February 16, 2015, <http://edition.cnn.com/2005/SPORT/08/26/armstrong.lkl/>.

<sup>146</sup> “Statement from USADA CEO.”

substances; he maintained his innocence. Four years later, in 2010, Armstrong was welcomed back from retirement to compete for an eighth title, and still considered by officials to be drug-free. Landis was evidently lacking the power and influence of his team's former star, and it did not sit well with him. His testimony to USADA CEO Travis Tygart set into motion a series of confessions from other cyclists with intimate knowledge of the USPS team's doping activities. To obtain the physical evidence necessary to build an incontestable case, Tygart and his team developed a clear strategy: launch a domino effect in confessions to build a snowball effect in evidence.

There was a fundamental difference in the evidence of the Armstrong case compared to that of Moss. The supermodel was forced into a scandal where an anonymous source had provided grainy video footage that showed her inhaling a white powder: based on this incident of "proof," the British tabloids had built a case that she was using cocaine. The world-class athlete was taken down by an accumulation of evidence over a professional lifetime, both from close acquaintances and investigative journalists. His multiple wins and responses to doping accusations were documented as part of the public record, and culminated in a report by the nation's anti-doping agency. Armstrong's case exemplified journalism taking on its public role of gathering and recording information over time. However, this information circulated by way of a suspension of disbelief that was actively propped up by both reading publics and reporters. Because the news media stood to gain long-term profits from audience investment in the story's controversy, their willingness to act as a watchdog and alert the public of indecency was impeded.

After the evidence reached a point where it became too overwhelming to deny, culminating in the USADA's report, journalists were forced to shift their angle. News media

response to both the Moss and Armstrong scandals followed a similar trajectory: identify the sin, express shock, badger the celebrity for a confession, and demand retribution or forgiveness. The media furor filled the public arena while crisis managers advising the celebrities led them down a safe route: lie low after exposure. Armstrong, however, was unable to truly recede from the public eye – not only because it was not in his nature to be a passive observer, but because years of aggressive lying had defined his persona in the minds of the news-consuming public.

The cycling code of silence was only broken by those who rode with the seven-time Tour de France winner after they had reaped financial gains from the team, and when they were either threatened with criminal charges or offered a grant of amnesty if they came clean. At the height of Armstrong's success, the myth was too big and there was no profit in the truth. This case, however, had seen whistleblowers from the very beginning. Following the release of the USADA's document, *Daily News* journalist Michael O'Keefe reported that the evidence legitimated the claims of Betsy Andreu, an early and consistent Armstrong critic. Andreu and her husband Frankie, a former USPS teammate of Armstrong's, were both forced to testify in a 2006 contract dispute between Armstrong and the Texas-based prize insurer company SCA Promotions, which was withholding a US\$5 million bonus from the cyclist over doping allegations. The Andreus attested that ten years earlier, they had overheard Armstrong tell doctors treating him for chemotherapy that he had used steroids, testosterone, EPO, and other banned substances. Widely reported by the media, this deposition exposing the 1996 hospital incident was a key point of contestation that repeatedly surfaced in doping allegations against the cyclist.

In the same deposition, Armstrong had taken a brazen and defensive stance, saying that chemotherapy doctors had not asked him about banned drugs; Betsy was just bitter and

vindictive, and Frankie was “trying to back up his old lady.”<sup>147</sup> SCA Promotions was forced to pay Armstrong more than USD\$7.5 million to cover the bonus, including interest and attorney fees.<sup>148</sup> Among its evidence, the USADA’s report contained a series of emails that pointed towards Armstrong’s lying under oath. A message he had sent to Frankie Andreu held the unmistakable undertone of a threat: “By helping to bring me down is not going to help y’alls situation at all. There is a direct link to all of our success here and I suggest you remind [Betsey] of that.”<sup>149</sup> The menacing connotation to hold to the cycling code of silence (the “omerta”) was evident. Like Frankie Andreu, many others members of the USPS cycling team who knew the truth had already implicated themselves by cheating, and were not willing to risk their livelihoods by crossing Armstrong.

Armstrong’s aggressive tactics to intimidate and silence those who got in his way were layered in design: threaten privately and denounce publicly. All of these actions were characterized by a hubristic, shameless defiance. On October 16, 2012, in the wake of the USADA releasing its document, *USA Today* published an article featuring reactions from journalists across media circuits. Michael Specter from the *New Yorker* maintained that Armstrong’s commitment to the fight against cancer did not justify his years of lying and vilifying; the defensive shield used to hide the truth was not strong enough, and it falsely gave its bearer a sense of righteousness. John Leicester from the Associated Press remarked, “Livestrong? How wrong. Those of you with bright yellow wristbands should ask for your dollar back,” and further commented that “[the] title of Armstrong’s biography, *It’s Not About the Bike*,

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<sup>147</sup> Michael O’Keeffe, “Lance Armstrong’s Fall Shows Former Teammate’s Wife, Betsey Andreu, Was Right All Along,” *Daily News*, October 11, 2012, accessed January 9, 2015, <http://www.nydailynews.com/sports/more-sports/lance-pedaling-lies-article-1.1181408?nopm=1>.

<sup>148</sup> Alan Abrahamson, “Allegations Trail Armstrong into Another Stage,” *Los Angeles Times*, July 9, 2006, accessed March 23, 2015, <http://articles.latimes.com/2006/jul/09/sports/sp-armstrong9/6>.

<sup>149</sup> O’Keeffe, “Lance Armstrong’s Fall.”

now looks like a cynical private joke.”<sup>150</sup> There was a clear understanding that Armstrong had received his millions of dollars in bad faith, with no care for those he had duped.

On October 17, a week after the United States Anti-Doping Agency’s evidence became public, the *New York Post* reported escalating effects from the doping controversy. Armstrong was stepping down as chairman of his cancer-fighting charity, and minutes after his statement, Nike announced that it was severing ties with the cyclist due to the “seemingly insurmountable” evidence that the company had been misled for over a decade.<sup>151</sup> USADA CEO Tygart’s “slam-dunk” case had gained traction, and while Armstrong was still strongly maintaining his innocence, it was clear that the allegations were reaching destructive levels. The development saw Armstrong’s team of lawyers and crisis managers advising him to distance his tarnished public image from the foundation and take a backstage role on its board of directors. Publicly, this was to spare the charity any negative effects from the doping controversy. This tactic was also perhaps crafted to hold on to the trust and support of his strongest constituency: the cancer community and its donors.

In the weeks following the USADA’s release of its evidence, Armstrong’s continued denials had backed him into a corner with dimming prospects of a comeback. After years of supporting the cyclist, the International Cycling Union, the world governing body for sports cycling, decided to uphold the sanctions against him. Armstrong lost more major sponsors, which in addition to Nike, included Oakley, Trek, and RadioShack. In his article “After Years of Denials, Armstrong’s Strategy Collapses,” *USA Today*’s Brent Schrottenboer quoted crisis

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<sup>150</sup> “Lance Armstrong Doping Scandal Is Just Gearing Up,” *USA Today*, October 16, 2012, accessed January 11, 2015, <http://www.usatoday.com/story/opinion/2012/10/16/-lance-armstrong-doping-scandal-just-gearing-up/1636599/>.

<sup>151</sup> “Lance Armstrong Stepping Down as Chairman of Livestrong Charity; Nike Ends Cyclist’s Contract,” *New York Post*, October 17, 2012, accessed January 11, 2015, <http://nypost.com/2012/10/17/lance-armstrong-stepping-down-as-chairman-of-livestrong-charity-nike-ends-cyclists-contract/>.

management experts who questioned Armstrong's lies and attacks. Had the cyclist handled the allegations differently, they said, he could have received lighter penalties and more easily achieved public forgiveness. David Srere, a consultant from the branding firm Siegel Gale, put it succinctly: "[It's] not the act that gets them in trouble, it's the lying about it afterward."<sup>152</sup> Armstrong's dishonesty was deep, ruthless, and tainted by the brazen attacks of his accusers. Where Moss had gone under the radar to manipulate competing discourses that successfully turned the tide in her favour, Armstrong had gone under oath and on record to boldly disseminate lies while expecting them never to be revealed. Both approaches utilized manipulative tactics, but Armstrong's offensive response came at the expense of countless people – not only those whom he had vilified, but every single person he had lied to.

Public reactions to the cyclist being stripped from his Tour de France titles were gathered in *USA Today*'s October 24, 2012 article, "Your Say: Fans on Lance Armstrong's Fall." Compiled remarks from the reading public on Facebook clearly indicated that the anti-doping agency's evidence against Armstrong, while substantial, still divided public opinion. A comment from William Cassada blamed the USADA for unfairly targeting Armstrong, calling their efforts a "politically motivated hatchet job."<sup>153</sup> John Tortorici, another commenter, presented an opposing view: these efforts were dedicated to upholding fair competition, and were intended to clean up a worldwide stain on American sports. Without proper anti-doping enforcement, Lance Armstrong's case would taint U.S. athletes in Olympic competition. The newspaper's focus on

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<sup>152</sup> Brent Schrotenboer, "After Years of Denials, Armstrong's Strategy Collapses," *USA Today*, October 23, 2012, accessed January 11, 2015, <http://www.usatoday.com/story/sports/cycling/2012/10/22/lance-armstrong-tour-de-france-doping/1650693/>.

<sup>153</sup> "Your Say: Fans on Lance Armstrong's Fall," *USA Today*, October 24, 2012, accessed January 12, 2015, <http://www.usatoday.com/story/opinion/2012/10/24/lance-armstrong-stripped-titles/1655845/>.

reader comments exemplified that the mediated discourses surrounding Armstrong's lie were being picked up and negotiated by people across the country.

On October 26, 2012, the *Daily News* published an in-depth article that brought together the paper's efforts, since 2008, to report on the growing evidence that the cyclist had cheated. In the article, the paper's journalists explained that their years of efforts had not been aimed at determining if the Texan was deserving of his Tour de France titles; rather, "it was about getting people's stories out in the open in the marketplace of information that Armstrong seemed to so thoroughly regulate."<sup>154</sup> Before delving into the testimonies compiled by the United-States Anti-Doping Agency, the writers highlighted a critical irony of the agency's document. Yes, it had revealed Armstrong's corrupt regime and made it easier to see why witnesses had feared their livelihoods and reputations. But with the floodgates now open and the accusations justified, it was also harder to understand the pain and isolation felt by those who had stood up against Armstrong during the peak of his Tour de France dominance. This timeline reflected exactly why the anti-doping agency was able to gather its evidence when it did. In 2010, Armstrong no longer dominated the podium, but his return to competition had put him back on the radar. It sparked bitterness from former teammates already caught doping, and a renewed interest in the allegations swirling around the cycling star throughout his career.

At this point in the sampling, the media furor made it clear that Armstrong's tactics were only working against him. While his abrasive public attacks against investigators and critics had lessened since announcing in August that he would not be contesting the anti-doping agency's charges, he continued to show signs of the defiance that defined his public image. On November

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<sup>154</sup> Teri Thompson, Nathaniel Vinton, Michael O'Keeffe, and Christian Red, "Victims of Lance Armstrong's Strong-Arm Tactics Feel Relief and Vindication in the Wake of U.S. Anti-Doping Agency Report," *Daily News*, October 26, 2012, accessed January 13, 2015, <http://www.nydailynews.com/sports/more-sports/zone-lance-armstrong-bully-downfall-article-1.1188512>.

13, 2012, Andy Soltis of the *New York Post* reported that the disgraced cyclist had posted a photo on his personal Twitter account, to his nearly four million followers, that showed him lying next to his seven Tour de France yellow jerseys. The image was cocky and condescending, a brazen provocation towards those challenging his victories. Soltis's article, entitled "Lance is Livingwrong: Taunting Photo as Bike Dope Quits Cancer Post," showed a clear disdain for Armstrong's arrogance. The article further reported that the cancer survivor had resigned from the board of his foundation, completely severing ties with the charity he had founded, and the "Lance Armstrong Foundation" became known as the "Livestrong Foundation."<sup>155</sup> This marked the foundation's subtle but substantive step towards distancing itself and its activities from the now highly liable brand image of its founder.

Prior to the height of the doping controversy, the link between Lance Armstrong and his cancer-fighting charity had been mutually advantageous. The charity benefited from its founder's celebrity to build an awareness and credibility that expedited donations, while Armstrong used the foundation and his battle with the disease as a shield against criticism. On November 29, the *Daily News* published an interview with Paul Kimmage, an Irish journalist who had spent years on Armstrong's trail. Kimmage unpacked how the cyclist's link to cancer had facilitated his rise to the top of the industry: "Lance was an iconic champion and he became the new face of the sport. He had massive commercial power and no one was going to question him after what he had been through. He was the answer."<sup>156</sup> Fans, corporate sponsors, and cycling officials had been given a hero, whose struggle and humanitarian efforts built him a foundation of trust and

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<sup>155</sup> Andy Soltis, "Lance Is Livingwrong: Taunting Photo as Bike Dope Quits Cancer Post," *New York Post*, November 13, 2012, accessed January 15, 2015, <http://nypost.com/2012/11/13/lance-is-livingwrong-taunting-photo-as-bike-dope-quits-cancer-post/>.

<sup>156</sup> Michael O'Keeffe, "Lance Armstrong's Cycling Legacy Has Been Tarnished, but Paul Kimmage Wants to See International Cycling Union Leaders Held Accountable Also," *NY Daily News*, November 29, 2012, accessed January 15, 2015, <http://www.nydailynews.com/sports/i-team/cleaning-cycling-doesn-lance-kimmage-article-1.1210467>.

support. It was Armstrong's untouchable persona, confirmed by the abandoned federal investigation against him, that made the United States Anti-Doping Agency's one-thousand-page document all the more impressive. According to Kimmage, Armstrong's exposure and complete disqualification was truly an American achievement that showed rigorous journalistic standards prevailing to provide the basis for implementing justice: "It's a great tribute to the United States. No other country would have had the stomach to do it."<sup>157</sup>

By way of the USADA's efforts that marked the end of the Lance Armstrong myth, the discourses that had propelled the former professional cyclist to fame were now being re-appropriated. Winning at all costs now meant ridding cycling of its drug culture, and using second chances signified giving the future generation a clean sport and fair competition. Anti-doping officials, like investigative journalists, were positioning themselves as guardians of moral purity. USADA CEO Travis Tygart, who offered the star of the scandal numerous opportunities to come forward and help investigators, headlined this self-generated sensibility. Armstrong refused to co-operate; he had invested much in his denials, and any confession would make him vulnerable to civil or criminal actions. The disgraced cyclist needed to rehabilitate his image if he was to compete again, and this needed to be done without incriminating himself. True to form, he would opt for trying to control his own narrative, and true to form, it was going to be in everyone's face.

In January 2013, it was announced that Lance Armstrong was thinking of publicly confessing to his doping in an interview with Oprah Winfrey. Media outlets let out sighs of exasperation. The *Daily News's* Mike Lupica compared it to "someone going on Oprah's network and announcing that he has new information, or breaking news, about the ocean being

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<sup>157</sup> Ibid.

deep.”<sup>158</sup> Lupica’s article, “Lance Armstrong’s Worldwide Web of Lies,” labelled Armstrong’s upcoming public apology as a “panhandle for redemption”: a desperate attempt to stay relevant after being exposed as a liar and a cheat.<sup>159</sup> According to Lupica, Armstrong’s “confession” would be less of a truthful revelation than another manipulative attempt to keep himself as the hero of his own drama, and to try to convince people that he had to do a lot of bad things for the greater good. He needed the yellow jerseys to sell the yellow bracelets – all the while getting richer and more famous. Lupica stressed, however, that people needed to focus on the real issue behind the Lance Armstrong myth, and it wasn’t about drugs in sports; it was about the cutthroat lying.

In the days leading up to Armstrong’s appearance on Oprah, journalists and brand specialists from around the world analyzed the disgraced cyclist’s plan to rehabilitate his image. British news reports expected that Armstrong’s team of advisors had steered him toward the idea that a televised confession would project honesty, and that Oprah’s established female following would likely be sympathetic.<sup>160</sup> In an article detailing the athlete’s long-term comeback plan, Brent Schrottenboer of *USA Today* quoted sources intimate with Armstrong’s strategy. The “multi-year healing process,” they said, hoped for a favourable judgment over time that would remember his work fighting cancer and his domination of a sport filled with dopers.<sup>161</sup> Schrottenboer noted that the confession plan might open the door for Armstrong to regain lost earnings with future income opportunities, such as book deals and speaking engagements.

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<sup>158</sup> Mike Lupica, “Lance Armstrong’s Worldwide Web of Lies,” *Daily News*, January 13, 2013, accessed January 16, 2015, <http://www.nydailynews.com/sports/more-sports/lupica-armstrong-worldwide-web-lies-article-1.1239104>.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid.

<sup>160</sup> John MacLeary, “Lance Armstrong on Oprah Winfrey: Why Confess Now, and What Next?” *Telegraph*, January 9, 2013, accessed January 16, 2015, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/sport/othersports/cycling/lance-armstrong/9789930/Lance-Armstrong-on-Oprah-Winfrey-why-confess-now-and-what-next.html>.

<sup>161</sup> Brent Schrottenboer, “Armstrong Admission Part of Long-Term Comeback Plan,” *USA Today*, January 14, 2013, accessed January 16, 2015, <http://www.usatoday.com/story/sports/cycling/2013/01/13/lance-armstrong-oprah-winfrey-interview-admit-doping/1831545/>.

Armstrong's curated myth had crumbled, but along with his team, he was still relentlessly calculating his bottom line and finding any way to spin the story in his favour.

Obtaining forgiveness from those whom the cyclist had deceived for so many years was undoubtedly a gamble. Others sought monetary compensation and candid answers to their questions. The *New York Post* reported that the *Sunday Times* of London (which had been forced to pay Armstrong over US\$400,000 after publishing an article in 2006 that suggested he was using banned substances) was suing the cyclist to recover the money it had paid, plus interest.<sup>162</sup> As part of his conspiracy of silence, Armstrong had used British libel laws against the nation's press. In cases like this, the burden of proof lies with the newspaper, and while the *Sunday Times* and its chief sports journalist probing the allegations, David Walsh, had a strong body of evidence that pointed to guilt, they could not actually prove the allegations. Such libel laws only helped to protect Armstrong's conspiracy of silence. On January 13, 2013, a few days prior to Armstrong's televised confession on Oprah, the *Sunday Times* took the unusual step of purchasing a full-page ad in Winfrey's hometown paper, the *Chicago Tribune*, where Walsh suggested ten questions to ask the cyclist, including the following: "Do you accept that your lying to the cancer community was the greatest deception of all?"<sup>163</sup>

In the lead-up to Armstrong's confession, an editorial published by *USA Today* on January 15 gave weight to the cyclist's history of cheating and lying. His actions had proven to be completely devoid of sincerity, so why would now be any different? "Armstrong's record overrides his conveniently timed words – or at least it should – and that record says his

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<sup>162</sup> Dan Mangan, "I'm a Dope Fiend: Lance 'Fesses in Oprah Sit-Down," *New York Post*, January 15, 2013, accessed January 17, 2015, <http://nypost.com/2013/01/15/im-a-dope-fiend-lance-fesses-in-oprah-sit-down/>.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid.

confession is nothing more than another self-centered ploy.”<sup>164</sup> In another editorial published by the same paper the following day, sports columnist Christine Brennan described the disgraced cyclist as “nothing short of pathetic in defeat.”<sup>165</sup> She contended that Armstrong was simply following the same “quick fix” mentality of his past, where handling an issue meant getting rid of it: “Facts? Deny them. Accusers? Destroy them. Banned for life? Call Oprah, apologize and move on.”<sup>166</sup> But the United States Anti-Doping Agency was now in charge of his narrative, and as Brennan noted, this turn of events may have seemed cruel to Armstrong, but it was absolutely fitting to those following his story.

Armstrong’s strategy to regain control over his narrative meant selling the public a new version of the truth. But there was no one left to buy it. A *Daily News* article entitled “Lance Armstrong Can’t Win Final Stage of This Fight, No Matter What He Says in Upcoming Oprah Interview,” broke down what was to come: “By the end of this week, we’ll be expected to believe that Lance just had to find a way to level the playing field in the hills of France, had to use drugs and keep using them because the world needed a hero like him.”<sup>167</sup> Here was stressed the bottom line against Armstrong: no one made him take drugs, and no one made him lie about it and “play the whole world for suckers.”<sup>168</sup> Others echoed a similar distaste for the never-ending cycle of manipulative lies. *USA Today*’s Brent Schrottenboer predicted that the confession

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<sup>164</sup> “Editorial: Armstrong Tour de Apology Can’t Escape Lies,” *USA Today*, January 15, 2013, accessed January 18, 2015, <http://www.usatoday.com/story/opinion/2013/01/15/lance-armstrong-oprah-doping/1837961/>.

<sup>165</sup> Christine Brennan, “Brennan: Life of Armstrong Over as He Knows It,” *USA Today*, January 16, 2013, accessed January 18, 2015, <http://www.usatoday.com/story/sports/columnist/brennan/2013/01/15/brennan-column-lance-armstrong-admits-doping/1835953/>.

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>167</sup> Mike Lupica, “Lance Armstrong Can’t Win Final Stage of This Fight, No Matter What He Says in Upcoming Oprah Winfrey Interview,” *Daily News*, January 16, 2013, accessed January 18, 2015, <http://www.nydailynews.com/sports/more-sports/lupica-lying-lance-win-final-stage-article-1.1240966>.

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.*

would be a delicate balance between total honesty and self-protection, but emphasized that Armstrong needed to rid himself of the arrogance and obstructionism that tarnished his image.

Armstrong's confrontational nature was effectively fuel for the fire, marshalled by journalists to amp up the scandal's sensationalism. In a piece succinctly entitled "Lance Is Axle of Evil," the *New York Post's* Andrea Peyser piled onto the furor that had descended upon Armstrong, arguing that the cyclist's personal affairs made him worse than shameless. His "entire adult life was a fraud fuelled by boundless ego and greed," spent "slumming like a groupie in the company of Tiger Woods, Bono and Sheryl Crow."<sup>169</sup> Peyser explained how Lance metaphorically "ran over" his former wife and their three kids, who had stood by him in his fight with testicular cancer. He left them when he could "snag a table at any hot restaurant" and began seeing singer Sheryl Crow, whom he later broke up with after their three-year relationship and engagement, confessing that he was unable to deal with the singer's recent breast cancer diagnosis. The registers of egoism and morality that dominated the scandal's trajectory were developing to deeply criticize Armstrong's life off the bike. Every aspect of his life was portrayed as tainted by dishonesty and disloyalty; it had defined him since the beginning, and it would define him until the end.

Lance Armstrong's public confession to Oprah marked the beginning of the end. The interview aired to 3.2 million American viewers; a repeat of the interview, broadcast later in the evening, brought in another 1.1 million.<sup>170</sup> It was the first of a two-part series, stretched and hyped by Oprah's network to boost viewership for the fledgling OWN channel and concurrently

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<sup>169</sup> Andrea Peyser, "Lance Is Axle of Evil," *New York Post*, January 17, 2013, accessed January 15, 2015, <http://nypost.com/2013/01/17/lance-is-axle-of-evil/>.

<sup>170</sup> Gary Levin, "Oprah Gets Huge Ratings with Lance Armstrong Interview," *USA Today*, January 18, 2013, accessed January 15, 2015, <http://www.usatoday.com/story/life/tv/2013/01/18/oprah-lance-armstrong-ratings/1845373/>.

raise advertising rates. For Oprah's own reputation, landing a high-profile interview with an international icon fallen from grace was a chance to reclaim a piece of the cultural spotlight that she had left behind in her syndicated stardom. These goals were achieved. According to OWN, audience numbers over the two nights and various airings on the cable TV channel reached 28 million viewers worldwide (12.2 million Americans, 15 million people overseas, and another 800,000 online on Oprah.com), with the interview being watched in more than 190 nations and in 30 languages.<sup>171</sup> Armstrong's public confession generated high demand for advertising and huge publicity for Winfrey; having been widely promoted, Oprah's interview became a news story in its own right.

The news media were taking clear advantage of Lance Armstrong's exchange-value, as they had with Kate Moss. Regardless of the position taken by journalists, both cases used the respective celebrity's ability to garner attention as a means of increasing audience numbers. The *Daily Mirror*, knowing the public's cultural affinity for the British supermodel, sold papers by focusing scandalous attention on Moss's actions. Oprah Winfrey, well aware of the swirling controversy surrounding the disgraced American cycling hero, entered herself into Armstrong's confession story to boost her channel's profits and regain reputation. These "scoops" were not only highly lucrative in themselves, they also had a ripple effect of more benefits for other news outlets eager to piggy back on the controversy.

The *New York Post*'s Dan Macleod recapped Armstrong's sit-down with Oprah, describing it as a "bombshell interview" where within the first three minutes, the "Lyn' King"

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<sup>171</sup> Jill Serjeant, "Oprah's Lance Armstrong Interview Viewed by 28 Million People Worldwide," *Reuters*, January 23, 2013, accessed February 15, 2015, <http://in.reuters.com/article/2013/01/23/television-oprah-lancearmstrong-idINDEE90M01I20130123>.

admitted to the doping that he had blatantly denied doing for over ten years.<sup>172</sup> Armstrong's lack of emotion and matter-of-fact statements were taken as completely void of contrition. They led to a uniform reaction that viewed the banned cyclist as calculating his future to compete again instead of showing any real desire to come clean. Unlike Moss, a stiff upper lip was not helping his case; it simply perpetuated the egotistic, self-serving character that was unfailingly bringing him down.

To a large extent, Armstrong's path to redemption was blocked before his interview with Oprah even aired. But it was surely calculated that there was always a way to push back against detractors. Once again, the lever would be Armstrong's cancer-survivor experience. In the midst of the furor from the long-awaited confession, *USA Today* published an interview with the doctor who helped Armstrong survive advanced testicular cancer. Dr. Lawrence Einhorn's words, crafted to defend his former patient, advocated for Lance's legacy as a cancer survivor and what he meant to the cancer community. According to Einhorn, this was a complex dilemma of unjustifiable means creating invaluable ends. He explained that patients were still carrying Armstrong's autobiography into their chemotherapy treatment "like someone religious carrying a Bible to help them through a very difficult period of time."<sup>173</sup> In the cancer community, Armstrong wasn't just admired, he was worshipped.

The popular propensity for hero worship suggested that while minimal, there was still hope for Armstrong's televised confession. Fallen American heroes had risen before: Bill Clinton in politics and Michael Vick in football. But Rick Hampton of *USA Today* equated the

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<sup>172</sup> Dan Macleod, "Lance Armstrong Finally Admits to Doping, Lying in Interview with Oprah Winfrey," *New York Post*, January 18, 2013, accessed January 19, 2015, <http://nypost.com/2013/01/18/lance-armstrong-finally-admits-to-doping-lying-in-interview-with-oprah-winfrey/>.

<sup>173</sup> Mike Lopresti, "Lance Armstrong Cancer Doctor Has No Mixed Feelings," *USA Today*, January 18, 2013, accessed January 19, 2015, <http://www.usatoday.com/story/sports/columnist/lopresti/2013/01/17/lance-armstrong-einhorn-cancer-doctor-oprah/1842777/>.

disgraced cyclist's task to more than a Tour de France competition: it was climbing Mount Everest. Like Kate Moss, Lance Armstrong had been the golden goose of his industry, but where the supermodel had promptly managed a smooth return to the spotlight, the cyclist's road back – if even possible – would be a long and treacherous one. In his article entitled “Cashing In on a Stinking Liar,” Phil Mushnick of the *New York Post* alluded that power, arrogance, megalomania, and charity work had led Armstrong to his downfall, disillusioning the cyclist into thinking that he was immune from the inevitable.

This inevitability was described by the *Post*'s Jonathan Mahler as the moment where former teammates, cancer foundation employees, and journalists would finally be “awakening to the reality that a Stage 4-cancer survivor competing in the most gruelling steroid-soaked sport in the world was powered by more than just his God-given strength and will.”<sup>174</sup> Mahler's article, entitled “Lance's Confession Is Just the Start,” called to end the sanctimony and outrage, and to begin the more sensible conversation about drugs and sports. Crucially, however, it tapped into another issue. Mahler had labelled the revelations from both the USADA's report and Armstrong's own confession as nothing but obvious. This begged the question: If the truth had been right under everyone's nose, then why did Armstrong's lie survive for as long as it did? The fallen hero's public confession shed light on the cycle of his myth: “All the blame is on me. But behind that story was momentum, and whether it's fans or the media, it just gets going...”<sup>175</sup>

Lance Armstrong chose to make himself the hero of his own drama, but his myth would not have survived without such a suspension of disbelief. The *Daily News*'s Nathaniel Vinton characterized Armstrong's doping scandal as “a profitable fiction surrounded by witnesses doing

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<sup>174</sup> Jonathan Mahler, “Lance's Confession Is Just the Start,” *New York Post*, January 8, 2013, accessed January 21, 2015, <http://nypost.com/2013/01/18/lances-confession-is-just-the-start/>.

<sup>175</sup> Macleod, “Lance Armstrong Finally Admits to Doping.”

stupid human tricks to prop it up until someone showed up with a badge.”<sup>176</sup> The morality register had developed into an exploration of moral relativism. On January 21, 2013, the *New York Post* published reader responses to Armstrong’s interview with Oprah. A comment from Karen Ann DeLuca of Virginia suggested that perhaps Armstrong was a product of the times. He began his rise to fame when the country’s president was equivocating as to whether or not he had inappropriate relations with an intern, and continued through a period of wars, which, to some degree, were meant to reclaim and assert the country’s exceptionalism. Her view: “Maybe we find him so repulsive because he is an unwanted but accurate reflection of the United States.”<sup>177</sup>

As predicted by his critics, Armstrong’s win-at-all-costs mentality followed him into contrition. On May 28, 2013, Brent Schrottenboer of *USA Today* wrote that the banned cyclist had overwhelmingly failed in his promise to make amends. Four months post-television confession, Armstrong’s personal apologies were few; he had refused to co-operate with the USADA in its efforts to clean up the sport; and instead of paying back those companies that were legitimately defrauded because of his doping, he was continuing to fight in court. If some had viewed his words on Oprah as sincere, his corresponding actions and legal strategy went counter to his stated remorse. It looked as if Armstrong was not willing to give up his empire, and his lawyers undoubtedly had financial incentive to persuade him to continue fighting. The article referenced the Q Scores Company, a firm that measures the popularity of celebrities and brands, to show that Armstrong’s exposure with Winfrey had failed to help the disgraced celebrity rise

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<sup>176</sup> Nathaniel Vinton, “In Close Pursuit on Journey, the News’ Nathaniel Vinton Got Close Look at Lance Armstrong’s Cheating, Bullying and Sociopathic Ways,” *Daily News*, January 19, 2013, accessed January 21, 2015, <http://www.nydailynews.com/sports/i-team/vinton-lance-cheating-bullying-sociopathic-ways-article-1.1243393>.

<sup>177</sup> “Armstrong’s ‘Confession’ and His Cycle of Deceit,” *New York Post*, January 21, 2013, accessed January 21, 2015, <http://nypost.com/2013/01/21/armstrongs-confession-and-his-cycle-of-deceit/>.

from the ashes: sixty-five percent of the general public said they viewed Armstrong “negatively or fair at best.”<sup>178</sup>

The discourses that positioned Lance Armstrong within his doping conspiracy proved able to sustain their vigour throughout the scandal. At their core, they established a deeply flawed human being who was set in his ways. The lies that Armstrong had aggressively fed the public discredited him completely, and he lost his own constituency by making his supporters feel betrayed and duped. As with Kate Moss, journalists had succeeded in portraying Lance Armstrong as a deceitful manipulator of his own image. But where the supermodel’s established reticence was tapped by her professional team to manipulate the story to their advantage, Armstrong’s aggressive persona buried the strategy crafted by his advisors. He receded from the public eye, but still showed signs of his defiance; he publicly confessed, but showed a lack of contrition. These actions only upheld his villainous nature as defined by his detractors, and they spoke convincing volumes about him being unworthy of forgiveness.

Armstrong’s egoism had fed his rise to fame, and it fed his fall from grace. In November 2013, a year after the scandal’s smoking gun was released, *USA Today*’s Claudia Puig reported on a film being released by the acclaimed documentarian Alex Gibney. Gibney had been hired in 2009 to document Armstrong’s comeback to cycling, but the project was shelved when the doping scandal had erupted. After the disgraced athlete’s confession, it was reworked and reopened under the title *The Armstrong Lie* to document how the wheels had come off the cyclist’s myth. Puig described the documentary as not only an examination of a disgraced sports hero, but also an exploration of drive, moral relativism, and the cult of personality. It deeply

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<sup>178</sup> Brent Schrottenboer, “For Lance Armstrong, Sorry Has Been the Hardest Word,” *USA Today*, May 28, 2013, accessed January 22, 2015, <http://www.usatoday.com/story/sports/2013/05/27/for-armstrong-forgiveness-is-not-saying-sorry/2364137/>.

questioned the nature of belief and faith, ultimately asking why the public was so willing to overlook the cyclist's deceit, and what that said about the collective national character.

The discourses making up the scandalous churn around Armstrong's doping were fuelled by a clear struggle between an aggressor and his detractors. Digging deeper, this in-depth investigation revealed that the Armstrong myth had fed off a suspension of disbelief to stay alive. When the fraud was exposed, the reading public benefited – yet the reading public had been part of the fraud to begin with. Armstrong's attempt at placing partial blame on the news media and his fans was widely condemned, but it was not a misguided statement. Crucially, it pointed towards the audience-media-celebrity triangulation that establishes the backbone of the investigation. This scandal proved that manipulated correctly, the aspects of plausibility that circulate to create a myth can ultimately tear it down.

## Chapter 6 – The Charlie Sheen Case: Manoeuvring a Meltdown

In early 2011, the notoriously rebellious Hollywood star Charlie Sheen took his reputation for scandal to a new high in a headline-grabbing public meltdown. A drug-fuelled bender had landed the troubled star in the hospital, forcing CBS to put his hit sitcom *Two and a Half Men* on hiatus for him to seek treatment. But instead of following the typical scandal trajectory of lying low, Sheen began a downward spiral of riveting media appearances. Rambling in interviews on local radio shows, major broadcast networks, and every other outlet available to him, TV's highest paid actor unleashed incendiary comments about his show's producers and the network, along with bizarre statements like, "I am on a drug. It's called Charlie Sheen. It's not available because if you try it you will die," all the while maintaining that he was sober and in excellent health.<sup>179</sup>

Charlie Sheen's infamous media blitz embodied a unique example of celebrity scandal where the subject himself was ingeniously, if manically, fuelling the controversy. Sheen's generative approach to scandal, unlike Moss on the defensive and Armstrong on the offensive, essentially beat the scandal sheets at their own game. Where Moss and Armstrong both entered into a discursive battle with their detractors, Sheen embraced the controversy and worked to stoke the furor, shamelessly manipulating the media to keep his name in the news. Crucially, he was able to do so because he had cultivated a following attuned to his reckless antics since the beginnings of his fame in the 1980s, becoming known as much for his marital, legal, and substance abuse problems as his acting. By building every divorce, arrest, and indiscretion into the fabric of his bad-boy persona, Sheen had essentially made himself scandal-proof.

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<sup>179</sup> Maerz, "The Charlie Sheen Dictionary."

Sheen's established reputation meant that his behaviour fit his image, which allowed him to bounce back from scandal time and time again. His aura of personal and professional indestructibility – which he publicized during his meltdown by boasting of having “tiger blood” and “Adonis DNA” while constantly “winning” at life – held some plausibility. Sheen often propagated his own controversies, while surrounded by a coterie of enablers in the entertainment industry.<sup>180</sup> More than Kate Moss in fashion or Lance Armstrong in sports, Charlie Sheen was part of a world that tolerated bad behaviour by star performers. In many ways, the actor's leading role on CBS's top-rated sitcom, *Two and a Half Men*, as the wittily hedonistic Charlie Harper, was based on his publicized off-screen self. His personal and professional tribulations were fodder for audiences and the media.

Following the organizational pattern of the Moss and Armstrong cases, Sheen's public meltdown was analyzed in a sampling of thirty articles gathered from three American news sources: the *New York Post*, the *Daily News*, and TMZ. The media texts were sorted, numbered, and analyzed chronologically to outline the narrative progression. An initial quantitative examination identified dominant recurring phrases and arranged them in a chart (see Appendix C). These key themes were further developed in a qualitative analysis that investigated how Charlie Sheen embraced and generated scandalous discourses. His diatribes were perhaps the result of a psychological breakdown, but his behaviour suggested a certain level of conscious control, where he was aware of both audience and media demand for fresh, scandalous content. Unlike Moss or Armstrong, Sheen's talent lay in acting; this meant that he might very well have been importing the mania (real or not) into his role. Here it is shown how Charlie Sheen

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<sup>180</sup> Brook Barnes, Bill Carter, and Michael Cieply, “Sheen Is a TV Star Surrounded by a Coterie of Enablers,” *The New York Times*, March 6, 2011, accessed February 2, 2015, [http://www.nytimes.com/2011/03/07/business/media/07sheen.html?pagewanted=all&\\_r=2&\\_](http://www.nytimes.com/2011/03/07/business/media/07sheen.html?pagewanted=all&_r=2&_)

manipulated the celebrity scandal system in a compelling manner, ultimately amplifying the controversy by injecting his rebellious bad-boy trope with manic, erratic behaviour.

In his own explanation, Charlie Sheen declared his meltdown to be a “melt-forward” that had been going downhill with no brakes and no plan. The scandal was centered on a seemingly out-of-control subject, but he was perhaps only as crazy as a fox. With his bizarre antics, Sheen was knowingly amassing a valuable following whose attention he later leveraged for profits. The actor fuelled controversy by deploying a vast array of erratic phrases that seamlessly translated into incendiary headlines and eye-catching stories; a seasoned veteran of the tabloids, he had picked up their formula. Twenty-five of the thirty articles studied the manic vocabulary that Sheen projected, with journalists either directly relaying the actor’s dialogue or appropriating his catchphrases into their own narratives. As with Moss and Armstrong, a register of entitlement accompanied reportage on this celebrity: many of Sheen’s statements, while outlandish, were self-aggrandizing and pointed toward a sense of superiority.

Sheen’s never-before-heard utterances baffled the news-consuming public, which nevertheless eagerly indulged in the wildly entertaining spectacle. The actor’s rants began as an attack against his bosses at *Two and a Half Men*: the show and its executives (referenced in twenty-two articles) had jeopardized his position as the highest-paid star on television. Sheen’s widely publicized personal and professional troubles were relayed through a clear register of rebellion. His notorious bad-boy image was present in twenty-four articles of the sampling, a theme that freely acknowledged and made use of his substance abuse problems, domestic issues, and volatile demeanour. In many instances, it was evident that Sheen’s reputation was enabling and excusing his bad behaviour. Thirteen articles referenced Sheen as a bankable star, both in his

acting roles and in his newsworthiness. Made of Teflon, Charlie Sheen was perfectly equipped to thrive in scandal.

The self-destructive actor invited audiences to live vicariously through his unconventional rock-star lifestyle. To connect more directly with his fans, Sheen gradually distanced himself from media gatekeepers. He booked his own radio and television interviews without the apparent need for a publicist. Taking advantage of social media, he started his own webcast and joined Twitter. Once his earnings were officially cut off, Sheen worked to keep his name in the news and regain what he had lost. This unprecedented media blitz (including interviews, webcasts, tweets, and tours) was detailed in twenty-five of the thirty articles. Where both Moss and Armstrong had receded from the public eye following their exposures, Sheen directed the spotlight on himself without shame.

These key discursive patterns within the reportage of Charlie Sheen's public meltdown provided evidence for the star's generative approach to scandal. Fuelled by public support, Sheen built an event worthy of global media coverage. The press painted him as an out-of-control maniac who had lost his mind, but the same journalists, joined by brands and businessmen, were riding on Sheen's apparent wave of insanity to profit from the attention that the star had garnered. With an established rebellious persona that required little or no concern for damage to his reputation, Sheen catered to audience demand for entertainment. The actor's familiarity with tabloid culture created a certain *schadenfreude* on steroids: not only were audiences gaining satisfaction from passively watching a famous person self-destruct in public, they were also living vicariously through Sheen's rebellion against the machine. This gave him a different following than either Moss or Armstrong, one that was prepared for his antics and wanted more.

Where Moss and Armstrong had been steered into their scandals by journalists and whistleblowers, Sheen ultimately created controversy of his own accord and reaped its benefits.

On January 28, 2011, the *New York Post* reported that Charlie Sheen had been hospitalized after suffering a hernia from a night of alcohol, cocaine, and porn stars. Sheen was said to have checked himself into rehab, and a statement on behalf of the show's network and its executive producer, Chuck Lorre, announced that *Two and a Half Men* would be put on production hiatus while the star sought treatment. Sheen, however, seemed reluctant to slow down. In a text message to the senior executive editor of celebrity news website *Radar Online*, the actor wrote: "I'm fine. People don't seem to get it... Guy can't have a great time and do his job also?"<sup>181</sup> A few days later, the *Post* published an editorial on Sheen that offered a comical – and not entirely unfounded – solution to get the actor out of trouble and reduce risky down-time: keep him at work with his own network. At that point, the *Post* noted, Sheen's show was bringing in US\$250 million in domestic syndication and millions more in ad revenue for CBS.<sup>182</sup> It was clear that when he was busy, he was bankable.

CBS had taken a production hiatus the previous year for another of Sheen's rehab stints, but this time around, the actor was straying far from traditional therapy. He declared that he was undertaking in-house rehabilitation, naming his Beverly Hills mansion the "Sober Valley Lodge" and boasting that it also housed his two girlfriends, whom Sheen called his "goddesses." One

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<sup>181</sup> "Charlie Sheen Checks Into Rehab, CBS Show on Hiatus," *New York Post*, January 28, 2011, accessed February 4, 2015, <http://nypost.com/2011/01/28/charlie-sheen-checks-into-rehab-cbs-show-on-hiatus/>.

<sup>182</sup> Linda Stasi, "How To Keep Sheen Out Of Trouble," *New York Post*, February 1, 2011, accessed February 4, 2015, <http://nypost.com/2011/02/01/how-to-keep-sheen-out-of-trouble/>.

was a former porn star, the other a model best known for appearing on the cover of a marijuana magazine.<sup>183</sup>

On February 24, 2011, the celebrity scandal program TMZ reported that Sheen had launched a “nuclear attack on live radio” in a call to the U.S. syndicated talk radio program, the *Alex Jones Show*, where he blasted *Two and a Half Men* creator Chuck Lorre, claiming that he had embarrassed Lorre by “healing at a pace that [Lorre’s] un-evolved mind [could not] process.”<sup>184</sup> Sheen, saying he was told that if he went on the attack, executives would cancel the show, repeatedly referred to Chuck Lorre by his Jewish birth name, Chaim Levine. The act sparked anti-Semitic accusations, but Sheen later denied bigotry, explaining that he simply wanted to “address the man, not the bulls\*\*t TV persona.”<sup>185</sup> In his radio rant, the frenetic-sounding actor referred to Alcoholics Anonymous as a “bootleg cult,” and addressed his drug and alcohol issues by declaring: “I have a disease? Bulls\*\*t! I cured it... with my mind.” Here were the first signs that suggested Sheen was going off the deep end: he was being recalcitrant by stoking the fire, but more than that, he was sounding manic, and had a grandiose sense of superiority. The news media and news-consuming public were in for a show.

After his opening tirade, Sheen escalated the attack on his show’s creator across media outlets. The same day, he spoke with TMZ to assert his “violent hate” for the “stupid, stupid little

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<sup>183</sup> “Charlie Sheen’s ‘Goddess’: Marijuana Bikini Model,” *TMZ*, February 24, 2011, accessed March 24, 2015, <http://www.TMZ.com/2011/02/23/charlie-sheen-natalie-kenly-cali-chronic-x-goddess-two-and-a-half-men-warner-bros-cbs-hiatus-rehab-intervention-addiction-marijuana-pot-weed-natty-baby/>.

<sup>184</sup> “Sheen Rips ‘Men’ Creator, AA and Thomas Jefferson,” *TMZ*, February 24, 2011, accessed February 4, 2015, <http://www.TMZ.com/2011/02/24/charlie-sheen-two-and-a-half-men-chuck-lorre-argument-radio-talk-show-tirade-turd-thomas-jefferson/>.

<sup>185</sup> “Charlie Sheen: I’m Not an Anti-Semite,” *TMZ*, February 25, 2011, accessed February 4, 2015, <http://www.TMZ.com/2011/02/25/charlie-sheen-anti-semite-chuck-lorre-chiam-levine-insult-two-and-a-half-men-carlos-estevez/>.

man,” whom he accused of denying money to himself, his family, and the show’s crew.<sup>186</sup> Not only did Sheen openly clash with the studio and network in their decision to stop production, he scoffed at everyone around him, saying: “All these guys told me to ‘clean it up.’ Well this is me cleaning it the f\*ck up.”<sup>187</sup> Continuing on his rampage to TMZ, Sheen called Lorre a “p\*\*sy punk” and challenged him to fight in an octagon: “If he wins, then he can leave MY show!” Sheen’s antagonizing, no-holds-barred act had created a story that was building in controversy and gaining traction by the minute. This celebrity scandal was fodder for the tabloids: it was packaged as a wildly entertaining story that invited audiences to live vicariously through Sheen’s heroic suspension of convention, or to take pleasure in watching his embarrassing implosion.

Just hours after TMZ posted its story online, CBS Entertainment and Warner Bros. Television released a joint statement announcing their decision to discontinue production of *Two and a Half Men* for the rest of the season “based on the totality of Charlie Sheen’s statements, conduct and condition.”<sup>188</sup> The concise statement insinuated that Sheen was in poor health, but more importantly, it suggested executive concern over the star’s behaviour distracting the program’s core viewership and affecting the economics of producing the show. *Two and a Half Men* had proved to be extremely lucrative both in syndication and in ad dollars. According to *Advertising Age*, a print weekly delivering data on marketing and media, it was CBS’s most expensive program for advertisers: a 30-second spot during the show cost an average of

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<sup>186</sup> “Charlie to ‘Men’ Creator: Let’s Fight in the Octagon!” *TMZ*, February 24, 2011, accessed February 5, 2015, <http://www.TMZ.com/2011/02/24/charlie-sheen-chuck-lorre-two-and-a-half-men-war-show-bahamas-octagon/>.

<sup>187</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>188</sup> “‘Two and a Half Men’ Shut Down After TMZ Story,” *TMZ*, February 25, 2011, accessed February 5, 2015, [http://www.TMZ.com/2011/02/24/charlie-sheen-chuck-lorre-two-and-a-half-men-argument-radio-talk-show-tirade-turd-thomas-jefferson-alcoholics-anonymous//?adid=TMZ\\_Search\\_Results](http://www.TMZ.com/2011/02/24/charlie-sheen-chuck-lorre-two-and-a-half-men-argument-radio-talk-show-tirade-turd-thomas-jefferson-alcoholics-anonymous//?adid=TMZ_Search_Results).

US\$206,722.<sup>189</sup> Sheen had publicly stepped out of line, and while his stand-alone exchange-value was going up, the performance he was propagating did not coincide with the professed integrity of his employers and their business.

Sheen's response to the cancelation of production was detailed in an open letter that he disseminated through TMZ: "Clearly I have defeated this earthworm [Lorre] with my words – imagine what I would have done with my fire breathing fists. I urge all my beautiful and loyal fans who embraced this show for almost a decade to walk with me side-by-side as we march up the steps of justice to right this unconscionable wrong."<sup>190</sup> Sheen was presenting his fans with an open plea to support him. The embattled actor broadcasted his rebellious persona in language that painted his path to "justice" as a movement of epic proportions, increasing both the reach and importance of his undertaking. In contrast to the Moss and Armstrong cases, Sheen was inviting audiences to take part in the controversy. This set the foundation for the scandal to gain traction as it built in intensity, fuelled by the subject's own utterances that spread like wildfire.

The *Daily News* was calling Sheen a "Hollywood wildman" who had spurred "a manic escalation of the insanity" on a "self-destructive joyride."<sup>191</sup> The paper reported that Sheen, armed with a cell phone and an inflated ego, was sending a spew of erratic text messages to celebrity news outlets. Sheen texted People.com to warn his enemies: "This is me warming up. They have awoken a sleeping giant." He called *Fox Sports Radio* to say that he wouldn't go back to *Two and a Half Men* unless "the turds that are currently in place" lose their jobs. TMZ also

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<sup>189</sup> Brian Steinberg, "CBS Halts Production of 'Two and a Half Men,' Citing Charlie Sheen's Behaviour," *Advertising Age*, February 24, 2011, accessed February 5, 2015, <http://adage.com/article/media/cbs-halts-production-a-half-men/149089/>.

<sup>190</sup> "Charlie Sheen -- RAGES in Open Letter about Chuck Lorre," *TMZ*, February 25, 2011, accessed February 5, 2015, <http://www.TMZ.com/2011/02/24/charlie-sheen-open-letter-two-and-a-half-men-chuck-lorre-tirade-turd-production-season-shut-down-crew-cbs-warner-bros/>.

<sup>191</sup> Samuel Goldsmith, "Charlie Sheen: I Can't Return to 'Two and a Half Men' Unless Enemies (Chuck Lorre?) Are Fired," *Daily News*, February 28, 2011, accessed February 11, 2015, <http://www.nydailynews.com/entertainment/tv-movies/charlie-sheen-return-men-enemies-chuck-lorre-fired-article-1.135101>.

picked up the story of Sheen's interview with *Fox*. In an online post the same day, the website quoted Sheen's unleashing on the "knuckleheads" behind *Two and a Half Men*: "Can you imagine going back into the sludge pit with those knuckleheads at this point? Can you imagine? It would go bad quickly."<sup>192</sup> As TMZ accurately noted, it already had.

In his implosive media tour, Sheen was breaking down the traditional divide between celebrities and the press. This barrier, upheld by publicists to separate their clients' personal and professional lives, worked to protect a star's public image and avoid jeopardizing income. For Kate Moss and Lance Armstrong, it was a crucial division. Self-destructiveness was not tolerated because their celebrity profited from clean behaviour and as such, they were required to lead healthy and wholesome lives. For Sheen, however, there was a blurred line between his personal reality and professional image, and it worked for him. His infamous, rebellious lifestyle was both expected and profitable. It had a high entertainment value not just for the tabloids, but also for his industry: his fictional role on *Two and a Half Men* was, in many ways, a reflection of his own life. In the premiere of the eighth season, Sheen's character describes himself as a "well-known rascal": when he doesn't do the wrong thing, people get disappointed.

Sheen understood his audience's expectation for mischief, and he delivered. The celebrity's disregard for conventional barriers, compounded by easy access to digital mobile technology and a mission to get his message across, manifested into a media spectacle. The bizarre situation, ostensibly a psychotic break from reality, only added to audience enjoyment and curiosity. Sheen's self-aggrandizing rants ("I'm tired of pretending like I'm not special") hinted that other high-paid stars, if revealed without filters, might echo his feelings of

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<sup>192</sup> "Charlie Sheen – 'Men' Was a 'Toxic Environment,'" *TMZ*, February 25, 2011, accessed February 6, 2015, <http://www.TMZ.com/2011/02/25/charlie-sheen-two-and-a-half-men-chuck-lorre-radio-interview//?adid= TMZ Search Results>.

entitlement.<sup>193</sup> Here was a celebrity unedited, using his own phone and unchecked words to give journalists and audiences unfettered entry into his mind. At this point, Sheen's long-time publicist, Stan Rosenfield, could not control his client. Rosenfield had stood by the scandal-ridden actor over the years as he went in and out of jail, rehab, the hospital and the tabloids, but the PR rep was no longer able to work effectively, and resigned. The *Daily News's* David Hinckley, who reported on this development, labeled Rosenfield as "the out-of-control actor's long-suffering mouthpiece."<sup>194</sup> Sheen's retort to the news: "He's not allowed to quit, so you're fired."<sup>195</sup>

In an article entitled "Just Call Him Snarly Sheen," the *New York Post's* Don Kaplan revealed more of the Hollywood bad boy's bitterness towards those threatening the well-being of his wallet. Sheen told the *Post*: "I have a certain lifestyle that my family and I are accustomed to, and these nabobs are getting in the way of that. I was counting on that dough."<sup>196</sup> According to Kaplan, sources close to the out-of-work actor hinted that he planned to rectify the situation by hitting Chuck Lorre, CBS, and Warner Bros. with a US\$320 million lawsuit: \$48 million for breach of contract (the cancellation of twenty-four episodes), and the rest – \$272 million – for "mental anguish." Throughout his eloquent if hyperbolic rants, Sheen maintained that he was off drugs; to prove that he was clean, he had invited reporters to film him providing blood and urine samples. The tests showed that he passed, but they only accounted for Sheen's past seventy-two

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<sup>193</sup> Melissa Maerz and Scott Collins, "Charlie Sheen: 'I'm Tired of Pretending Like I'm Not Special,'" *Los Angeles Times*, March 1, 2011, accessed February 6, 2015, <http://articles.latimes.com/2011/mar/01/entertainment/la-et-charlie-sheen-20110301>.

<sup>194</sup> David Hinckley, "Charlie Sheen, Stan Rosenfield Cut Ties: Long-Time Publicist Quits Amid Actor's Public Meltdown," *Daily News*, February 28, 2011, accessed February 6, 2015, <http://www.nydailynews.com/entertainment/tv-movies/charlie-sheen-stan-rosenfield-cut-ties-long-time-publicist-quits-actor-public-meltdown-article-1.139223>.

<sup>195</sup> Ibid.

<sup>196</sup> Don Kaplan, "Just Call Him Snarly Sheen," *New York Post*, March 1, 2011, accessed February 7, 2015, <http://nypost.com/2011/03/01/just-call-him-snarly-sheen/>.

hours. Intervention specialists remarked that this simply suggested that addiction was unlikely to be the actor's only problem.

Major news outlets, lead by ABC and NBC, were giving Sheen plenty of airtime to fulminate and garner them ratings with his overtly unusual behaviour. As critics at the *LA Times* noted, the networks were abetting the meltdown of the highest-paid star of the highest-rated comedy at rival CBS.<sup>197</sup> On *The Today Show*, NBC's Jeff Rossen likened Sheen's behaviour to a "dangerous spiral," while still providing the celebrity with a platform on which to propagate his destructive impulses. ABC's *Good Morning America* feature on the troubled star included an interview with one-time addict and intervention specialist Kristina Wandzilak, who implied that Sheen's negative drug tests did not speak to his overall well-being, and called for him to seek psychiatric help. Experts acknowledged that although it was impossible to diagnose Sheen from a distance, his manic demeanour showed signs of drug withdrawal and bipolar mania.<sup>198</sup> Wandzilak contended: "This is more than a sensational story; this is a tragedy that is unfolding on a national stage."<sup>199</sup>

Bafflement was growing into unease, and Wandzilak's words spoke to a clear issue at hand. Charlie Sheen was exhibiting unsettling behaviour that pointed toward the need for serious medical attention, yet his delusions of power and uniqueness were being fed by journalists giving him an outlet in exchange for ratings. Analogous to the Lance Armstrong case, the news media was packaging and distributing the celebrity's exchange-value for profit. Journalists had actively

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<sup>197</sup> James Rainey, "News Outlets Prove Able Enablers of Sheen's Meltdown," *Los Angeles Times*, March 2, 2011, accessed February 7, 2015, <http://articles.latimes.com/2011/mar/02/entertainment/la-et-onthemedial-20110302>.

<sup>198</sup> Maia Szalavitz, "Addict or Bipolar? Examining the 'Passion' of Charlie Sheen," *TIME*, March 1, 2011, accessed February 7, 2015, <http://healthland.time.com/2011/03/01/addiction-or-bipolar-examining-the-passion-of-charlie-sheen/>.

<sup>199</sup> Kristina Wandzilak, interviewed by George Stephanopoulos, "Good Morning America – Kristina Wandzilak on Addiction and Charlie Sheen (March 11<sup>th</sup>)," YouTube video, 6:42, posted by Ryan Wilke, March 21, 2011, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eCXAZN8TRSM>.

maintained Armstrong's superman persona for audiences seeking hope, as they were actively publicizing Sheen's madman persona for those seeking entertainment. Both cases saw the news-consuming public as willingly participants in the scandal narratives, involving themselves either by writing online comments or watching television interviews.

In an article published on March 1, 2011, the *Daily News* described Sheen as "careening" through his media tour.<sup>200</sup> In addition to interviews with ABC and NBC, Sheen appeared on CNN's *Piers Morgan Show*, where he gave an open message to his ex-publicist Stan Rosenfield: "Stop your silliness. Just get over here and enjoy the ride. We're winning." To Morgan, Sheen explained how he was skilfully making headlines: "It's been a tsunami of media and I've been riding it on a mercury surfboard."<sup>201</sup> The CNN host's pandering to Sheen, telling the actor that he sounded "alarmingly normal," raised heavy criticism in reader comments on the show's blog; many questioned Morgan's own credibility as an interviewer and deplored him for exploiting a person in need of help. Piers Morgan's hour-long "exploitation" brought the show an average of 1.35 million viewers – the highest audience since Morgan interviewed Oprah Winfrey in his debut. As the *New York Times* pointed out, 561,000 of those watching Sheen were in the 25- to 54-year-old age range – its highest ratings up to that point in a demographic coveted by advertisers and cable news executives.<sup>202</sup>

Off-camera, the actor's personal life was equally imploding. On March 2, TMZ broke the news that a judge had temporarily stripped Sheen of custody of his twin sons after his ex-wife,

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<sup>200</sup> David Hinckley, "Charlie Sheen Makes Media Rounds, Stopping at 'Piers Morgan,' 'Good Morning America,' 'Today,'" *Daily News*, March 1, 2011, accessed February 7, 2015, <http://www.nydailynews.com/entertainment/gossip/charlie-sheen-media-rounds-stopping-piers-morgan-good-morning-america-today-article-1.122556>.

<sup>201</sup> Charlie Sheen, interviewed by Piers Morgan, "Charlie Sheen on Piers Morgan Tonight (2011 02 28)," YouTube Video, 47:59, posted by Rafa Der, December 8, 2011, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9BuQp-2bjJU>.

<sup>202</sup> Brian Stelter, "Sheen Brings Piers Morgan Best Ratings Yet," *New York Times*, March 1, 2011, accessed February 9, 2015, [http://mediadecoder.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/03/01/sheen-brings-piers-morgan-best-ratings-yet/?\\_r=0](http://mediadecoder.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/03/01/sheen-brings-piers-morgan-best-ratings-yet/?_r=0).

Brooke Mueller, an actress with substance abuse issues of her own, submitted a declaration in support of her request for a restraining order. In it, she claimed that Sheen had told her, “I will cut your head off, put it in a box and send it to your mom.”<sup>203</sup> The incendiary words were not unlike Sheen’s flagrant public threats to his bosses. TMZ’s article quoted Sheen’s response to the allegations: “That’s a good one, I guess. If you spend enough time around me you can formulate things and make it sound like it could have come from my mouth, but you can do that watching reruns.” Whether or not the allegations were true, they recalled Sheen’s sordid history of domestic violence.

Later in the day, TMZ revealed more scandalous details of Mueller’s declaration. The celebrity gossip and entertainment news website posted an article showing a screenshot of a scathing anti-Semitic text that Sheen had purportedly sent to Mueller. It read: “I must execute mark b [Mark Burg, Sheen’s manager] like the stoopid [*sic*] jew pig that he is.”<sup>204</sup> Sheen denied that the message had been sent from him, and told TMZ that he had previously caught Mueller sending texts from his phone to cause discord. (TMZ also spoke with Burg, who echoed a belief of Sheen’s innocence and listed the actor’s three attorneys and his two children as Jewish to disprove bigotry.) Sheen’s ex-wife’s allegations and his children being taken away by the police only added to the train wreck.

The non-stop media coverage of Sheen’s public meltdown was catering to clear public interest in the story. In an editorial published by the *Daily News* on March 2, Lindsay Goldwert explored why audiences were so engaged with Sheen’s mishaps. *Schadenfreude*, the pleasure

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<sup>203</sup> “Sheen’s Kids Removed after Alleged Death Threat,” *TMZ*, March 2, 2011, accessed February 9, 2015, <http://www.TMZ.com/2011/03/01/brooke-mueller-charlie-sheen-child-custody-twins-bob-max-death-threats-divorce-temporary-restraining-order/>.

<sup>204</sup> “Brooke Claims Charlie Sheen Sent Anti-Semitic Text,” *TMZ*, March 2, 2011, accessed February 9, 2015, <http://www.TMZ.com/2011/02/28/charlie-sheen-kids-taken-away-custody-brooke-mueller-nanny-restraining-order-mark-berg-anti-semitic/>.

derived from another's misfortune, was a key factor; public enjoyment of Sheen's unstable behaviour was likely at the expense of his health. But there was a more specific reaction that described Sheen's case. The *Daily News* quoted Colin Leach, a professor of psychology at the University of Connecticut and author of *The Social Life of Emotions*, who suggested another German word to describe what audiences felt for Sheen: *genugtuung*, the pleasure derived from seeing justice done. The enjoyment in *genugtuung*, Leach explained, derives more from the deserving of the misfortune – a poetic justice. In other words, a celebrity's fall from grace is enjoyed precisely because they had it coming. The “crack-smoking, prostitute-frequenting Mr. Sheen” had made his own mess.<sup>205</sup>

Sheen's manic rants were loaded with bizarre phrases that became motivational fodder for the news-consuming public; these buzzwords invaded pop culture and gave his scandal even more traction. An article in the *New York Post* delved into Sheen's “wide-ranging philosophical meandering” and observed that his multitude of interviews were providing enough material “to keep a motivational poster factory busy.”<sup>206</sup> In addition to his main buzzword (“winning”), Sheen introduced: “Can't is the cancer of happen”; “Dying is for amateurs”; and “My success rate is 100 percent. Do the math.” When asked in an interview with ABC's Andrea Canning if he was bipolar, Sheen declared: “I'm bi-winning. I win here and I win there.”<sup>207</sup> Clearly, Sheen was winning the spotlight, and the unprecedented attention on him added value to his channel and his brand. The out-of-work actor was proving the power of his pull and intent on reaping its rewards.

No longer TV's highest-paid sitcom star, Sheen was forced to find alternative sources of income that would support his lifestyle. He opened a Twitter account, telling TMZ that the

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<sup>205</sup> Barnes, Carter, and Cieply, “Sheen Is a TV Star.”

<sup>206</sup> “Charlie Sheen's Rants Become Motivational Fodder,” *New York Post*, March 3, 2011, accessed February 13, 2015, <http://nypost.com/2011/03/03/charlie-sheens-rants-become-motivational-fodder/>.

<sup>207</sup> Melissa Maerz, “The Charlie Sheen Dictionary.”

primary motivation behind his rants was now to score money through advertising; the micro-blogging website, according to Sheen, was a “cash cow.”<sup>208</sup> Sheen reportedly made a deal with Ad.ly, a social media talent agency known for connecting brands and celebrities, to endorse products on Twitter. Brands were eager to piggyback on the established reputation of alluring celebrity figures like Sheen, who were now bypassing the traditional media to connect more directly with their audiences.

Sheen’s Twitter endeavour broke a Guinness World record: he was the fastest person to attract one million followers, achieving this in just over twenty-four hours. According to the *Post*, he amassed sixty thousand fans in minutes, before he even put out his first tweet.<sup>209</sup> His Twitter biography included the description “unemployed winner.” While his life was a train wreck, the whole world was watching, and the seemingly troubled celebrity was reaping money from advertisers eager to cash in on the attention.

With the help of journalists and audiences, Sheen had obtained a ubiquitous presence in the news media circuit. He was on a public quest to “right this unconscionable wrong”: paying his cast and crew – and himself – for the eight unproduced episodes that the network had cancelled. In the process, Sheen gathered followers by catering to those who found pleasure in his persona; fans stayed loyal to the actor who consistently made them laugh. In an article entitled “It’s Charlie Sheen Overdose but We Just Can’t Take Our Eyes Off This Car Wreck,” the *Daily News*’s Joanna Molloy compared Sheen’s nonsensical rants to “projectile verbiage”

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<sup>208</sup> “Charlie Sheen: I Twitter for Cash!” *TMZ*, March 3, 2011, accessed February 13, 2015, <http://www.TMZ.com/2011/03/03/charlie-sheen-twitter-money-advertising-rants-sober-cash-cow-million-followers/>.

<sup>209</sup> “Charlie Sheen’s Rants Become Motivational Fodder.”

that people could not stop listening to.<sup>210</sup> The fascination with Sheen's performance art, Molloy suggested, stemmed from society's misguided love for outlaws, and Sheen made no effort to hide his inclination towards rebelling against societal norms.

Sheen's manic behaviour increased the story's thrill for audiences. He was an actor by profession, and knew how to fill a role. With the way things were progressing, it looked like the troubled star was headed to a mental institution, prison, or the morgue. Not only was his own fate on the line, but also that of CBS's hit show *Two and a Half Men* – a proven crowd-pleaser. The public's interest in Sheen launched *Sirius XM*'s "Tiger Blood Radio," a round-the-clock radio channel devoted solely to updates on the Charlie Sheen controversy. In an article reporting on this development, the *New York Post* cited a statement from the U.S. satellite radio company that explained how the show would "take listeners behind the headlines, exploring the media frenzy / media reaction, as well as the medical, psychological, psychiatric and pop culture and celebrity angles."<sup>211</sup> Aiming to capitalize on the mania surrounding Sheen, the radio project was an unabashed ratings booster for the channel.

Audience demand for Sheen had noticeably spiked, and the actor's popularity was making his "winning" catchphrases bankable. Online retailers of user-customized products were seeing an influx of Sheen-related merchandise: his buzzwords were being put on T-shirts, coffee mugs, bumper stickers, and more. On March 5, 2011, the *New York Post* reported that CafePress, a leading retailer in the customizable products industry, featured over seventeen thousand Sheen

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<sup>210</sup> "It's Charlie Sheen Overdose but We Just Can't Take Our Eyes Off This Car Wreck," *Daily News*, March 3, 2011, accessed February 15, 2015, <http://www.nydailynews.com/entertainment/gossip/charlie-sheen-overdose-eyes-car-wreck-article-1.116864>.

<sup>211</sup> "Charlie Sheen 'Tiger Blood Radio' Channel to Launch on SiriusXM," *New York Post*, March 4, 2011, accessed February 17, 2015, <http://nypost.com/2011/03/04/charlie-sheen-tiger-blood-radio-channel-to-launch-on-siriusxm/>.

products on its website, all being sold from US\$4 to \$25.<sup>212</sup> In the *Post*'s article, the Director of Public Relations and Brand Marketing at CafePress Inc., Marc Cowlin, explained that it was Charlie Sheen's newsworthiness that made the products attractive; four weeks prior, there had been "little to no interest" in Sheen-related merchandise. Sheen's manic rants had infused his bad-boy image with enough appeal to warrant widespread reporting in the media, and that appeal was being leveraged, under license, into celebrity consumables.

Sheen made use of the Internet as a tool to keep his audience watching. Continuing to expand his platforms for communicating directly with his fans, he launched a webcast series called *Sheen's Korner* (the tagline: "You're either in Sheen's Korner or you're with the trolls"). It was broadcast on March 5 on Ustream, a live video-streaming website that offered no possibility of editing or retakes. This real-time forum and absence of traditional media gatekeepers (such as editors, producers, or interviewers) made Sheen's rapid-fire rants all the more unpredictable and uncensored. The debut drew heaps of online scorn – viewers called it boring, pointless, a disaster, and a joke – but it still garnered impressive ratings.<sup>213</sup> According to Ustream, the first *Sheen's Korner* broadcast attracted more than 333,000 unique viewers, netting over 1.2 million recorded and live views, about one-tenth of the audience of Sheen's former CBS show, *Two and a Half Men*.<sup>214</sup> Through a facility with social media, the actor used his own name and reputation to speak directly with his fans and those following his meltdown. In a shrewd way, Sheen took charge of his own persona, bypassing both the news media's desire to control the story and the network's plan to steer events.

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<sup>212</sup> "Companies Cash In on Charlie Sheen's 'Winning' Comments," *New York Post*, March 5, 2011, accessed February 11, 2015, <http://nypost.com/2011/03/05/companies-cash-in-on-charlie-sheens-winning-comments/>.

<sup>213</sup> Rich Schapiro, "Charlie Sheen Webcast: 'Sheen's Korner' Was 'Pointless' and 'Sad,' Fans Say," *Daily News*, March 6, 2011, accessed February 19, 2015, <http://www.nydailynews.com/entertainment/gossip/charlie-sheen-webcast-sheen-korner-pointless-sad-fans-article-1.117566>.

<sup>214</sup> Joyce Eng, "Charlie Sheen Debuts *Sheen's Korner* and a 'Winning' Tattoo," *TV Guide*, March 5, 2011, accessed February 21, 2015, <http://www.tvguide.com/news/charlie-sheen-korner-1030394/>.

The actor's other media ventures were concurrently "winning." Four days after joining Twitter, Sheen had reached a staggering two million followers. In response to the news, he tweeted the following: "We gobbled the soft target that was 2.0 mil like a bag of troll-house zombie chow."<sup>215</sup> Sheen's leveraged audience attracted the attention of American businessman and investor Mark Cuban, who approached the star to discuss developing programming for his cable network HDNet. Undeterred by the pillorying of *Sheen's Korner*, Cuban expressed amusement: "Everybody wants to critique a Web show that got put together in a few hours. That's not the point... The thing I like the most about Charlie is that he just loves to mess with the media. You guys fall hook, line and sinker."<sup>216</sup>

Sheen was beating the scandal sheets at their own game. His bizarre rants and self-promotion kept his name in the news and amassed him a following wildly entertained, if horrified, by his behaviour. In a *New York Post* article entitled "Rating Ma-Sheen," a senior television editor at *Adweek Media*, an online magazine that covers media news with a focus on branding and advertising, commented on the encompassing power of Charlie Sheen's meltdown: "He's a train wreck, and people love that... He's getting himself in deeper and deeper and he never shuts up... This is what makes headlines."<sup>217</sup> Sheen's propagation of bizarre and provocative buzzwords over television, radio, and social media pointed toward an acute awareness of a world where the headline was the message.

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<sup>215</sup> Nancy Dillon, "Charlie Sheen Makes Another Disastrous Ustream Appearance with Expletive-Laden 'Sheen's-Korner' Show," *Daily News*, March 7, 2011, accessed February 21, 2015, <http://www.nydailynews.com/entertainment/gossip/charlie-sheen-disastrous-ustream-appearance-expletive-laden-sheen-korner-show-article-1.122894>.

<sup>216</sup> Tim MacMahon, "Mark Cuban, Charlie Sheen in Talks," *ESPN*, March 7, 2011, accessed February 28, 2015, <http://sports.espn.go.com/dallas/nba/news/story?id=6188052>.

<sup>217</sup> Michael Starr, "Rating Ma-Sheen," *New York Post*, March 8, 2011, accessed February 23, 2015, <http://nypost.com/2011/03/08/rating-ma-sheen/>.

The actor's weeks of incendiary outbursts took their toll on his professional reputation. On March 7, 2011, the legal team at Warner Bros. sent a letter to the actor's lawyer announcing that the studio had terminated Charlie Sheen from *Two and a Half Men* for committing a "felony offense involving moral turpitude."<sup>218</sup> The letter, obtained by TMZ from sources close to the actor, included eleven pages of reasoning and a ten-page list of media coverage surrounding Sheen's public tirades. At the outset, Warner Bros. stated what they termed "the obvious":

Your client has been engaged in dangerously self-destructive conduct and appears to be very ill. For months before the suspension of production, Mr. Sheen's erratic behavior escalated while his condition deteriorated. His declining condition undermined the production in numerous and significant ways. Now, the entire world knows Mr. Sheen's condition from his alarming outbursts over just the last few weeks.<sup>219</sup>

It was clear that the show's executives were not amused by Sheen's presence in the news and the effects of his personal transgressions. The studio's letter described Sheen's offenses in detail, including his drug binges, trashing of hotel rooms, on-set failures from drug fatigue, and diatribes against *Two and a Half Men* creator Chuck Lorre. Executives characterized Sheen's meltdown as a "public spectacle" of "self-inflicted disintegration," maintaining that they "would not, could not, and should not attempt to continue 'business as usual' while Mr. Sheen destroys himself as the world watches."

On March 8, the *New York Post* reported that Sheen reacted to his firing with his "typical blabbering bravado," proceeding to insult the studio and even the clothes he had to wear on the sitcom: "They continue to be in breach, like so many whales. It is a big day of gladness at the Sober Valley Lodge because now I can take all of their bazillions... and I never have to put on

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<sup>218</sup> "Here's Why You're Fired," *TMZ*, March 7, 2011, accessed February 23, 2015, <http://www.TMZ.com/2011/03/07/charlie-sheen-warner-bros-two-and-a-half-men-terminated-fired-contract-letter-lawsuit-cocaine-drugs-moral-turpitude-felony/>.

<sup>219</sup> *Ibid.*

those silly shirts for as long as this warlock exists in the terrestrial dimension.”<sup>220</sup> Sheen’s outrageous antics continued to make headlines. A *Post* article published the same day recapped yet another online video rant that Sheen had posted on Ustream, featuring him looking gaunt, smoking cigarettes, and chugging a drink that he called “a secret elixir,” something that he wouldn’t reveal “unless they pay me.”<sup>221</sup>

Other sources of revenue were materializing. Sheen’s first paid Twitter sponsorship through Ad.ly connected him with the start-up company Internships.com. His tweet for the company read, “I’m looking to hire a #winning INTERN with #TigerBlood,” and linked to an application on the company’s website. Ad.ly did not disclose how much the start-up had paid for the endorsement, which was ostensibly more a publicity stunt than a legitimate job offer, but the company revealed that it was the most expensive tweet in its history.<sup>222</sup> (In an episode of Sheen’s Ustream web series, it was suggested that the Ad.ly deal was worth at least six figures.)<sup>223</sup> TechCrunch, a news website focusing on information technology companies, reported that according to Internship.com’s internal web analytics system, its site had attracted 1,035,021 unique visitors from Sheen’s plug, including the subsequent shares and media attention; in the campaign’s run (between March 7 and 11), Sheen’s tweet received over 475,375 clicks, and over

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<sup>220</sup> Don Kaplan, “Fed-Up Bosses Boot Sheen,” *New York Post*, March 8, 2011, accessed February 25, 2015, <http://nypost.com/2011/03/08/fed-up-bosses-boot-sheen/>.

<sup>221</sup> “Unhinged Charlie Sheen Videotapes Crazy Rant Where He Says He Wants to Write a Book,” *New York Post*, March 8, 2011, accessed February 25, 2015, <http://nypost.com/2011/03/08/unhinged-charlie-sheen-videotapes-crazy-rant-where-he-says-he-wants-to-write-a-book/>.

<sup>222</sup> Meena Hartenstein, “Charlie Sheen Draws In over 74,000 Social Media Intern Applicants Within Less than 48 Hours,” *Daily News*, March 10, 2011, accessed February 25, 2015, <http://www.nydailynews.com/entertainment/gossip/charlie-sheen-draws-74-000-social-media-intern-applicants-48-hours-article-1.118268>.

<sup>223</sup> “VIDEO: Charlie Sheen’s Latest Web Show: Dead Man Ranting,” *Radar Online*, March 8, 2011, accessed February 25, 2015, <http://radaronline.com/exclusives/2011/03/charlie-sheens-new-video-dead-man-ranting/>.

82,148 people from 181 countries applied for the position.<sup>224</sup> The start-up had successfully leveraged Sheen's social media power to drive substantial traffic numbers to its site.

Sheen's next venture for earnings took the form of a nation-wide tour. On March 11, the *New York Post* reported that Charlie Sheen was presenting his audience with twenty-one dates for a one-man show, promising to give fans the real story behind his firing from *Two and a Half Men*. The tour, entitled "Charlie Sheen LIVE: My Violent Torpedo of Truth," reeled audiences in with a brazen and shameless description on the Ticketmaster website, written by Sheen: "Will there be surprises? Will there be guests? Will there be mayhem? Will you ask questions? Will you laugh? Will you scream? Will you know the truth? WILL THERE BE MORE?!?!"<sup>225</sup> TMZ reported that Sheen was expecting to gain US\$7 million from the tour, which included between \$250,000-\$275,000 for each show, plus additional income from merchandising and after-parties. The overhead was minimal for the performance act – it was essentially the actor doing comedy in a chair – and as TMZ accurately noted, there were no advertising costs; the shows had sold out from Charlie Sheen's Twitter posts.

The actor's haphazard performance tour was poorly received. Fans heavily booed his first show in Detroit, with many walking out of the theatre and demanding ticket refunds. The celebrity had not attracted the love and admiration he felt entitled to, and the audience was left without the entertainment they had paid for. Yet as Sheen declared onstage in Detroit, after being heckled by a member of the audience, people had willingly paid for a show without knowing what they were getting, just as they had tuned in to watch *Sheen's Korner*. This mutual contempt

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<sup>224</sup> Alexia Tsotsis, "Charlie Sheen Tweets Generated over 1M Uniques for Internships.com," *TechCrunch*, March 14, 2011, accessed February 28, 2015, <http://techcrunch.com/2011/03/14/charlie-sheen-tweets-generated-over-1m-unique-for-internships-com/>.

<sup>225</sup> "Charlie Sheen Announces He Is Taking His Act on Tour," *New York Post*, March 11, 2011, accessed February 28, 2015, <http://nypost.com/2011/03/11/charlie-sheen-announces-he-is-taking-his-act-on-tour/>.

pointed to a dependent relationship between Sheen and his fans. Ironically, as much as audiences showed displeasure at Sheen's unscripted performances, they indulged his behaviour with their own presence.

Six months post-meltdown, Charlie Sheen appeared on NBC's *Today Show* with Matt Lauer to reflect on his public downward spiral. The *Daily News* published excerpts from the interview, where Sheen told Lauer how he got caught up in the moment and "couldn't really put out the fire," explaining: "It was so silly and people took it so seriously and I figured, alright, I'll continue to give the people what they want, you know?"<sup>226</sup> Here was the actor talking, implying that he was filling a role. As much as Sheen avoided the filtering function of the press, he used news outlets to disseminate his scandal and connect with his audiences. Sheen's words provided evidence for the key relationship forming the thesis triangulation: the interdependent link between the audience, the news media, and the celebrity. In this case, the celebrity was ostensibly running the show.

Charlie Sheen's public meltdown, and his own churning of scandalous content to garner attention, revealed a unique example where a celebrity was taking on the role of tabloids selling scandal stories, and capitalizing on the use of inflammatory discourses. Sheen refused to follow the standard post-scandal trajectory that Kate Moss and Lance Armstrong had taken; there was no apology and no traditional rehab, only more of the rebellious Sheen and his winning mischief. The star fed the churning cycle of scandalous news, ultimately showing how the other actors in the articulation not only benefited from the controversy, but were also its necessary enablers.

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<sup>226</sup> Adam Rathe, "Charlie Sheen Dishes on Public Meltdown to Matt Lauer: 'I Couldn't Really Put Out the Fire,'" *Daily News*, September 14, 2011, accessed February 28, 2015, <http://www.nydailynews.com/entertainment/tv-movies/charlie-sheen-dishes-public-meltdown-matt-lauer-couldn-put-fire-article-1.952943>.

In 2012, Sheen returned to television as the star of a new network sitcom called *Anger Management*. Satirically based on Sheen's highly publicized antics, the FX series premiered to record ratings: close to six million viewers tuned in, making it both the most-watched series premiere in the network's history and the most-watched scripted comedy series premiere in cable history.<sup>227</sup> While the high viewership failed to last (the show was cancelled after two seasons), it showed the continued willingness of television executives to milk Sheen's scandal, and the continued curiosity of those following Sheen's manoeuvres. At the end of the day, the sitcom star made sure that everyone profited, except perhaps the network that had fired him. Cleverly steering his own controversy and talents, the scandal-ridden actor kept himself in the spotlight, and with a reputation that was still mainly intact.

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<sup>227</sup> James Hibberd, "Charlie Sheen's 'Anger Management' Ratings: Biggest FX Premiere Ever," *Entertainment Weekly*, June 29, 2012, accessed March 26, 2015, <http://www.ew.com/article/2012/06/29/anger-management-ratings>.

## Chapter 7 – Setting Controversy on a Wider Stage

The phenomenon of celebrity scandal is a compelling area of inquiry that opens the door to wider explorations of journalistic practices in times of controversy. Understanding the processes and patterns in reportage on star indiscretions, what drives these news circuits, and who benefits from the stories, is to understand the complex, inter-dependent relationship between those reporting (journalists), those being reported on (celebrities), and those responding (audiences). The audience-media-celebrity triangulation established in this study provides a clear framework to guide wider investigations of how and why meaning is controlled and circulated around the issue of celebrity and scandal. It holds particular currency within the shifting contours of today's media landscape, where digital technologies facilitating the flow of information have increased the speed of cause and effect, while concurrently decreasing barriers that once acted as filters.

The scandals involving Kate Moss, Lance Armstrong, and Charlie Sheen were mobilized to exemplify how the news media, as business interests, utilize celebrities for their unique ability to attract audiences. Times of transgression conspicuously heighten the power to engage, presenting valuable opportunities to accumulate attention. This formula led the development of each case study. The *Daily Mirror* shamelessly exploited a moment at Moss's expense, using her position in society as leverage to create a sensational scandal that would attract more readers. When Armstrong was ready to confess, Oprah Winfrey strategically manoeuvred an exclusive interview that was intended to raise interest in her own network. News media across the board eagerly capitalized on Sheen, who directed his own persona to gather a lucrative following for himself. In a celebrity scandal currently being played out on the Canadian stage, the *Toronto Star*

was able to profit from sexual assault allegations against former CBC radio host Jian Ghomeshi, gaining the added bonus of being seen to practice investigative journalism in the public good.

Journalists and the organizations that employ them consistently stand to benefit from scandal, but ownership of the story is not guaranteed. The scandalous discourses that surrounded the stars profiled here, controversial by nature, circulated with a clear struggle over meaning – more specifically, over who would “own” the truth. Going beyond the superficial aspects of a “he said, she said” debate, the broad study critically analyzed how language was manipulated in each case to create milieux for advantage. Moss, Armstrong, and Sheen each employed unique tactics in their attempts to control media furor, leading to a variety of case outcomes. Kate Moss, on the defensive, came out on top: her crisis management team waited for the controversy to blow over, using her established reticence and support within the fashion and entertainment industries to turn the bad press around. Lance Armstrong, on the offensive, crashed and burned: he attempted to curate his own narrative of events, but failed to demonstrate the remorse necessary to reposition his tainted persona. Charlie Sheen, endlessly generative, survived and thrived: recognizing the demand for controversy, he turned his personal antics into a professional career, effectively erasing the boundary between his private and professional personas.

This exploration of particular celebrity news stories delineated the discursive struggles that form in controversy. The research outcomes echo the study’s core expectation: that journalists and audiences, locked in a mutually dependent relationship with stars, hold together scandal stories after they erupt, and are even complicit in their creation. Circulating discursive patterns within the samplings provided evidence for this premise: Armstrong’s survival story that had been widely accepted as a reality regardless of its incredulous nature; Moss’s embodiment of a “heroin chic” look to be concurrently desired and denounced; and Sheen’s rebellious antics that

consistently delivered lucrative and entertaining fodder. Yet behind journalists, audiences, and celebrities, there is a vast web of others holding an interest in the star's cultivated public image system, including (but not limited to) public relations representatives, crisis management experts, company executives, and advertisers. Acknowledging the influence of these backstage actors is crucial to forming a thorough analysis of the forces at work in star scandals. This logic informed the main concerns of the study, outlined below in a detailed discussion of each research question.

The first research question asked: What is the importance of a celebrity's exchange-value for themselves, audiences, and the news media? Who is using whom, who benefits, how, and why?

The investigation adapted Andy Warhol's understanding of a star's exchange-value as its aura and unpacked this concept to reveal that the ultimate commodity being sold was attention. A celebrity's ability to garner audience numbers increases in times of controversy. As the case studies demonstrated, the events reported as scandals heightened public engagement: the *Daily Mirror* earned a hundred thousand-reader increase in copy sales from breaking Kate Moss's cocaine scandal; Oprah Winfrey's network earned twenty-eight million viewers worldwide from airing Lance Armstrong's public confession; and not only did networks like CNN and FX gain record ratings from capitalizing on Charlie Sheen's meltdown, but the actor himself amassed two million followers on Twitter just four days after joining the social media website. It bears mentioning that today, Sheen's account boasts more than eleven million followers.

The thesis triangulation provided a clear, dynamic framework to articulate the mutually dependent relationship between the three participating elements in the celebrity news matrix. The audience invests attention to receive pleasurable diversion (most notably, through *schadenfreude*), and to enter into a valuable forum where members feel they are part of a larger

discussion or negotiation about public values and morals. The celebrity mobilizes both audience attention and media dissemination, receiving economic gains from the scandal as long as discourses can be manipulated to advantage. The news media, simultaneously a filter and a conveyor, touch every aspect of the story, keeping it alive and increasing sales. In this manner, regardless of how a scandal develops, journalists benefit.

Each case study revealed clear manipulative processes at work. Moss's case was a classic example of a tabloid scandal, where journalists focus on dramatization to exploit a high-profile figure, and tap into audience desire for *schadenfreude* to sell more papers. The British tabloid that capitalized on a moment at the supermodel's expense had called "Cocaine Kate" out on a question of basic morality, a lie about her drug use, and attempted to turn it into something bigger. Armstrong's case embodied a clear instance of scandal where journalists profit from the accumulation of controversy over time. The news media was able to propagate the cyclist's story by taking advantage of the suspension of disbelief that accompanied his myth, with journalists keeping the narrative alive by positioning the discourses as a push-pull between the celebrity and his detractors. Sheen's case reflected a standard collusion pattern between audiences, media, and celebrities, whereby the entertainer, understanding the entertainment value of his public persona, steers discourses in line with his own motives. The actor's maniacal rants were nearly incomprehensible, but his behaviour suggested a level of conscious driving of events.

The second research question asked how media spotlight on star personas reflects the notion of journalists not only as conveyors of information, but also as producers of culture.

The central premise of the thesis contends that in circulating scandal, journalists strive ultimately not to inform or to educate the public, but rather to gain audiences and sell papers. In catering to public interest, reportage on celebrity indiscretions reflects, selects, and

deflects aspects of reality. Stories about celebrity scandals act as terministic screens by using particular language to create discursive patterns that actively construct the world, shaping morals, identities, and social relations. In their competition for attention, the news media knowingly pump up rhetoric with opinionated commentary and value judgments, often crafted as factual reporting, to keep a scandal story alive and reap its rewards.

The registers that accompanied the Moss, Armstrong, and Sheen scandal stories were strategically deployed to reach wider audiences by going beyond the worlds of fashion, sports, and entertainment. In disseminating Moss's cocaine exposure, journalists positioned the supermodel as a drug addict, spoiled hypocrite, and poor role model, using frames of morality, entitlement, motherhood, and in a wider sense, corruption. With Armstrong's doping controversy, the news media focused on the athlete's egoism and inexcusable lack of morality, framing the story more broadly through a register of betrayal. Reportage on Charlie Sheen's meltdown used registers of entitlement and rebellion to explain his antics, putting forward a story where significant value was placed on entertainment. By tapping into such registers, the news media were able to both drive and entice audiences to frame these events as scandals.

Journalists added to the richness of culture through reportage that often cynically reinforced societal values and standards. This was most evident in the Armstrong case: while it played out as a celebrity scandal, the outcome was the result of what society expects from journalism. The collected suspicions against the cyclist, gathered by journalists over the years as a matter of public record, became a body of evidence that ultimately helped to undermine his myth. Once Armstrong's doping scandal erupted, reporters positioned the subject as the epitome of everything wrong in professional sports: lying, cheating, and abusing drugs to gain advantage – with more recent accounts of the scandal going deeper to reveal that cycling's leading

governing body, the International Cycling Union, was complicit in concealing its star athlete's doping.<sup>228</sup> While the stakes in the Moss and Sheen scandals were conceivably lower, they nevertheless saw reporters condemning the societal ills of drug use (Moss as an addict failing in her responsibility as role model) and power abuse (Sheen as a reckless, out-of-control entertainer taking advantage of the system).

Question three asked: Do journalists reporting on celebrity scandal attempt a balance between exposing scandals and holding celebrities socially accountable for their actions?

This research question was addressed with the view that both the news media and audiences enter into scandal stories through a certain suspension of disbelief. With Moss, this manifested itself in an apparent denial that the model's "heroin chic" appearance had anything to do with drug use in her personal life. With Armstrong, it was an unwavering hope that his miraculous story of survival was the truth. In his case, the news media as a whole could not be trusted to bring down the myth because in the long term, they stood to profit from the accumulation of evidence against the cyclist. Audiences wanted the beautiful lie, not the ugly truth, leading to Armstrong being held accountable only when the evidence against him was too overwhelming to deny. Credible proof against him had been circulating for years, published both by whistleblowers and investigative journalists. However, it was only when an official body – the national anti-doping organization for the United States – published its report that Armstrong's lie was decisively exposed and his ability to intimidate by threatening to sue was curtailed. In Moss's case, journalists exploited a moment at her expense; they held her accountable only to the extent that the cocaine-use exposure could instil across the general public

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<sup>228</sup> Brent Schrottenboer, "Report Details Lance Armstrong's 'Special Relationship,'" *USA Today*, March 9, 2011, accessed March 26, 2015, <http://www.usatoday.com/story/sports/cycling/2015/03/08/lance-armstrong-circ-report-vrijman--tour-de-france/24626605/>.

a potential moral panic to fuel the scandal. In the end, these case studies showed that exposure and being held accountable depended on how much journalists could gain from the resulting controversy.

The fourth research question asked: Do people enjoy seeing celebrities shamed? Why do they, at times, even forgive them?

The notion of *schadenfreude* was a central component of this thesis, mobilized to help explain why celebrity scandals generate such widespread interest. Stars, immersed in a hierarchical and exclusive structure, are inevitably set on a pedestal; scandals that bring them down to a more human level give the news-consuming public a certain feeling of pleasure. If the star was perceived as undeserving of his or her fame, or their transgression was deemed to be in need of retribution, the enjoyment was likely to come from seeing justice being done – essentially, that the celebrity “had it coming.” This was clearly reflected in the case studies: “evidence” of Moss’s purported cocaine use did not square with claims that she did not use drugs; Armstrong’s massive myth of the invincible athlete was destined to crumble; and Sheen’s self-destructive lifestyle was bound to catch up with him.

But where Lance Armstrong was pilloried and ruined, Kate Moss and Charlie Sheen were able to rebound. The offense-apology-forgiveness cycle in the context of these three discursive battlefields demonstrated that forgiveness for the celebrity depended on their projected persona and their ability to successfully steer the scandal’s rhetoric. Armstrong was punished without forgiveness because he shamelessly displayed a clear lack of contrition, one that defined his character; Moss was redeemed in the public eye because of her professional team’s tactful focus that tapped into cultural tendencies to humanize her in motherhood; and Sheen continues to thrive in controversy because audiences are attuned to and entertained by his antics, while he

caters to public expectations of delinquent behaviour. The evolution of these narratives showed that audiences, given agency in their desire for controversy and their capacity for forgiveness, ultimately dictated the evolution of each celebrity scandal story.

The fifth and final research question asked: How do audiences make sense of celebrity scandals in ways that reflect their own identity politics?

The analysis, set within a social constructionist worldview, focused on the social character of media texts. This presupposed that circulating discourses would be negotiated socially through interactions with others and through cultural norms. Thus, within the audience-media-celebrity triangulation, audiences were given significant agency. The research moved past Adorno and Horkheimer's understanding of audiences as passive receivers of text to be mined and swayed at will. Instead, it mobilized a more contemporary view, adapting Stuart Hall's reception theory as a framework to acknowledge the reading public's significant role in understanding and responding to texts. The thesis purposefully chose the Moss, Armstrong, and Sheen cases to show how this agency was heightened by a digital media landscape that fed demand for (and supply of) the "scandal churn." While the sampling was based in media texts written by journalists to present a focused analysis, it also considered online reader comments. This is to suggest that future research would benefit from a more direct engagement with audience response, perhaps through a sampling comprised solely of reader comments to celebrity scandal stories.

The notion of identity politics, in the context of the research, understands celebrities as resources in the social construction of identity. In the contemporary age of media stardom, controversies involving high-profile stars circulate images, discourses, and narratives that

individuals identify with and appropriate in different ways.<sup>229</sup> The case analyses made it clear that in times of scandal, and with celebrity as a whole, audiences engage in subject positions that reflect their own values, beliefs, and ideals. Kate Moss's cocaine exposure, while bringing out complex and unfavourable views of her responsibility as role model and mother, revealed among the British public a more simple cultural appreciation for a stiff upper lip. Lance Armstrong's doping controversy self-reflexively uncovered in audiences that the star athlete had perhaps been a product of his times, where American values of winning at all costs prevailed and tainted norms of honourable conduct. Charlie Sheen's manic meltdown, despite its outrageous nature, reflected a compelling societal value in entertainment, especially when it played to vicarious desires of rebelling against the system.

These research questions illuminated the main concerns of the thesis, providing direction and focus for the investigation. The versatile lines of inquiry intertwined both cultural and political-economic viewpoints to allow for a multi-dimensional approach in understanding what happens and who benefits when celebrities are placed (Moss), get caught (Armstrong) or put themselves (Sheen) in scandals. Upon extensive discursive analysis of each case study, it was made apparent that the adage "all press is good press" needed to be redefined under conditional circumstances. The idea that any media report was beneficial to a celebrity's reputation only rang true if the star was able to reposition the bad publicity to his or her advantage. This was effectively reflected in the dichotomy between the Kate Moss and Lance Armstrong cases: the supermodel succeeded in rebuilding her image and survived her scandal with increased income, while the professional athlete largely failed in regaining support and was buried by a tarnished

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<sup>229</sup> Douglas Kellner, *Media Spectacle* (London: Routledge, 2003), 117.

career. Charlie Sheen, infamously “winning” in bad press, walked out of his meltdown with yet another notch on his belt.

Unlike Moss or Armstrong, Sheen is an actor who knows how to fill a role. This noteworthy difference in Sheen’s mediated persona adds a layer to his case that makes it especially interesting. Was the actor performing a psychotic break with reality, actually experiencing one, or combining both and incorporating the real mania into his role? The key is that the audience will never really know. The controversies involving the model and athlete seemingly exposed a harsh reality, while the actor’s meltdown suggested a level of fabrication in his indiscretions. Furthermore, he was able to take control over his own persona through a facility with social media, bypassing both his former bosses and the news media to display an acute proficiency in connecting directly to his fans and driving events himself. In the end, and in a cunning manner, Sheen made for a scandal where everyone profited, with the likely exception of the network that wronged him. Reputation intact, such as it is, Sheen was last reported in the news for tweeting a rambling, racist diatribe against U.S. President Obama, igniting what the *Daily News* called a “social media firestorm.”<sup>230</sup>

In stark contrast to Charlie Sheen’s deliberate and successful steering of his public persona, Lance Armstrong lost control over his own celebrity. The key to Armstrong’s redemption rests with all those he wronged, and the adverse fallout from his confession makes it clear that the former professional athlete’s lying will not easily be forgiven or forgotten. Still far from rebuilding his tarnished career, Armstrong was most recently reported to be facing a US\$10 million penalty in a perjury battle, believed to be the largest such sanction against an individual

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<sup>230</sup> Ethan Sacks, “Charlie Sheen Calls Obama ‘Barry Satera Kenya’ in Tweet,” *Daily News*, March 19, 2015, accessed March 22, 2015, <http://www.nydailynews.com/entertainment/gossip/sheen-calls-obama-barry-satera-kenya-rambling-tweet-article-1.2155718>.

in American judicial history.<sup>231</sup> In January 2015, two years after his interview with Oprah, Armstrong made headlines when he told *BBC Sports* that if put back in the same situation, he would cheat again. Speaking in his first television interview since his public confession, Armstrong commented on his return to the spotlight, saying: “Selfishly, I would say ‘yeah, we’re getting close to that time,’” and, “Listen, of course I want to be out of timeout, what kid doesn’t?”<sup>232</sup> The registers of egoism and morality continue to dominate his story.

While it remains to be seen how long Armstrong will be sitting on the sidelines, Kate Moss’s bad behaviour “timeout” did not last long: a decade later, she continues to dominate her industry as if she never left. In an interview with *Vanity Fair* in the wake of the cocaine exposure, the British artist Marc Quinn, a friend of the supermodel, accurately predicted that Moss would come out a more culturally complex figure.<sup>233</sup> The most recent report on Moss, from the same British tabloid that broke her scandal, admires with fascination the supermodel in a magazine shoot “as you’ve never seen her before”; the *Daily Mirror* describes Moss as “showing every model everywhere how it’s really done,” boasting an “ageless figure” and “giving the impression she’s come straight out of a painting.”<sup>234</sup> The tabloid clearly makes it known that Moss continues to maintain her ethereal, almost mythical, aura. There are no mentions of drug-induced damage.

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<sup>231</sup> Brent Schrottenboer, “Lance Armstrong Must Pay \$10 Million in Perjury Battle,” *USA Today*, February 16, 2015, accessed March 22, 2015, <http://www.usatoday.com/story/sports/cycling/tourdefrance/2015/02/16/lance-armstrong-sca-promotions-ruling/23496931/>.

<sup>232</sup> Dan Roan and Matt Slater, “Lance Armstrong: I’d Change the Man, Not Decision to Cheat,” *BBC*, January 26, 2015, accessed March 22, 2015, [http://www.bbc.com/sport/0/cycling/30981609?ns\\_mchannel=social&ns\\_campaign=bbc\\_breaking&ns\\_source=twitter&ns\\_linkname=news\\_central](http://www.bbc.com/sport/0/cycling/30981609?ns_mchannel=social&ns_campaign=bbc_breaking&ns_source=twitter&ns_linkname=news_central).

<sup>233</sup> Ward, “The Beautiful and the Damned.”

<sup>234</sup> Rebecca Pocklington, “Kate Moss Strips Topless as She Steps Back in Time for Stunning Magazine Shoot,” *Daily Mirror*, March 18, 2015, accessed March 22, 2015, <http://www.mirror.co.uk/3am/celebrity-news/kate-moss-strips-topless-steps-5359073>.

The controversy surrounding Jian Ghomeshi, the disgraced former CBC radio host, presents an ongoing celebrity scandal in the Canadian context that is important to consider in relation to the thesis findings. Ghomeshi's scandal grabbed Canadian headlines in October 2014 when the CBC announced its decision to fire him after he showed executives what they called "graphic evidence" that he had physically injured a woman.<sup>235</sup> He has now been charged with seven counts of sexual assault and one of overcoming resistance by choking. The initial story has much in common with the Armstrong case: the *Toronto Star*, in collaboration with freelance journalist Jesse Brown of the Canadaland podcast and website, conducted an investigation with unnamed witnesses coming forward to give the initial push. Yet the original story here, with no one on record and no substantial evidence, was essentially gossip. It gained traction only when Ghomeshi, fearing scandal, voluntarily disclosed his own evidence to CBC supervisors, and then panicked when he was fired.

Once public exposure became a real threat, Ghomeshi and his spin team attempted to be out first and fast. But the celebrity's tactics to get ahead of the scandal – including publicly posting his own version of the story on Facebook and suing the CBC for US\$55 million, a campaign described by the *National Post* as "open warfare" – fell short.<sup>236</sup> Women were encouraged by the police to go on record to substantiate the allegations, and they responded, generating a moral panic not only around workplace harassment but also the much wider question of sexual assault in society. The weight of the allegations necessitated a switch from an offensive to a defensive approach. Ghomeshi and his spin team began an effort to rehabilitate his image in light of the accusations of violence against women: they hired a female defense lawyer,

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<sup>235</sup> "Ghomeshi Case Returns to Court Feb. 26," *Toronto Star*, February 4, 2015, accessed March 22, 2015, <http://www.thestar.com/news/crime/2015/02/04/ghomeshi-case-returns-to-court-feb-26.html>.

<sup>236</sup> Joseph Brean and Jake Edmiston, "Jian Ghomeshi Reveals Details of Sex Scandal."

who bought time in court to wait for the frenzy to die down, and had him released into the custody of his mother.

The Ghomeshi case provides a compelling example of how ownership of a scandal story can fall into the hands of the audience, which provides legitimacy to claims and threats of exposure all at once. As in the case of Lance Armstrong, the evidence became too overwhelming to ignore, and more than in the case of Kate Moss, this scandal turned into a real moral panic. Ghomeshi, now defending himself against eight criminal charges in a court of law, ultimately failed in his attempt to salvage his job and reputation. At this writing, as more women come forward to provide disturbing accounts of non-consensual abusive incidents with the former CBC radio star, the inflammatory discussion around sexual assault and workplace harassment continues.

Analogous to the Moss, Armstrong, and Sheen case studies, Ghomeshi's controversy provides evidence for the contention that journalists expose scandal to profit from the attention. Applying the central research question of this study (who benefits?) to Ghomeshi's case shows how the *Toronto Star* was able to own the scandal and reap its rewards, all the while claiming to be practicing investigative journalism in the public good. Shortly after the *Star* released its story on Ghomeshi, revealing that its reporters had been investigating the case for months, the paper's editor-in-chief, Michael Cooke, published an article to address the question of "Why now?" Cooke spoke of Ghomeshi's statement on Facebook and his high public profile in Canada as reasons for making the allegations "now... in the public interest."<sup>237</sup> The newspaper, appearing to be motivated by the desire to bring a sexual predator to justice, positioned itself to capitalize on

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<sup>237</sup> Michael Cooke, "Why the Star Chose to Publish Jian Ghomeshi Allegations," *Toronto Star*, October 26, 2014, accessed March 22, 2015, [http://www.thestar.com/news/gta/2014/10/26/why\\_the\\_star\\_chose\\_to\\_publish\\_jian\\_ghomeshi\\_allegations.html](http://www.thestar.com/news/gta/2014/10/26/why_the_star_chose_to_publish_jian_ghomeshi_allegations.html).

the scandal the moment when attention on the celebrity soared, and without damage to its reputation.

This thesis argues for a critical understanding of the link between journalism studies and celebrity culture, one that does not dismiss audiences as passive or scandals as mindless distraction. The audience-media-celebrity triangulation was constructed as an inter-dependent relationship to put a spotlight on a rhetorical feedback loop that necessitates an understanding of audiences that act with agency. Not simply idle consumers, these reading publics are willing participants in the story-generation machine; their response to controversy provides an appetite for more news about a particular scandal. The study aims to give audiences a level of agency that they have not been directly assigned in the past. It moves beyond Adorno and Horkheimer's seminal work on the culture industry, and contends that popular culture in capitalist societies, in the age of mass communications media, does not just render audiences homogenized and docile. There are, of course, manipulative processes at work, but they do not serve to make people passive; rather, and especially in times of scandal, they aim to make them active.

Journalists initiating the celebrity news circuit rely on responsive audiences to keep controversy alive. Public opinion, which gives these narratives traction, is a defining ingredient in the recipe for scandal, and in a marketplace where news and images are consumed with increasing rapidity, this circuit flows at a heightened pace. The digital mediascape and audience reaction within it embody prevalent components of contemporary scandal stories that are worthy of renewed critical examination. They challenge outmoded and restricted understandings of popular culture narratives, pushing boundaries and eroding barriers to reveal a more fluid environment between those reporting, those being reported on, and those responding. Crucially,

such reports on star indiscretions push us to question the forces at work behind news-making processes, which can be more easily revealed in times of controversy.

## Appendices

### Appendix A.

Media texts on Kate Moss, numbered chronologically, organized by theme and source.

	<i>the Daily Mirror</i>	<i>the Daily Mail</i>	<i>the Guardian</i>	/ 30
<b>drugs</b>	1, 2, 6, 28, 30	7, 13, 14, 15, 16, 18, 19, 21, 22, 24, 25, 26	3, 4, 5, 8, 9, 12, 17, 23, 27, 29	<b>27</b>
<b>contracts / earnings</b>	1, 6, 28	7, 10, 11, 13, 14, 15, 16, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 25, 26	3, 4, 5, 8, 9, 12, 17, 23, 27	<b>26</b>
<b>motherhood</b>	1, 2, 6, 28, 30	7, 10, 11, 13, 14, 16, 21, 22, 26	3, 27	<b>16</b>
<b>silence</b>	2, 28	7, 13, 16, 18, 20, 26	3, 4, 15, 22, 27, 29	<b>14</b>
<b>Pete Doherty</b>	1, 2	7, 16, 21, 24, 26	3, 4, 17, 29	<b>11</b>
<b>role model</b>		15, 18, 19, 20	4, 5, 17, 23	<b>8</b>

### Appendix B.

Media texts on Lance Armstrong, numbered chronologically, organized by theme and source.

	<i>the Daily News</i>	<i>the New York Post</i>	<i>USA Today</i>	/ 30
<b>doping</b>	2, 3, 8, 10, 11, 25	5, 9, 13, 18, 19, 22, 23, 26, 27	1, 4, 6, 7, 12, 14, 15, 16, 17, 20, 21, 24, 28, 29, 30	<b>30</b>
<b>bully / liar / cheater</b>	2, 3, 8, 10, 11, 25	9, 13, 18, 19, 23, 26, 27	4, 6, 7, 12, 14, 15, 16, 17, 20, 21, 24, 28, 29, 30	<b>27</b>
<b>cancer</b>	2, 3, 8, 10, 11, 25	5, 9, 13, 18, 19, 22, 23, 27	4, 6, 12, 14, 15, 16, 17, 20, 21, 24, 29, 30	<b>26</b>
<b>witnesses / evidence</b>	2, 3, 8, 10, 11, 25	5, 9, 13, 18, 19	1, 4, 6, 7, 12, 14, 15, 16, 17, 24, 28, 29, 30	<b>24</b>
<b>legal disputes</b>	2, 3, 8, 11, 25	13, 18	1, 6, 12, 14, 16, 17, 29	<b>14</b>
<b>American story</b>	10, 11, 25	19, 21, 27	6, 12, 14, 15, 16, 20, 21, 30	<b>14</b>

### Appendix C.

Media texts on Charlie Sheen, numbered chronologically, organized by theme and source.

	<i>the Daily News</i>	<i>the New York Post</i>	TMZ	/ 30
<b>manic vocabulary</b>	7, 9, 11, 17, 20, 25, 26, 29, 30	10, 15, 18, 19, 21, 23, 24, 27	3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 12, 13, 28	<b>25</b>
<b>media blitz</b>	7, 9, 11, 12, 14, 17, 20, 25, 26	10, 15, 18, 19, 21, 23, 24, 27	3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 13, 16, 28	<b>25</b>
<b>bad boy image</b>	7, 9, 11, 14, 17, 20, 25, 26, 29	1, 2, 10, 18, 19, 21, 23, 24, 27	3, 4, 5, 12, 13, 22	<b>24</b>
<i>Two and a Half Men</i>	7, 9, 11, 25, 26, 30	1, 2, 10, 18, 19, 21, 23, 24, 27	3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 22, 28	<b>22</b>
<b>bankable star</b>	7, 11, 17, 25, 26, 30	2, 15, 18, 19, 21, 23	28	<b>13</b>

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