

Celebrity journalism: the end is nigh?

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[Sam Delaney](#) is one of our leading celebrity magazine editors and one of the most thoughtful journalists I've heard for a while. In a sparkling, frank [talk](#) he laid out a vision of the genre that was in turns delightful and disturbing. Here's a selection of the Thoughts of Sam.

Celebrity Readers

There are three types of celebrity readers:

- 1. Those snobs who pretend not to read celebrity news but in fact consume it regularly on the sly. Readers of the Guardian, for example, which is full of celebrity news under various guises
- 2. Morons who believe it is all true
- 3. The majority who know that it's largely crap but love it



What Is A Celebrity?

A celebrity is someone who is extraordinary or who does extraordinary things. They might not be the most talented, but they do compelling things. Hollywood stars are not good celebrities because their image management is too controlling. They make bad cover stars. They don't trade their private lives for attention. It's not a new phenomenon. Evelyn Waugh used to write about rich drunks who were well-known for being well-known at cocktail parties in the 30s. What has changed is the explosion of mass media, including online, which means there is now a voracious demand for celebs, so the supply has boomed, too.

What Makes A Good Celebrity Journalist?

Good journalism of all kinds is based around one proposition: make one point and build a compelling narrative around it to lure the audience into paying attention. Nowadays celeb journalists are as likely to befriend celebs on Facebook or talk to them on Twitter. People are desperate for fame so it's not hard to find willing subjects. But you still have to get the right person and the right story. Sales can vary by six figures if you take the wrong line or put the wrong face on the cover.

Where Will It All End?

Celebrity journalism may be on the wane. The celebrity media field is super-competitive and there are signs that the public is suffering from fame fatigue. Readers are becoming desensitised by the blanket coverage. Jordan overkill means there are now diminishing returns. X Factor gave the genre a huge boost. It is the biggest shared experience in British media life, but no one person can guarantee big sales. This means that both the celebrities and the journalists are becoming more desperate – where will it end? 'Not in a good place, probably' says Sam.

Sam Delaney says that Heat is a moderate magazine. It is wicked but not cruel; silly but not stupid. It leaves celeb children alone and attempts, at least, to reduce the harmful impact of stories related to body size. It tends towards a more 'vanilla' taste in celebrity. Cheryl Cole is the nearest they have to an ideal subject.

But he is ambiguous about its social role. On the one hand, celebrity is utterly democratic. It's difficult for anyone to really control the market in this kind of fleeting fame. You can become a celebrity with some well-written tweets or by walking out of a reality TV show, if what you do or represent is interesting enough.

On the other hand it's a weird world when school pupils feel that they can tell their careers advisors that their chosen life path is 'to be famous'. But as Sam says, it's not such an unreal aspiration these days when everyone gets their Warhol 15 minutes.

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