Introduction

[1] From "outing" well known actors to breaking news of celebrity pregnancies or mental breakdowns, the gossip blog has become a key component of contemporary celebrity culture—one that is arguably usurping more traditional gossip forums such as the weekly magazine. Perez Hilton, one of the most popular gossip blogs, draws up to 7 million hits per day (LA Times) and in conjunction with other well known sites such as TMZ, Lainey Gossip, What Would Tyler Durden Do, Dlisted and The Superficial, it exerts a considerable influence on the way that celebrities are mediated in contemporary media culture. Such blogs report the scandalous, glamorous and everyday behaviors of celebrities at such a frenetic pace that traditional celebrity gossip delivery mechanisms are struggling to compete. Furthermore, gossip bloggers have the power to undermine the often carefully crafted image that the entertainment industry works tirelessly to cultivate and maintain. Sean Redmond asserts that "The everywhere of fame has the potential to offer new and liberating interactions and engagements for all those who are "made up" in fame, or for all those who regularly consume its stars, celebrities and personalities." (Redmond, 27) Gossip bloggers are helping to redefine this concept of the "everywhere of fame" whereby the intimate interactions between the blogger and audience can alter the public circulation of a celebrity.

[2] Blogs encourage a cynical awareness of the production of celebrity culture and encourage us to question the mechanisms through which we are positioned as consumers. Yet this questioning has its limits. In order to understand this more fully, it is necessary to examine the cultural function of the gossip blog and its use of the "Bitch" as narrator—especially as this relates to the mediation of performative markers of femininity within a post-feminist context. In particular, I want to ask how a recent shift to more malicious or "Bitchy" discussion of female celebrities, as well as the heightened profile of the female "train-wreck" celebrity, has been propelled by the rising popularity of gossip blogging. Indeed, what is particularly crucial here is how the female celebrity, which arguably represents versions of the "ideal" female body in the public sphere, can be understood within a Western neoliberal emphasis on individualism. Furthermore, although there has been a burgeoning collection of scholarship on both the tabloidization of news (Gamson, Biressi and Nunn), as well as the concept of contemporary celebrity culture (Cashmore, Rojek, Holmes, Turner), little attention has been paid to how gender is configured (and reconfigured) within this climate. It is also clear that gossip bloggers--Perez Hilton in particular—are pertinent examples of how celebrity culture is
no longer considered as "cheap fodder" for the masses. As Jo Littler suggests;

Previously, for professional middle-class taste-makers, engaging with the gossip and tittle-tattle around celebrity culture was positioned as downmarket, flashy, sensationalist and trashy: as 'common'. Now, to know about it is important, even if this is accompanied by a vestigial sense of distance through irony (Littler, 8).

Gossip blogs plug this gap neatly, representing a seemingly "democratic culture" in which audiences interact with celebrity images in multiple and diverse ways.

The development of the gossip blog

[3]

[FIGURE 1 OMITTED]

Blogging has been in existence since the mid 1990s when the concept of the blog evolved from more personal online diaries. Blogs gained widespread mainstream recognition when they became popular during the 2004 US Presidential campaign. Providing a journalistic mechanism to reach a twenty first century technology-dependent audience, blogging offers a means through which to stimulate and disseminate political debate on a global scale. Gossip blogging operates in much the same way: often using derisive and vicious discourse, it provides an opportunity to debate aspects of a celebrity's behavior, lifestyle and appearance, while complicating the cultural, spatial and temporal relationship between celebrity and audience. Celebrities are no longer perceived as primarily or necessarily figures of aspiration, but as characters to judge and deride. Almost all gossip blogs function in analogous ways: images are often posted with a caption or commentary and an invitation to post a response. Of course, stars and celebrities have always proffered images which can be decoded by audiences in both resistant and hegemonic ways (Dyer, 1986). However, today, the gossip blogger becomes both the producer and consumer of the celebrity--offering a route through which to deconstruct the celebrity image, while also contributing to, and even reshaping, its semiotic and cultural connotations. As Tenenbaum suggests:

Blogs have become the online expression of American egalitarianism in relation to those placed on a pedestal by way of their participation in public entertainment. And just as Oscar Wilde and Voltaire lampooned the aristocracy in 19th and 17th century Europe, so too do Michael K, Trent Vanegas, and Perez Hilton sit down each day at their computers and turn their keen eyes to the celebrity aristocracy among us (Tenenbaum).

[4] Celebrity gossip is of course nothing new. Perez Hilton and his contemporaries represent the most recent figures in a long line of celebrity gossips that began functioning during the early days of the Studio System. Louella Parsons is generally regarded as the first gossip columnist, and
Parsons began reporting from Hollywood for William Randolph Hearst in 1925. By the 1950s, her work appeared in numerous Hearst papers and was syndicated in many others across the world. Parsons remained the most powerful columnist until former actress Hedda Hopper entered the industry in the late 1930s. The two women reportedly became fierce rivals, and although many of their stories were actually planted by the Hollywood studios, they created anxiety among many popular stars of the day when it came to the protection of their image. Later developments included Confidential in the 1950s, the first publication dedicated to reporting star scandal and gossip. Unlike Parsons and Hopper, Confidential had a much more removed and antagonistic relationship with the studios—one fostered by the decline of the studio system and the extent to which stars lost the measure of industrial and cultural protection which had previously shielded them from the most ruthless press scrutiny.

[5] Whereas in previous eras, figures such as Hopper and Parsons may have adopted a level of derogatory discussion regarding particular stars, they operated from inside and alongside the Hollywood studio system and generated interest in actors to promote their latest films. Indeed, the gossip mavens of the studio system functioned as distant but caustic commentators on the stars of the day, whereas contemporary bloggers are engaged in a much more intimate relationship with their readers, often gaining information from them and directly participating in online discussion. The speed at which these sites are able to post their content permit minute observations of celebrity behavior. Many sites, including TMZ.com, post video content from the paparazzi, and the immediacy of seeing and hearing a celebrity caught "off guard" offers an arguably more visceral experience than any print material could possibly offer. At the height of Britney Spears' well-publicized breakdown in January 2008, TMZ.com placed videographers with a live feed outside the star's house and at the courtroom, so that the public could literally follow her journey in virtual real time. The New York based Gawker gossip site also exemplifies this cultural and temporal shift in a feature entitled "Celebrity Stalker." Members of the public who spot a celebrity in Manhattan can email the sighting to the editors. The editors then publish the information alongside a map and directions so that a reader can literally follow the movements of a celebrity across the city. Of course, the celebrity gossip market remains dominated by paparazzi images, but gossip blogs increasingly publish "candid" photographs taken by the public. This to some degree circumvents the conventional channels through which celebrity gossip is disseminated, encouraging the audience to become a more intrinsic part of the machinery which produces celebrity culture.

[6] Weekly gossip magazines remain popular in both the UK and the US, and publications such as heat and Now regularly garner large weekly sales figures of around 500,000 (baueradvertising). However, unlike gossip magazines, blogs are beholden to no journalistic standards and rely on unsubstantiated rumors, unsourced stories, unflattering candid photography and acerbic commentary. Gossip bloggers often prefer to remain anonymous and many sites rely on members of the public providing content, which is posted without attribution. Indeed, the outing of bloggers has now become a pastime of the
mainstream media. For example, the press relentlessly pursued information about the origins of the blog Girl with a One Track Mind, and eventually succeeded in revealing the identity of its author, Abby Lee. However, there are some who are keen to overtly display their identity and Hilton is the self-proclaimed "Queen of all Media" (Perezhilton.com). Both Hilton and Lainey Liu of Lainey Gossip occupy an interesting space between the invisible commentator and visible celebrity, while both provide significant examples of the mordacious dissection of female celebrities' looks and style.

Gossip blogging and postfeminism

[7] I situate the celebrity gossip blog phenomenon as an important, but largely unexamined, register for the transmission and reiteration of discourses of contemporary postfeminist media culture—a culture which, as Tasker and Negra assert:

is inherently contradictory, characterized by a double discourse that works to construct feminism as a phenomenon of the past, traces of which can be found (and sometimes even valued) in the present; postfeminism suggests that it is the very success of feminism that produces its irrelevance for contemporary culture (Tasker and Negra, 8).

I position gossip bloggers within this context, one which regularly suggests that feminism in its traditional sense is no longer necessary. Although postfeminism does at times complicate this assertion, as it can celebrate feminist gains in a limited and frequently reductive fashion, it almost always evokes—as Tasker and Negra assert—"the pastness" of feminism, implying that we can only look back at a feminist movement that no longer holds much relevance to a twenty-first century media culture. It appears that this "pastness" has been willfully embraced in popular culture, evidenced in the hyper-sexualization of popular culture from the Girls Gone Wild phenomenon to the E! reality show Girls of The Playboy Mansion (2005-present). Postfeminism is both a complex and loaded term and one that, in a neo-liberal society, has been packaged successfully, suggesting that women must buy into the products of makeover and celebrity culture in order to demonstrate their "empowerment". This reinforces the notion that the principles of second wave feminism are archaic, and it operates to further fuel cultural anxieties surrounding body image, relationships, careers and motherhood. As Paula Black suggests:

The gains made by feminism, such as access to free and safe contraception and a commitment to equality in the workplace, at least in the affluent industrial world, mean that young women have been freed to make choices regarding occupation and sexuality within less rigid restrictions than their mothers. However, this freedom has also been experienced as responsibility and fear of failure. (Black, 153)

[8] That these anxieties may have arisen as a consequence of possessing such freedoms, suggests women must be seen as successful in all areas of life, and particularly in terms of physical appearance. The discourses of
postfeminism actively reinforce these concerns by suggesting that women may be able to have it all, but must also engage in the constant maintenance of the self in order to remain beautiful, employable, marriageable and ultimately happy. In both makeover and celebrity culture any sense of identity stasis is condemned; women are encouraged to look to the body to locate their sense of self and in order to be perceived as a good citizen, they must be involved in a process of what Meredith Jones terms "becoming" (2008). This is a state in which one must continually engage in practices that are seen to improve both the inner and outer self and as Jones argues, this culture suggests that "becoming is more desirable than being" (Jones, 12). A continuous beauty regime and an investment in costly surgical procedures are fervently advocated with no discussion of financial implications. The voracity of the empowerment or "you're worth it" rhetoric has propelled this to the point where women are often considered as "letting themselves go" if they have not continuously participated in rigorous beauty regimes.

Engagement with this prescriptive regime of self-maintenance is mandatory in a postfeminist culture, while the boundaries of this ideal self are positioned as precarious and fluid. Celebrities are also regularly deemed as having "gone too far" in their quest for youth and beauty and as such, are publicly condemned in the gossip blog. Older female celebrities such as Cher, Farah Fawcett and Melanie Griffith are regularly vilified for not "growing old gracefully" and for having too much surgery so that the extensive labor involved in maintaining this "ideal self" is revealed. Conversely, within this context, celebrities are also routinely maligned for not fully participating in this process as their success is seen as reliant on a youthful physical appearance. Being correctly "feminine" is a concept that pervades both makeover and celebrity culture. One of the functions of the gossip blog within this landscape is to reinforce and police such conservative conceptions, while wrapping a deeply derogatory discourse in a cloak of reflexivity and irony which allows the blog to become an "acceptable" and normalized part of celebrity representation. A key feature of this discursive context is that female celebrities are unsurprisingly held to different and more exacting standards than their male counterparts. It seems that the female celebrity must be acquiescent to a culture that is more concerned with her physical representation than her professional accomplishments. Bitch Culture

The seeming pleasure with which vicious celebrity gossip bloggers have been embraced may well suggest that a "Bitch culture" is a key part of the landscape of postfeminism. The term "Bitch" is recurrently used in a variety of contexts within popular culture. It has undergone something of a reclamation in some areas, as demonstrated by its use in relation to best selling books such as "The Bitch in the House" and the diet bible "Skinny Bitch". Here, the term is used in a celebratory way to describe women who are confident, self-assured and focussed. The "Bitch culture" that exists within the gossip blog does not operate to celebrate women who exude such traits, but to continually denigrate them. Bloggers often adopt the traits traditionally associated with the term; they are outspoken, flout codes of courtesy and are fiercely opinionated. As well as reconfiguring the celebrity image in terms of detailed discussion of how female celebrities rigidly conform to, or deviate from, the
prescribed boundaries of femininity, Perez Hilton also attempts to "out" celebrities (and has done so with N-Sync singer Lance Bass and actor Neil Patrick Harris, while regularly hinting at the possible homosexuality of stars such as Will Smith, John Travolta and Tom Cruise). Identifying as a homosexual and founding a media personality on his "queen persona," Hilton clearly embraces a camp sensibility and insists that no celebrity should claim the right to remain "in the closet" when in the public sphere. Perez Hilton's persona as a gay male diva embraces this bitch identity, while endorsing a peculiarly essentialist configuration of gender categorization. In Hilton's cultural space as a gay diva, women must be essentially "female" and those that he perceives as not conforming to these strictures, such as actress Lindsay Lohan's girlfriend Samantha Ronson and wrestler Hulk Hogan's daughter Brooke, are routinely positioned as "other", and labeled with terms such as "manly" or "trannies". (Perezhilton) Here, Perez Hilton couches his condemnation in an ironic and playful context by using humorous discourse in an attempt to mitigate the ferocity of his condemnation.

[FIGURE 2 OMITTED]

[11] In comparison, Perez Hilton promotes burlesque star Dita Von Teese and Hollywood actresses Natalie Portman and Scarlett Johansson, as examples of celebrities who achieve his required state of being "ideally female". Yet Von Teese's image is complicated by her identification with burlesque which parodies feminine identity. In making visible--to some degree--the labor of femininity, Von Teese's image in part resists mainstream notions of feminine beauty. Yet such complicating factors are not acknowledged. Evidently, the key practice of gossip blogging is to police the physiological status, style and appearances of female celebrities--regardless of their association (or otherwise) with more "meritocratic" notions of talent and fame. Perez Hilton has frequently attacked actress Mischa Barton for her seeming lack of style and for her body, which has been photographed displaying evidence of cellulite. Gossip blogger Lainey Liu of Laineygossip also adopts a "Bitch" persona and regularly engages in these discourses to call attention to celebrities' beauty regimes and engagement with consumption practices. An image dissection of US singer and actress Jessica Simpson is presented in malicious detail.

All the signs are there ... Just before John Mayer broke up with Jessica Simpson, she was photographed wearing those infamous high waisted pants, a little bloated from drowning her pre-breakup heartache into much food and booze, incapable of thinking straight, let alone being able to dress herself properly. I feel another episode coming. Maybe not the exact same trousers, but something equally as memorable, equally as atrocious, and hopefully equally as hilarious. Check out Jess in Vegas at the grand opening of the Palms the other night. She looks awful. She looks old. And she knows it too. Because the Jessica Simpson we've seen the last few months has been totally the opposite. When things were right in her relationship, Jess was no tranny. She was light and beautiful with really great hair and so much confidence and now just a shadow of that remains. Note her body language in this black dress. Not
flattering and she can feel it. Even worse, she can't figure out how it make it work anyway despite the poor fit. Jess has lost her mojo and she will also lose her Romo ... which can only mean one thing: Another epic fashion disaster is just around the corner. You can't wait. Don't lie. (Laineygossip.com)

[12] This kind of detailed dissection of a celebrity image is typical of the Bitch narratives at work within gossip blog culture. This discourse also exists as a reminder to all women that, while we may look up to celebrities, we must consume correctly and become obsessive about our own bodies. A pertinent example of such surveillance is the celebrity "baby bump watch" phenomenon, where the slightest evidence of a bloated stomach automatically raises questions about pregnancy (see Negra on the fetishization of celebrity pregnancy). If the celebrity is not pregnant, they are warned that they must re-shape their bodies, and like their celebrity counterparts, "ordinary" women are encouraged to be obsessed with their bodies in terms of pregnancy, and post-pregnancy weight. The contradictions here are obvious: female celebrities are considered strong and independent women and yet they also regularly inscribed as infinitely inadequate. This is arguably a far cry from the pedestal that the famous were afforded only a few decades earlier in the Hollywood studio system. Although the gossip columnist in this era may well have offered negative comment, there remained a sense that stars were valued by audiences both for their looks and their style as much as for the "talent" which made them famous. The qualities of transcendence and ineffability that attached to so many Studio era stars are largely anathema to the contemporary celebrity gossip blog.

Gossip blogging and "train wreck" celebrity

[13] In recent years, there have been a number of well-documented cases of the "downfall" of young female celebrities including; Paris Hilton, Nicole Richie, Britney Spears, Mischa Barton, Lindsay Lohan, Lily Allen, and Amy Winehouse. These women are linked by their highly publicized drug or alcohol addictions or arrests for driving offences, while they are also seen as being connected by their putative narcissism, conspicuous consumption, and bids for sexual affirmation. Deemed innately fascinating, they have become everyday fodder for the majority of gossip blogs, magazines and tabloids in both the US and UK. Perez Hilton's namesake, Paris, is an example of a celebrity whose private self has happily disappeared into its own image, becoming the ultimate example of post-modern identity. Hilton encapsulates the sexist imagery that postfeminism utilizes with its trademark ironic twist, exploiting her sexuality for commercial gain. While the concept of the "bad girl"--particularly in Hollywood--is nothing new, assiduous attention has been paid to this small group of female celebrities whose behavior has been treated with widespread condemnation. The term "train wreck", an American expression adopted by most gossip bloggers, has become a catch-all term for young female celebrities deemed to be "out of control." During 2006 and 2007, a number of these celebrities were photographed seemingly encouraging paparazzi to take pictures of their intimate body parts while
exiting limousines. Perez Hilton and others have regularly posted these images of female celebrities ostensibly exposing themselves (see also Schwartz in this issue). To some degree, this exposure could be read as an espousal of a feminist ideal of freedom of choice: these women opt to be in the public eye and choose to display their bodies in particular ways to the waiting paparazzi, fully aware that these images will appear on such sites, commodified for our consumption. Yet these episodes and images do not suggest freedom. Rather, they evoke a postfeminist trickery that encourages hypersexualization and exploitation in the name of empowerment. As Ariel Levy suggested in her conceptualization of postfeminist hypersexualization:

> Because we have determined that all empowered women must be overtly and publicly sexual, and because the only sign of sexuality we seem to be able to recognize is a direct allusion to red-light entertainment, we have laced the sleazy energy and aesthetic of a topless club or a Penthouse shoot throughout our entire culture. (Levy, 26).

Predictably, the incidents of celebrity flashing created furious debate and discussion in the popular media. Camille Paglia commented angrily on the phenomenon suggesting, "I am completely appalled by what these young women are doing because I think that they are cheapening their own image and obliterating all sexual mystery and glamour, which are at the heart of the star system" (Paglia, cited in 'Us Magazine'). Yet these women have grown up in a culture where second wave feminism is seemingly of little relevance to their lives: they exist within a postfeminist culture in which the relentless focus on individual choice and pleasure has been the pervading societal mood.

[14] A mainstreaming of celebrity hatred has also taken place, and the evolution of the gossip blog--with its use of the Bitch narrator--has certainly propelled this development. Turner suggested in 2004 that invasive, exploitative and vengeful celebrity coverage is niche and targeted at a "minority for whom such coverage may well operate in ways that are difficult to interpret from the outside" (Turner, 122) Yet today, this discourse is far from niche, not least of all because Bitch culture has become firmly embedded within the mainstream paradigms of celebrity mediation. Within this context, few celebrities have received more negative attention than Britney Spears. Her fall from pop stardom and descent into mental health problems and drug addiction has been well documented, not least due to her supposed status as an "unfit mother". Lisa Appignanesi suggests that:

> Then as now, it seems, men can be wild and bad, transgress bounds, enter the revolving doors of what we casually call "rehab", without incurring the stigma and constraints of madness, whereas women, certainly once they have reached the maturity of motherhood, cannot. Being a bad, rebellious girl, in the style of Amy Winehouse or Lily Allen, may just about be permissible, but the socially defined limits of what is considered "sane" quickly narrow with the arrival of babies. (Appignanesi)

Spears's public downfall and perceived failure at motherhood attests to the fact that famous mothers--particularly when they are young are under
unprecedented surveillance by the media. Gossip bloggers promulgate this process by scrutinizing, instructing and passing judgment on celebrity mothers. In particular, the media is seemingly unable to tolerate images of sexualized, and thus "transgressive" mothers. This can also function in reverse: celebrities such as Nicole Richie and Angelina Jolie both of whom possess something of a "wild child" past, are represented as being "redeemed" through motherhood.

[15] The fall of Spears was religiously documented and followed by bloggers, and this narrative may have been the making of many gossip sites. The speed with which Spears provided content through her erratic behavior meant that traditional newspapers and magazines could not keep apace with the raft of stories available and gossip bloggers function to plug this gap. This wrought a pertinent convergence of paparazzi video footage and gossip blogging. This video footage, which is now an intrinsic part of such sites, brings the audience in closer contact with the spectacle of the female body while encouraging a curious mixture of desire and repugnance. TMZ.com regularly uses such footage and has its own crew placed outside key locations such as Robertson Boulevard in Los Angeles, a popular haunt for the famous. In Spears' case, the public were able to witness the downfall of a celebrity in such fast and cerebral terms that it became acceptable to witness hordes of paparazzi following her and for gossip bloggers to post content almost continually. Such is the frenetic nature and voracious appetite for images of young women "out of control". Furthermore, the paparazzi have generated new templates of car-based celebrity scandal in which they use baiting techniques in a desperate attempt to taunt celebrity subjects into a "train-wreck" response, whether in terms of road rage or displays of reckless driving. Most of these encounters were captured on video, are well documented on Hollywood.tv or YouTube and were obviously lucrative for the photographers and agencies involved. Clearly, once a celebrity is considered "out of control", the media lament their slide into the darker side of fame, while capitalizing on the material it offers.

[16] Celebrities featured in the machinery of their profession, at premieres, awards ceremonies, on-set or even in their "ordinary lives," are now considered staid and do not feed the voracious media and public appetite for scandal. The scaling down (in some quarters) of coverage of what we might call "practiced celebrity" has dovetailed with the apparent decline of more meritocratic explanations of fame. Those who are famous for their "well knownness" (Boorstin) have often become a key focus for gossip bloggers given the expectation that they are more likely to make "desperate" (and thus scandalized) bids for fame. However, it is always a more significant event when a celebrity with a more apparently meritocratic persona breaks down in the manner of Spears (Spears, once an unusual example of a smooth transition from child to adult star, was at least seen as a successful singer and dancer, even if the cultural value of pop celebrity remains contested). The coverage of celebrity mental illness, as Harper (Harper) documents, is increasingly gendered. The long-held assumptive link between genius and mental illness is most often associated with men, while famous women with a mental illness are often placed into the category of the melodramatic woman who cannot be controlled (see also Bell in this issue). The zealousness with
which intense negative coverage of Spears' mental illness was relayed via
gossip blogging suggests that the archaic representational template of the
hysterical woman continues to be keenly perpetuated. Gossip bloggers
regularly describe female celebrities in derogatory terms if they are
represented as behaving in perceived "inappropriate ways", but these women
are caught in a paradox. On the one hand, they are encouraged to imitate
plastic female stereotypes of postfeminist sexuality, while on the other, they
are condemned as behaving in morally reprehensible ways. Terms such as
"famewhore", "slut" and 'hasbeen' are used regularly by Hilton to designate
perceived transgressions of behavioral norms and celebrities are essentially
dragged back through the mechanisms that made them. As Salon.com
suggests of Spears: "She (Spears) embodies the disdain in which this culture
holds its young women: the desire to sexualize and spoil them while young,
and to degrade and punish them as they get older. Of course, she also
represents a youthful feminine willingness -stupid or manipulated as it may
be--to conform to the culture's every humiliating expectation of her" (Traister).
As Rebecca Traister suggests, celebrities are caught between this double
helix of meaning which is symptomatic of a contemporary postfeminist popular
culture: female celebrities are encouraged to hyper-sexualize themselves in
order to generate revenue for the organizations surrounding them, yet they
are routinely condemned for growing older (and by implication losing their
sexual value). McRobbie also suggests that a key factor in the dismantling of
feminism is the "normalization of pornography" in which:

There is quietude and complicity in the manners of generationally specific
notions of cool, and more precisely, an uncritical relation to dominant,
commercially produced, sexual representations that actively invoke hostility to
assumed feminist positions from the past in order to endorse a new regime of
sexual meanings based on female consent, equality, participation and
pleasure, free of politics. (McRobbie, 34)

This new regime of sexual meaning which McRobbie describes here is also at
work within the gossip blog. Bloggers are keen to exploit celebrity images in
the name of commercial gain, yet they vilify those who appear to "transgress" sexual boundaries. This expropriation of meaning thus suggests a much more
complex relationship between popular culture and feminist frameworks.
Celebrity culture encourages audiences to criticize celebrity bodies through
the discourse of the gossip blogger, yet this also perpetuates the consensus
that we cannot escape the judgment of our own bodies against the famous.
As Blum suggests "In identifying with the two-dimensional bodies (which is the
invitation) implicit in celebrity culture, we simultaneously experience seeing
and being seen. We are subject and object of the gaze, which is the ultimate
achievement of the narcissistic subject" (Blum, 187).

Conclusion

[17] The Bitch persona that many bloggers have adopted is inextricably
enmeshed within a postfeminist cultural landscape. It functions as a figure of
pseudo-empowerment by seemingly promoting a "shared" attitude toward the
celebrity that is couched in a tone of humorous, ironic discourse. Yet it clearly
vilifies female celebrities who have been afforded all of the freedom that second wave feminism offered, while labeling them "sluts", "has-beens", "fame-whores" and "trainwrecks". Many of the so called "train wreck" celebrities are caught in the constricting hold of celebrity culture, aware that they must remain young, beautiful and sexualized in order to retain visibility. The highly public negotiation of new female freedoms raises complex questions requiring the responsibilities that the gains of second wave feminism have created. The representations of "train wreck" celebrities discussed here are set alongside the more widespread sexualization of culture, or as Ariel Levy has famously termed "raunch culture". Levy suggests that "The proposition that having the most simplistic, plastic stereotypes of female sexuality constantly reiterated throughout our culture somehow proves that we are sexually liberated and personally empowered has been offered it us, and we have accepted it." (Levy, 197) As Levy proposes, the convergence of raunch culture dynamics and the allure of celebrity have particularly worrying consequences for feminism.

[18] Gossip blogging is a mechanism symptomatic of a culture that has no "colossal" stars anymore; all celebrities (especially if female) are there to be deconstructed, their images taken apart piece by piece via the hypercritical Bitch persona which pervades many sites hosted by both male and female bloggers. Indeed, Perez Hilton's childlike use of Photoshop--in which he scrawls snarky comments over the image of the celebrity--seems designed to mitigate against criticism by suggesting a certain innocence--a use of "home-made" technology which usefully undermines the practices of the more carefully constructed (professional) image. The apparent instantaneous nature of the blog clearly elicits a sense of interactivity with the processes of manipulation, and Hilton's use of Photoshop serves to further stress that women are still judged by narrow standards of beauty. Through these mechanisms, audiences become complicit in a postfeminist policing of the boundaries of the celebrity body through identification with the Bitch persona of the blogger. While Rebecca Feasey (Feasey) suggests that the coverage of celebrity style in heat magazine can be a potentially empowering discourse for the female reader, here the ridiculing of female celebrities in gossip blogs arguably creates even more rigid boundaries of prescribed femininity.

[19] Female celebrities have become accustomed to such policing of their bodies via the Bitch character in blogs and magazines. The audience consumes this policing as part of the apparatus of contemporary celebrity culture, while being subject to interpellation as a consumer themselves. Lainey Gossip's description of Paris Hilton as; "Hollywood Ebola--Deadly Ebola Virus devastates those in its path--leaving victims bleeding out from all orifices. Such is the effect of Paris Hilton on Hollywood. Like Ebola, Hollywood Ebola cannot be killed. She lurks in cracks and corners, unleashing her destruction on anyone who gets too close, retreating into the rain forest to regenerate only to come back even uglier, more potent, more vile" (Laineygossip.com) is not atypical, and these discourses are now commonplace within gossip blogging. Female stars and celebrities, whether perceived as traditionally "talented" or not, are no longer held up as models to aspire to unless they rigidly conform to this limited range of representational
tropes. With Bitch rhetoric increasingly dominating everyday commentary regarding female celebrities, the rhetoric of postfeminist hostility and judgment is truly in action. Perhaps the postfeminist Bitch culture that pervades the celebrity landscape allows a validation of competitiveness as audiences revel in the downfall of those who seemingly have it all. In order to fully examine these cultural shifts, more complex conceptions of the gendered hierarchies of fame which structure celebrity gossip are needed. But for now, female celebrities will continue to be dissected for public consumption and audiences will continue to revel in it.

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