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## **Taking the extra out of the extraordinary: Paparazzi photography as an online celebrity news genre**

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### **Abstract**

Paparazzi photography presently constitutes the largest genre of visual celebrity news on the internet along with red carpet photography. With the emergence of digital media, this genre has moved towards the centre of mainstream news and entertainment culture, and the content has undergone a significant transformation. Trademark paparazzi photographs used to be depictions of celebrities deviating from prevailing norms of proper conduct by exhibiting bodily excess and/or transgressing social or moral codes. By contrast, a content analysis conducted for this article shows that snapshots of famous people engaged in insignificant everyday activities hold by far the largest share of today's insatiable digital, globalized and commercialized market for news pictures of celebrities off-duty. Re-examining the well-known theorization of the tension between the ordinary and extraordinary in celebrity culture studies, this article thus investigates the following research question:

How is the ordinary represented in paparazzi photographs as a genre of visual celebrity news in the current, digital media landscape?

### **Keywords**

celebrity culture, the everyday, middle region private-ness, online celebrity news, the ordinary and the extraordinary, paparazzi photography

## Introduction

Since Richard Dyer's seminal work *Stars*, from 1979, the tension between ordinary and extraordinary has comprised an important framework for understanding representations of celebrities. Discussions about the ordinary and the extraordinary have proliferated especially over the past years due to intensified celebrification processes (Couldry, 2004; Driessens, 2012; Gamson, 1994; Rojek, 2001). The advent of reality TV and other entertainment formats have cultivated the mediated transformation of the self, whereby ordinary people turn into celebrities, or 'celetoids', to borrow Chris Rojek's (2001) term, that is, individuals possessing 'no particular talents' (Turner, 2006: 156, see also Turner, 2010) eagerly pursuing a career in the entertainment industry. However, while celetoid culture, as it might be called, has been the subject of thorough scholarly scrutiny, less attention has been devoted to what is today the main outlet in celebrity culture for the visual construction of the extraordinary as ordinary: paparazzi photography. Just as popular media convert the ordinary into the extraordinary, paparazzi photographs of the ordinary, everyday selves of the extraordinary, of celebrities, are sought-after and widely circulated commodities.

Following the dissemination of a range of digital technologies, which enables everybody to produce and distribute images, let us make it clear from the very outset that paparazzi photographs need not be taken by paparazzi or celebrity photographers. They can be, of course; however, this is not the focus of this article. Furthermore, photographs taken by paparazzi photographers need not be taken of celebrities unawares or against their will – even though they may seem so. We use the term in order to point to a particular and recognizable kind of celebrity news photography, which gives an impression of celebrities caught off guard.

This article is based upon a content analysis of a large sample of online celebrity news photography from entertainment news sites, which points to some pronounced tendencies. Overall, paparazzi photography presently constitutes the largest genre of visual celebrity news on the internet,

along with ‘red carpet photography’, as the other main genre is commonly termed. Before the emergence of digital media, paparazzi photographs were confined to a more marginal, though conspicuous position in tabloids and gossip magazines. Today, this genre has moved towards the centre of mainstream news and entertainment culture, and is distributed broadly across media platforms, including gossip and entertainment sites, mainstream news media, fashion magazines, social media, etc.

Regarding paparazzi photography specifically, our study indicates that this genre has undergone a significant transformation concurrent with intensified multimedia consumption. According to the existing literature in the field (e.g. Howe, 2005; Mendelson, 2007; Squiers, 1999, 2010), trademark paparazzi photographs used to depict celebrities exhibiting bodily excess and/or transgressing social or moral codes. Our analysis, by contrast, shows that snapshots of famous people engaged in insignificant everyday activities hold the largest share by far of today’s insatiable digital, globalized and commercialized market for paparazzi photography. In other words, as a visual genre of online celebrity news, paparazzi photography is predominantly characterized by a discourse of ordinariness, firmly rooted in and contributing to celebrity culture’s tension between the ordinary and the extraordinary.

This presents us with an intriguing paradox of a widespread genre of visual celebrity news, which contains limited newsworthiness in terms of conflict and sensation, with inconspicuous framings of celebrities seemingly caught unaware in a moment of privacy and self-absorption while shopping, picking up their children from school, exiting gyms, passing through airports, etc. Accordingly, this article addresses the following research question: How is the ordinary represented in paparazzi photographs as a genre of celebrity news in the current digital media landscape?

To answer this question, the article consists of five sections. We first present the research design and key findings of the content analysis of posted celebrity photographs in 10 major English-language entertainment news sites from June 2011. In the second section, we review the existing

literature in the field and characterize paparazzi photography as an online celebrity news genre. The third section offers a theoretical framework in which we argue for the need to be more precise in the conceptualization of the central notion of ‘ordinariness’ in celebrity culture studies than is the case, for example, in Dyer’s (1989 [1979]) work. Consequently, drawing on Erving Goffman (1990 [1959]) and Joshua Meyrowitz (1985), we suggest the term ‘middle region private-ness’ to encompass paparazzi photography’s particular staging of the ordinary. The fourth section engages analytically with this concept and examines how the ordinary manifests itself in paparazzi photography as a performative ‘private-ness’ and a ‘look of everyday’. Finally, we conclude on the news value of contemporary, online paparazzi photography in view of this construction of ordinariness.

### **Methodology and major findings**

The ambition behind the content analysis was twofold: first, to facilitate a general idea of the main genres of celebrity photography on entertainment news sites and, second, to examine the different ways celebrities are represented on paparazzi photographs. Based on the hypothesis that digital modes of production and distribution have changed the genre profoundly, the analysis focused exclusively on online celebrity photography. In this way, the article differs from the previous literature in the field, which has predominantly centred on celebrity photography in printed tabloids. If print media had been included, the analysis might have disclosed patterns of cross-media distribution and given a broader view of celebrity news photography. For example, Becker suggests that, in printed tabloids, ‘the plain photograph of the person posing at home is probably the most common’ (2008: 89), and Johansson claims that celebrities in British tabloids ‘appear to occupy a world of leisure, with snapshots from parties, premiers, family life and holidays’ (2007: 112). Judging from these qualitative studies, the representation of celebrities in printed tabloids differs significantly from the online celebrity news photographs in our sample.

While traditionally a qualitative field, a small number of celebrity studies have recently opened up to quantitative methods such as Gorin and Dubied's (2011) content analysis of celebrity stories in print media and Marwick and boyd's (2011) quantitative and qualitative analyses of celebrities' use of Twitter. In the present article, we deploy a combination of quantitative and qualitative analyses. Whereas the content analysis provides an overview of the domineering genres of celebrity news photography online and detailed knowledge about the content of paparazzi photography, a supplementary qualitative approach enables us to analyse at more depth how contemporary online paparazzi photography reinterprets the idea of the ordinary.

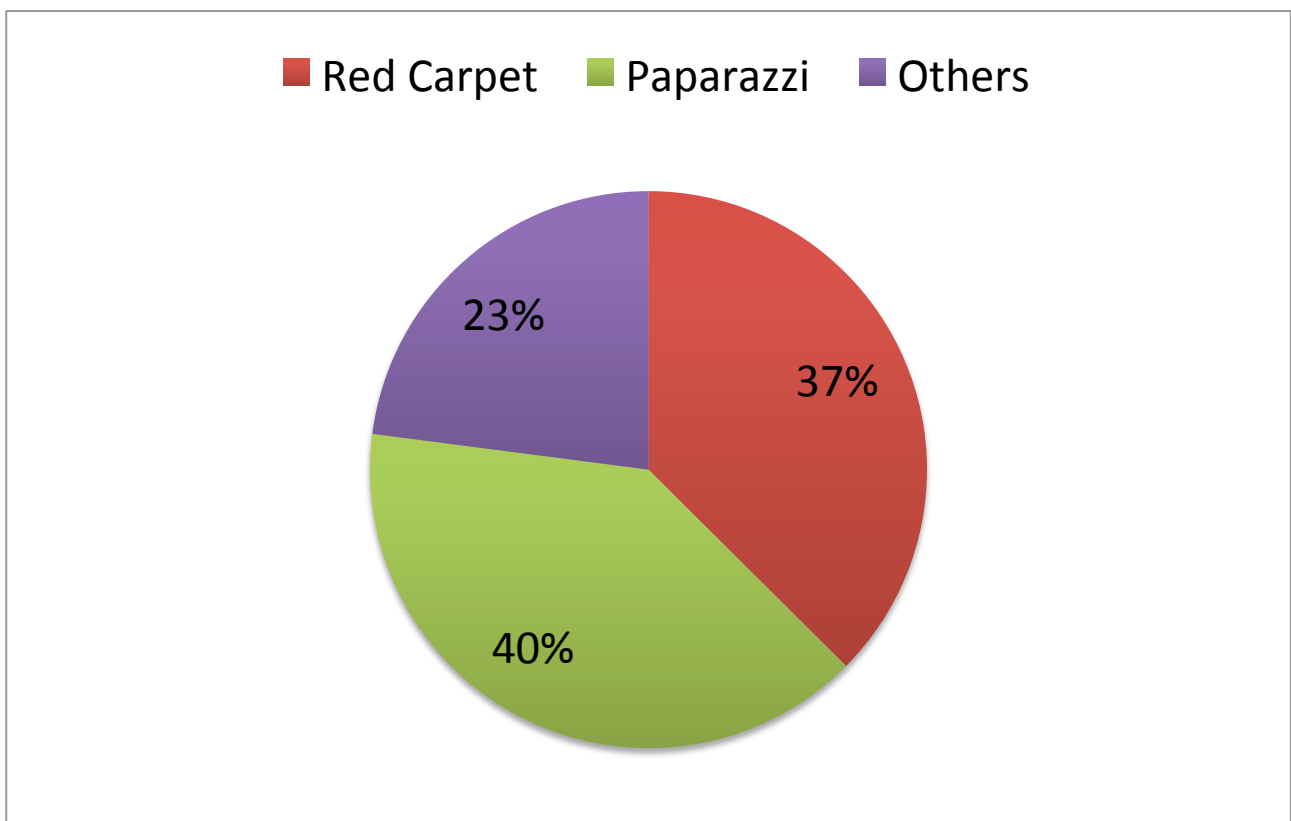
The first step was to single out 10 of the most visited entertainment news sites, from which the material was going to be procured. The list was created on the basis of website traffic information supplied by Google Ad Planner and crosschecked with [www.ebizma.com](http://www.ebizma.com), [www.alexa.com](http://www.alexa.com) and [www.compete.com](http://www.compete.com). Using these tools, the 10 most visited entertainment news sites as of June 2011 were: [omg.yahoo.com](http://omg.yahoo.com), [people.com](http://people.com), [tmz.com](http://tmz.com), [popeate.com](http://popeate.com), [eonline.com](http://eonline.com), [mediatakeout.com](http://mediatakeout.com), [usmagazine.com](http://usmagazine.com), [celebuzz.com](http://celebuzz.com), [starpulse.com](http://starpulse.com) and [gawker.com](http://gawker.com). Search terms for locating celebrity entertainment sites were combinations of 'celebrity', 'news', 'gossip', 'Hollywood', 'stars' and 'entertainment'. In case of differences in numbers, Google Ad Planner's traffic counts were chosen. However, the overall results show the same pattern: 10–15 much visited sites and a large number of sites much less visited, that is, 'a long tail' structure (Anderson, 2006). As for traffic, we counted unique visitors, reach, visits and total visits, but no marked differences showed. No differentiation was made between independent sites and sites belonging to a media conglomerate (e.g. [people.com](http://people.com)).

The sampling was conducted on Tuesdays and Thursday in three successive weeks (7, 9, 14, 16, 21, 23 June 2011), and a total of 4737 photographs were registered. The photographs were collected in the following manner: (1) all photographs on the opening page were counted; (2) at one level deeper, all photographs were counted after clicking on image links on the front page; (3) all

photographs were counted after clicking on news text on the front page. Only photographs, not videos, were counted.

The subsequent coding of the sample took place on three levels to answer the following questions:

- (1) What are most common genres of celebrity news photography?
- (2) What are the most common subgenres of paparazzi photography, 'ordinary' or 'compromising'?
- (3) Which situations and activities are represented on the 'ordinary' paparazzi photographs?



*Figure 1: Total Number of Celebrity News Photography, n=4737. Survey conducted June 2011 (7th, 9th, 14th, 16th, 21st, 23rd) on the following celebrity news sites: omg.yahoo.com, people.com, tmz.com, popeate.com, eonline.com, mediatakeout.com, usmagazine.com, celebbuzz.com, starpulse.com and gawker.com.*

With respect to the first level, two distinctive genres of almost the same size turned out to be the major ones within celebrity news photography (see Figure 1). 'Paparazzi photography' is the

largest with 1876 images (40%); 'Red carpet photography' is nearly the same size, with 1774 images (37%). The remaining 1087 images (23%), consist of diverse photographic material: first, other official photographs, for example press material, photographs from press meetings and magazine covers; second, photographs from informal appearances in talk shows, performances at award shows, etc.; third, a small number of exterior views of celebrities' estates; and fourth, celebrities' auto portraits from Twitter, Facebook and other social networking sites. On a methodological note, dividing the pictures on this overall level appeared rather unequivocal, as the two main genres never overlapped: paparazzi photographs represent celebrities who do not seem to pose, either because they are engaged in mundane doings or because they are caught in compromising situations. Red carpet photography shows celebrities posing in front of cameras, when attending press-covered official events and celebrations like award ceremonies, launches and charity events.

Concerning the second level, that is, the most common subgenres of paparazzi photography, we initially divided the images into two groups: 'ordinary', showing celebrities in everyday situations, and 'compromising', depicting celebrities in situations which appear to be less flattering to their public image. Accordingly, the 'ordinary' is to be comprehended as the everyday, the uneventful, following Roger Silverstone's (1994) understanding of the term as the taken-for-granted, the routine and rhythmically repetitive, which contributes to the ordering of day-to-day life. The 'compromising', on the other hand, is characterized by dramatic and often sensational incidents, which break everyday routines. 'Ordinary' definitely comprises the largest group with 1752 pictures (93%) of celebrities in everyday situations: with their children, passing through airports, on the streets, on the beach, etc. Of the 4737 pictures, only 124 (7%) expose celebrities in 'compromising' situations, mainly being drunk, exhibiting bodily flaws or appearing in a criminal context, for example entering or exiting courthouses.



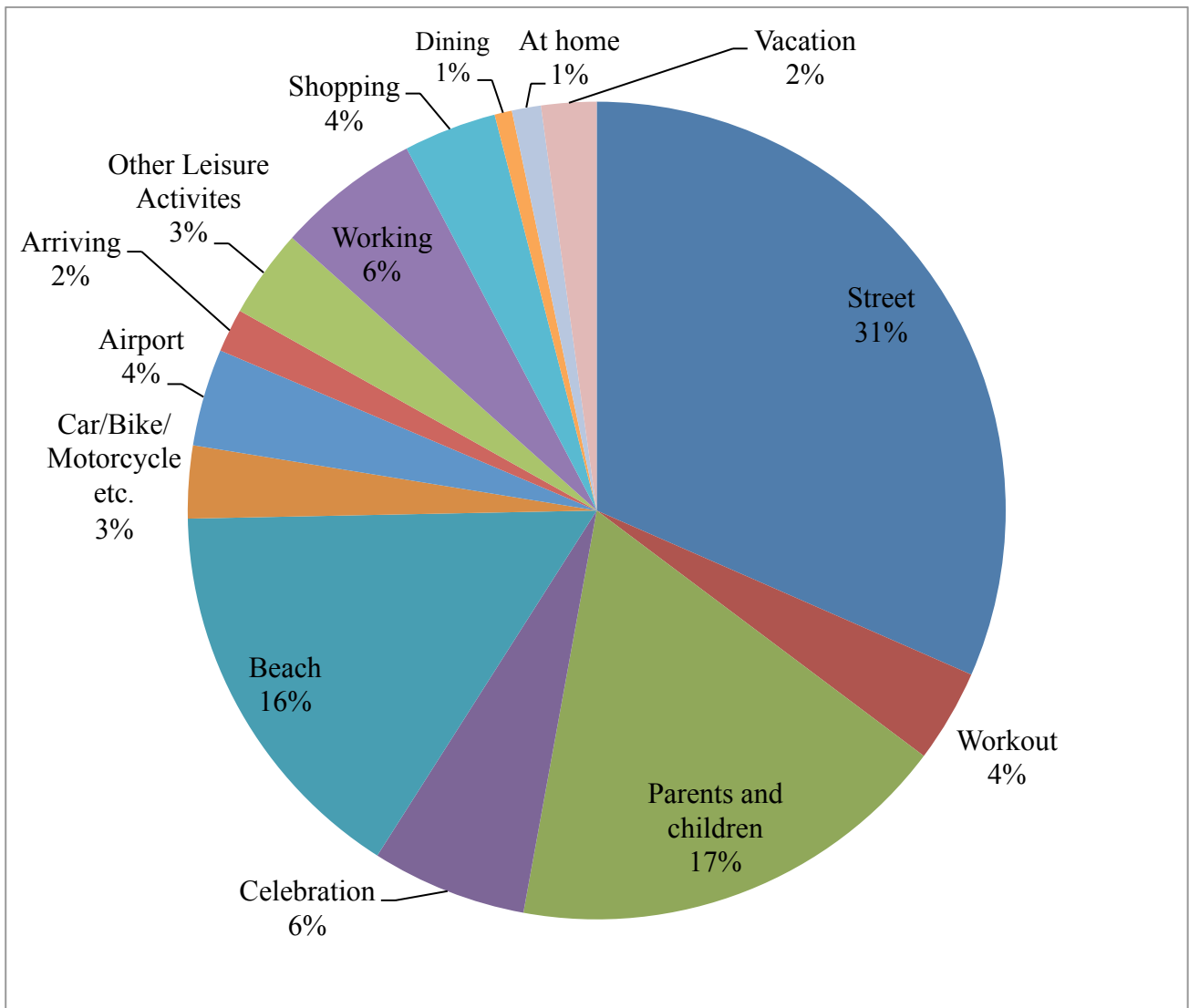


Figure 2: Paparazzi photographs of the 'ordinary',  $n=1752$ . For details about the survey and the total number of photographs, see figure 1.

On the third level, the paparazzi photographs within the 'ordinary' category show some noteworthy results regarding the activities and situations represented (Figure 2). When bearing in mind the logistical and practical challenges of paparazzi photographers, it is hardly surprising that images taken on the street, typically connoting both leisure and consumption, comprise the largest category with 550 pictures (32%). The second largest is 'parents and children' with 307 photos (18%), of celebrities with their children. 'Beach', associated with leisure and showing off a fit, disciplined body, amounts to 273 (16%) and is the third largest. The smaller categories 'work out' (64 pictures/4%) and

‘other leisure activities’ (61 pictures/4%) similarly signify leisure and the perfect body, in opposition to the limited number of paparazzi photographs in the sample showing bodily flaws. These results are interesting in comparison with the thesis put forward by Dyer back in 1979 that the construction of celebrities as ordinary focuses on ‘a lifestyle of leisure’ and ‘consumption’ (1989 [1979]: 35). Thus, the analysis points to ‘parents and children’ as a noteworthy emerging theme, while ‘lifestyle of leisure’ and ‘consumption’ are still highly represented. Methodologically, these numbers should be read with the reservation that the coding of the images was based upon an assessment of the most distinctive feature, when two categories were relevant, for example, when a picture of a celebrity walking on the street with his or her child could be categorized as both ‘parents and children’ and ‘street’.

In sum, the content analysis shows that paparazzi photography and red carpet photography constitute the major genres of celebrity news photography. Yet more interesting, the analysis also shows that the overwhelming majority of paparazzi photographs falls into the category of ‘ordinary’, with leisure, consumption and family life as the most common motifs. We return to the empirical data below.

### **Paparazzi photography as a genre**

Despite paparazzi photography’s ubiquitous presence, it has been the subject of little scholarly scrutiny and, prior to the present article, no quantitative studies have been conducted on the genre.

Symptomatic of this tendency, Rojek’s (2010) four-volume collection *Celebrity* contains no articles about paparazzi photography, and the genre is only mentioned in passing a few times in P. David Marshall’s (2006) *The Celebrity Culture Reader*. Within the limited research tradition, Carol Squiers (1999, see also 2010) has authored a pioneering historical study of paparazzi photography from its conception in post-war Rome, when a group of photographers determinedly pursued candid images of international movie stars working in the city’s blooming film industry. This new branch of photographers gained their name

from the character Paparazzo in Fellini's *La Dolce Vita* (1960). Moreover, scholars have discussed the alleged role of the paparazzi in the death of Princess Diana in 1997 (Hellmueller and Aeschbacher 2010; Hindman, 2003; Squiers, 1999). Other approaches have included a juridical account of celebrities' rights vis-à-vis paparazzi photographers (Willis, 2007), and a study of the particular 'anti-aesthetics' produced by celebrities fighting to maintain control over their public image (Mendelson, 2007). The only study to focus on the genre in the digital era is McNamara's (2011) notable enquiry into the business model and organization of producers and distributors of paparazzi photography (but see also Jerslev and Mortensen, forthcoming).

In this context, Squiers deserves notice for her historical framing of the genre as a hybrid of several photographic forms: Despite its singular reputation, it is not a singular visual discourse. Instead, it is a rough-edged hybrid that is patched together from the visual regimes and positivist assumptions that constitute four types of photography that are practiced and consumed as if they were distinct from one another: photojournalism; documentary; celebrity photography, which is itself a hybrid of editorial and promotional photography; and surveillance photography. (1999: 271; see also Mendelson, 2007: 170). According to Squiers, paparazzi photography first continues the tradition of photojournalism insofar as the images are circulated as topical news. Second, paparazzi photography shares documentary photography's recording of reality, but not the social ideals conventionally fuelling this genre. Third, Squiers calls attention to 'celebrity photography', in itself a hybrid between 'editorial photography and promotional photography', as a predecessor to paparazzi photography. Fourth, paparazzi photography draws on the monitoring and control of surveillance photography, even if the visual paradigms work in opposing ways; the surveillance camera is set up to capture the unlawful, irregular and, indeed, the extraordinary from the ordinary flux of everyday life, whereas the paparazzo tries to capture the ordinary everyday life of the extraordinary persona.

While appreciating Squiers' historical take, we disagree with how she does not differentiate qualitatively between the influences from photojournalism, documentary photography,

celebrity photography and surveillance photography. From the perspective of this article, 'celebrity photography' is not merely one of the 'visual regimes and positivist assumptions' (1999: 271), contributing to the hybridity of paparazzi photography. Rather, we regard the broader concept of visual celebrity news culture as the overall media matrix hosting and shaping paparazzi photography. We therefore take a pragmatic point of departure and draw on Steve Neale's classical definition of genre within film and media studies as 'systems of orientations, expectations and conventions' (1980: 19), in order to pinpoint paparazzi photography as a contemporary online celebrity news genre.

### **Paparazzi photography as online celebrity news**

As the two dominating genres of online celebrity news photography, paparazzi photography and red carpet photography are mutually interdependent and, to a large extent, constitute and structure one another as the main sites for the staging of the 'extraordinary' and the 'ordinary' respectively. On the one hand, red carpet photography shows celebrities posing at their most glamorous and extraordinary. For reasons of image maintenance and often to fulfill contractual obligations, celebrities collaborate with photographers when taking part in photo sessions at award ceremonies, premieres, fashion shows, etc. Celebrities not only draw attention to a particular event, product or work, they also promote and reproduce their star quality by exposing a photogenic self in accordance with the Hollywood conventions. On the other hand, paparazzi photographs document ordinary appearances and mundane doings. They function as a reverse makeover, in the sense that the 'ordinariness' of the pictures is constituted by the 'extraordinariness' of red carpet photography and other representations of the celebrity. In other words, the news value of paparazzi photography is intrinsically linked to the already established celebrity persona. Paparazzi photographs only enter the journalistic flow as rejoinders to preceding glamorous images of the celebrity.

Therefore, paparazzi photography is to be understood within this tension between the ordinary and the extraordinary. The genre functions as celebrity news due to the constant flow of incoming images creating a continued narrative about the ordinary, everyday life of celebrities, which parallels the everyday life of media users. Concerning paparazzi photography as online celebrity news specifically, the genre is distinguished by three features: seriality, speed and interactivity.

First, regarding seriality, multiple images of the same situation are recorded and disseminated and contribute to near endless rows of paparazzi photographs on entertainment news sites featuring the 'visual serialization of the celebrity's public life' (McNamara, 2011: 9; see also Jerslev and Mortensen, forthcoming). At first, the images are arranged according to time in reverse chronological order, that is, on account of being recently taken they are ascribed news value and compiled into a narrative. However, at the same time, the pictures are published in one and usually more galleries devoted to specific celebrities, or themes such as 'Moms & Babies' and 'Celebrity Injuries', where they remain after their limited time as top news stories has expired.<sup>1</sup> The seriality characteristic of paparazzi photography as online celebrity news genre should not be mistaken with the journalistic news update, which Saltzis (2011) defines as every new version of a story, no matter how significant or elaborated the additions. Paparazzi images accumulate in quantity, but do not necessarily supply new information. To the celebrity-interested crowd, each picture functions as yet another collector's item, which provides the ideal starting point for talk and gossip about celebrities with the undramatic, everyday scenes leaving room for identification, projections and fantasies. Ongoing online gossiping about posted paparazzi photographs at once evaluates their newsworthiness and produces them as news (see Jerslev, 2010).

Second, as for speed, digital technologies have almost collapsed the time between the production and distribution of images. Paparazzi photographs can be uploaded and accessed within minutes of their creation, and their relevance to the audience also depends on the speed of distribution (McNamara, 2011: 8–12). Most of the pictures are carefully located in time and space; captions

establishing when and where the celebrity was recorded appear to be of great importance, which seems somewhat puzzling in light of the uneventfulness typical of today's paparazzi photographs. However, the serial and successive documentation of the celebrity is itself to be understood as the point of this activity, as the images secure the indexicality and authenticity of the flux of everyday-lived life.

Third, since digital platforms have introduced interactivity to the consumption of celebrity culture, and invited users to post comments and gossip, and engage in other ways with paparazzi photos, the distance between celebrity and audience, which has always been up for negotiation in celebrity culture, has been reduced. Also, the sites extend to social networking sites like Twitter and Facebook, mimicking the way users organize picture-sharing in their own social life.

### **Paradoxes of extraordinary ordinariness**

To sum up the previous sections, the news value of present-day paparazzi photographs derives from capturing celebrities at their most ordinary and insignificant, when they appear to be exactly like us, walking along the street with a cup of coffee in their hands, talking on mobile phones and looking unglamorous and off-stage: private people in public spaces. This begs the following theoretical question: how are we to conceptualize this ordinariness produced over and over again, which is apparently so important for constituting celebrities as objects of desire and maintaining their status as extraordinary people epitomizing the spirit of an era?

The tension between ordinary and extraordinary, as already mentioned, has long comprised a framework for understanding celebrity culture. For instance, in photographs from the private homes of stars in American fan magazines from the 1930s (Dyer, 1998 [1979]: 40–1; see also Jerslev, 1996), or in Sid Avery's photos of Hollywood stars in the 1950s, celebrities made 'themselves available to the camera, submitting to the then current conventions of celebrity self-exhibition' (Schickel's introduction in Avery and Schickel, 1990: 8). The surroundings were private and the stars' poses ordinary – they might read, cook, play with their children – but the self they projected was

nevertheless a public and formal self, and no backstage views are shown from their extraordinary homes. While photographs from the stars' homes constituted the private as public, most contemporary paparazzi photographs constitute a sense of the private in the public.

In Dyer's understanding of celebrity culture, the paradoxical projection of ordinariness can be recognized on three different levels:

First, stars can be seen as ordinary people who live more expensively than the rest of us but are not essentially transformed by this. Second, the wealth and success of the stars can be seen as serving to isolate certain human qualities (the qualities they stand for), without the representation of those qualities being muddied by material considerations or problems. Both of these explanations fit with notions that human attributes exist independently of material circumstances. Stars may serve to legitimate such notions. Finally, stars represent what are taken to be people typical of this society; the specialness of stars may be then that they are the only ones around who are ordinary! (1989 [1979]: 43)

The first paradox outlined by Dyer is that, apart from extraordinary wealth and conspicuous consumption, celebrities lead ordinary lives; this corresponds to the grand narrative of the true self and the unchangeable inner core also unfolded, for example, in the abundance of makeover stories in contemporary popular culture (Heller, 2007; Weber, 2009). This is related to the second paradox that extraordinariness enhances ordinary personal qualities, which have remained uncorrupted by success and prosperity. The third paradox is Dyer's first critical engagement with the crucial point, he develops in later writings, that stars have achieved their position and continue to capture the popular imagination because they embody 'aspects of living in contemporary society' (1986: 8). At once unique and general, celebrities offer the perfect material for constructing narratives of the predominant societal aspirations,

struggles and ideals at particular historical times; this is why Dyer humorously concludes that stars may be the ‘only ones around who are ordinary’ (1989 [1979]: 43).

Dyer’s definition of the paradoxical extraordinary ordinariness inherent in stardom grasps the cultural meaning of celebrities at a general taxonomic level, and most of the paparazzi photographs in our sample likely fit into this framework. This goes especially for pictures in the category ‘parents and children’, which project the ordinary lives and genuine values of celebrities in the visualization of affectionate parenthood. In these pictures, celebrities such as Katie Holmes, Angelina Jolie and Jennifer Garner typically carry or embrace their children, thereby emphasizing the close family ties. Celebrities are ascribed moral authenticity through this idealization of ‘ordinary’ family life, which reflects current societal norms and values. By contrast, Dyer noted in 1979 that celebrity culture hardly features ‘the developing relationship of a star and her/his child’ (1989 [1979]: 45). However, with the figure of the ‘power celeb mom’ evolving since the 1980s (Douglas and Michaels, 2004: 110–39), new attention is given to the ideals of parenthood, and particularly motherhood, in picture-perfect work–life balance. While Dyer’s taxonomy provides us with the overall frame for understanding contemporary paparazzi photographs, the crucial question remains unanswered of how ordinariness is constructed in the visuals. In the following, we would like to argue that the ordinary manifests itself as a performative public ‘private-ness’.

### **Ordinary as middle region private-ness**

The tension between private and public is of course not only central to understanding the dynamics of paparazzi photography and celebrity culture at large, but also to a diversity of other contemporary popular media formats, such as talk shows, reality TV and social network sites, where people perform parts of their ‘private’ and ‘true’ selves. Along the same lines, paparazzi photographs put on display a performative private-ness, which may best be understood with reference to Erving Goffman’s (1990 [1959]) classical micro-sociological deployment of theatre metaphors to conceptualize social behaviour



and the presentation of self in everyday communication, along with Joshua Meyrowitz's (1985) analysis of the impact of electronic media on culture and everyday life.

Performance is a central term for Goffman, signifying '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' (1990 [1959]: 32). We are always audience and actors for each other on shifting scenes, and depend on each other for the recognition and acceptance of the impression of reality our performance is intended to project. Therefore, to Goffman, authenticity is a question of acting authentic. His social architecture of two separate spaces, *front* and *back stage* or *back region* implies that on the front (stage), behaviour is official and formal, in accordance with the socially sanctioned script for a given role. Back stage is a private space, in which rehearsals take place and social batteries are recharged. However, back stage does not necessarily equal the private home or the intimate sphere, but may be located in many different spaces, as long as they are closed off from front region.

Meyrowitz further develops Goffman's terms to understand new cultural developments; the appearance of still new (mediated) arenas for acting and still new (media) audiences. *No Sense of Place* concerns the way electronic media have altered our access to information about everyday performances, and call for 'new sets of social performances' (Meyrowitz, 1985: 39). According to Meyrowitz, this has caused a blurring of boundaries between back stage and on stage, and a new 'middle region' area has emerged. Parts of the private spaces for rehearsal are now accessible to audiences, who are offered a "side-stage" view' (Meyrowitz, 1985: 47). Correspondingly, actors adjust their performance to the new information made available to the audience:

In middle region behaviours, the extremes of the former front region are lost because performers no longer have the necessary backstage time and space; the control over rehearsals and relaxations that supported the old front region role is weakened. The new

behaviours also often lack the extremes of the former backstage behaviour because the new middle region dramas are public (that is, performed before an ‘audience’) and, therefore, performers adapt as much as possible to the presence of the audience, but continue to hide whatever can still be hidden. (Meyrowitz 1985: 47)

In our understanding, middle region performance is suitable as a general labelling of what happens in today’s most common paparazzi photographs.<sup>3</sup> It is an exact expression of the consequences of the intensified hunt for stolen moments, according to Sean Redmond’s almost Goffman-esque allusion to a ‘vision regime that leaves little if any space for them [celebrities] to be offscreen, out of print, switched off’ (2006: 34). With the ubiquity of cameras and the ever-present possibility of being captured, the photographs constitute celebrities being private in the sense of performing the private. Differently put, we would like to argue that a particular *middle region private-ness* is presented in the pictures: the scenes shown are not just private, for the sole reason that they take place in public. They cannot just be considered public either, on account of their apparent candidness and intimacy.

### **Private-ness as performance**

The concept of private-ness involves the audience in a double contract: on the one side, celebrities have adapted to a media development characterized by audiences and media producers – and audiences as media producers – potentially everywhere, and, on the other side, paparazzi images often function as an informal method of public relations.

The ‘private’ self of celebrities is offered discursively as the capturing of a transient moment, even though viewers may be and probably are well aware that this hardly constitutes an entirely private self, but rather a ‘spectacle of invaded celebrity privacy’ (Sekula, 1984: 26). Most prominently, middle region private-ness is negotiated through a striking lack of posing in most of the

photos in the sample: celebrities appear to be unaware of the photographer and absorbed in the moment of ordinary life, hence the pictures give the impression of granting access to the private person and offering a privileged gaze back stage. To this seeming lack of posing, one might ask whether it might not be another pose, thus confronting us with a performative paradox. Or, in the words of Dyer, whether paparazzi photography functions as a way of ‘authenticating authenticity’ (1991: 133). This would also be in line with Roland Barthes’ reflections on the inevitability of posing as a bodily interaction in the presence of cameras: ‘Once I feel myself observed by the lens, everything changes: I constitute myself in the process of “posing”, I instantaneously make another body for myself, I transform myself in advance into an image. This transformation is an active one’ (1984 [1980]: 10). Empirically, it seems likely that celebrities are conscious of the lurking paparazzi lenses (see also Becker, 2008: 89–90), and therefore transform themselves into an image in advance as ‘an authored “ordinary” self’ (Tolson, 2001: 443), or enact ‘doing being ordinary’, to borrow an illuminating phrase from Harvey Sacks’ (2003 [1984]) work on conversation analysis.

Along these lines, paparazzi photographers have accounted for their tacit or explicit collaborations with celebrities (Currid-Halkett, 2010; Howe, 2005; McNamara, 2011; Mendelson, 2007). Picture editor and journalist Peter Howe brings forward the example of newly divorced Angelina Jolie visiting the playground with her son and creating a casual photo opportunity of harmonious and caring single mom life (2005: 162–4). Another example of a seemingly unposed, ‘stolen’ photograph, rumoured to be the result of a conscious PR strategy, is the much publicized picture of Chris Martin alluding to his wife, Gwyneth Paltrow’s, pregnancy by touching her stomach when leaving a doctor’s office in 2003. In the words of Howe:

Another example of a ruthless paparazzo intruding upon a joyful, private moment in order to make a lot of money from an exclusive? No, it probably wasn’t. According to most people in the business, it was an example of a new trend whereby a publicist sets up and

controls a set of pictures that are made to look like paparazzi shots. (2005: 16)<sup>4</sup>

As media users are mostly not informed about the degree of implicit or explicit collaboration, the pictures play upon this uncertainty as part of the middle region private-ness. In opposition to famous, ‘compromising’ images of celebrities such as Sean Penn and Britney Spears raging against photographers and going back to the iconic images of stars aggressively trying to prevent photographers from taking their pictures in Rome in the early 1960s, the images of celebrities as ordinary invariably conceal the production situation, not only through celebrities (possibly) posing as not-posing, but also as the visuals hardly ever show other photographers, even though they are bound to be present at many of the same locations.

While most of the images in the ‘ordinary’ category in our sample might serve as an example, we end this section by illustrating middle region private-ness with a pre-divorce photograph of Tom Cruise, Katie Holmes and their daughter Suri, which falls into the category of ‘parents and children’ already reflected on. Published on the site <http://omg.yahoo.com/> and dated 19 June 2011, the photograph shows the family walking in Miami Beach, Florida.<sup>5</sup> Suri – already proclaimed to be a style icon – is on her mother’s arm, wrapped in a towel and facing the other way, while Cruise and Holmes are wearing casual clothes, hats and the obligatory dark sunglasses. Like many other paparazzi photographs, this image resonates on a general level with Dyer’s three paradoxes of extraordinary ordinariness. First, ordinary family life is on display; however, they do not appear ‘ordinary as an ordinary person’ but clearly as ‘celebrity-being-ordinary’ (Tolson, 2001: 450). Second, the celebrity status of Holmes and Cruise seems to have refined the authenticity inherent in their personalities, since they could be ascribed moral credibility for the affectionate care of their child and the close family ties. A smiling Holmes is carrying her daughter, and all family members are physically connected. Third, the togetherness of the family contributes to contemporary celebrity culture’s idealization of motherhood. With the towel wrapped around Suri resembling a cloth, the image is reminiscent of a secular Madonna

and child icon. Given Holmes' status as an actress, the paparazzi photograph creates an idyllic union of motherhood and career. But this image also points to paparazzi photography's public transit spaces as the proper backdrop for middle region performances of the private self. Holmes and Cruise seem to be immersed in this moment of family life without considering themselves potential photographic subjects. On the one hand, their accessories denote the wish for privacy and, simultaneously, once documented by the camera, they provide the photograph with news value exactly on account of the recorded 'private' moment. On the other hand, the sunglasses and hats can also be understood discursively, as props in a performance, contributing to the construction of private-ness.

### **The look of everyday**

Middle region private-ness further manifests itself in the everyday look of celebrities, which is conveyed both by the contents and the aesthetics of the images. Routines and the trivial normally delineate ordinary lives, apart from when this repetitive flow is punctuated by exceptional events like celebrations or parties. The everyday repetitiveness is unglamorous and unmemorable, hence mostly not worth photographing. As for paparazzi photography, the reverse is the case. Extraordinary people engaged in everyday tasks are considered newsworthy and embody the positive values of the common man and the essential, genuine self. Photographs of celebrities carrying coffee in public spaces, exiting cars or hurrying through airports, wearing relaxed, high-street clothes and showing un-made-up appearances, (looking) like everybody else, attach to their appearance an 'aesthetics of authenticity' (Lai, 2007). In the same vein, Paddy Scannell argues that 'any person appearing in the public realm who lays claim to ordinariness' projects sincerity; '[i]t is how you prove you are like the rest of us' (1996: 74). Sincerity, to Scannell, is a sign of interpersonal reliability; paparazzi photographs, however, transform everyday sincerity into a look. What we mean by 'a look' might be explained by considering the affinity between paparazzi photography and fashion street photography, that is, images of 'stylish' people in urban spaces spotted by photographers or fashion bloggers. Even though celebrities' clothes may appear

insignificant in their everyday ordinariness, the aesthetic framing inscribes celebrities as stylish and timely, akin to this contemporary trend in fashion photography.

If the everyday is a look worn by celebrities, the digital snapshot aesthetics (Sandbye, 2007) passes on the look of the everyday to the picture surface. At a point in history when embellishing and perfecting images is standard business in celebrity culture, the high demand for this basic, vernacular format may be regarded as a counter-movement and claim to reality. The snapshot comes across as casual and accidental, and is therefore perceived as more authentic than other photographic genres. This conveys to the viewer a sense of proximity to the celebrity, or an ‘illusion of intimacy’, as Schickel (2000 [1985]) puts it, which is essential to the celebrity–fan relationship (Hills, 2002; Turner, 2004). Paparazzi photography creates the illusion of a transparent and digitally unmanipulated record of the meeting between photographer and celebrity, and could be regarded as part of the ‘regime of truth’ to which, Dovey (2000) has argued, camcorder recordings belong. The images contain the indexical promise that what is depicted corresponds to what was in front of the camera, and in this way situate the spectator as eyewitness by proxy. This is enhanced by the fact that this could be ‘us’, the viewers, casually meeting the celebrity on the street, and contributing to celebrity news by snapping a photo with our mobile phones. Professional photographers specialized in the field are experiencing competition from *citizen paparazzi* or *celebrity stalkers*, and websites and mobile phone apps have been set up for tracking celebrities (Lavalley, 2008; McNamara, 2011; Schofield, 2010). In this manner, the everyday of middle region private-ness is constructed both by means of unglamorous motifs and an aesthetic which emphasizes proximity and contingency. This might be another reason for the large amount of this subgenre of paparazzi photography online. The photos function as mirrors of a contemporary culture of the specular and mediatized self (Marshall 2010); by flaunting their ‘ordinary’ selves, celebrities contribute to the ‘democratization of public personal revelation’ (Marshall, 2010: 500) through the internet and social media, and hence create an improved sense of proximity.

## Conclusion

In this article, we have examined how paparazzi photography can be conceptualized as an online celebrity news genre in the current, digital media landscape. To this end, our discussion has primarily focused on the visual construction of celebrities' ordinariness.

Starting from the content analysis of paparazzi photographs on entertainment news sites, we have demonstrated that what we usually think of as paparazzi photography – images showing celebrities trying to hide from or else aggressively reject indiscreet photographers, or alternatively disclosing juicy, even scandalous details from their private lives – hardly corresponds with the genre today. Even if the scandalous paparazzi photographs might draw more attention, as was the case with the release of the images of Kate Middleton sunbathing, the majority of contemporary paparazzi photographs depict famous people as ordinary human beings: looking unremarkable, doing everyday things.

Present-day paparazzi photography is a prime provider of pictures of the ordinary in celebrity culture, which fits with the spread of digital image technologies and the possibilities for photographers to circulate and publish photographs more widely. The ubiquitous photos of celebrities as ordinary mirror a seemingly insatiable market to fill the large amount of entertainment news sites. Moreover, we have emphasized how paparazzi photography at once feeds on and is defined by what is absent in the photos, the glamorous and extraordinary images of perfection. Hence, paparazzi photography can only be understood when framed within the field of tensions crucial to the theoretical confines of celebrity culture, in which the tension between the ordinary and the extraordinary is fundamental.

The article contributes to celebrity culture studies with a clarification of the notion of the ordinary as analytically more complex than just the opposite of the extraordinary. We have pointed out

that the ordinary in online paparazzi photography is constituted visually by means of what we call *middle region private-ness*. The particular content in contemporary online paparazzi photography provides the images with news value; moreover, the content may also be the reason for the continued demand for this kind of photo. First, despite the profusion of paparazzi images, each one gives the impression of immediacy and of a rare and true moment captured; conceivably, the very lack of the sensational holds a news value in and of itself. Second, by means of their everyday aesthetics, the photos furnish an impression of access and proximity to the famous. Third, their lack of drama notwithstanding, they add new information to the fans' scrapbooks. Fourth, due to their openness and photographic displacement of the back stage authentic, and due to the construction of the private as middle region private-ness, the photographs invite discussion and guessing, assumptions and gossip. And finally, on account of this yielding to the curiosity and narrativized meaning-making strategies of the viewers, they evoke the need for more information, more news – more paparazzi photographs.

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## **Notes**

1. See: <http://www.usmagazine.com/momsbabies>, [http://photos.tnz.com/galleries/celebrity\\_injuries#tab=most\\_recent](http://photos.tnz.com/galleries/celebrity_injuries#tab=most_recent)

2. Even though Dyer's book is titled *Stars* and celebrity studies discuss differences between celebrities and stars (in Redmond and Holmes, 2007 for example), this distinction is not important to this study.

3. Despite the 1985 publication being mainly preoccupied with television, *No Sense of Place* is also valuable for understanding the last decade's general development in celebrity culture, which puts our analysis in perspective. Meyrowitz observes that new middle region behaviour fosters 'deep backstage' and 'forefront' behaviour, which are extreme versions of former back and front behaviour (1985: 47). On the one side, the small amount of 'compromising' paparazzi photography in our sample may be said to frame deep back stage. On the other side, we see still more examples of celebrity forefront performances, most notably the media and entertainment industries' glamorous self-celebrations and extended live broadcasts from red carpet events, and the increased circulation of photographs of young European royalty transformed into celebrities.



4. According to Currid-Halkett (2010), the photograph was taken and sold to the media by Paltrow's brother.

5. Due to copyright restrictions, we are not able to reproduce the picture. However, it is available online, see for instance: <http://www.fanpop.com/clubs/tom-cruise/images/23031381/> title/tom-cruise-katie-holmes-miami-with-suri-photo (accessed 29 May 2013).

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