

Words for Study

Hollywood	obsession	googled	episodes
tabloid	appetites	ultra	footage
National Enquirer	airwaves	contestant	syndrome
skyrocketed	spin-off	Bachelor	advent

Celebrity vs. Reality

Americans have had a love affair with celebrities ever since the first actors and actresses stepped onto the silver screen in the early 1900s. The excitement of seeing those movie stars in their glamorous outfits set our hearts racing and left us breathless. Right away, photos of celebrities began gracing the pages of newspapers and magazines. Regular people living ordinary lives were able to gaze at the sparkling gowns and trendy hairstyles of the actresses, see the stylish suits worn by the actors, and feel like they were a part of that glamorous life. Movie stars' lives looked like fairy tales full of exciting adventures. Many people dreamed of living the Hollywood life.

But what do these images have to do with reality? In 1926, a weekly magazine took the celebrity-watching world by storm. The tabloid magazine was printed on cheap newsprint and offered current photos of the most sought after celebrities—actors, actresses, entertainers, sports stars, and more. Yes, it offered the most up-to-date news and gossip about these celebrities to give people the latest on their favorite stars. But not only did it offer the good—it offered the bad and the ugly, too! The tabloid gave the public all the dirt on celebrity crime, scandals,

and heartbreak. The magazine? It was to become what is today *National Enquirer*. At its height, *National Enquirer* had a weekly circulation rate of over six million copies. In the 1980s, its slogan was, “Inquiring minds want to know.” Today, *National Enquirer* reaches just over one million, thirty thousand people each week. And the tabloid has plenty of competition.

We’ve all seen them on the racks at the grocery store checkout lines. At times, there are half a dozen weekly tabloids, as well as other entertainment magazines aimed at giving readers the latest celebrity and entertainment news, gossip, and photos.

Not much is left private by supermarket tabloid and entertainment magazines. The reality is that celebrities are real people. Underneath all of the glamour and makeup and beautiful gowns, they are just like the rest of us. They eat. They sleep. They play on the beach with their kids. They get in fights with their husbands and wives. They get in trouble with the law. The only difference is that they do all of it in front of a camera. And the pictures wind up in the tabloids and magazines sold across America. The public is hungry for all the celebrity news it can get.

One such entertainment magazine is *People* magazine, which reaches 3.6 million readers each week. *US Weekly* boasts an average weekly circulation of 1.9 million readers. Another weekly celebrity magazine is *In Touch Weekly*. This tabloid has more than 1.2 million readers each week.

How did gossip become such a big business? A drastic change in celebrity-watching took place after World War II. People began watching their favorite stars right in their own living rooms. That's when TV usage skyrocketed in the U.S. Before the war, TV sets were very expensive. The average person could not afford to have one. But in 1947, one company made a TV set that sold for under \$200. That finally made TV affordable for millions of Americans. People could see all of their favorite celebrities in action—without going to the movies. Plus, a whole new crop of stars was born. These were TV stars—people who acted on TV series, entertained in variety shows, or were part of other programming. Fans could watch their favorite stars day after day and week after week. TV had become another way people could continue their romance with the stars.

By 1954, 55.7 percent of households had a TV set. By the early 1960s, 90 percent of households had one. Today, 98 percent of homes have a TV—and most of those homes have more than one!

How many TV sets do you have in your home? Two? Three? Five? What kinds of shows do you like to watch? Are you interested in what celebrities are doing, where they are going, and what they are wearing? Or do you enjoy hearing about celebrities who have gotten in trouble with the law? Partied too hardy, or whose marriages are on the rocks?

Have the latest teen idols inspired your son or daughter to want to look like them or want to dress like them? It seems that in America, our interest in celebrities has become an obsession.

In 1981, a new type of TV show helped to feed our appetites for celebrity gossip. That year, *Entertainment Tonight (ET)* hit TV airwaves to rave reviews. The daily TV entertainment news show calls itself “the most watched entertainment newsmagazine in the world.” Today, *ET* continues to air in the U.S., Canada, and around the globe, making it the longest-running TV newsmagazine in history. The show offers, in its own words, “all the Hollywood news you crave and desire.” *ET* dives headfirst into celebrity successes and scandals. The show's spin-off, *The Insider*, also airs weeknights. *ET* and *The Insider* aren't the only shows that dish the dirt on celebrities. There's *Access Hollywood*, *EXTRA*, *TMZ*, *E! News*, and more. But *ET* still remains one of the top 10 highest rated shows. It seems that viewers can't get enough of the good or the bad about their favorite stars.

Since the development of cable and satellite TV stations in the 1970s, people have had even more channels to watch to keep up with what their favorite celebrities are doing. And with the computer revolution of the 1990s and the introduction of the Internet, now celebrity news is just a mouse click away. Search engines offer easy access on their startup pages to the latest entertainment news. MSN Entertainment, AOL, Yahoo News, and online newspapers all offer entertainment pages. Some even have hot links for instant access to the latest celebrity doings. Among popular stars, it's a competition to see who is most googled!

Anyone can become a celebrity with the current trend in TV programming—the reality show. In recent years, the reality show has become ultra-popular. Reality shows take regular people—people who would normally be TV viewers—and make them TV stars. Reality shows include programs such as *The Real World* or *Survivor*. *The Real World*, which takes a group of seven young men and women and puts them together in a house to see what happens, claims to be the first reality show. Each week, it follows the housemates as they fight, bond, love, and grow. *Survivor*, which is still going strong after 10 seasons, pits a group of people against each other in an uninhabited location in the hopes that one contestant will outlast all of the others. There are many other types of reality shows—some are job-based shows that offer a prize at the end and center

around a certain career. Others are dating shows such as *The Bachelor* or *The Bachelorette*, in which viewers watch as contestants vie for the affections of a prized partner over several episodes.

How real are reality shows? People who watch reality shows week after week see what looks like reality—but really it is not. Many reality shows are edited to make viewers think what is going on is real life. There is talk that some episodes are scripted or that contestants are prompted to do or say certain things that will create conflict or excitement. Much of what is shown on reality TV is only a small part of what is really happening. The footage is carefully edited so that viewers see only the most interesting interactions. That's what keeps the audience coming back for more.

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