

PLAYING DIRTY: ANALYZING THE IMAGES OF THE TABLOID JOURNALISTS
IN THE COMPLETE FIRST SEASON OF THE FX NETWORK SERIES *DIRT*

by

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Abstract

The FX Network original series *Dirt* is one of the most comprehensive representations of tabloid journalism on television to date. Although the series only aired for one and a half seasons, examining and understanding the images of the tabloid journalists in *Dirt* is necessary because the relationship between the public and real-life tabloid journalists is hostile and angry. While a fraction of what the public thinks about journalists comes from real-life experiences with tabloid publications and journalists, part of what the public thinks about these journalists comes from the images they see on television programs like *Dirt*—images that ultimately reinforce the tabloid journalist as corrupt, unfair, unethical, and amoral. Although tabloid journalists had a presence in film and television prior to *Dirt*, the FX series demonstrates an in-depth portrayal of the competitive field of tabloid journalism while reinforcing the idea that getting the story is the ultimate goal.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Journalists in the complete first season of the FX Network 2007 original series *Dirt*¹ often bribe and blackmail sources, misrepresent themselves by going undercover or using hidden cameras, and are hardly ethical or moral. However, the *Dirt Now* tabloid team strives for accuracy and exclusivity when it exposes celebrity adulterers, solves small-town murder mysteries, and highlights drug scandals. Although tabloids, both in film and television depictions as well as real life, often print well researched, accurate stories, their stories are seldom fair. *Dirt* presents an image of the tabloid journalist that is hardly heroic.

Because *Dirt* only aired for one and a half seasons, it does not have the power to substantially influence the image of the journalist like *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* (a 1970s CBS television series which aired for seven seasons that became known as “one of the most acclaimed television programs ever produced,”²), *Murphy Brown* (a 1980s CBS television series that aired for seven seasons that is hailed for establishing “itself as one of television’s premier ensemble comedies, exploring life among the reporters, producers, staff, and friends of FYI,”³), and *Lou Grant* (a late-1970s CBS spin off of the wildly successful *Mary Tyler Moore Show* that provides a more serious angle of the inner workings of a major metropolitan newspaper⁴). However, those who followed *Dirt* throughout its short run were immersed in a thorough depiction of tabloid journalists.

Images of tabloid journalists in *Dirt* are important to the public’s overall perception of tabloid journalists because “the public memory seldom distinguishes

between the actual and the non-real.”⁵ The relationship viewers develop with *Dirt Now* editor-in-chief Lucy Spiller (Courteney Cox) throughout the first season of *Dirt* is likely the closest most will ever come to a tabloid editor—real or fictional. *Dirt* brings to life tabloid editors, paparazzi, reporters, publishers, media owners, investigative reporters, and assistants who roll “in the muck and mire of Hollywood, the trash-and-cash capital of the world, and make it pay.”⁶

According to the *New York Times*, celebrity tabloids *OK* and *US Weekly*'s circulation rose 10 percent in 2007 “even as a round of price increases contributed to an unusual drop in overall sales of celebrity magazines.”⁷ This increase is similar to the one the weeklies saw the prior year. Though *OK* and *US Weekly*'s circulation has reached more than 1.9 million, *People* remains far ahead at 3.6 million.⁸ Like the fictional *Dirt Now*, these celebrity-based tabloids focus on the attention-grabbing power of their cover stories.

Each year, the Audit Bureau of Circulations, a non-profit association of advertisers, ad agencies, and publishers, and the Magazine Publishers of America, the industry association for consumer magazines, tabulate the top 100 consumer magazines. The latest results (2007) find *People* number 11 with a total paid circulation of 3,676,499; *US Weekly* number 39 with a total paid circulation of 1,905,030; *Entertainment Weekly* number 42 with a total paid circulation of 1,804,797; *In Touch Weekly* number 71 with a total paid circulation of 1,290,769; and the *National Enquirer* number 87 with a total paid circulation of 1,033,271. Some weekly celebrity tabloids have higher paid circulation numbers than *Time*, *Newsweek*, *Popular Science*, or the *Economist*.⁹

The popularity of these publications indicates the public's fascination with them. Although often criticized for arguably shoddy journalistic standards, tabloids represent a major media outlet for entertainment news today.

Film and television presents “a unique way to evaluate the relationship of the public with the news media throughout the centuries.”¹⁰ According to a *New York Times* review, “Hollywood, as painted in *Dirt*, is a sordid world of sex, privilege, Faustian bargains, and betrayal.”¹¹ Viewers experience the “dark side of show business—sex, drugs, and sinful self-indulgence.”¹² If the public only viewed this image of the tabloid journalist and knew nothing else of the of the field of journalism, many might see these entertainment journalists—who both decry and buy into corrupt show business values¹³—as dishonest people who abuse the power of the press not because they are interested in exposing injustices or righting wrongs, but because they want to increase circulation and remain powerful and influential in the entertainment media.

Chapter 1 Endnotes

¹ According to the FX Network Web site, “Matthew McNair Carnahan is creator, writer, director, and producer. Courteney Cox, David Arquette, and Joe Fields are executive producers. ABC Studios and FX are co-production partners in association with Coquette Productions. The series films in Hollywood, California. The total episode running time for the complete first season is estimated at 607 minutes.”

<http://www.fxnetworks.com/shows/originals/dirt/> (accessed January 2008).

² “*The Mary Tyler Moore Show*,” (The Museum of Broadcast Communications),

<http://www.museum.tv/archives/etv/M/htmlM/marytylermo/marytylermo.htm> (accessed March 2009).

³ “*Murphy Brown*,” (The Museum of Broadcast Communications),

<http://www.museum.tv/archives/etv/M/htmlM/murphybrown/murphybrown.htm> (accessed March 2009).

⁴ “*Lou Grant*,” (The Museum of Broadcast Communications),

<http://www.museum.tv/archives/etv/L/htmlL/lougrant/lougrant.htm> (accessed March 2009).

⁵ Joe Saltzman. “Analyzing the Images of the Journalist in Popular Culture: A Unique Method of Studying the Public’s Perception of Its Journalists and the News Media.” (Resources, Recommended Books, Articles and Web sites, Popular Culture, IJPC.org.) Los Angeles, CA: The University of Southern California. p. 2. Saltzman is the director of the Image of the Journalist in Popular Culture (IJPC), a project of the Norman Lear Center, at the University of Southern California Annenberg School for Communication.

⁶ Tom Shales. “FX’s *Dirt*: A Wickedly Good Wallow in Hollywood,” (The Washington

Post, January 2, 2007), <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/01/01/AR2007010100972.html> (accessed February 2008).

⁷ Richard Perez-Pena. “*US Weekly*’s Circulation Rises 10% in Soft Year,” (The New York Times, February 12, 2008),

<http://www.nytimes.com/2008/02/12/business/media/12mag.html> (accessed December 2008).

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ “Top 100 consumer Magazines of 2007,” (Info Please),

<http://www.infoplease.com/entertainment/magazines/top-100-consumer.html> (accessed January 2009).

¹⁰ Joe Saltzman. "Analyzing the Images of the Journalist in Popular Culture: A Unique Method of Studying the Public's Perception of Its Journalists and the News Media," p. 2.

¹¹ Alessandra Stanley. "Disposable Friendships and a Fight to the Finish," (The New York Times, March 27, 2007), <http://tv.nytimes.com/2007/03/27/arts/television/27stan.html?n=Top/Reference/Times%20Topics/People/A/Aniston,%20Jennifer> (accessed February 2008).

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Tom Shales. "FX's *Dirt*: A Wickedly Good Wallow in Hollywood."

Chapter 2: Lucy Spiller, the Editor-in-Chief

Lucy Spiller,¹⁴ “tabloid bitch,”¹⁵ is *Dirt Now*’s resident editor-in-chief¹⁶—a “mad genius” with a “God-given gift to find editorial gold.”¹⁷ Spiller is “known throughout Hollywood as one of the most powerful people in the art of forming public opinion.”¹⁸ She has a reputation for being able to “get the news by any means possible and...make it sensational enough to keep the rabble happy.”¹⁹ The way Spiller sees it, “Fame has its price. She’s here to collect.”²⁰

Initially, Spiller is editor-in-chief of two weeklies²¹—*Dirt*, “a lowdown, peephole-peeking gossip sheet,”²² and *Now*, “a more traditional newsweekly that goes back 70 years and concerns itself with matters other than who’s pregnant, who’s getting a divorce, and who’s in rehab.”²³ She merges the two publications into one super tabloid, *Dirt Now*. Spiller is the only editor ever mentioned in *Dirt*. There are no references to copy editors, photo editors, or any other type of subordinate editor. This emphasizes Spiller’s role as one of *Dirt Now*’s most powerful.

Spiller wanted to become a journalist so she could know the “why” of things.²⁴ Her curiosity evolved into obsession. Spiller eats, sleeps, and breathes her work at *Dirt Now*, the “tabloid that swallowed [her] whole.”²⁵ When she isn’t in her office or sitting at the head of the conference table in pitch meetings, she is secretly meeting anonymous sources or falling asleep alone with *Dirt Now*’s latest issue in hand.²⁶ She sees every conversation she has with anyone as an interview.²⁷ Even though she is often the last one to leave the office she constantly takes her work home with her.²⁸ When Spiller is at an

exclusive Hollywood event or party, she is thinking about her next cover²⁹ and talking business with the people around her.³⁰ Actress Julia Mallory (Laura Allen) thinks “Lucy Spiller is a wannabe [and that] she peddles gossip so she can get close to real talent.”³¹ Mallory doesn’t think Spiller has any “real power, unless [the celebrities] give it to her.”³² Spiller doesn’t agree with Mallory. She thinks she plays an important role in Hollywood by exposing scandal and by making³³ and breaking careers.³⁴ Spiller proves that there is a big difference between being an actor and being famous.³⁵ She makes actors famous.³⁶

Spiller knows her craft better than anyone else in the tabloid business. She figures out what her readers want and how to appeal to *Dirt Now*’s target audience. Sometimes this means Spiller has to bribe her sources.³⁷ Other times, she can only succeed through blackmail³⁸ or by giving sources ultimatums.³⁹ One of Spiller’s main sources in Hollywood’s inner circle is actor Holt McLaren (Josh Stewart).⁴⁰ She blackmails McLaren by threatening to leak a sex tape she has of his girlfriend, Mallory, having sex with her co-star, Johnny Gage (Johann Urb).⁴¹ She understands that sometimes she puts her sources in incredibly dangerous positions. Because of this, she is discrete about whom she gets her tips from and is very careful about never revealing the identity of an anonymous source.⁴²

Spiller likes to have control of everyone with whom she interacts. Even though she relies on the art of seduction and manipulation for many of her cover stories, she will not tolerate anyone trying to take advantage of her.⁴³ When Dana Pritchard’s (Kristin Minter) assistant lies to Spiller about his client’s wedding plans, Spiller tells him, “don’t

take this personally but you're an idiot, which is not my objection. My objection is that you would assume I would believe an idiot."⁴⁴ She knows the difference between "PR bullshit" and what's really going on,⁴⁵ and does not fall for subterfuge by deceitful celebrity publicists.⁴⁶ She won't let anyone try to use the pages of *Dirt Now* to satisfy their own personal ends.

Her primary allegiance is to both the accuracy and exclusivity of her stories, and to the profit and success of her magazine. She wants everyone to know that every single week she "will give you the unvarnished and uncompromising truth because that is what *Dirt Now* is and always will be."⁴⁷ To do this better than the competition, Spiller goes after the most extreme cover stories that expose the most salacious celebrity scandals. The more challenging the story may be to get, the better the cover will likely be.⁴⁸ Spiller always finds the angle she thinks the other tabloids won't have.⁴⁹ She is the first tabloid editor to put a photo of a dead celebrity's body on the cover of a magazine.⁵⁰

A master at her craft, she knows her field is competitive.⁵¹ *Dirt Now's* owner Gibson Horne (Timothy Bottoms) frequently reminds Spiller he won't hesitate to replace her with Tina Harrod (Jennifer Aniston), the editor-in-chief of a rival gossip magazine, if Spiller makes an editorial blunder or squanders the tabloid's budget.⁵² One of the biggest reasons Horne threatens to fire Spiller is because she blatantly ignores the *Dirt Now* budget and spends too much money bribing sources.⁵³ Spiller knows that, to Horne, she is only as good as her next cover sales. Horne is the only character Spiller shows her deference to because he is the only one who can fire her.⁵⁴ But, since Horne is rarely in the *Dirt Now* office, Spiller comes across as having more power than she really has. She

barks out orders like, “I don’t care if you’re on your deathbed, your mother’s on fire, we’re at the brink of a nuclear war; I want those photos on my desk tonight.”⁵⁵

Almost every film or television series about the media “has at least one major argument between the reporter and the editor.”⁵⁶ This is a recurrent theme in *Dirty*; Spiller and publisher Brent Barrow (Jeffrey Nordling) are no different. The two are often at odds about what is appropriate to spend and what is appropriate to publish. Even though Barrow is technically Spiller’s superior, she does not treat him with respect. She often lies to him⁵⁷ and goes behind his back to publish stories against his will.

Journalism is often stereotyped as wreaking “havoc on most personal relationships.”⁵⁸ Spiller’s mother, Dorothy (Mariette Hartley), accuses Spiller of alienating the people close to her.⁵⁹ Spiller has a poor relationship with her mother whom she resents for treating Spiller’s father’s suicide with disrespect.⁶⁰ Spiller’s brother, Leo (Will McCormack), constantly reminds Spiller that he is disappointed in her for being so obsessed with what he finds an embarrassing job.⁶¹ Leo asks Spiller to publish pictures of him and Jack Dawson (Grant Show), which show the two engaged in an explicit affair, in order to expose the action star as a homosexual,⁶² but he turns on Spiller when the story tears Dawson’s family apart.⁶³ Leo is so angry with her that he leaves town⁶⁴ and refuses to let Spiller know where he is going.⁶⁵ He then secretly stalks Spiller in an attempt to get her to realize what it is like on the other side of the paparazzi’s cameras. When Spiller catches him, Leo tells her he did it *for* her because he “couldn’t get you to see what you were doing to people, to me, to yourself. I wanted you to feel the same terror and helplessness as your victims.”⁶⁶ Don Konkey (Ian Hart) is the only character who

understands that “Lucy has serious abandonment issues when it comes to family.”⁶⁷

Because of this, Spiller is unable to foster healthy relationships with her family members and with men.

Spiller’s only semi-significant romantic relationship in *Dirt* is a secret affair she has with McLaren.⁶⁸ She never admits to anyone that she actually cares about him. Although she tells him about her father’s death, she doesn’t let him know much more about herself.⁶⁹ She puts up an emotional wall to prove she’s thick-skinned because she has to have control of every relationship she has.⁷⁰ Other than McLaren, Spiller is only briefly involved with one other man—who is never given a name—whom she takes home after they meet at a valet booth when they are both waiting for their cars. After sleeping with him and assuring him that he will not be able to give her an orgasm, she kicks him out of her house. Spiller, “as brutal in her busy bedroom as she is at the office,”⁷¹ tells him she has hours of work to get back to.⁷² With her, it is always business first, pleasure second. Otherwise, Spiller comes home to an empty bed each night where she uses her vibrator before falling asleep.⁷³ Konkey blames Spiller’s commitment issues with men on her father’s suicide.⁷⁴

Film and television journalists “usually end up alone in the big city without a family.”⁷⁵ Because of this, typically “the only friends most newspeople have are the people who work with them.”⁷⁶ Spiller always comes home to an empty house—she does not even have pets.⁷⁷ According to McLaren, “Lucy Spiller is nobody’s friend.”⁷⁸ While she doesn’t have many friends, she does have one genuine best friend, Konkey. Spiller and Konkey went to the same college where they worked on the college newspaper

together.⁷⁹ Besides Leo, he is the only person whose well being Spiller unquestionably cares about. She always checks on Konkey to make sure he takes his schizophrenia medication and brings him food when she thinks he hasn't eaten.⁸⁰ When Konkey runs away, Spiller orders her bodyguard to focus first on finding him and second on figuring out who is stalking her.⁸¹ Spiller regrets not telling Konkey how much she really cares about him.⁸² Konkey is the only co-worker who has evolved into Spiller's extended family.⁸³ Spiller is portrayed as being overly consumed with her work at the expense of most personal relationships.

Although viewers are likely to have an affinity for Spiller because she is the leading character, they are also likely to be critical of Spiller because of how she behaves. Researchers found most leading journalists in film and television are either heroes or villains.⁸⁴ Spiller's character is not distinctly one or the other. Rather, she blurs the line between reflecting "society's innermost hopes and dreams...[and] its fears and nightmares."⁸⁵ There are times where viewers will look at Spiller with adulation, and then abhor her seconds later.

Journalist heroes often are "self-made persons, independent spirits, people who get angry over injustice and unfairness."⁸⁶ Spiller has worked her way to the top. She is independent and cutthroat, business savvy and determined. In addition to working hard, heroes are both brave and honest.⁸⁷ When former child star Sammy Winter (Vincent Gallo) takes the staff of *Dirt Now* hostage, Spiller never pleads for her life. Rather, she asks Winter if she can do a story on him.⁸⁸ When Mallory attacks Spiller with a knife, stabbing her in the stomach, Spiller calls Konkey and tells him to get to her house and get

the photos of her before he calls 911 for help.⁸⁹ These examples demonstrate Spiller's values, what is most important to her. She puts her magazine before her own personal health and safety. However, rather than appearing a hero dedicated to the success of her publication, Spiller's actions are more representative of an obsessed madwoman.

Although Spiller believes she is righting wrongs and bringing justice to the public, she simultaneously disregards all ethical and moral standards of journalism that stand in her way. Heroes use the power of the press to "right wrongs, to stop injustice, to do what is fair and right."⁹⁰ While Spiller thinks that she is being honest with her readers by printing the happenings of the corrupt Hollywood celebrities the public looks up to and invests in, she uses bribery and blackmail—things a true journalist hero would not stoop to. Although her means to get the story are questionable, Spiller will only settle for accuracy for *Dirt Now*, telling her reporters, "OK listen, there is actual reporting involved in what we do. Our readers want to know that people actually screw up and that they actually sleep with hookers and that they lie. So no, a friend of a friend—that would be gossip. And gossip is what lands you in court. The only real defense we have is the truth—preferably with photos."⁹¹ Spiller makes sure that every story *Dirt Now* publishes is verified by more than one source.⁹² Furthermore, journalist heroes typically believe "that the ends, the triumph of right over wrong, justify any means, no matter what the ethical or moral cost may be. They believe in and embrace the public interest."⁹³ To a small extent Spiller represents some qualities of a journalist hero. But her willingness to sacrifice ethical and moral standards to get a better story is hardly admirable.

Unlike heroes, journalist villains are vain, conceited⁹⁴ “socially undesirable, usurpers, abusers, snobs, strangers, traitors, sneaks, chiselers, narcissists”⁹⁵ who abuse the media by using it “to serve their own social, economic, political, or personal ends.”⁹⁶ Spiller is accused of playing with people’s lives.⁹⁷ She uses the power of the press to blackmail people into giving her information and to bring her exclusive stories. Spiller does admit that she is “just a little shallow,”⁹⁸ but she is never preoccupied with her own economic interests before those of *Dirt Now*. Lastly, journalist villains “care nothing about the public interest.”⁹⁹ When Spiller’s bodyguard tells her that she knows “better than just about anybody how easy it is to get into someone’s life and steal their soul,” she assures him that what *Dirt Now* does has nothing to do with stalking or terrorizing people.¹⁰⁰ Spiller convinces herself that the pages of *Dirt Now* actually do serve the public interest and that what she and her staff do to get those stories is unobtrusive and acceptable. The problem is, she exists in a world where she twists genuine values of honorable journalism to meet the ends of her product. She sees nothing wrong with what she does.

Spiller knows that a lot of people dislike her because of the nature of what she publishes.¹⁰¹ She ends up paying \$2,000 a day for a personal security team¹⁰² and hires a bodyguard when a stalker starts to leave photos on her bed and in her car of her undressing and having sex with McLaren.¹⁰³ Spiller’s bodyguard tells her, “I’ve been to parades with fewer people than your list of possible suspects.”¹⁰⁴ Spiller was “one of the few non-politicians to get the gift of deadly classified chemicals,” specifically anthrax, after 9/11.¹⁰⁵ She even carries a stun gun with her at all times and keeps a spare at

home.¹⁰⁶ When she sets her dirty martini down on a table at an exclusive Hollywood event, a director warns her, “Oh I wouldn’t do that if I were you. No woman should leave their drink unattended in these troubled times—most of all you. Do you have any idea of how many of these people would like to see you laying on the ground begging for somebody to call 911?”¹⁰⁷ Spiller laughs, even though she knows he is right. It is not just the people Spiller publishes stories about who dislike her; the people who work for her are not always fans either. There is “a secret blog of disgruntled Lucy Spiller employees,” with the password “d-bag.”¹⁰⁸

Of journalist heroes and villains, “an argument can be made that there have never been any true heroes or villains in journalism, simply celebrities.”¹⁰⁹ Because Spiller represents what it is to be both a journalist hero and villain at times, she is more likely to be seen as a journalist celebrity. The journalist as celebrity is distinguished by his or her image, whereas the journalist as hero is distinguished by his or her achievement.¹¹⁰ Spiller knows “being in the public eye is the definition of celebrity.”¹¹¹ Readers know who Spiller is because *Dirt Now* is usually the top-selling tabloid. Celebrities know who Spiller is because she exploits them each week. While “heroes create themselves, celebrities are created by the media.”¹¹² Where a hero will continue to be a hero as time passes, “the passage of time destroys the celebrity,”¹¹³ who is only as good as his or her reputation.¹¹⁴ If Spiller is ever fired from her job as editor-in-chief, people likely will soon forget who she is as they turn their attention to the next editor-in-chief. Spiller’s power comes from her job, not the other way around. “The celebrity is the creature of gossip, of public opinion, of magazines, newspapers, and the ephemeral images of the

movie and television screen.”¹¹⁵ Ironically, as a result of overseeing the writing about celebrities, Spiller has become as widely known as the people in the pages of *Dirt Now*.

Editors represented in film and television “throughout the century, are always gruff and sharp-tongued but usually soft under their bluster.”¹¹⁶ Although Spiller often comes across as completely self-sufficient and independent, she reveals vulnerability with certain people or when she is alone. She cannot sleep through the night,¹¹⁷ and when she tries to she has hallucinations, experiences paranoia,¹¹⁸ and has nightmares about her own death.¹¹⁹ When Spiller realizes she is being stalked, she goes to Konkey’s house because she is scared. She feels safe with Konkey and is able to finally fall asleep in his lap.¹²⁰ Spiller’s father’s death haunts her every day of her life.¹²¹ It is clear she loved him and his suicide has crushed her.¹²² In her toast to her mother’s marriage, Spiller admits, “twenty-five years ago my mother’s first husband, my father, hanged himself in our living room. Ever since then I have questioned the whole idea of love and commitment.”¹²³ Spiller’s commitment issues permeate her every personal interaction. McLaren tells her, “You’ve got no one. It’s obvious. You’ve got nothing and no one.”¹²⁴ Leo constantly challenges Spiller because he does not like her job. He does not understand how she can sacrifice every opportunity for a substantial personal life for her magazine. He thinks she will end up alone and lonely. “I just have this image of you in your expensive home with nothing to hold but your latest issue. Is that really enough?”¹²⁵ Leo asks her. McLaren, the only man she actually cares about romantically, calls her poison¹²⁶ and accuses her of even hating herself.¹²⁷ She knows she cannot trust anybody because of the work she does, so she always has her guard up.¹²⁸ Likewise, people around

Spiller have difficulty trusting her because they fear she will publish anything as long as it is a good story.¹²⁹

Spiller savors her success. She wears fashionable clothes. She lives in a big house with a view of the Hollywood Hills. She drives a fancy sports car. She feels no shame about what she does. She considers her job as editor-in-chief of *Dirt Now* both legitimate and important. She is exceptionally loyal to *Dirt Now* and she genuinely likes her job as editor—she would not want any other position at the magazine.¹³⁰ Spiller's world of journalism ethics is a skewed one where she believes she is not a corrupt individual. Rather, she blames the competitive business and corrupt politics of Hollywood for the public's idea that tabloid journalism is disreputable press. People blame Spiller and her articles for ruining marriages, careers, and fortunes, and exploiting embarrassing habits or fetishes. Harvey, a Hollywood director, tells Spiller her article resulted in his divorce, costing him two of his three houses. It could be argued that Harvey's escapades with hookers resulted in his wife divorcing him—Spiller's article just made sure his wife knew about it.¹³¹ Spiller does not ever feel guilty for whatever consequences result from the material she publishes because she believes that a scandal is still a scandal whether or not she puts a story out about it.¹³²

Research of film and television journalists find, “among the most popular villains in newspaper movies are the power-hungry gossip columnists, who will stop at nothing to get that must-read item into the newspaper. They are cocky, power-mad, ready to sacrifice everyone to get ahead and stay on top. Yet, they are played by such likable and ingratiating actors that their evil is muted. You like them in spite of what they do and

how they act.”¹³³ This is a working definition of Spiller’s character. She abuses the power of the press, she keeps a safe with information in it to blackmail and bribe sources, she distorts stories to make a point, and she emphasizes certain aspects of a story to bring down or bring up a celebrity depending on how cooperative the celebrity is with her. While she prides herself on accuracy, she is seldom fair in her reporting. The only thing that really matters to Spiller is getting the story and making sure her magazine sells.¹³⁴

Chapter 2 Endnotes

¹⁴ According to the FX Network Web site, “Courteney Cox plays ‘Lucy Spiller,’ the powerful, intelligent, and utterly ruthless editor-in-chief of *Dirt Now* magazine. At the end of season one, Lucy discovers the price one must pay for success in a world built upon unraveling the truth behind celebrity facades. Courteney moved to Los Angeles in 1985 and grabbed her first big break when she was cast in *Family Ties* as Michael J. Fox’s girlfriend, ‘Lauren Miller.’ She is best known, however, for her standout performance as ‘Monica Geller’ on the hit series *Friends*, which won a 2002 Emmy Award for ‘Outstanding Comedy Series.’ In addition to starring in *Dirt*, Courteney is executive producing the show under her production company Coquette, which was established in 2004 with her husband David Arquette. As part of Coquette, Courteney’s first project was an interior design show for cable’s WE (Women’s Entertainment) Network called *Mix it Up*. Courteney served as a producer of the show, which profiled couples and roommates whose styles were at odds. Coquette’s comedy *Daisy Does America* aired on TBS. Coquette has several other projects in development and recently released *The Tipper*, a horror film written and directed by David Arquette. Courteney’s performance as ‘Gail Weathers’ in Wes Craven’s horror/comedy film *Scream* in 1996 led to a continued role in the two follow-up films. She starred opposite Jim Carrey in 1994’s breakout hit *Ace Ventura: Pet Detective*, directed by Tom Shadyac. It was for this role of ‘Melissa Robinson’ that she received an American Comedy Award nomination. Courteney’s other film credits include: *3000 Miles to Graceland*, *Mr. Destiny*, *Cocoon: The Return*, *Zoom*, *November*, *The Longest Yard*, and *Barnyard*. She lives in California with her husband, daughter, and dogs.”

¹⁵ Episode 5: “You Don’t Know Jack,” *Dirt*. First aired January 30, 2007, FX Networks. ABC Studios, FX, and Coquette Productions. Directed by Chris Long. Written by Dave Flebotte. (46:09).
DAWSON’S BODYGUARD: Your friend Leo, turns out he’s Lucy Spiller’s brother.
DAWSON: That tabloid bitch?

¹⁶ The word *editor-in-chief* originated in 1873 to mean “an editor who heads an editorial staff.” “Editor in Chief,” (Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary), <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/editor%20in%20chief> (accessed February 2008).

¹⁷ Episode 6: “The Secret Lives of Altar Girls,” *Dirt*. First aired February 6, 2007, FX Networks. ABC Studios, FX, and Coquette Productions. Directed by Jesse Bochco. Written by Joel Fields. (19:49).

¹⁸ Episode 9: “This Is Not Your Father’s Hostage Situation,” *Dirt*. First aired February 27, 2007, FX Networks. ABC Studios, FX, and Coquette Productions. (28:00).

¹⁹ Joe Saltzman. "Analyzing the Images of the Journalist in Popular Culture: A Unique Method of Studying the Public's Perception of Its Journalists and the News Media," p. 23.

²⁰ "*Dirt*," (Internet Movie Database), <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0496275/> (accessed January 2008).

²¹ Typical responsibilities of editor-in-chief include acting as the overall editor of a single publication, the entire publication house, or a set of publications owned and operated by the publishing house. "Editor in Chief," (MSN Encarta Online Dictionary), http://encarta.msn.com/dictionary_/editor%2520in%2520chief.html (accessed February 2008).

²² Tom Shales. "FX's *Dirt*: A Wickedly Good Wallow in Hollywood."

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Episode 6: "The Secret Lives of Altar Girls," *Dirt*. (19:49).

LAFOON: Fun story, huh?

SPILLER: Yea, everyone loves murder.

LAFOON: Fifteen and bam, it's over just like that.

SPILLER: Yup.

LAFOON: You're not objective.

SPILLER: Excuse me?

LAFOON: This story, I know why you're so obsessed by it.

SPILLER: Why, I'm a mad genius? Or is it just my god-given gift to find editorial gold?

LAFOON: It's the girl. I remember way back one night you got drunk at McLooty's and told me the whole story of your father's suicide, how you found his body when you were 15, how you never understood why he did it. You were 15 just like this girl. You said you died that day. Your words, 'I died that day.' You said that's why you wanted to be a reporter, so you can know the why of things.

SPILLER: I said that.

LAFOON: You were drunk.

SPILLER: Yeah, must have been.

LAFOON: You said your father's suicide was the one mystery you most wanted to solve. You said it like everything would just fall into place if you knew the answer to that one question, why. Why'd he do it?

²⁵ Episode 12: "Caught on Tape," *Dirt*. First aired March 20, 2007, FX Networks. ABC Studios, FX, and Coquette Productions. Directed by Frederick King Keller. Written by Joel Fields. (29:35).

²⁶ Episode 10: “The Sexxxx Issue,” *Dirt*. First aired March 6, 2007, FX Networks. ABC Studios, FX, and Coquette Productions. Directed by Lev L. Spiro. Written by Matthew Carnahan. (45:05).

Spiller reads her magazine in bed.

²⁷ Episode 12: “Caught on Tape,” *Dirt*. (36:44).

MALLORY: Is this an interview?

SPILLER: Isn’t that the point? I mean isn’t it always?

MALLORY: I guess.

²⁸ Episode 1: “Pilot,” *Dirt*. First aired January 2, 2002, FX Networks. ABC Studios, FX, and Coquette Productions. Directed by Matthew Carnahan. Written by Matthew Carnahan. (53:49)

Episode ends with Spiller lying in her bed surrounded by pages of cover options.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

Spiller is observing celebrities at the party. She eyes a woman and a man together, but the man is looking at another man, apparently disinterested in the pretty woman talking to him. The scene flashes to a man holding a mini-camera in his hand as he snatches a photo of the couple. A magazine cover with the couple kissing and the headline “*I’M GAY!!!*” (00:31) comes up on the screen to signify the week’s stories Spiller will get from this party. Another photo for the cover flashes up with “*HOLLYWOOD HOOKUP!!!*” (00:39) over a picture of guy and girl (he is fixing her dress strap) as they stumble out of a room. Another: “*Celebulimia?!?*” (00:56) streaked across a picture of a young woman hastily eating at the bar. Spiller has a confident sneer on her face that says she knows the secrets of the celebrities around her. Spiller’s mind is focused on her weekly tabloids *Dirt* and *Now* 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

³⁰ *Ibid.* (00:46).

Spiller is in a formal red gown at an exclusive Hollywood party. Partygoers approach Spiller to ask her questions, to compliment her, to attempt to discuss business. She blatantly ignores every approach, as if she is above everyone around her, as if she does not have time for them.

WOMAN TRIES TO GET SPILLER’S ATTENTION: Hey sweetie! Listen, Jessica wants you to print a retraction, she’s really—

SPILLER: No. (As she disregards the woman and keeps on walking.)

³¹ Episode 12: “Caught on Tape,” *Dirt*. (34:54).

³² *Ibid.*

³³ Episode 6: “The Secret Lives of Altar Girls,” *Dirt*. (00:29).

KONKEY: That's Holt McLaren. He gives Lucy dirt. With her help he's gonna be the next big thing in action movies.

³⁴ Episode 1: "Pilot," *Dirt*. (01:42).

SPILLER: You know why I'm not afraid? Because you and all your Hollywood pals read my magazines and secretly love them and know every word is true. And as much as you all hate to admit it, you need me.

³⁵ Ibid. (41:43).

MCLAREN: I'm an actor. That's all I ever wanted to do.

SPILLER: No. You wanted to be famous. There's a big difference.

³⁶ Episode 6: "The Secret Lives of Altar Girls," *Dirt*. (30:52).

SPILLER: You're a really good actor. But the thing that'll make you pop is that you have the look and you don't even know it.

MCLAREN: Well if I pop it's just because of your magazine.

SPILLER: That too.

MCLAREN: So I guess I owe you?

SPILLER: You do.

³⁷ Episode 2: "Blogan," *Dirt*. First aired January 9, 2007, FX Networks. ABC Studios, FX, and Coquette Productions. Directed by Chris Long. Written by Matthew Carnahan. (28:14).

SPILLER: I know that you don't want to be a star. But I also know that you're from Flora de Mayo and that your mother and sister are there with other family members.

GABRIELLA: How do you know about my—

SPILLER: I'm a journalist. And I know that you worry about them and their standard of living.

GABRIELLA: And if I help you?

SPILLER: Well there is a farm with some acreage and a very nice house next to your mother and it's for sale for about \$200,000, U.S. I think that if you help us, that could be a very realistic goal. Now the insiders are reporting that she's going to induce at the superstar suite at Cedars. They're all camped out there but I don't think they're gonna go to Cedars. There're gonna be too many unanswered questions there, due to the nature of the pregnancy. Don't you think?

GABRIELLA: I think you are right. But they don't tell me the location. When the baby comes they will call and then they will send a car.

SPILLER: OK well why don't you let us worry about that. All you need to do is take that baby to the window for a shot of California sun. You know how the babies get jaundice.

GABRIELLA: It's the house plus \$100,000, U.S. I want half the money upfront, non-refundable. And the other half if you get your picture.

SPILLER: Congratulations on your new home.

³⁸ Episode 3: “Ovophagy,” *Dirt*. First aired January 16, 2007, FX Networks. ABC Studios, FX, and Coquette Productions. Directed by Paris Barclay. Written by Joel Fields. (20:39).

TYREESE: I followed your crazy pap. Did you really think I wouldn’t figure out it was you who sent those pictures?

SPILLER: You’re a smart man Prince. Of course I thought you’d figure it out. I was counting on it. Gibson Horne owns this magazine. He owns your team. That makes us family. I don’t want to publish those nasty photos. That’s why I intercepted the negatives, so I could give them back to you. Because that’s what family does, they look out for each other, right?

TYREESE: OK.

SPILLER: So, I do something to look out for you, give you the negatives, and you do something for me. We’re looking into the disappearance of Andre G. I know you hang out with his pals and his manager. That’s a pretty tight circle you’re in. I want that story.

TYREESE: I don’t know. I don’t know anything about that.

SPILLER: Ugh, I don’t want this to turn into one of those ugly family fights where you won’t help me and I won’t help you and then that picture of you with the dildo gets out. Wouldn’t be good for your image, let alone your marriage.

TYREESE: I can’t talk about Andre G. I can give you anything else.

SPILLER: How ’bout an exclusive on how you like taking it up the ass? Would that work? Come on, I always protect my sources. Whatever you tell me no one will ever know it came from you.

TYREESE: I can’t.

SPILLER: We go to press in two days.

³⁹ Episode 1: “Pilot,” *Dirt*. (04:55).

SPILLER: What does she look like?

ANONYMOUS MALE REPORTER: Not bad, slutty.

SPILLER: Good we love slutty. OK, Tell her if she doesn’t talk to us we’re going to run it without her side anyway.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.* (40:31).

SPILLER: Now what can I do for you? Besides receiving your undying gratitude for the beautiful profile in my magazine.

MCLAREN: I’m not gonna give you any more dirt. Not about my friends or my enemies. Kira’s in the hospital because I told—

SPILLER: Kira’s in the hospital because she’s a drug addict.

MCLAREN: The point is that you people—

SPILLER: OK first of all, you’re welcome for the profile. Plus the three other tidbits we managed to place, which any publicist would sacrifice a left nut for. Secondly, you’re now a source. And I think we’re gonna do wonderful things together. Me, you, and Don here.

MCLAREN: I’m not gonna help you anymore.

SPILLER: Oh, poor Julia.

MCLAREN: No. Don't—don't even go there.

SPILLER: When she finds out about your betrayal, think about it. Poor Julia. I mean I know how much she adores you.

MCLAREN: She'll either understand or she won't. I don't care. I love her and she loves me.

SPILLER: Well that's brave.

MCLAREN: Screw you.

⁴¹ Ibid. (41:43).

SPILLER: Holt, I think you need to see something. You know what we love here at *Dirt* and *Now*? Homemade porn. (She starts to show McLaren a tape of Mallory having sex with her co-star.)

SPILLER: I honestly would rather not leak this... You can give your dirt to Don whenever. Just make sure it comes in regularly.

⁴² Episode 3: "Ovophagy," *Dirt*. (31:43).

TYREESE: If I tell you, they kill me. I'm not shittin' you. If they knew I was here right now they'd kill both of us.

SPILLER: I'm willing to take the risk. No one will ever know where I got this information.

⁴³ Episode 1: "Pilot," *Dirt*. (22:29).

ANONYMOUS GUY SPILLER MET AT THE VALET WHILE THE TWO WERE WAITING FOR THEIR CARS: This is for you. Just our CD. Just in case you want to give it a listen. (He gives her his CD after they sleep together.)

ANONYMOUS: Nothing like being a desperate musician trying not to appear desperate. How am I doing? You want to make us famous?

SPILLER: I never told you what I did for a living.

ANONYMOUS: No, why, you're not like CIA are you?

SPILLER: Wow, you knew the whole time.

ANONYMOUS: That was just my feeble attempt at humor.

SPILLER: Get out...get your shit and go. (She says as she uses a stun gun on the man's penis to get him to leave faster.)

⁴⁴ Episode 9: "This Is Not Your Father's Hostage Situation," *Dirt*. (05:07).

⁴⁵ Episode 8: "The Thing Under the Bed," *Dirt*. First aired February 20, 2007, FX Networks. ABC Studios, FX, and Coquette Productions. Directed by Dean White. Written by Sally Robinson. (05:38).

SPILLER: She's a B-list actress with a sinking sitcom. God I love the smell of PR bullshit in the morning. (She is talking about the tip McPhearson just got on Pritchard from the travel agent.)

MCPHEARSON: Well I don't smell it.

SPILLER: Really? Take a deep breath. Dana Pritchard's 15 seconds are over. She had them in front of a club when someone with a cell-phone cam caught her husband, rock star Joey Perez, beating her like a bowl of brownie mix. Good footage, number one celebrity download for a week. And then America lost interest. Dana's been linked to everyone but Osama. She's an ink-seeker trying to save face and stick it to Perez. Do not buy it.

⁴⁶ Episode 3: "Ovophagy," *Dirt*. (11:55).

CONNIE CHRIS'S PUBLICIST: I'm here with a press release and it says that between nonstop work on her album and national church functions Connie Chris got exhausted. And she'll be fully recovered and back to work soon. I wanted to give it to you personally because it seems that your people are particularly interested.

SPILLER: Really?

PUBLICIST: Yes. Staking out her house, her mother's house, her grandmother's house.

SPILLER: Her grandmother's? Hmm, someone's showing initiative.

PUBLICIST: Good.

SPILLER: I love press releases. They're so much fun to translate. Let's see here, 'medical attention,' I'm guessing it's nose job or abortion, but which? 'Exhaustion,' well that's tough. Maybe rehab or a psychotic break?

PUBLICIST: Connie Chris is a role model for young people across the country. I will not have her reputation dragged down by some—

SPILLER: By what Rema? You're a publicist. You don't exist without us. Gimme my first cover. I'll pay you back. Come on, we're friends.

PUBLICIST: You don't know what friendship is, Lucy. (12:53).

SPILLER: I know you're lying about Connie Chirs. I can smell it. Gimme the truth and I'll at least give you the chance to put your spin on it.

⁴⁷ Episode 12: "Caught on Tape," *Dirt*. (13:43).

⁴⁸ Episode 2: "Blogan," *Dirt*. (05:32).

SPILLER: We're in a war here. It may be a war of the absurd, but it's a war just the same. First it was Blair Marshall, princess of pop without a hit in over a year. Then there was Logan Hicks, struggling after the breakup of his boy band *Straight Up Lovin'*. But when Blair met Logan there was a media frenzy. Blogan. And now, blump. No couple has ever been so controlling about their pregnancy and their baby pictures. It started eight months ago with their pregnancy announcement and an unforgettable pap confrontation. It's the perfect storm for a cover story. This baby picture is what Walmart mommy wants and it's going to be the next cover of *Now*. I want some kick ass cover lines by lunch.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.* (06:56).

SPILLER: Now the other magazines will run a cover pretty much like this one. (Spiller flashes a cover with a headshot of Klay on the projection screen in her conference room

meeting with *Dirt* magazine that says *We Remember Kira Klay 1978-2007*.) But none of them will run one like this. (Spiller changes the cover to show *SHOCKING FUNERAL PHOTOS*.) I have someone on the funeral photos. (Spiller hears her employees gasp in shock.) What is this too hard-core for you Columbia J-School grads? This isn't *Tiger Beat*.

⁵⁰ Ibid. (39:27).

SPILLER: If Tina Harrod can beat that you should give her the job. (Talking about her Kira Klay cover.)

BARROW: How does that feel? Being the first tabloid editor to put a dead star on the cover.

SPILLER: It feels great.

⁵¹ Episode 6: "The Sexxx Issue," *Dirt*. (35:07).

PATTERSON: You wanna ask my forgiveness for the way you treated me?

SPILLER: I thought I treated you well.

PATTERSON: You climbed over my smoldering corpse to get a promotion.

SPILLER: Aw, don't be a baby.

PATTERSON: You told me you had feelings for me.

SPILLER: I didn't say which feelings.

⁵² Episode 13: "Ita Missa Est," *Dirt*. First aired March 27, 2007, FX Networks. ABC Studios, FX, and Coquette Productions. Directed by Matthew Carnahan. Written by Matthew Carnahan. (15:56).

SPILLER: Oh please, you'd sell that little newborn for a shot at my desk and we both know it.

HARROD: Well you know what? If she doesn't stop crying through the night I may just take you up on that.

⁵³ Episode 2: "Blogan," *Dirt*. (08:10).

HORNE: Well you're gonna make 'em for less money. Knock off 20 percent. Lucy, do not mistake fondness for weakness. I will tolerate a lot of things but I will not tolerate someone losing my money.

SPILLER: We'll find a way.

HORNE: No, you'll find a way. Or so help me I will bury you.

⁵⁴ Ibid. (42:25).

HORNE: If I do this for you— (He approves Spiller's idea to merge *Dirt* and *Now*.)

SPILLER: You name it, I'll do anything. I know this will succeed. I know it. I can feel it.

HORNE: Brent Barrow know anything about this?

SPILLER: I came straight to you. Vision is not a part of his job.

HORNE: He won't be pleased.

SPILLER: I don't give a shit. I don't work for him.

HORNE: Then God help you if you're wrong.

SPILLER: I won't be.

⁵⁵ Episode 1: "Pilot," *Dirt*. (04:15).

⁵⁶ Joe Saltzman. "Analyzing the Images of the Journalist in Popular Culture: A Unique Method of Studying the Public's Perception of Its Journalists and the News Media," p. 35.

⁵⁷ Episode 1: "Pilot," *Dirt*. (25:40).

BARROW: Why do you have guys on Prince Tyreese?

SPILLER: Is he the basketball player? (She plays dumb, even though she and Konkey set Tyreese up with the hooker.)

SPILLER: Oh come on. We always have people on him. He's got a squeaky-clean family-man image and he's a total slime ball.

BARROW: Did you get anything on him?

SPILLER: No. The son of a bitch loses us every time. (She lies about the photos she has of him with the hooker.)

(26: 32) BARROW: Let me know if you get anything on Prince Tyreese.

SPILLER: You're always my first call, Brent. (She lies again; Konkey hands her a manila envelope of the pictures of Tyreese once Barrow leaves.)

⁵⁸ Joe Saltzman. "Analyzing the Images of the Journalist in Popular Culture: A Unique Method of Studying the Public's Perception of Its Journalists and the News Media," p. 37.

⁵⁹ Episode 4: "What to Expect When You're Expecting," *Dirt*. First aired January 23, 2007, FX Networks. ABC Studios, FX, and Coquette Productions. Directed by Paris Barclay. Written by Dawn Prestwich and Nicole Yorkin. (03:52).

DOROTHY: We're getting married, Lucy. Day after tomorrow, right here in the hotel. I want you and your brother to give me away. You're gonna need a new dress.

SPILLER: Does Leo know about this?

DOROTHY: Well yes, he's doing the flowers.

SPILLER: You're a brave man. (She says this to Paul, Dorothy's fiancé.)

DOROTHY: You've only just met Paul, darling. Do you have to alienate him so soon?

⁶⁰ *Ibid.* (19:26).

DOROTHY: Your dad did as he chose that day. Now so am I. (She is talking about how she is getting married on the anniversary of Spiller's father's suicide.)

SPILLER: You act like it's some kind of retribution. How can you blame him?

DOROTHY: It was a hostile act. He did it at home. There was no note. No explanation. Why should I honor that day?

SPILLER: Because it's a pretty significant day to me. (She starts to get emotional, her eyes water up.)

DOROTHY: Lucy, I took you to that doctor. We talked about it ad infinitum, we've read books, what more could I do?

SPILLER: Well, you could try being a mother for once. Listen, I'm sorry, I've got so much work to do.

⁶¹ Ibid. (27:31).

LEO: I can't believe you'd do this to me. (He is looking at the photos Spiller had Konkey take of him and Dawson.)

SPILLER: I can't believe you're banging Jack Dawson, the Republican-family-man-super-action-macho-homo Jack Dawson.

LEO: If I'd wanted you to know I'd have told you. Jesus Christ, Lucy.

SPILLER: Well it's not like I'm gonna publish these. You know I wouldn't do that right?

LEO: You had your own brother followed by the stalkerazzi so don't act all indignant.

SPILLER: Oh my god. This isn't serious, is it?

LEO: Yes. I love him and he loves me. Why is that so hard to believe? Two people can meet and actually fall in love.

SPILLER: Leo, he is a movie star. I have covered this kinda story a thousand times—

LEO: I'm not a story. I'm your goddamn family. Can you be happy for anybody? I meet a terrific person and you diminish it like it's some piece of gossip. Mom finally finds someone she can fall in love again with, after 25 years, and you shit all over that too.

SPILLER: Leo.

LEO: Just don't with the whole big sister act. I'm embarrassed for us both.

⁶² Episode 5: "You Don't Know Jack," *Dirt*. (06:43).

LEO: I didn't seek him out. He seduced me. I was there to do a job. He played me for a fool, Lucy. I want to expose his lying, cheating, trainer-blowing ass. (He found out that Dawson is cheating on him.)

SPILLER: OK, well this just happened so why don't you give it a little time to digest.

LEO: Digest? Digest what? That a guy tells you that he loves you, that you're the first guy he's ever been with or felt this way about. Then two days later you catch him with his dick in another guy's mouth. If you tell me it's just sex, I'm cool with that. If you tell me you think you're falling in love, that you want me to clear my schedule for a month to be in New Zealand while you shoot your next picture, I'm thinking game on.

SPILLER: Well honey, I understand. But as your sister—

LEO: I don't want to talk with my sister, OK. I want to talk with the editor of *Dirt Now*. Is she in or isn't she?

SPILLER: You have no idea what you'd be getting yourself into.

LEO: I trust you.

SPILLER: No, no, this has nothing to do with trusting me. You want to out one of the biggest action stars in the world. I sure as hell would try to protect you but there are no guarantees. Do you really want to take that risk?

LEO: You bet your ass I do.

SPILLER: Good, cuz this is a great goddamn story.

⁶³ Episode 7: “Come Together,” *Dirt*. First aired February 13, 2007, FX Networks. ABC Studios, FX, and Coquette Productions. Directed by Adam Arkin. Written by Rebecca Dameron. (24:40).

SPILLER: Jack Dawson’s lawyer is threatening to put you on the stand if we don’t make a retraction. OK? You know I can’t do that.

LEO: You’d rather drag everyone through a public hearing?

SPILLER: I asked you more than once, ‘are you sure you want to do this Leo?’ You said to me, ‘You bet your ass.’ That is a direct quote—yes it is! I warned you.

LEO: You warned me? Warning me was bullshit! You should’ve said he has a family and two kids.

SPILLER: Oh like you didn’t know that.

LEO: God. Are people even real to you?

SPILLER: Yes, you’re real. This is so unfair, Leo. (She says this as Leo walks out of her house, shaking his head.)

⁶⁴ Episode 8: “The Thing Under the Bed,” *Dirt*. (00:13).

KONKEY: Lucy’s brother Leo got physical with action star Jack Dawson’s wife. Not in a good way. Leo told Lucy they shouldn’t have done the story on Jack Dawson. Dawson dropped all the charges, Leo dropped out of sight.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.* (22:15).

SPILLER: I saw mom, and she said that you call her every Sunday night. I wanna believe her because that means that you’re OK. She may just be trying to hurt me though, so can you please call me and tell me you’re OK? You don’t have to talk to me, you can just tell me you’re alright. Please? (She leaves Leo another message.)

⁶⁶ Episode 13: “Ita Missa Est,” *Dirt*. (34:13).

LEO: It was me, Lucy.

SPILLER: OK, don’t arrest him. Just get him away from me. (She is crying.)

LEO: After what happened with Jack Dawson I was so hurt and so angry and I couldn’t get you to see what you were doing to people, to me, to yourself. I wanted you to feel the same terror and helplessness as your victims.

SPILLER: My victims? Oh Jesus, Leo.

LEO: I’m sorry, Lucy.

SPILLER: You terrorized the one person who loves you unconditionally because you’re uncomfortable with her career. Way to go.

LEO: Before I walked out, I was standing on a chair, in my living room with a noose around my neck. I was ready, Lucy. I was gonna be just like him. No note, no explanation, no real attachments—so the best I could do was to try to reach out to my sister to try to put a dent in her perfect little system of justification and denial. I was

trying to reach you because I love you and I can't just sit by and watch you slip away like he did. I am sorry, Lucy. Lucy! (He starts to shout as she walks away.)

SPILLER: What?

LEO: I did it for you.

⁶⁷ Episode 8: "The Thing Under the Bed," *Dirt*. (00:30).

KONKEY: Lucy has serious abandonment issues when it comes to family. Her dad hanged himself when she was a kid. He left her a note...that was helpful.

⁶⁸ Episode 6: "The Secret Lives of Altar Girls," *Dirt*. (31:25).

Spiller and McLaren have sex in the back of the limo. McLaren brings her to orgasm, which (as she said in the "Pilot" episode) doesn't happen unless she uses her vibrator.

⁶⁹ Episode 8: "The Thing Under the Bed," *Dirt*. (33:25).

SPILLER: I was 15 when he died.

MCLAREN: That's the first thing you've ever told me about yourself. Personal, I mean.

SPILLER: I've told you I have never had an orgasm with anyone but you. That's not personal enough? Do you trust me?

MCLAREN: I don't even like you.

SPILLER: I don't like you either.

MCLAREN: Then we're safe.

⁷⁰ Episode 6: "The Secret Lives of Altar Girls," *Dirt*. (33:05).

SPILLER: Home sweet home.

MCLAREN: I can't come in, Julia's expecting me.

SPILLER: Did I invite you in?

MCLAREN: Oh, I'm sorry...

⁷¹ Tom Shales. "FX's *Dirt*: A Wickedly Good Wallow in Hollywood."

⁷² Episode 2: "Blogan," *Dirt*. (32:41).

SPILLER: I do have a lot of work to do. (She says this after having sex with the anonymous guy she met at the valet stand.)

ANONYMOUS: So essentially I'm a booty call?

SPILLER: Well, yeah. I have like two more hours of work to do tonight.

ANONYMOUS: You're like a guy, you really are. (He says as Spiller rushes him out of her door.)

⁷³ *Ibid.* (16:05).

Spiller is doing work in bed at night again, drinking red wine. She pauses to use a vibrator.

⁷⁴ Episode 6: "The Secret Lives of Altar Girls," *Dirt*. (00:55).

KONKEY: Lucy's dad committed suicide when she was 15. Now her relationships with men aren't so good.

⁷⁵ Joe Saltzman. "Analyzing the Images of the Journalist in Popular Culture: A Unique Method of Studying the Public's Perception of Its Journalists and the News Media," p. 37.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Episode 3: "Ovophagy," *Dirt*. (47:06).
Spiller is standing alone in her expensive house with no one to share the good news of her new magazine's sales with.

⁷⁸ Episode 12: "Caught on Tape," *Dirt*. (34:22).

⁷⁹ Episode 7: "Come Together," *Dirt*. (17:10).
ABBY: You went to college together, he told me. (She says this to Spiller about Konkey.)

⁸⁰ Episode 6: "The Secret Lives of Altar Girls," *Dirt*. (12:34).
SPILLER: I brought you some food. It's your favorite soup. (She says this to Konkey.)

⁸¹ Episode 13: "Ita Missa Est," *Dirt*. (02:52).
SPILLER: OK, so find out. Just find him first. He's never disappeared for this long before. If I have to choose between this asshole who's stalking me and Don, I say find Don. (She says this to her bodyguard when he suggests that Konkey is her stalker.)

⁸² Ibid. (20:12).
SPILLER: I never tell him what a good friend he is to me. He really is my friend. (She says this to Leo of Konkey.)

⁸³ Joe Saltzman. "Analyzing the Images of the Journalist in Popular Culture: A Unique Method of Studying the Public's Perception of Its Journalists and the News Media," p. 37.

⁸⁴ "Then as now, the images of the journalist in popular culture embody the basic notions of what a hero and villain are." Ibid. p. 4.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Dixon Wecter. *The Hero in America: A Chronicle of Hero-Worship*. New York, NY: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1972. p. 482-487.

⁸⁸ Episode 9: "This Is Not Your Father's Hostage Situation," *Dirt*. (40:57).
 SPILLER: Come on Sammy, let me do it. Let me take care of you, come on. (She never pleads for her life, she pleads for the story.)

⁸⁹ Episode 13: "Ita Missa Est," *Dirt*. (42:38).

MALLORY: You ruined my life.

SPILLER: I'm sorry.

MALLORY: I was thinking about that article you wrote, it was actually pretty good. But I have some cuts. (She takes a knife and stabs Spiller. They engage in a serious fight. Spiller stumbles out of her house and collapses on the driveway, holding her stomach where she was stabbed.)

SPILLER: Don, I need you to get to my house right away. Don't call 911 until after you get the pictures. (She manages to call Konkey.)

KONKEY: OK. (He takes out his IVs and leaves the hospital. Konkey gets to Spiller's and takes her photos and then holds Spiller, panicking and rocking back and forth.)

KONKEY: It's OK, Lucy. Help is on its way, you're going to be OK. I didn't do this, it was the forces. I didn't do this. I didn't do this. OH MY GOD! (He yells as the scene fades.)

⁹⁰ Joe Saltzman. "Analyzing the Images of the Journalist in Popular Culture: A Unique Method of Studying the Public's Perception of Its Journalists and the News Media," p. 5.

⁹¹ Episode 1: "Pilot," *Dirt*. (05:39).

⁹² Episode 7: "Come Together," *Dirt*. (22:59).

SPILLER: Every story in this magazine is verified by more than one source.

⁹³ Joe Saltzman. "Analyzing the Images of the Journalist in Popular Culture: A Unique Method of Studying the Public's Perception of Its Journalists and the News Media," p. 5.

⁹⁴ Dixon Wecter. *The Hero in America: A Chronicle of Hero-Worship*. p.11-12.

⁹⁵ Joe Saltzman. "Analyzing the Images of the Journalist in Popular Culture: A Unique Method of Studying the Public's Perception of Its Journalists and the News Media," p. 5.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Episode 7: "Come Together," *Dirt*. (17:55).

SPILLER: I'm gonna chalk that up to young and dumb. Look, play the patron of the arts if that's what gets you off, but don't play with people's lives.

ABBY: I thought that's what you did for a living?

⁹⁸ Episode 1: "Pilot," *Dirt*. (16:26).

ANONYMOUS MALE: No, you don't look shallow at all. (He is waiting with Spiller for his car at the valet.)

SPILLER: Well I might be...just a little.

⁹⁹ Joe Saltzman. "Analyzing the Images of the Journalist in Popular Culture: A Unique Method of Studying the Public's Perception of Its Journalists and the News Media," p. 5.

¹⁰⁰ Episode 10: "The Sexxx Issue," *Dirt*. (03:53).

¹⁰¹ Episode 12: "Caught on Tape," *Dirt*. (10:31).

SPILLER'S BODYGUARD: You think there's someone who wants to hurt you?

SPILLER: I'm the boss. Everyone wants to hurt me here.

¹⁰² Ibid. (29:03).

SPILLER: The only person who's interested in me seems to want me dead.

LEO: Why do you say that?

SPILLER: I don't know. Ask my \$2,000-a-day security team. It's weird, though. It's surreal. It's almost like I'm being stalked by a ghost.

¹⁰³ Episode 10: "The Sexxx Issue," *Dirt*. (26:26).

Spiller comes home at night and finds a photo on her bed of her and McLaren having sex.

¹⁰⁴ Episode 9: "This Is Not Your Father's Hostage Situation," *Dirt*. (01:40).

SPILLER'S BODYGUARD: Now, no offense, but I've been to parades with fewer people than your list of possible suspects.

SPILLER: None taken. If it were smaller I'd be unemployed.

¹⁰⁵ Episode 10: "The Sexxx Issue," *Dirt*. (03:15).

¹⁰⁶ Episode 11: "Pap Smear," *Dirt*. First aired March 13, 2007, FX Networks. ABC Studios, FX, and Coquette Productions. Directed by Chris Long. Written by Albert Kim. (04:13).

SPILLER: Don, I want you to carry this. It's a stun gun, 300,000 volts. OK?

KONKEY: No Lucy, you keep it.

SPILLER: It's alright. It's my spare.

¹⁰⁷ Episode 1: "Pilot," *Dirt*. (01:02).

¹⁰⁸ Episode 13: "Ita Missa Est," *Dirt*. (11:40).

¹⁰⁹ Joe Saltzman. “Analyzing the Images of the Journalist in Popular Culture: A Unique Method of Studying the Public’s Perception of Its Journalists and the News Media,” p. 5.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Episode 12: “Caught on Tape,” *Dirt*. (36:44).

¹¹² Joe Saltzman. “Analyzing the Images of the Journalist in Popular Culture: A unique Method of Studying the Public’s Perception of Its Journalists and the News Media,” p. 5.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Daniel J. Boorstin. *The Image or What Happened to the American Dream*, New York, NY: Atheneum, 1962. p. 61-62.

¹¹⁵ Ibid. p. 63.

¹¹⁶ Joe Saltzman. “Analyzing the Images of the Journalist in Popular Culture: A Unique Method of Studying the Public’s Perception of Its Journalists and the News Media,” p. 35.

¹¹⁷ Episode 8: “The Thing Under the Bed,” *Dirt*. (11:05).
SPILLER: I’m not sick I just, I haven’t slept that’s all.

¹¹⁸ Ibid. (12:27).

HYPNOTIST: Have you ever used medication?

SPILLER: Benzos, off and on.

HYPNOTIST: Does anyone in your family have a history of insomnia?

SPILLER: I don’t know.

HYPNOTIST: Do you have trouble falling asleep or staying asleep?

SPILLER: I sleep alone. I mean both.

HYPNOTIST: Hallucinations? Paranoia?

SPILLER: At night.

¹¹⁹ Episode 1: “Pilot,” *Dirt*. (03:11).

Spiller has a nightmare that she wakes up as a red rope tied around her neck tightens, strangling her.

¹²⁰ Episode 8: “The Thing Under the Bed,” *Dirt*. (42:56).

KONKEY: Want some tea?

SPILLER: No thanks. I just want to sit here for a minute.

KONKEY: You can sleep here.

SPILLER: No, I'm just gonna stay for a minute. (Konkey puts a record of Hawaiian music on the record player and covers Spiller with his sweater/coat. Spiller lays her head in his lap and he strokes her head and she finally falls asleep.)

¹²¹ Episode 4: "What to Expect When You're Expecting," *Dirt*. (11:23).

SPILLER: So, not only is she getting married on three-days notice to some stranger, but she's doing it on the anniversary of dad's death. How sick is that?

LEO: To be honest I don't even know if she remembers.

SPILLER: She remembers the day I got a DUI when I was 20.

LEO: In her defense, Lucy, it was Christmas. Listen, dad's death was 25 years ago. There's a lot of Valium under that bridge. It's just a day.

SPILLER: No. It will never be just a day to me.

¹²² *Ibid.* (30:56).

Spiller keeps her father's suicide note in the strings of a ukulele wrapped in a Hawaiian shirt in her closet. She cries as she reads the note and has a flashback of her father hanging himself in her family's living room. "Dearest Lucy, I had a dream, which was not at all a dream...I did this for you. Someday you will understand. Dad."

¹²³ *Ibid.* (41:55).

SPILLER: This is a very special day for this particular family. Twenty-five years ago my mother's first husband, my father, hanged himself in our living room. Ever since then I have questioned the whole idea of love and commitment. It's nice to see that my mother doesn't share the same doubt. And neither does my brother, apparently. Good for them, and I mean that. To Mom and Paul, may the truth never infringe upon your happiness. (This is her toast to her mother's marriage.)

¹²⁴ Episode 1: "Pilot," *Dirt*. (41:43).

¹²⁵ Episode 3: "Ovophagy," *Dirt*. (16:41).

LEO: And you wonder why you're alone.

SPILLER: I'm not alone. I have my magazine.

LEO: I just have this image of you in your expensive home with nothing to hold but your latest issue. Is that really enough? (Spiller doesn't respond.)

¹²⁶ Episode 7: "Come Together," *Dirt*. (04:11).

MCLAREN: This is wrong.

SPILLER: Don't take me on your guilt trip.

MCLAREN: You're poison, Lucy.

SPILLER: Excuse me?

MCLAREN: We have to stop.

SPILLER: Then what are you doing standing here?

¹²⁷ Episode 11: "Pap Smear," *Dirt*. (24:11).

MCLAREN: You know why I'm the only guy that can make you come? Because I'm the only one that hates you as much as you do.

¹²⁸ Episode 13: "Ita Missa Est," *Dirt*. (28:07).

HARROD: Wow. You really just don't trust anybody, do you?

SPILLER: Well... (She sarcastically smiles.)

HARROD: I mean you do have to trust somebody, sweetie. This is no way to live. You don't deserve to be alone.

¹²⁹ Episode 11: "Pap Smear," *Dirt*. (22:35).

MCLAREN: What, you have half of the photographers in Hollywood on payroll and you don't know who took this? Yeah, that's bullshit. You're always laying your traps, aren't you? Spinning your little web. (He says this to Spiller when Spiller shows him the photo her stalker took of the two of them having sex. He thinks Spiller set him up to expose him or to use it as blackmail.)

¹³⁰ Episode 1: "Pilot," *Dirt*. (29:36).

BARROW: You want my job.

SPILLER: I would kill myself if I had your job. I like to get dirty.

¹³¹ *Ibid.* (01:42).

HARVEY: Damien Fields, less than 20 feet away. You have pictures of him blowing some guy in Griffith Park. (He points out celebrities at the party that Spiller's magazine has written about to remind her of why people might be out to get revenge on her.)

SPILLER: At least we shot his good side.

HARVEY: Kara Valente. Exposé on her and her nanny.

SPILLER: Manny.

HARVEY: And, that time-lapsed series on the hooker parade on and off my yacht. That was very clever, and very funny. I didn't even make the cover.

SPILLER: You're hardly Spielberg, Harvey.

HARVEY: Certainly not anymore after becoming a punch line in one of your magazines. You know that divorce cost me two out of my three houses? In Hollywood that's practically homeless.

¹³² Episode 3: "Ovophagy," *Dirt*. (17:32).

SPILLER: What's eating you? I'm only lookin' out for you here.

MCLAREN: "You're only lookin' out for me? Kira Klay is dead because of what I told you and what you published. Julia's back is screwed up and she's in constant pain. So don't tell me you're lookin' out for me.

SPILLER: Kira Klay was a drug addict who got pregnant, freaked out and OD'd. Your girlfriend's in constant pain because you flipped your car at 90 miles an hour. All I've done is make you look great.

¹³³ Loren Ghiglione and Joe Saltzman, "Fact or Fiction: Hollywood Looks at the News." (Resources, Recommended Books, Articles and Web sites, Films, IJPC.org.) Los Angeles, CA: The University of Southern California, 2003. p. 22.

¹³⁴ Episode 3: "Ovophagy," *Dirt*. (45:57).

SPILLER: Where is it? (She points to the empty section of the newsstand looking for the first issue of *Dirt Now*.)

FRANKIE: Where's what? (He is the newsstand operator.)

SPILLER: Don't mess with me, Frankie. This is a P&W Newsstand. We pay for tier-one placement. Where the hell is *Dirt Now*?

FRANKIE: I dunno. Maybe the placement's too good. They sold out.

Chapter 3: Don Konkey, the Paparazzo

Patience, persistence, and point of view¹³⁵ are how Don Konkey¹³⁶ became the best in the business and Spiller's go-to paparazzo¹³⁷ for *Dirt Now*'s most exclusive cover photographs. Technically, Konkey is freelance,¹³⁸ "but outside of the occasional *Cat Fancier* magazine photo [he's] exclusive to *Dirt Now*."¹³⁹ A typical celebrity paparazzo seeks out shocking and titillating photographs¹⁴⁰ and "shoot[s] pictures of indescribable horror and barely escape[s] death to bring back"¹⁴¹ those photos to be published. Although on the surface Konkey does just that, he is not the typical Hollywood paparazzo.

Konkey is a functional schizophrenic.¹⁴² He has difficulty distinguishing his delusions from reality. For example, he thinks he is in a relationship with superstar Kira Klay (Shannyn Sossamon) who dies from overdosing on cocaine.¹⁴³ He knows she is dead,¹⁴⁴ but still thinks he can have sex with her.¹⁴⁵ He experiences another delusion where Klay gives birth to a litter of kittens.¹⁴⁶ He keeps one of the kittens, that he calls Tristen after his previous cat Tristen who recently died from cancer.¹⁴⁷ Konkey does not like to take his medication because when he does, he does not have the schizophrenic episodes¹⁴⁸ that make him think he has a girlfriend and talking cat.¹⁴⁹ Spiller is Konkey's only real friend.¹⁵⁰ Likewise, Konkey is the only person Spiller has a genuine friendship with from *Dirt Now*.¹⁵¹ She treats him with respect and kindness and never takes advantage of him.¹⁵² Despite his illness, Spiller thinks he is a genius at what he does.¹⁵³

She also believes his work for *Dirt Now* actually helps his disease by giving him something to focus on.¹⁵⁴

Konkey separates himself from the menacing pack of paparazzi that “poke their cameras into people’s faces, yell out questions, [and] recklessly pursue popular actors.”¹⁵⁵ He tells a young photographer that most paparazzi will take any picture just to get any shot. They do not think, he says, “they just, you know, they got no patience. They just rush in. We’re not knowin’ what it is they wanna get. I mean, they get a shot, but they don’t get a story. Stories are better.”¹⁵⁶ It is the “continual bombardment of obnoxious reporters chasing popular actors [that] contributes to the public’s rejection of the reporter as hero as someone necessary to society.”¹⁵⁷ Because Konkey does not associate himself with these types of photographers, it is difficult to see him entirely as a villain.

Konkey actually performs investigative journalism through his photography. His photos typically solve crimes and complex stories and give Spiller the proof she needs to publish certain cover stories. Investigative reporters in film and television often “end up beaten—but never broken. They are always threatened and show great courage in putting their lives on the line to get the story.”¹⁵⁸ Konkey, though not technically an investigative journalist, is physically attacked a number of times.¹⁵⁹ His house gets ransacked.¹⁶⁰ A group of Hispanic photographers take a metal bat to his car and slit his tires.¹⁶¹ Through all the abuse, he is always more worried about his camera equipment and saving his film than he is about himself.¹⁶² He carries empty rolls of film in case anyone ever demands he hand over his material.¹⁶³ No matter how badly he is beaten up he never tells his abusers that he works for Spiller because he wants to keep her safe.¹⁶⁴ Additionally, he

does not like Spiller to know when people push him around because he does not want her to worry about him.¹⁶⁵ These examples are reflective of Konkey's primary values. He puts his job and what Spiller wants before his personal health or safety—even if that means hurting himself. When he has trouble getting access to a celebrity in a hospital room he cuts off his finger so that he will have to have surgery—and, therefore, access to the celebrity he needs a photo of.¹⁶⁶ His dedication to Spiller, because he knows how much she cares about getting the story, is absolute. However, he too comes across as an obsessive manic who has an unhealthy relationship with his job.

Konkey relies on hidden cameras and surveillance¹⁶⁷ to get most of his cover shots.¹⁶⁸ Sometimes he hides out for hours, as when he is trying to get photographs of basketball star Prince Tyreese (Rick Fox) having sex with a prostitute. He buries himself in the ground and covers his body with a dirt-colored blanket, leaving only his telephoto lens exposed.¹⁶⁹ He uses small lapel cameras¹⁷⁰ and cameras that slip onto his finger like a ring¹⁷¹ when he needs to be discrete in public. He even goes through celebrities' garbage if he thinks that will give him a lead¹⁷² on a photo opportunity. Konkey is able to avoid interacting with sources for most of his assignments but sometimes Spiller needs him to lie about who he is or who he works for¹⁷³ in order to get a shot.¹⁷⁴ When Spiller tells him she needs a picture of Christian pop-star sensation Connie Chris's (Kate Linae) medical charts, Konkey pretends to be a flower deliveryman to try to get access to her hospital room.¹⁷⁵ When his first attempt fails he steals a doctor's jacket.¹⁷⁶ He does not ever back down from a challenging situation, but his notion of right and wrong disappear in the face of the higher value: getting the story.

The First Amendment protects freedom of speech and freedom of the press. It invites criticism of government and protects opinion. What it does not protect is invasion of privacy¹⁷⁷ and trespassing to get a photograph. According to Harold Fuson, a director for the Newspaper Association of America, “trespass is a strict liability tort; if you are on the property of another without permission or excuse, even if by accident or mistake, you are liable.”¹⁷⁸ An illegal intrusion may be accomplished without physical entry onto private property. Also, conduct that invades privacy may also violate criminal law.¹⁷⁹ Konkey runs into this problem when Spiller’s brother Leo helps Konkey sneak onto action star Dawson’s private property, enabling him to take a photograph that will expose the celebrity as a homosexual.¹⁸⁰ Caught taking the photos and beaten up, Konkey is arrested and bailed out by Spiller. Even though the men take Konkey’s camera from him, Konkey manages to swallow the film. Spiller takes him to the hospital to recover the photos.¹⁸¹ Although Konkey breaks the law to get the shot, he does not get away with it entirely, showing consequences to unlawful journalism. But *Dirt Now* still runs the story. While Konkey is reprimanded for his unlawful actions and viewers are able to see what the paparazzi are not allowed to get away with, he breaches major ethical standards in the name of getting the story.

Legally, there is a fine line between what photographers like Konkey can and cannot do. According to the Society of Professional Journalists’ code of ethics, in order to minimize harm journalists must “recognize that private people have a greater right to control information about themselves than do public officials and others who seek power, influence, or attention.”¹⁸² Only an overriding public need can justify intrusion into

anyone's privacy."¹⁸³ During the time Konkey took the photographs of Dawson, Dawson was at his private home—not in public. Even though Dawson is a public figure, he should have a reasonable expectation of privacy in his own home. If Dawson were to press charges, he would have to prove that he had a reasonable expectation of privacy¹⁸⁴ when the photos were taken of him in order to win his case. Konkey's photos themselves are not ever a threat to *Dirt Now* legally because a photograph by itself will rarely place a subject in a false light.¹⁸⁵ Konkey knows he is breaking the law, which is why he takes such precaution to be discreet. But he cares more about getting the story than he does about obeying the laws of the land.

Konkey has a protégé for one episode, Marqui Jackson (Lukas Haas). Jackson approaches Konkey and asks if he can follow him around to learn a few things about photography.¹⁸⁶ Jackson does not understand how to be patient to get the shot that tells the story. This gets him into trouble when he leaves Konkey's side. The group of Hispanics who previously beat up Konkey and wrecked his car brutally attack Jackson. Konkey hears the fight but does not go to help Jackson until he gets the shot Spiller wants.¹⁸⁷ Like Spiller, Konkey's first priority is to get the story, always.

Sometimes Konkey gets upset with the kind of work he does. When he comes home one night to find his first cat, the original Tristen, dead on the floor he cries to Spiller and tells her, "We killed him. All the stuff we did, all the bad things."¹⁸⁸ Konkey is the most sensitive character in the series. When Spiller tells Konkey that someone has been following her and taking her picture Konkey tells her, "They're doing what we do."¹⁸⁹ He understands that people in the tabloid business are often selfish and he tells

Jackson, “No one will remember them, who you were fighting with, what drugs they were taking, who they were screwing. Cuz tomorrow there will be another story. Nobody stays. Nothing stays. Just this.”¹⁹⁰ He sees legitimacy in photography—a story without words.

In film and television, “newspapermen and women are incredibly loyal to their publications and, most of all, to their colleagues.”¹⁹¹ Konkey is the most loyal character in *Dirt*. His greatest loyalty is to Spiller. Because her greatest loyalty is to *Dirt Now*, Konkey’s loyalty to Spiller translates to his devotion for the publication and the story. Most photographers represented in film and television would “lie, cheat, deceive a friend, take advantage of a loved one,”¹⁹² to get an exclusive picture for a cover story. This is not entirely true of Konkey’s character. Konkey would never purposely deceive or take advantage of Spiller. He would never put anyone or anything before her either.¹⁹³ When former child star Winter takes *Dirt Now* hostage Konkey puts himself between Spiller and Winter’s gun numerous times.¹⁹⁴

Usually Konkey’s schizophrenic episodes involve harmless delusions. However, in the season finale, Konkey is being told through his schizophrenic hallucinations that he has to kill Spiller.¹⁹⁵ When he imagines himself slitting Spiller’s throat he freaks out and drives into the desert.¹⁹⁶ He would rather wander in the desert alone, where he knows he will likely die, than potentially harm his best friend.¹⁹⁷ When he cannot take his delusions anymore he takes a knife to his throat, ready to end his own life in order to save Spiller’s.¹⁹⁸ A helicopter finds Konkey in the desert before he kills himself. When Spiller comes to see Konkey in the hospital he cries because he is so happy he did not hurt

her.¹⁹⁹ He realizes he cannot completely trust himself when he is off his medication. When Mallory stabs Spiller and Spiller calls Konkey to come over and get the photos—before he calls the police—he cries and rocks back and forth screaming, “I didn’t do this, it was the forces, I didn’t do this. I didn’t do this. OH MY GOD!”²⁰⁰ It is clear how unstable Konkey’s character is, but also how much he cares about Spiller.

At times it seems as though Konkey and Spiller are a two-man team, the only two on staff who provide *Dirt Now* with exclusive material.²⁰¹ It also seems the only reason Konkey even takes photographs is because Spiller asks him to. He truly believes Spiller is a good person.²⁰² He does not want to let her down²⁰³ when he knows she is relying on him for the cover story.²⁰⁴ Konkey is the only character who knows Spiller on an emotional level.²⁰⁵ He knows she is not as tough as she seems to be to the other employees. He is honest and open with her. Konkey tells her his deepest secrets, such as that he was molested by his stepmother when he was 14 years old.²⁰⁶ He is very observant of Spiller’s behavior²⁰⁷ and knows her better than anyone else on the series. The two have a very special friendship.

Konkey’s character is smart and likable. He provides viewers with an image of the paparazzi they have not likely seen before. An unlikely photographic genius, he is always one step ahead of the sweaty herd of typical Hollywood photographers. He knows only one shot will tell the story Spiller wants to tell and he does not stop until he has it. Although Konkey always seems to get the shot he needs, it does not come easy and he does not believe in luck. Often the only reward he gets for his job is pleasing Spiller and seeing her magazine sell well. He does not appear to have a lot of money or care about

anything material. He is one of the characters who makes tabloid journalists seem human, not just muckraking scandalmongers. Even though he knows as a paparazzo, “you never get time to sleep. You’re always getting arrested. People spit on you. And there’s always someone new trying to steal your job,”²⁰⁸ he never complains and never gives up.

However, he does terrible things—perhaps even more horrible than things real-life paparazzi do. He looks the other way when a friend is getting beat up for something he did and he sits in trees with telephoto lenses. He misrepresents himself, he lies, he abuses privacy, he breaks the law, and he continually puts himself in danger. Konkey and Spiller both serve at the altar of a higher god, the story. The two identify with each other in that they have the same values when it comes to journalism: do whatever it takes to get the story, even if that means lying or cheating, suffering, or dying.

Chapter 3 Endnotes

¹³⁵ Episode 11: “Pap Smear,” *Dirt*. (25:33).

KONKEY: Patience, persistence, point of view. Like the three R’s, but they’re P’s. (He says when Jackson asks him how long he plans to wait to get the shot.)

¹³⁶ According to the FX Network Web site, “Ian Hart plays Lucy’s best friend ‘Don Konkey,’ a schizophrenic paparazzo who has no boundaries in capturing shots of caught-off-guard celebrities. Don struggles to find a balance between his personal life, his career, and the disease that wreaked havoc on him. A Liverpoolian actor who shot to fame with two memorable turns as John Lennon in the early 1990’s, Ian Hart has gone on to build an impressive career. Ian’s portrayals of the iconic Beatle in the black-and-white short *The Hours and Times* and the music-infused drama *Backbeat* were roundly acclaimed. After several years on stage, Ian made his feature film debut in 1986 with a small role in the Liverpool-set feature *No Surrender*. In 1995, he garnered a Best Supporting Actor honor at the Venice Film Festival for his work in *Nothing Personal*. Later that year, Ian starred in the comedy *The Englishman Who Went Up a Hill but Came Down a Mountain* and in the independent films *Loved Up* and *Clockwork Mice*. Ian most recently wrapped production on *Morris: A Life with Bells On*, due out later this year. His other film credits include *Hollow Reed*, *Michael Collins*, *The Butcher Boy*, *Frogs for Snakes*, *Robinson Crusoe* and the blockbuster hit *Enemy of the State* starring Will Smith and Gene Hackman. Later, Ian appeared in *Liam*, for which he received a British Academy of Film and Television Arts (BAFTA) nomination; *The Homecoming*, for which he won The Irish Times Best Actor Award; *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone*; *Finding Neverland*, and *Blind Flight*, for which he received a Best Actor Award from the Tribeca Film Festival. On the small screen, Ian was featured in the miniseries *Longitude*, which aired on A&E in 2000. He also starred in the British drama *Aberdeen*, winning a Best Actor award the Czechoslovakia Film Festival; the American comedy *Spring Forward* (which debuted at Sundance in 2000) and then took on a supporting role in *Best*.”

¹³⁷ The word *paparazzo* dates back to 1959¹³⁷ and is defined as a scandal-seeking “freelance photographer who aggressively pursues celebrities for the purpose of taking candid photographs.” “Paparazzo,” (Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary), <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/paparazzo> (accessed March 2008).

¹³⁸ Freelance “is a person who acts independently without being affiliated with or authorized by an organization.” “Freelance,” (Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary), <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/freelance> (accessed March 2008).

¹³⁹ Episode 6: “The Secret Lives of Altar Girls,” *Dirt*. (00:04).

¹⁴⁰ “Paparazzo,” (MSN Online Dictionary)
http://encarta.msn.com/dictionary/_paparazzo.html (accessed March 2008).

¹⁴¹ Joe Saltzman. “Analyzing the Images of the Journalist in Popular Culture: A Unique Method of Studying the Public’s Perception of Its Journalists and the News Media,” p. 38.

¹⁴² Episode 2: “Blogan,” *Dirt*. (01:02).
KONKEY: This is hard for me because I have a tenuous grasp on what’s real. I’m a functional schizophrenic. Lucy helps me, and I help her.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.* (46:30).
Konkey is in bed. The dead Klay is lying in bed with him. Klay calls him “sweetheart” as she snuggles up to him.

¹⁴⁴ Episode 3: “Ovophagy,” *Dirt*. (00:27).
KONKEY: This is Holt McLaren. He’s a good actor. He doesn’t like me. But, he gave Lucy dirt on how Kira Klay was gonna have a baby. She OD’d. Then she died. Now she lives with me. (He talks about how his schizophrenia makes him think Klay is living with him.)

¹⁴⁵ Episode 4: “What to Expect When You’re Expecting,” *Dirt*. (01:36).
Konkey is so delusional that he actually thinks he is having sex with the dead Klay.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.* (32:55).
Klay gives birth to a litter of kittens.

¹⁴⁷ Episode 5: “You Don’t Know Jack,” *Dirt*. (31:32).
KONKEY’S KITTEN: Dad, I think it’s time. (He has hallucinations where his kitten talks to him.)

¹⁴⁸ “Schizophrenia is a chronic, severe, and disabling brain disease. Approximately 1 percent of the population develops schizophrenia during their lifetime – more than 2 million Americans suffer from the illness in a given year. Although schizophrenia affects men and women with equal frequency, the disorder often appears earlier in men, usually in the late teens or early twenties, than in women, who are generally affected in the twenties to early thirties. People with schizophrenia often suffer terrifying symptoms such as hearing internal voices not heard by others, or believing that other people are reading their minds, controlling their thoughts, or plotting to harm them. These symptoms may leave them fearful and withdrawn. Their speech and behavior can be so disorganized that they may be incomprehensible or frightening to others. Available treatments can relieve many symptoms, but most people with schizophrenia continue to suffer some symptoms throughout their lives; it has been estimated that no more than one in five

individuals recovers completely,” “Schizophrenia,” (Schizophrenia.com), <http://www.schizophrenia.com/family/sz.overview.htm> (accessed March 2008).

¹⁴⁹ Episode 4: “What to Expect When You’re Expecting,” *Dirt*. (36:45).

KLAY: It’s time for me to go, Don.

KONKEY: No, I’m gonna make you French toast.

KLAY: It’s time for you to go back on your meds.

KONKEY: I don’t want to go back on my meds. They make me feel bad.

KLAY: You have to.

KONKEY: I don’t want to, I love you. I don’t want to be alone again.

KLAY: You wont be. (She hands him a little white kitten, like Tristen.)

KONKEY: Tristen?

KLAY: No, it’s his son. You’re all he has. (Konkey cries and kisses her as he hugs her goodbye.)

¹⁵⁰ Episode 3: “Ovophagy,” *Dirt*. (00:11).

KONKEY: I work for my best friend, Lucy Spiller.

¹⁵¹ Episode 7: “Come Together,” *Dirt*. (17:10).

ABBY: So, you’re Don’s boss?

SPILLER: Friend.

ABBY: You went to college together, he told me.

¹⁵² Episode 1: “Pilot,” *Dirt*. (38:48).

SPILLER: You’re a great photographer, Don. You don’t owe me anything.

¹⁵³ Episode 3: “Ovophagy,” *Dirt*. (40:40).

SPILLER: Oh my god, Don. These are fantastic. (She’s talking about Konkey’s pictures of Chris.)

KONKEY: Thank you.

SPILLER: Tell me she told you what drugs she was using when she set herself on fire?

KONKEY: Heroin and epinephrine and said it felt like touching God.

SPILLER: She actually said that?

KONKEY: Uh huh.

SPILLER: I think I just came a little. Oh my god, Don, you’re a genius. That’s it, that’s the cover: *Connie Crisp*. (She picks out a close up of Chris’s face.)

¹⁵⁴ Episode 6: “The Secret Lives of Altar Girls,” *Dirt*. (13:15).

KONKEY: I’m fine. It’s just, you know, it’s up and down like always. I just need to work, you know, for focus. It’ll help.

SPILLER: OK, why don’t you come in on Wednesday and I’ll have something for you.

¹⁵⁵ Joe Saltzman. "Analyzing the Images of the Journalist in Popular Culture: A Unique Method of Studying the Public's Perception of Its Journalists and the News Media," p. 33.

¹⁵⁶ Episode 11: "Pap Smear," *Dirt*. (18:07).

JACKSON: At the store, why didn't you shoot Lulu and Tuesday? (He says this to Konkey as they go through tracking numbers on packaged documents looking for something from the celeb's realtor.)

KONKEY: That's not the story.

JACKSON: Yeah, but wouldn't you want to just get the shot?

KONKEY: They just shoot, they don't think. You know, there used to be rules. Like, don't become part of the story. But they just, you know, they got no patience. They just rush in. We're not knowin' what it is they wanna get. I mean, they get a shot, but they don't get a story. Stories are better.

¹⁵⁷ Loren Ghiglione and Joe Saltzman. "Fact or Fiction: Hollywood Looks at the News," p. 24.

¹⁵⁸ Joe Saltzman. "Analyzing the Images of the Journalist in Popular Culture: A Unique Method of Studying the Public's Perception of Its Journalists and the News Media," p. 36.

¹⁵⁹ Episode 1: "Pilot," *Dirt*. (44:30).

Konkey gets hit on the head in a parking garage.

ANONYMOUS: Paparazzi piece of shit. (He says this as he kicks Konkey while he's down.)

¹⁶⁰ Episode 11: "Pap Smear," *Dirt*. (19:13).

Konkey comes home at night to find his house has been ransacked.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.* (10:47).

ROMERO: Muchachos, muchachos. A mountain will come to Mr. Konkey. Sorry my shooters roughed you up. Ozzie Romero. (As he hands Konkey a business card.)

ROMERO: You know, we're a new agency, need to make a splash. We own this story, now you need to find another one. Now if you want to stick with this job? You're workin' for me. Get whatever he shot. (As he orders one of the Hispanics with him to get Konkey's film. They don't punch him, but they physically provoke him so that he hands over his film.)

KONKEY: I got a job.

ROMERO: Let me know if you change your mind. I'll even throw in a bonus to cover the damages to your car. (As a Hispanic man takes a metal bat to Konkey's car and slits his tires.)

¹⁶² Ibid. (02:49).

Konkey is on top of a dumpster, snapping photos of Tuesday and Lulu when a group of Hispanic men beat him badly and take his camera. Konkey is more worried about his camera than himself.

¹⁶³ Ibid. (18:52).

KONKEY: Empty rolls. Always carry empty rolls. Then you've got something to give the security guards when they pull you over.

¹⁶⁴ Episode 2: "Blogan," *Dirt*. (35:22).

(Tyreese busts into Konkey's house and pushes him over.)

TYREESE: You set me up with that skank.

KONKEY: Those pictures, those were great. You were in the hot tub and the Chaise lounge and the whipped cream and the strap-on right in your butt! (As Tyreese shoves him again.)

TYREESE: You want to talk like that anymore? Say that shit again and see what happens! Who you working with?

KONKEY: I'm a small businessman.

TYREESE: Who hired you for those pictures.

KONKEY: Nobody, just me.

TYREESE: You lying nutbag. (As he continues to throw Konkey around.)

TYREESE: This ain't over. (As he leaves.)

¹⁶⁵ Episode 11: "Pap Smear," *Dirt*. (04:13).

KONKEY: Ow! (As Spiller pats him on his left shoulder.)

SPILLER: Ow what?

KONKEY: Uh, I fell over. (He lies about getting beat up.)

SPILLER: You fell over?

KONKEY: No, well, it was a couple of guys—it's not a great neighborhood.

SPILLER: You got mugged?

KONKEY: I'm OK, but they took my camera.

¹⁶⁶ Episode 3: "Ovophagy," *Dirt*. (38:50).

KONKEY: Good thing we're at the hospital, huh? I'm gonna need some surgery. (After he goes to the loading dock at the back of the hospital with a cup of ice and proceeds to cut his left pinky finger off on the back of a delivery truck. He puts the finger on ice and says this to two deliverymen who are staring at him in disbelief because he just cut his finger off so he could get into the hospital for a photograph Spiller wants.)

¹⁶⁷ Episode 11: "Pap Smear," *Dirt*. (15:12).

KONKEY: Tuesday's voicemail. It's an audit system. I can hack in through the admin box, use a default code. (He says this to Jackson as he dials Tuesday's voicemail on a speakerphone system in the *Dirt Now* conference room.)

¹⁶⁸ Episode 1: "Pilot," *Dirt*. (32:51).

Konkey hides out in a tree above Klay's backyard. He uses a blanket to conceal himself but keeps the telephoto lens exposed. He is recording the conversation between Klay and her unborn baby's father on an audio tool using headphones and a speaker. Konkey's photo becomes the next cover with the headline: *EXCLUSIVE! SHE'S HAVING HIS BABY!*

¹⁶⁹ Ibid. (06:43).

Konkey digs a hole in the ground so he can climb in. He has half of his body submerged. He covers himself with a dirt-colored blanket and leaves the lens of his telephoto camera exposed. The housekeeper let him in and he gave Stormy (the prostitute Spiller and he set up to entice Tyreese (18:23)) half the money upfront. Hours later, when it's dark, Konkey gets photos of Tyreese doing cocaine and having sex with a hooker in his hot tub using a strap-on. Tyreese is married with children.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid. (09:36).

Konkey uses a large camera with a telephoto lens and also has a mini video recorder attached to his lapel.

¹⁷¹ Episode 8: "The Thing Under the Bed," *Dirt*. (23:55).

Konkey slips a tiny camera shaped like a ring onto his middle finger to snap pictures of Dana Pritchard at the lesbian strip club. The photos will out her.

¹⁷² Ibid. (15:25).

MCPHEARSON: You know we're not getting squat.
 KONKEY: Follow her home and wait 'til it gets dark.
 MCPHEARSON: And do what?
 KONKEY: Go through her garbage.

¹⁷³ Episode 4: "What to Expect When You're Expecting," *Dirt*. (13:27).

SPILLER: This is important. I need you to take a picture today. It's for the cover. You OK?

KONKEY: Yeah. Real good.

SPILLER: Good, because this is sensitive. Andre G, the singer, he was murdered. I need you to go to the Cabrio Wine Vault in Sun Valley and check out Twitty McDaniel's collection. You're looking for Andre G's head. Don, the manager thinks you're a photographer from *Wine Spectator* magazine.

¹⁷⁴ Episode 2: "Blogan," *Dirt*. (01:49).

SPILLER: I need a shot of Kira Klay for the *Dirt* cover.

KONKEY: She's dead.

SPILLER: I know, Don. I need you inside the funeral. I'm going to put you in a suit. A nice suit. You're gonna blend in in the suit. Now, we have a guy on the inside. He's got a shaved head and a pinstriped suit. His name is Baby. You hand him your invite, OK. Tell him you're Kira's cousin, Dan. (As she is talking to Konkey the scene flashes forward to Konkey putting on the suit with all his secret photography equipment, going to the funeral, passing a slip of paper to Baby in their handshake at the door, and photographing the celebrities at the funeral with a number of hidden cameras).

¹⁷⁵ Episode 3: "Ovophagy," *Dirt*. (20:04).

KONKEY: Delivery, 8th floor. (As he brings a small vase filled with yellow flowers to the reception desk at the private hospital.)

RECEPTIONIST: Deliveries go to the loading dock out back.

KONKEY: I always take 'em up to the room, least to the nurse's station.

RECEPTIONIST: New policy. Loading dock. Our guys will get 'em to the room on time.

KONKEY: My boss is kinda particular.

RECEPTIONIST: Well so is mine. You are not getting upstairs. We got a big celebrity up there and you'd be surprised what the press would do to sneak in.

KONKEY: Well that sucks.

RECEPTIONIST: Makes it bad for everybody doesn't it?

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.* (24:44).

Konkey is in a white doctor's coat carrying a tray of test tubes. He has on glasses and is wearing fake, pointed ears.

¹⁷⁷ Privacy isn't mentioned in the U.S. Constitution or Bill of Rights because it wasn't an issue at the time they were drafted. However, it became an issue at the end of the 19th century and has been an increasing one ever since. There are four areas, or torts, of privacy law: appropriation of name or likeness for trade purposes, right of publicity, use of name or likeness, and intrusion upon an individual's solitude. The tort that most applies to what Konkey does is intrusion upon an individual's solitude. Here the *act* of gathering the news constitutes the intrusion, not the publishing. Clay Calvert and Don R. Pember. *Mass Media Law*. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill, 2007. p. 275-342.

¹⁷⁸ Harold W. Fuson, Jr. *Telling it All: A Legal Guide to the Exercise of Free Speech*. Kansas City, MO: Andrews and McMeel, 1995. P. 51.

¹⁷⁹ Clay Calvert and Don R. Pember. *Mass Media Law*, p. 275-342.

¹⁸⁰ Episode 5: "You Don't Know Jack," *Dirt*. (11:50).

Konkey uses the gate code Leo purposely dropped on the ground that would enable him to get onto Dawson's private property. He climbs up to the balcony so he can get a better shot of Leo and Dawson. He gets photos of them kissing in their bathing suits, but then

Konkey gets caught by two anonymous males at Dawson's who chase him out and punch him, kick him, and steal his camera.

¹⁸¹ Ibid. (22:17).

SPILLER: Do you have the film? (When she goes to bail Konkey out of jail and to hopefully recover the photographs of Dawson and Leo from him.)

KONKEY: I think so.

SPILLER: Do you need to go to the bathroom to get it?

KONKEY: No. It's not there.

SPILLER: Where then?

SPILLER: What's the quickest and safest way to remove it from his stomach? (As she looks at an X-ray of Konkey's stomach (the scene switches from the jail to the hospital, Konkey obviously swallowed the film.))

DOCTOR: Well we can send a tube down his throat, and then reach in and grab it with a claw. Or we can do it microscopically. It's a little more involved. We'd make an incision—

SPILLER: What do you think, Don?

KONKEY: Claw.

SPILLER: Me too.

SPILLER: Will it damage the canister?

DOCTOR: No. Stomach acid, on the other hand, can break down just about anything given enough time. How the hell did you swallow a film canister?

KONKEY: Can I be home by 6:00?

¹⁸² Courts struggle to find common ground on determining who qualifies as a public figure, a public official, an all-purpose public figure, a voluntary public figure, etc. Hugely important is the fact that public officials have access to communication. They have access to the media and the resources to be heard. Public officials and public figures have the opportunity to use the marketplace of ideas to counter allegations—they do not always need a courtroom. The Supreme Court was torn in the challenging case of *Time v. Hill* (1967) as it attempted to apply the *New York Times Co. v. Sullivan* (1964) rule to extremely different circumstances. It was only a few months later that the Supreme Court held that “the rule laid down in *Times v. Sullivan* applied in libel cases to plaintiffs other than officials like Commissioner Sullivan,” (Lewis, 189) referencing *Curtis Publishing Co. v. Butts* (1967), which made the character of the plaintiff critical in a libel case. Specifically, the *Gertz v. Robert Welch, Inc.* (1974) case established a standard for defamation concerning private persons under the First Amendment through the ruling of public persons established by *Sullivan*. Clearly, the struggle with public officials and private persons is a complicated one. Clay Calvert and Don R. Pember. *Mass Media Law*, p. 197-218.

¹⁸³ Society of Professional Journalists: Code of Ethics, <http://www.spj.org/ethicscode.asp>. (Accessed February 2008).

¹⁸⁴ Clay Calvert and Don R. Pember, *Mass Media Law*, p. 300-308.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.* p. 334-342.

¹⁸⁶ Episode 11: “Pap Smeared,” *Dirt*. (09:51).

JACKSON: Mr. Konkey? Mr. Konkey? I found this out there in front of the store. Is it yours? (He holds up a camera lens cap.)

KONKEY: No.

JACKSON: My name’s Marqui. How come you don’t shoot digital?

KONKEY: It’s not my lens cap.

JACKSON: Yeah, I know. You get lots of covers. I’ve heard of you. I was just thinking, do you ever, do you need somebody to carry your stuff?

KONKEY: No. (He gets uncomfortable and gathers his stuff and starts to walk away.)

JACKSON: I don’t want anything—any money or anything—I just wanna learn.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.* (38:10).

(One of Romero’s Hispanics finds Jackson going back to get the scanner out of the car, and three of the Hispanics beat him with the metal bat because he won’t tell them where Konkey is. Konkey hears the fight but sees the Tuesday’s car pull up. Instead of going to help Jackson, he stays to get the shot. The Hispanics beat Jackson almost to death. They attach car cables to him and electrocute him. Once Konkey has the shot, he runs back to Marqui.)

KONKEY: I need an ambulance.

KONKEY: Lucy called me, the ambulance is coming and they’re gonna fix you up, OK. So you’re gonna be OK, so don’t move, you can’t move... (As Spiller calls him, Konkey says this to Jackson’s practically lifeless body.)

KONKEY: I gotta go, I gotta go. (Spiller calls him again and he runs out of the garage.)

¹⁸⁸ Episode 1: “Pilot,” *Dirt*. (51:50).

(Konkey comes to Spiller’s house at night with his dead cat, Tristen, who died earlier from cancer.)

KONKEY: We killed him. All the stuff we did. All the bad things.

SPILLER: No, Don. No. Tristen had cancer. Remember? We didn’t kill him.

KONKEY: We did. We did. (Spiller cries and hugs Konkey.)

¹⁸⁹ Episode 10: “The Sexxx Issue,” *Dirt*. (28:52).

SPILLER: Someone is trying to do something to scare me. (She is explaining to Konkey how someone has been following her and taking her picture.)

KONKEY: They’re doing what we do.

¹⁹⁰ Episode 11: “Pap Smeared,” *Dirt*. (44:38).

¹⁹¹ Joe Saltzman. "Analyzing the Images of the Journalist in Popular Culture: A Unique Method of Studying the Public's Perception of Its Journalists and the News Media," p. 37.

¹⁹² *Ibid.* p. 38.

¹⁹³ Episode 3: "Ovophagy," *Dirt*. (38:01).

KONKEY: I promised Lucy I'd get this shot. (To the dead Klay.)

KLAY: Damn Lucy. It always comes down to what Lucy wants. You know, you're just gonna have to make a choice between Lucy and I.

KONKEY: No, don't make me do that.

¹⁹⁴ Episode 9: "This Is Not Your Father's Hostage Situation," *Dirt*. (12:08).

WINTER: Hey, Lucy. (As he hits Spiller on the forehead with his gun. Spiller falls to the floor. Konkey screams and gets in Winter's face to stick up for Spiller.)

WINTER: Get down you stupid-looking bastard. Back off, back off! Get down, get down! (To Konkey. Konkey doesn't back down. He just screams again.)

¹⁹⁵ Episode 12: "Caught on Tape," *Dirt*. (43:02).

MCLAREN: Don, you know you have to kill Lucy. You have to kill her to save her. (Konkey thinks he is seeing McLaren standing in his home. It is really one of his schizophrenic hallucinations.)

¹⁹⁶ Episode 13: "Ita Missa Est," *Dirt*. (12:35).

KONKEY: They want me to kill my best friend but I won't do it. (Konkey comes into Spiller's office late at night and cuts her throat with a knife. He holds her and rocks back and forth. There is blood everywhere. The scene flashes to the desert, where Konkey has driven to get away. Cutting Spiller's throat was a hallucination. He knows that he didn't really cut Spiller's throat, but it completely freaks him out and he says that he won't ever really do it.)

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.* (14:25).

KLAY: Don, you're gonna die out there if you don't go back and kill her. (She comes back as a hallucination in the desert.)

KONKEY: I know. (He walks away from her, and farther into the desert.)

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.* (21:40).

KONKEY: It's the only way. I can't kill Lucy. (He takes the knife to his throat and falls to the ground just as the helicopter finds him.)

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.* (25:25).

(Konkey cries when he sees Spiller in his hospital room. He is so happy he didn't kill her.)

KONKEY: I'm gonna sign over my medical power of attorney to you.

SPILLER: Why don't we talk about that when you're feeling better.

KONKEY: I can't trust myself when I'm really, really sick. And I trust you. Promise me you'll do whatever you have to do even if that means putting me somewhere?

SPILLER: Don, no one is ever gonna put you anywhere.

KONKEY: Just promise me.

SPILLER: OK. I promise you.

KONKEY: Thank you, Lucy.

²⁰⁰ Ibid. (45:00).

Konkey takes the photos and then holds Spiller, panicking.

KONKEY: It's OK, Lucy, help is on its way, you're going to be OK. I didn't do this, it was the forces. I didn't do this. I didn't do this. OH MY GOD!

²⁰¹ Episode 2: "Blogan," *Dirt*. (11:38).

SPILLER: This is just like when we were in school, on the paper, remember? We were the only ones who could write and shoot. It's just like that. It's just the two of us. And we can't fail.

KONKEY: I won't fail, Lucy. I won't.

²⁰² Ibid. (19:21).

KONKEY: I'm really sorry but I have to take your picture now. Lucy needs it. She has to compete in a very tough market. She's a good person. She just has to compete. And I gotta help her because I'm the only one she has, and I can't fail. (As he snaps photos of Klay at the crematory.)

²⁰³ Episode 3: "Ovophagy," *Dirt*. (15:22).

SPILLER: This is Connie Chris, Christian pop star. She dropped off radar last week. Reliable sources say she's at St. Alma's Private Hospital in Northridge. They happen to have a big drug treatment program there. I need cover-quality pictures, plus her chart.

KONKEY: Mmk. (As he scribbles Spiller's orders on the palm of his left hand.)

SPILLER: If this first issue doesn't hit, it's over for both of us.

SPILLER: Tell everyone I'll be back in two hours. I want to see cover tries. (She orders Kenny.)

SPILLER: They'll all suck. Don't let me down. (She lowers her voice to Konkey.)

KONKEY: I won't.

SPILLER: I know you won't. (She kisses Konkey on the cheek.)

²⁰⁴ Episode 2: "Blogan," *Dirt*. (04:45).

(Konkey approaches Kira Klay's open casket.)

SPILLER: Just get the shot of Kira. I know you can do it. I know you can. (Konkey imagines Spiller in his head saying this as he looks at the dead Klay. He takes out a chapstick camera and snaps photos of the actress in her casket.)

²⁰⁵ Episode 6: "The Secret Lives of Altar Girls," *Dirt*. (24:22).

KONKEY: She looks sweet, sad. (He is talking about the photo of the murdered cheerleader from Walnut Valley.)

SPILLER: Why? She's smiling.

KONKEY: Sad smile. She reminds me of you when you were younger.

²⁰⁶ Episode 10: "The Sexxx Issue," *Dirt*. (14:32).

KONKEY: Do you remember Lynette?

SPILLER: Your stepmother. I've met her.

KONKEY: She was closer to my age than to my dad's. She was an actress. I think I made her feel younger. (He's telling Lucy how his stepmother molested him.)

KONKEY: I was 14. She called me 'little lover.' Sometimes I liked it.

SPILLER: Don, you know none of that is your fault, right?

KONKEY: No. No, Lucy, I don't.

²⁰⁷ Episode 6: "The Secret Lives of Altar Girls," *Dirt*. (37:55).

KONKEY: You look different.

SPILLER: I do?

KONKEY: Your hands are relaxed and your eyes are soft.

²⁰⁸ Episode 11: "Pap Smear," *Dirt*. (25:33).

KONKEY: You never get time to sleep. You're always getting arrested. People spit on you. And there's always someone new trying to steal your job. (To Jackson about being a paparazzo.)

Chapter 4: Willa McPhearson, the Reporter

The lifeblood of *Dirt Now*'s weekly issues is the staff of hard-working, fact-finding reporters.²⁰⁹ Willa McPhearson (Alexandra Breckenridge)²¹⁰ is the series' main reporter. In the beginning of the season, McPhearson blends in with all the other reporters as she pitches seemingly mindless stories to Spiller.²¹¹ However, McPhearson becomes more confident with Spiller and aggressive with her reporting in subsequent episodes.

A reporter represents the public in that it is his or her job to "ask questions of the powerful and force them to explain themselves."²¹² Furthermore, a reporter can be someone who is "unspeakably aggressive in seeking the news and deplorably loud in writing it up."²¹³ McPhearson represents a cub reporter more than a sob sister. A cub reporter "knows nothing about journalism," and is usually the "one journalist with whom everyone in the audience can identify."²¹⁴ The cub reporter is a novice, trying to overcome inexperience. Initially, McPhearson is a stuttering mess during pitch meetings and can barely manage to look Spiller in the eye. McPhearson has trouble determining what is *Dirt Now* news and figuring out how to write for a tabloid.²¹⁵ After reading one of her first stories, Spiller tells McPhearson, "When I was done reading your piece all I remembered was a typo. It wasn't bad, but it was dull. And that's worse."²¹⁶ Even the other more experienced reporters are hard on McPhearson at first, telling her she needs to toughen up.²¹⁷ It is obvious she is new to her job at *Dirt Now* and new to the field of journalism.

Cub reporters typically mess up a lot²¹⁸ but eventually prove their worth.²¹⁹ When Spiller sends McPhearson out on one of her first big stories, McPhearson ends up paying \$1,900 and taking drugs from a celebrity drug dealer.²²⁰ The drug dealer did not admit to having any connection to the story Spiller wanted. Spiller is furious with McPhearson for her unprofessional slip-up. She yells at her, “I thought maybe this girl’s got the balls for the job, but I was obviously wrong because I gave you the goddamn tip and you came back with dick.”²²¹ For her next story, McPhearson ends up in a room at the W Hotel for a convention of bariatric surgeons (doctors who perform surgery on the morbidly obese).²²² She allows a celebrity plastic surgeon to masturbate while he looks at her feet in exchange for exclusive information on a celebrity stomach-stapling procedure.²²³ Spiller does not even end up running the story.²²⁴ When McPhearson makes mistakes like these she is most upset with the idea that she disappointed Spiller.²²⁵

McPhearson wants Spiller to know that she is dedicated to *Dirt Now* and not in it for any personal reasons or perks like free office swag.²²⁶ In an effort to gain experience and prove her dedication to the tabloid, she works later than most of the other reporters.²²⁷ Spiller eventually starts to trust McPhearson with bigger stories.²²⁸ With more experience in the field, McPhearson begins to develop an instinct for what makes a good story—sometimes before Spiller.²²⁹ She begins to prove herself by taking up Spiller’s ethos. Although Spiller starts to give McPhearson a chance to crack stories before the other reporters, Spiller warns her that she does not get a second chance.²³⁰ If she errs, Spiller will fire her or move on to a different *Dirt Now* reporter who can get the job done.

McPhearson will do anything Spiller tells her to, even if she does not necessarily agree with it.²³¹ She listens to her every word and observes how Spiller does her job as editor. After Spiller shows a video of sharks eating each other in the womb, McPhearson stays late at the office to re-watch the video.²³² She understands the field of tabloid journalism is competitive and that if she cannot be a more aggressive reporter she will get eaten alive.

Not only does McPherson want to prove to Spiller that she is a good reporter, but she also wants to be exactly like Spiller. When she finds out *Dirt Now's* investigative reporter, Chuck Lafoon (Paul Reubens), worked with Spiller at the *Tribune*, she constantly asks him what Spiller was like when she started in the field. Lafoon tells her that Spiller was a little bit like McPhearson.²³³ Hearing this, McPhearson is inspired by their so-called similarities.

As McPhearson gets more confidence she starts to develop more of an attitude with her sources. She realizes that when she has information she has power. Spiller overhears McPhearson on the phone saying to a source, "You think that you can just shit all over me and this magazine? This is *Dirt Now*. We've outsold every other weekly two weeks running and we're about to make it a third. You listen to me you insignificant piece of shit. You're giving me this story because if you don't, *Dirt Now* will have a camera up your client's ass every second of every day. If she so much as blinks at another contestant we're gonna run that she's screwing him. Every pit stain, every ounce of cellulite, every photograph that makes her look semi-retarded will be splashed full-color in the pages of our magazine. And that's just off the top of my head. Wait 'til I give it

some real thought. Now you've got 20 minutes to get her contestant-nailing ass over here before I make her a pinup girl for every STD known to man and then some." Spiller is proud of McPhearson's newly developed take-charge attitude—the attitude she thinks reporters need to survive in the tabloid industry.

The sob sister is a female journalist who is “considered an equal by doing a man's job, a career woman drinking and arguing toe-to-toe with any male in the shop, holding her own against everyone and anything, then often showing her soft side and crying long and hard when the man she loves treats her like a sister instead of a lover.”²³⁴ Like a sob sister, McPhearson is hungry. She wants to prove to Spiller that she is thick-skinned enough to do the job.²³⁵ When Spiller sends her on an investigative story with experienced investigative reporter Lafoon, McPhearson tells him she does not need his help and she can do the story herself.²³⁶ McPhearson's only romantic relationship in the first season is a sexual relationship with *Dirt Now's* publisher, Barrow.²³⁷ Unlike the sob sisters of the 1930s-1950s, McPhearson doesn't get emotionally attached to him.²³⁸ A sob sister is generally are depicted giving “up anything and everything for marriage, children, and a life at home,”²³⁹ no matter how successful a journalist they might be. In *Dirt*, McPhearson is more attached to her job and the possibility of climbing the *Dirt Now* editorial ladder than she is to any relationship.²⁴⁰ When McPhearson's affair with Barrow starts to interfere with her job,²⁴¹ she dumps him saying, “You're a distraction, OK? Look, I can't do this anymore. If I don't get my shit together I'm outta here.”²⁴² Her job is her top priority.

Researchers found that the perception of reporters in film and television is typically negative. “To be a reporter was to do something disreputable, to live on the edge of decent society.”²⁴³ Additionally, a reporter is usually seen as “a busybody, a keyhole snooper, a penny-a-linter, a ne’er do well.”²⁴⁴ McPhearson possesses some of these unlikable characteristics in her approach to her job. If she has to, McPhearson will go undercover or misrepresent herself to get a story. She pretends to be looking for a discrete celebrity nanny when trying to find out who celebrity superstars Blair Marshall (Ailsa Marshall) and Logan Hicks’s (Bryce Mouer) baby nurse is. Through fake tears, she tells a celebrity nanny in a park that she is looking for a nanny like the one Blair and Logan use for her child because her husband is prominent in the entertainment industry.²⁴⁵ The nanny eventually tells McPhearson the nurse Blair and Logan use. On her next story, McPhearson tells a bariatric surgeon that she needs help with her master’s thesis when she is really trying to find out for *Dirt Now* if celebrity Vena Smith had her stomach stapled.²⁴⁶

Eventually McPhearson learns how to relate to her sources in order to get more information out of them.²⁴⁷ In attempts to get the best friend of a murdered cheerleader to talk to her, McPhearson talks to her about Lindsay Lohan and Paris Hilton.²⁴⁸ Her method works, as she is able to get Maddy Sweet (Stephanie Turner) to admit she killed her best friend before the cops even arrest her.²⁴⁹ Additionally, McPhearson is able to get one of her sources to give her a lead by making him feel guilty. She tells him if she does not get the story she will probably just quit her job.²⁵⁰ According to the Society of Professional Journalists’ code of ethics, misrepresentation in exchange for information is unethical.

Reporters should “avoid undercover or other surreptitious methods of gathering information except when traditional open methods will not yield information vital to the public.”²⁵¹ Because *Dirt Now* is typically after confidential information reporters like McPhearson would be unlikely to obtain that information using traditional reporting methods. Usually her only option—if she wants the exclusive story—is to misrepresent herself. But that doesn’t make it right.

According to research on the public’s perception of journalists in film and television, the reporter often “went beyond the news of the day to reveal shams and corrupt business practices.”²⁵² It became acceptable for a reporter to “lie, cheat, distort, bribe, betray, or violate any ethical code as long as the journalist exposed corruption, solved a murder, caught a thief, or saved an innocent,”²⁵³ and only when their work was in the public interest. It is not ethical when McPhearson manipulates an under-aged sexual abuse victim into admitting she murdered her best friend,²⁵⁴ but that does not matter to her or to *Dirt Now* because the story results in a child abuser’s arrest and a murderer ending up in prison—and most importantly, a cover story sure to sell out at the newsstand. Some of McPhearson’s stories are catty and pure sensationalism, but she’s convinced others actually make a difference in society.

McPhearson’s character shows tremendous growth throughout the first season of *Dirt*. When Spiller thinks she might be fired she turns to McPhearson to see how the staff is reacting. At this point McPhearson is so confident with her craft that she tells Spiller she is not worried—she will find work elsewhere if she has to.²⁵⁵ By the season finale, McPhearson threatens her sources just as she thinks Spiller would. Without letting Spiller

know, McPhearson starts filing sources in her own personal vault.²⁵⁶ The last image of McPhearson is her sitting behind Spiller's desk with a long black wig on.²⁵⁷ She wants to be Spiller more than anything.

McPhearson embodies the typical meddling characteristics of fact-hungry print reporters. As one *Tribune* reporter blatantly said, "It is shameful to earn a living in this way,"²⁵⁸ by being a reporter. McPhearson does not see any shame in what she does. Her character is relatively likable because viewers feel sorry for her when Spiller constantly cuts her down in the beginning. She is one of the most passionate *Dirt Now* employees and is willing to do just about anything to make sure Spiller knows that. Her character demonstrates how challenging it is to keep up at a fast-paced publication like *Dirt Now* under the direction of an intimidating editor. Yet, she has an affair with her superior, uses deception and lies to get sources to talk to her, and, like Spiller and Konkey, will do anything to get the story. Although it can be argued that her actions are guided by her desire to get ahead in the business, she is willing to forego all ethics and morals that stand in her way. Throughout the episodes, viewers see McPhearson's standards for right and wrong decline as she gains confidence in her abilities as a reporter and her desire to be just like Spiller.

Chapter 4 Endnotes

²⁰⁹ The word *reporter* dates back to the 14th century and is defined as “any person employed by a newspaper, magazine, or television company to gather and report news.” “Reporter,” (Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary), <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/reporter> (accessed March 2008).

²¹⁰ According to the FX Network Web site, “Alexandra Breckenridge plays ‘Willa McPhearson,’ a young, ambitious reporter who has finally come to terms with the fact that ruthlessness and cunning are keys to success in the tabloid world. Alexandra recently wrapped production on two films: *The Art of Travel*, starring Christopher Masterson and Brooke Burns, as well as *The Bridge to Nowhere*, starring Ving Rhames and Bijou Phillips. Previously, she has appeared in the films *She’s The Man*, *Wishcraft*, and *Big Fat Liar*. She also starred in the comedy short *D.E.B.S* and in the video *Rings*, which served as a bridge between the two horror films *The Ring* and *The Ring 2*. On television, Alexandra has guest starred on numerous series, including *Psych*, *C.S.I.*, *Medium*, *JAG*, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *Charmed*, and *Freaks and Geeks*. She also appeared in the ABC’s Family movie *Romy and Michelle: In The Beginning* and lends her voice in numerous episodes of Fox’s *Family Guy* and *American Dad*. Breckenridge grew up in Darien, Connecticut, and moved to California at the age of 12. At 12 she discovered her love for acting while on stage in Mill Valley, California. She then moved to Los Angeles to pursue a career. After just two months of auditions she got her first break when she landed a starring role on ABC’s production of R.L. Stine’s *Ghost of Fear Street*. Her first recurring series role was on the WB comedy *Opposite Sex*. Currently, Breckenridge lives in Hollywood. Her uncle, actor Michael Weatherly of *Navy: NCIS*, is an important role model in her life.”

²¹¹ Episode 2: “Blogan,” *Dirt*. (07:15).

SPILLER: Alright, what’s out there today?

MCPHEARSON: Um, celebrity fat farms.

SPILLER: Do you have art?

ANONYMOUS FEMALE REPORTER: More than you would ever want.

SPILLER: Alright, I’ll put it down for five. Two spreads and a single. Keep the text tight. The photos should sell the story. Alright, tell photo to watch the adjacencies. I don’t want Dunkin Heinz or Betty Crocker ads opposite the fatties.

²¹² Joe Saltzman. “Analyzing the Images of the Journalist in Popular Culture: A Unique Method of Studying the Public’s Perception of Its Journalists and the News Media,” p. 21.

²¹³ James G. Harrison. “Nineteenth-Century American Novels on American Journalism I,” *Journalism Quarterly*, Volume 22, Number 3. September 1945. p. 218.

²¹⁴ Joe Saltzman. “Analyzing the Images of the Journalist in Popular Culture: A Unique Method of Studying the Public’s Perception of Its Journalists and the News Media,” p. 34.

²¹⁵ Episode 4: “What to Expect When You’re Expecting,” *Dirt*. (15:47).
 SPILLER: Basketball star with a prostitute isn’t news. That he wanted her to bang him in the ass with a strap-on, that’s your lead. (As she throws the copy back on McPhearson’s desk. The copy is completely marked up in editor’s red pen.)

²¹⁶ Episode 5: “You Don’t Know Jack,” *Dirt*. (03:47).

²¹⁷ *Ibid.* (18:54).

MCPHEARSON: Is that normal procedure? I busted my ass on that piece. I mean, tell me if I’m wrong to be upset and I’ll let it go. It’s just that—

ANONYMOUS FEMALE REPORTER: Willa, you want my advice?

MCPHEARSON: Yeah, of course.

ANONYMOUS FEMALE REPORTER: Grow a pair.

MCPHEARSON: Pardon?

ANONYMOUS FEMALE REPORTER: Tough shit, your piece got spiked. Write another one, end of story. Now if you’ll excuse me, these celebrities aren’t going to screw themselves.

²¹⁸ Episode 4: “What to Expect When You’re Expecting,” *Dirt*. (00:31).

KONKEY: Lucy gave her a hot lead on a breaking story. She blew it. (He is talking about McPhearson on the Connie Chris story.)

²¹⁹ Loren Ghigliione and Joe Saltzman. “Fact or Fiction: Hollywood Looks at the News,” p. 25.

²²⁰ Episode 3: “Ovophagy,” *Dirt*. (25:34).

MCPHEARSON: We actually wanted to throw a party for Connie when she gets out. (She is at Garbo’s house, the celebrity drug dealer, looking at her drugs.)

GARBO: Connie?

MCPHEARSON: Chris. I told you on the phone that we’re good friends.

GARBO: Really? I just figured you were a nark and I’d just have to kill you before you left. You brought cash?

MCPHEARSON: Uh, yeah, \$1,900, right?

GARBO: Yup. You gotta try this. On the house. Seriously, I need to know you’re not a nark. Plus, this shit will totally open your mind. One is to get you goin’ and this is to keep it coming in waves all night. Come on, it’ll change your life. (She holds the drugs up to McPhearson’s nose and McPhearson inhales.)

GARBO: It's like coming, isn't it? Here. (She gives McPhearson a pill and she takes it, obviously already influenced by the drugs she just inhaled.)

GARBO: You're really friends with Connie Chris?

MCPHEARSON: Uh, yeah. (Her tone is different because of the effect of the drugs.)

GARBO: Give her a message for me. You tell her there is a dealer in Hollywood who thinks she's searing-hot sexy. (Things start to distort for McPhearson. Garbo kisses McPhearson on the lips.)

²²¹ Ibid. (30:37).

²²² Episode 4: "What to Expect When You're Expecting," *Dirt*. (16:28).

SPILLER: Willa, there's a convention of bariatric surgeons at the W that ends tonight. Find a Dr. Kozar and ask him about Vena Smith.

²²³ Ibid. (32:08).

DR. KOZAR: You know, I've got a video of me performing surgery. It's in my room.

MCPHEARSON: Oh, well that might be helpful. I also have a few questions about the types of patients you treat.

DR. KOZAR: Well, come on up. I'll be happy to tell you anything you want to know.

MCPHEARSON: So I imagine you treat celebrities.

DR. KOZAR: Oh, they're the worst. (As he puts a tape into the VCR and he goes and sits on the end of the bed, facing the TV. He pats the spot on the bed next to him to signal McPhearson to come sit by him on the bed.)

DR. KOZAR: Come on sit by me, you can see better.

MCPHEARSON: Um, I can see fine, thanks. I heard that Vena Smith got her stomach stapled—

DR. KOZAR: Come on. (He interrupts her as he physically pulls her onto the bed. He lays back and turns his attention to her.)

MCPHEARSON: Look, I didn't come up here to do anything.

DR. KOZAR: That's a load of shit now, isn't it? You don't think you're the first reporter to try to pry privileged client information from me, do ya?

MCPHEARSON: I'm not screwing you.

DR. KOZAR: It's not your precious bloom that I'm interested in. (He looks at her feet.)

MCPHEARSON: My feet?

DR. KOZAR: Oh God, they're so small and dainty and alabaster. Guessing a perfect size eight? You let me be who I have to be and I'll give you what you want—off the record, of course.

MCPHEARSON: No touching.

DR. KOZAR: Good. (As he gets on the floor and unbuttons his pants.)

DR. KOZAR: Now dangle it, dangle it. (He starts to masturbate to the sight of her feet. She starts to dangle her shoe.)

DR. KOZAR: No, no don't let it drop, don't let it drop. Oh yeah you make me so hard, hold it up, hold the goddamn foot up. Don't close your eyes. Look at me, look at me, look at me! (He continues to moan and say 'I'm sorry,' until he comes.)

²²⁴ Episode 5: "You Don't Know Jack," *Dirt*. (03:47).

MCPHEARSON: Uh, Lucy, I uh, well, I didn't see my Vena Smith article and I was just wondering if—

SPILLER: That's because I'm not running it.

MCPHEARSON: Oh, well I kinda got the impression it was going to go in this week.

SPILLER: Really? Where did you get that impression?

MCPHEARSON: Like I said, I just kind of assumed.

SPILLER: Well you know what happens when you assume.

MCPHEARSON: Yes, it makes an ass out of you and me.

SPILLER: No, it pisses me off.

²²⁵ Episode 7: "Come Together," *Dirt*. (36:48).

MCPHEARSON: Lucy thinks I'm an amateur. I'm so pissed at myself.

²²⁶ Episode 2: "Blogan," *Dirt*. (22:40).

MCPHEARSON: Lucy, I've got something on the baby nurse. Um, name, number, rates, a little history, hometown, immigration status.

SPILLER: Nice, you can pick something from the swag pile. (She is still more interested in the work in front of her than McPhearson.)

MCPHEARSON: Oh, no thanks.

SPILLER: No thanks?

MCPHEARSON: Well, it sounds kinda stupid but, um, I do it for the story.

²²⁷ Episode 3: "Ovophagy," *Dirt*. (22:35).

MCPHEARSON: Look, I'm sorry I missed dinner but I have to work late. I know I said I'd be there, Mom but every— (She is on the phone with her mom. Spiller walks by her desk. The office looks near empty. Only Spiller, McPhearson, and three other reporters are still there.)

MCPHEARSON: I gotta go. Let me call you back.

²²⁸ Episode 2: "Blogan," *Dirt*. (25:04).

SPILLER: Just keep following this story. Don't leak a word—not even in house. I want you to create a secret edit queue and file your stuff there. I want only dummy text and grey space up on that wall. You know what really pisses me off? I was the first person to report this pregnancy and she played me. I really don't appreciate that. (She is talking to McPhearson after finding out Blair is faking her own pregnancy.)

²²⁹ Episode 8: "The Thing Under the Bed," *Dirt*. (10:36).

SPILLER: Congratulations, your gut's a winner. We're in the game. I've offered \$600,000, but I don't like dancing in the dark. I'm gonna team you up with Don Konkey. (She is talking to McPhearson about her hunch on the Pritchard story.)

²³⁰ Episode 3: "Ovophagy," *Dirt*. (22:47).

SPILLER: Want a chance to crack it? (She is talking to McPhearson about the Chris cover story.)

MCPHEARSON: Yeah, yes!

SPILLER: It's the pager number. It's probably Connie's dealer. Ask for Garbo.

MCPHEARSON: Great, thanks.

SPILLER: Willa, don't page her from here.

MCPHEARSON: I was just, um, canceling my dinner.

SPILLER: This dealer expects to see a young face. That's why I picked you. Don't make me regret it.

²³¹ Episode 2: "Blogan," *Dirt*. (25:31).

SPILLER: Also, Willa, I'm gonna want you to write some copy on a fashion piece that we're doing on Julia Mallory. It's a many looks retrospective kinda thing. She's gonna be coming in and sitting with you and one of our photo editors.

MCPHEARSON: I thought we were sticking to the trashy angle on her.

SPILLER: Yeah, well we're gonna go a little counter to that, see how that plays.

(34:22) MCPHEARSON: So our idea is to do a sort of many looks of Julia Mallory piece. We're gonna pull a bunch of really great red carpet shots and some candid and, you know, different hair cuts, cuz readers love that kinda thing. (She is talking to Mallory, sticking to the angle Spiller wants.)

²³² Episode 3: "Ovophagy," *Dirt*. (45:34).

McPherson is sitting in the conference room all alone at night watching a video of a school of sharks.

²³³ Episode 6: "The Secret Lives of Altar Girls," *Dirt*. (06:50).

MCPHEARSON: So what was Lucy like when she was starting out? I mean, what was her first big story? How did she rise so far and so fast? (She is talking to Lafoon when she realizes he worked with Spiller at the *Tribune*.)

LAFoon: You're a one-man press conference. Look, you want to be a reporter, remember this: everyone wants to tell their story. You've gotta cultivate your source one question at a time. Sometimes, no questions.

MCPHEARSON: Sorry. So what was Lucy like when she started out?

LAFoon: Kinda a little bit like you. Not necessarily a compliment.

²³⁴ Joe Saltzman. "Analyzing the Images of the Journalist in Popular Culture: A Unique Method of Studying the Public's Perception of Its Journalists and the News Media," p. 39-40.

²³⁵ Episode 4: “What to Expect When You’re Expecting,” *Dirt*. (15:47).

SPILLER: Willa, I’m really starting to question your commitment.

MCPHEARSON: My commitment? You know I took some of those drugs that Garbo woman was selling so that she would trust me. I don’t even take aspirin. I was sick all night from it.

SPILLER: Who the hell asked you to take drugs?

MCPHEARSON: I just wanted you to know that I have the balls for the job.

SPILLER: That story didn’t call for balls. It called for brains. Don’t confuse the two.

²³⁶ Episode 7: “Come Together,” *Dirt*. (07:12).

MCPHEARSON: Look, Chuck, she’s a sexual abuse victim. I don’t want her to clam up because there’s a man in the room.

LAFOON: Little Willa wants to fly solo and not share her byline.

MCPHEARSON: It’s nothing personal. It’s just, Lucy’s wrong. I don’t need help with this.

²³⁷ *Ibid.* (41:20).

McPhearson and Barrow sleep together. She smiles and picks up a copy of the magazine. When he leaves the room, she is still in his bed.

²³⁸ Episode 8: “The Thing Under the Bed,” *Dirt*. (10:03).

MCPHEARSON: Look, we coupled. That doesn’t make us a couple. You can relax. I’m not expecting to meet your mother.

²³⁹ Joe Saltzman. “Analyzing the Images of the Journalist in Popular Culture: A Unique Method of Studying the Public’s Perception of Its Journalists and the News Media,” p. 40.

²⁴⁰ Episode 8: “The Thing Under the Bed,” *Dirt*. (20:28).

BARROW: How much is Lucy paying? (He asks McPhearson with his hands up her skirt.)

MCPHEARSON: We can talk dirty but we can’t talk *Dirt*.

BARROW: Any more rules?

MCPHEARSON: How about a pre-not-nup. Six weeks, and then we both walk away. No obligations, no expectations.

BARROW: No crying.

MCPHEARSON: No cards at Christmas.

BARROW: Option to extend? (As McPhearson pulls his hands out.)

BARROW: I thought we were negotiating?

MCPHEARSON: I told you, work.

²⁴¹ Episode 11: “Pap Smear,” *Dirt*. (00:39).

KONKEY: I don't think Willa's little threesome went over very well with Lucy.

²⁴² Ibid. (15:48).

MCPHEARSON: You wanted to see me?

BARROW: Shut the door. (When he stands up his pants are around his ankles.)

MCPHEARSON: You've got to be kidding me. That's what you called me in here for?

BARROW: Well, you seemed a little tense today, so...

MCPHEARSON: So what? You thought that bending me over your desk for a round of pump the co-worker would help me relax?

BARROW: I thought you enjoyed our little get-togethers?

MCPHEARSON: I do. I mean, I did.

BARROW: Did I do something wrong?

MCPHEARSON: Could you just pull up your pants? All I can think of is that you're out of toilet paper. Look, you're a distraction, OK? Look, I can't do this anymore. If I don't get my shit together, I'm outta here.

BARROW: Willa, look, come on.

MCPHEARSON: No, you're not listening to me. She's got me watching videos of old reality shows. This is the editorial equivalent of Chinese water torture. Look, we had fun. Let's just call it a day and cash out.

BARROW: What? Just like that? Cold turkey? You don't want to wean off?

MCPHEARSON: No. Look, I told you what I want. I want to focus on work. Besides, there are plenty of other women in the office who would gladly fill the roll.

²⁴³ Joe Saltzman. "Analyzing the Images of the Journalist in Popular Culture: A Unique Method of Studying the Public's Perception of Its Journalists and the News Media," p. 21.

²⁴⁴ Louis M. Starr. *Bohemian Brigade: Civil Newsman in Action*, New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 1954. p. 6.

²⁴⁵ Episode 2: "Blogan," *Dirt*.

MCPHEARSON: Excuse me, um, I couldn't help but overhear you're in the childcare field.

NANNY: That's right.

MCPHEARSON: We just lost our wonderful person this week and I am just desperate.

NANNY: You don't have an agent?

MCPHEARSON: No no no, of course we do, it's just, um, we have to go through a hundred interviews before we can find someone who's, you know, discrete enough. My husband is very prominent in the entertainment industry.

NANNY: Really. And who's that?

MCPHEARSON: I'm so sorry, I can't tell you. You know how it is with security and everything. It's crazy. It can be so isolating sometimes. I wish we could live a normal life, you know?

NANNY: Well, of course you do, dear.

MCPHEARSON: I'm so sorry. I don't even know you. I just thought you might know who the most discrete celebrity baby nurses might be.

NANNY: There's just a handful, dear.

MCPHEARSON: I know. You know, I was just talking to that wonderful nurse who Blair and Logan were using and she was telling me that she had a friend who might be available, but you know, I can't reach them because, you know, they've gone into hiding.

NANNY: Blair and Logan's baby nurse. You mean Gabriella?

MCPHEARSON: Yes! Yes yes, that's right, Gabriella.

²⁴⁶ Episode 4: "What to Expect When You're Expecting," *Dirt*. (32:08).

DR. KOZAR: So, you think you got something to work with there?

MCPHEARSON: Oh yeah, yeah wow. This is gonna make my thesis much more exciting. Thank you.

²⁴⁷ Episode 6: "The Secret Lives of Altar Girls," *Dirt*. (13:43).

MADDY SWEET: You actually know Britney?

MCPHEARSON: Well, it was just a little interview. But we did have a burping contest.

SWEET: I bet she won.

MCPHEARSON: Oh, hands down.

²⁴⁸ *Ibid.* (14:02).

MCPHEARSON: So, who else was Amber into?

MADDY SWEET: She was a Lindsay girl all the way. I'm all about Paris, you?

MCPHEARSON: Oh, Paris.

SWEET: I know, right?

²⁴⁹ Episode 7: "Come Together," *Dirt*. (05:45).

MCPHEARSON: The reverend's daughter told me she's the one who killed her best friend.

BARROW: She confessed that to you?

MCPHEARSON: Yeah. The cops don't even know yet. Lucy thinks that the confession cover might hit the stands before she's even arrested. Chuck and I are going back today to get her full interview.

²⁵⁰ Episode 8: "The Thing Under the Bed," *Dirt*. (08:36).

MCPHEARSON: You know, I put money on this. I really mouthed off to my boss. She said it was PR play and now she's gonna rub my nose for using it. I should just quit my job. I'm lousy at it. (She's at lunch with Pritchard's assistant, playing the down-and-out sob sister to try to get him to spill something on the story.)

²⁵¹ "Code of Ethics," (Society of Professional Journalists), <http://www.spj.org/ethicscode.asp> (accessed March 2008).

²⁵² Joe Saltzman. "Analyzing the Images of the Journalist in Popular Culture: A Unique Method of Studying the Public's Perception of Its Journalists and the News Media," p. 21.

²⁵³ Ibid. p. 29.

²⁵⁴ Episode 7: "Come Together," *Dirt*. (10:40).

SWEET: I hit her with my baton. (She is telling McPhearson how she killed Carmichael. The *Dirt Now* photographer starts taking Sweet's picture.)

SWEET: Shouldn't I have makeup?

MCPHEARSON: No honey, your skin is beautiful.

SWEET: Are you sure?

MCPHEARSON: Well maybe just a little lip gloss.

SWEET: Khiels!

MCPHEARSON: It's yours.

SWEET: Thank you. (She applies the gloss, and poses all smiles for the picture, like it's for a class photo or something.)

²⁵⁵ Episode 12: "Caught on Tape," *Dirt*. (20:34).

MCPHEARSON: People are nervous. They're loyal to you, but to a point. Their major concern right now is if you get fired how is it going to impact them. (She is talking to Spiller about the staff of *Dirt Now* after Gage told reporters Spiller was the only other person with a copy of his and Mallory's sex tape.)

SPILLER: And what about you?

MCPHEARSON: I'm not worried. I'll work.

²⁵⁶ Episode 13: "Ita Missa Est," *Dirt*. (37:26).

MCPHEARSON: Lucy gets nothing. Willa, however, takes this little tidbit and puts it in her own personal vault, and owns you. And your first of many favors to come is exclusive access to the Lessisfol family. (She says this to the *Best New Model* host when she confronts her about knowing she is the one who bought the models the diet drugs.)

HOST: I don't know if I can deliver that.

MCPHEARSON: You can, and you will. Any gossip in the fashion world, any supermodel bullshit, any anything comes to me.

HOST: Your mother must be proud of you.

MCPHEARSON: Yours too, what with the drug deaths and all.

²⁵⁷ Ibid. (41:38).

McPhearson sits at Spiller's desk with a long dark wig on, flipping through copy layouts. It appears as though she wants to be exactly like Spiller.

²⁵⁸ Louis M. Starr. *Bohemian Brigade: Civil Newsman in Action*, p. 6.

Chapter 5: Brent Barrow, the Publisher

Brent Barrow²⁵⁹ is Spiller's watchdog, the mediator between her and the magazine owner.²⁶⁰ As the publisher²⁶¹ of *Dirt Now*, Barrow functions as the "representative of the owner of a newspaper, periodical, or publishing house."²⁶² Many resources²⁶³ define a publisher as a person who publishes products and who also owns the entity he or she publishes. But Barrow is not the owner of *Dirt Now*, Horne is. Unlike Horne, though, Barrow plays an active role in every episode of *Dirt's* first season.

Whenever Spiller shows an aggressive attitude toward Barrow or challenges him, he reminds her that he hired her.²⁶⁴ In *Dirt*, Barrow's biggest role as publisher is not necessarily publishing the weekly *Dirt Now*, but attempting to keep Spiller under his watchful eye. This trivializes the seriousness of Barrow's position. Although he cannot fire Spiller, only Horne can, he often reminds her why Horne might choose to do just that.²⁶⁵ Spiller is often irritated with Barrow's interventions and prefers he leave her alone to do her job.²⁶⁶ To Spiller, Barrow is never right. However, Spiller turns to Barrow because she knows he has inside knowledge of Horne's business maneuvers.²⁶⁷

Barrow understands, perhaps better than any other character, that because of the seedy topics *Dirt Now* covers, it is sometimes difficult to consider what they do as hard journalism. He sarcastically asks Spiller, "Is that how you get through the night? Pretending to be a journalist?!"²⁶⁸ He might not consider himself a traditional journalist, but Barrow does hold high standards for accurate reporting in *Dirt Now*.²⁶⁹ When approached by two men in Twitty McDaniel's (Billy Brown) inner circle who want him

to give up *Dirt Now*'s source on the Andre G murder story, Barrow tells them, "Confidentiality between the journalist and his or her source is sacrosanct. Shield laws²⁷⁰ give journalists the legal protection to keep the identity of a source private—even when police and prosecutors are threatening contempt²⁷¹ and jail time. Now, to betray that confidence is a breach of ethics so great it compromises the very foundation of how much the whole of journalism is predicated."²⁷² He understands *Dirt Now*'s right to be part of a free press, protected by the Bill of Rights.

Publishers typically "want to know how the stories will affect the economics of the newspaper."²⁷³ Barrow's biggest problems with Spiller typically involve her seemingly reckless abandonment of the publication's budget.²⁷⁴ He presents Spiller with editorial budget cuts²⁷⁵ to emphasize how serious Horne is about spending responsibly. Next in importance to his economic concerns are his legal ones—they often go hand-in-hand.²⁷⁶ When Spiller tries to publish a cover accusing McDaniel of murdering his client, hip-hop artist Andre G, Barrow intervenes. Unless Spiller's anonymous source is willing to come forward when the legal department demands it, Barrow won't allow her to go forward with the cover.²⁷⁷ He is the only character to refer to *Dirt Now*'s legal department,²⁷⁸ which shows he takes legal issues seriously.

In film and television, "the publisher, whether in American or British journalism, was the man most...blamed for the sins of the press."²⁷⁹ Because of this, the publisher is typically seen as the highest power at media outlets.²⁸⁰ Barrow doesn't appear to have the level of control a typical publisher should have, since publishers rank higher on the tabloid totem pole than editors. However, Spiller constantly undermines Barrow, such as

when she goes behind his back to merge *Dirt* and *Now* into one publication,²⁸¹ or when she totally ignores him.²⁸² Barrow knows Spiller prefers extreme cover stories. He tells her when he thinks she is crossing the line legally or obscenely,²⁸³ but she often goes behind his back and runs the questionable story anyway.²⁸⁴ Even though Spiller rarely takes Barrow seriously as her superior, he knows that she is great at her job—which is ultimately getting stories that will sell the magazine—and he respects her for that.²⁸⁵

Barrow represents the image of the journalist as a flawed individual. While Barrow is “not all good and not all bad,”²⁸⁶ he does demonstrate a number of negative characteristics. One night, Barrow comes home from work to find two of McDaniel’s business associates in his kitchen, cooking dinner and drinking red wine. The men tie him up and threaten to cut off his penis and feed it to him if Barrow does not tell them who Spiller’s source was on the Andre G murder story.²⁸⁷ Barrow tells the men it was Prince Tyreese who told Spiller about McDaniel murdering Andre G. The two men later beat Tyreese’s knees with a metal bat, until they almost kill him. Spiller is furious with Barrow, saying he committed a journalistic sin by revealing an anonymous source.²⁸⁸ Even though he is under such torture, this capitulation still makes Barrow look somewhat weak, selfish, and unprofessional as a journalist.

Viewers are not likely to dislike Barrow for the way he does business, but rather for how he conducts his personal life. As a person, Barrow comes across as a total sleaze. He punches the cleaning lady and knocks her out during a hostage situation,²⁸⁹ he shamelessly checks out the significantly younger female reporters²⁹⁰ and interns of *Dirt Now*,²⁹¹ and he even has a threesome with a barely-18 girl and McPhearson.²⁹² Spiller

often criticizes Barrow for his affinity for younger co-workers.²⁹³ He tells her that she “has a nice ass.”²⁹⁴ When Barrow compliments McPhearson on her first cover story he touches her shoulder suggestively.²⁹⁵ In many professional settings, it might not be appropriate for co-workers to get involved romantically. Yet Barrow makes passes at McPhearson in the *Dirt Now* office in the middle of the workday.²⁹⁶ It does not take long for Barrow to work his charm²⁹⁷ and get McPhearson in his bed.²⁹⁸ Immediately after Barrow and McPhearson have sex for the first time, Barrow walks into another room in his house to reveal a recording of them having sex. He writes McPhearson’s name on the mini-DV tape and adds it to his collection of tapes of all the women he’s slept with.²⁹⁹

Barrow and McPhearson carry on their affair for a short time. Sometimes they fool around in his office, other times in the supply closet.³⁰⁰ More casual about their situation than Barrow, McPhearson manages to call the shots³⁰¹ and take control of their sexual relationship.³⁰² In addition to being weak in his professional life, this situation makes Barrow look weak in his personal life as well.

Even though sexually, Barrow is slimy and corrupt, he does not use *Dirt Now* to satisfy his personal ends. He is usually benevolent and fair when it comes to the business of the publication. He tells Spiller he is always worried about the magazine’s image before his own because he understands that what *Dirt Now* publishes has consequences.³⁰³ While Spiller says that Barrow has “never had a magazine subscription he could read with his pants on,” he tries to avoid publishing lurid sensationalism in *Dirt Now*.³⁰⁴ He focuses on increasing circulation of *Dirt Now* while decreasing the possibility of lawsuits. Although he does come off as wealthy and entrepreneurially successful,³⁰⁵ he

does not come off as richer or more powerful than Spiller. Like Spiller, Barrow has no family or friends.³⁰⁶ His only significant relationship is with *Dirt Now*. In film and television, publishers are typically seen as “the ones who are destroying the media’s role in a free society: to serve the public interest at all costs.”³⁰⁷ In *Dirt*, Barrow makes a lot of mistakes—most of which involve his personal life. He demonstrates how a responsible publisher should focus on the economics of his publication, but does not come across as a strong and honest businessman. Barrow does not adhere to the same values as Spiller, Konkey, or McPhearson. He is not consumed by a need to get the story. He is more conscious of the laws and money involved with *Dirt Now*. Because of these conflicting images, Barrow represents both admirable and objectionable images of what a responsible tabloid publisher should and should not be.

Chapter 5 Endnotes

²⁵⁹ According to the FX Network Web site, “Jeffrey Nordling plays ‘Brent Barrow,’ the publisher of *Dirt Now* who is often at odds with Lucy’s business practices, yet relies on her celebrity exclusives to drive magazine sales. Jeffrey has been acting professionally for over 20 years. He received his Master’s of Fine Arts degree in Acting at Southern Methodist University and began his career on the stage both in New York and regional theaters. Most recently he was seen in the world premiere of Robert Schenkkan’s *Lewis and Clark Reach the Euphrates* at the Mark Taper Forum as well as in Richard Greenberg’s *Take Me Out* at the Geffen Playhouse. Other regional theater work includes production with the Old Globe in San Diego and the Oregon Shakespeare Company. Jeffrey’s work on the New York stage includes *Shakespeare in the Park*, *The Public Theatre* and *Classic Stage Company*. Most recently, Jeffrey wrapped production on *Surfer Dude*, a comedy starring Matthew McConaughey, as well as the independent films *Pornstar* and *Hole in the Paper Sky*. His other television credits include *Flight 93*, *24*, *Shark*, *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation*, *The Closer*, *Judging Amy*, *nip/tuck*, *Providence*, *Once and Again*, *Almost Perfect* and *Melrose Place*. Additional film credits include *Home of the Brave*, *Flicka*, *Apollo 11*, *Mighty Ducks 3*, *Quiz Show*, *Matrimony*, *And the Band Played On*, *Citizen Cohn*, *Ruby*, *Ask Me Again*, and *Working Girl*. Jeffrey is a proud member of the Screen Actor’s Guild and Actors Equity as well as the Antaeus Company, a classical repertory company in Los Angeles.”

²⁶⁰ Episode 1: “Pilot,” *Dirt*. (29:36).

BARROW: Gib asked me to look at some sales spending ratios, and someone needs a little intervention.

SPILLER: Since when do you have anything to do with the editorial budget?

BARROW: Since the owner of the company asked me to.

²⁶¹ The word *publisher* dates back to the 15th century. “Publisher,” (Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary), <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/publisher> (accessed March 2008).

²⁶² Ibid.

²⁶³ “Publisher,” (MSN Encarta Online Dictionary), http://encarta.msn.com/dictionary_1861736028/publisher.html (accessed March 2008).

²⁶⁴ Ibid. (29:36).

BARROW: You know, maybe you should remember who hired you.

SPILLER: You just wanted to screw me.

²⁶⁵ Episode 2: “Blogan,” *Dirt*. (39:27).

BARROW: Oh yeah? You know somebody else who's gonna die? Some other big celebrity couple gonna fake a baby we can steal pictures of? Cuz those are the only kinda covers that are gonna keep us out of debt every week.

SPILLER: Well thanks for your concern, but that's my problem.

BARROW: No it's not. As of tomorrow it's Tina Harrod's problem. Unless you accept my cuts.

²⁶⁶ Episode 1: "Pilot," *Dirt*. (29:36).

BARROW: I hired you because you were the one editor out there that was supposed to run two magazines at the same time and make them twice as successful as they were under two editors.

SPILLER: Well, if you want me to run two magazines then give me the freedom to run two magazines.

²⁶⁷ Episode 13: "Ita Missa Est," *Dirt*. (17:16).

SPILLER: OK, no bullshit. Is Gibson floating my job out to Tina Harrod? (As she storms into Barrow's office.)

BARROW: Jesus Christ, Lucy, what is it gonna take to get you to knock?

SPILLER: Blow me.

BARROW: Deal. (As he sticks his hand out to shake.)

SPILLER: Yeah right, save it for the next intern.

BARROW: Look, your job is not in jeopardy, OK. Yes, your numbers are down and the whole Johnny Gage thing doesn't help but, like I said, Tina and I are just—

SPILLER: Are on the full of shit committee, I got it.

BARROW: My god, why do I bother? You're not gonna listen to a word I say anyway.

SPILLER: Alright. (As she turns and walks away.)

²⁶⁸ Episode 1: "Pilot," *Dirt*. (26:00).

²⁶⁹ Episode 4: "What to Expect When You're Expecting," *Dirt*. (20:30).

BARROW: Well we never set out to diss anybody, Twitty. It's not what we do. We just seek the truth, that's all.

²⁷⁰ According to *Mass Media Law*, shield laws are "state statutes that permit reporters in some circumstances to shield the name of a confidential news source when questioned by a grand jury or in another legal forum." Clay Calvert and Don R. Pember. *Mass Media Law*, p. 731.

²⁷¹ Contempt of court is "an act of disobedience or disrespect to a judge, which may be punished by a fine or jail sentence." *Ibid.* p. 726.

²⁷² Episode 5: "You Don't Know Jack," *Dirt*. (20:50).

²⁷³ Joe Saltzman. “Analyzing the Images of the Journalist in Popular Culture: A Unique Method of Studying the Public’s Perception of Its Journalists and the News Media,” p. 26.

²⁷⁴ Episode 4: “What to Expect When You’re Expecting,” *Dirt*. (38:56).

BARROW: Well, I hope this sells, cuz, ya know, the poly-bagging is gonna blow your budget all to hell. And, given that this is the fourth week in a row you’ve gone over budget, according to the terms of your contract, you just forfeited your annual bonus. (He is talking about the Andre G murder cover story.)

SPILLER: That’s bullshit. Poly-bagging is a production cost. It’s not on the editorial budget.

BARROW: It is now.

²⁷⁵ Episode 2: “Blogan,” *Dirt*. (14:58).

BARROW: And, you know something, you should be kissing my ass just a little bit more considering I probably just saved your job.

SPILLER: So after you threatened it, now you’re going to save it?

BARROW: Oh give me a break. We both know you want to stay here.

SPILLER: Let me see your little masterpiece. (As she picks up the packet of paper Barrow left on her desk.)

BARROW: ‘Course, editorial’s gonna take the biggest hit.

SPILLER: Well it’s already a wasteland. Look at these bullshit numbers. What—you’re just gonna eliminate the fact-checking department? How much crack are you smoking?

BARROW: I counted 23-percent reduction in overhead right there.

SPILLER: Twenty percent of which is in editorial. This is like a cheap power grab. Excuse me I have two magazines to put out.

²⁷⁶ Episode 5: “You Don’t Know Jack,” *Dirt*. (14:49).

SPILLER: Don’s in jail.

BARROW: Ah, I’m sorry.

SPILLER: Yeah, I’m gonna go bail him out.

BARROW: What? Wait, no no no no. No. Don does not work for *Dirt Now*. He’s freelance. We are of no obligation to him whatsoever. Any interference on our part might—

SPILLER: I’m bailing him out as a friend. You know what friends are, don’t you Brent?

BARROW: Oh, will you let me finish? You’re settin’ us up for a lawsuit.

SPILLER: He has our next cover pictures on him.

BARROW: I don’t care if he has pictures of Lindsay Lohan and Paris Hilton going down on the ghost of Frank Sinatra. How he got them is my concern.

SPILLER: He got them by being the best photographer out there.

BARROW: I know you’re a busy woman, Spiller, what with saving the planet one drunken celebrity at a time, but there are amended statutes you might want to gloss over before you hand the magazine out to dry.

SPILLER: Are you done?

BARROW: Yeah.

SPILLER: Good, I'm gonna go get my next cover.

BARROW: Loved the friend angle. Almost had me on that one.

²⁷⁷ Episode 3: "Ovophagy," *Dirt*. (35:25).

BARROW: There's no way we're running this. Are you out of your mind?

SPILLER: I sourced it myself. Nothing sells better than death. Were gonna hit our 1.1 and then some. (She is smiling in front of a television screen that is projecting a cover of *Dirt Now* with the headline *Andre G's Grisly End!*)

BARROW: Lucy, there is no world in which legal is going to approve this story. The minute this rolls off the press, the D.A.'s gonna demand your source. You don't give it to 'em? They're gonna get a judge to hold you in contempt, take you to jail.

SPILLER: I'll run the magazine from jail. Great publicity.

BARROW: Yeah, so what happens when this manager, Twitty McBlack Guy, sues us for libel because we just accused him of murder?

SPILLER: He's guilty. Do you really think he's gonna want to rush into court for this one?

BARROW: Thirty percent. Gibson's interest in Prince Tyreese's team. Thirty percent.

SPILLER: And?

BARROW: And there are security cameras in the parking garage. I saw the tape. You with Prince Tyreese. I mean what else would he be doing there? Renewing his subscription? God. Look, if he wants to come forward, be sourced, that's fine, that's great. Run the story. But if not, you gotta get a different cover.

SPILLER: I have less than a day to go to press.

BARROW: Good luck. (He says as he turns off the projection screen and walks out of the room.)

²⁷⁸ Episode 6: "The Secret Lives of Altar Girls," *Dirt*. (18:38).

BARROW: Just wanted to come by, congratulate everybody. Good job this week.

SPILLER: Thanks, Brent.

BARROW: Is that next week's cover?

SPILLER: That's something we're playing around with. I'll let you know when it's locked. (She is talking about the cheerleader murder story as she physically pushes Barrow out of the conference room.)

BARROW: Uh huh. We have the parent's cooperation?

SPILLER: We'll see.

BARROW: Talk to legal. They're not public figures, if they won't cooperate—

²⁷⁹ Joe Saltzman. "Analyzing the Images of the Journalist in Popular Culture: A Unique Method of Studying the Public's Perception of Its Journalists and the News Media," p. 26.

²⁸⁰ The publisher “was usually known as chief or Mr., whose orders were always final and to be obeyed no matter what.” Ibid.

²⁸¹ Episode 3: “Ovophagy,” *Dirt*. (07:24).

BARROW: Did you go to Gibson Horne behind my back to merge the magazines?

SPILLER: The ad pages weren’t there.

BARROW: And you think the advertisers are going to line up to buy into your glossy tabloid?

SPILLER: Gibson is behind this new magazine. If you feel you can’t deliver advertisers I will gladly pick up the phone and let him know.

²⁸² Episode 5: “You Don’t Know Jack,” *Dirt*. (14:49).

BARROW: There you are. Got a second? Hello?! (He is talking to Spiller but she totally ignores him. He is walking up the stairs, she down, and she acts like she doesn’t even see him.)

BARROW: I just said I need to speak with you.

SPILLER: No, you asked me if I had a second and obviously I don’t.

²⁸³ Episode 10: “The Sexxx Issue,” *Dirt*. (10:27).

BARROW: Look, I know you’re—what, rattled—but honey you can’t publish our magazine with a triple-X on it. Our Walmart rep actually cried. (As he looks at a print out of the *Sexxx* issue cover.)

SPILLER: Awwwww.

BARROW: They won’t stock the issue. That’s 30 percent right off the top.

SPILLER: We’ll make it up at the newsstand.

BARROW: Look, I know what you’re doing. The *Sexxx* issue, it’s a great idea, I’m just saying lose the tippie-X.

SPILLER: Oh, Brent Barrow, eroding your freedom of speech one X at a time. (She says this as she walks away from him.)

²⁸⁴ Episode 4: “What to Expect When You’re Expecting,” *Dirt*. (38:56).

BARROW: I told you not to go with this story. (He is talking to Spiller about the Andre G murder story.)

SPILLER: I don’t work for you, Brent. (She says back, lounging on a red Chaise lounge with her legs crossed. She is reading a copy of the issue.)

SPILLER: And, this time I had photographic evidence.

²⁸⁵ Episode 9: “This Is Not Your Father’s Hostage Situation,” *Dirt*. (39:30).

BARROW: No one will give your story justice like Lucy Spiller.

²⁸⁶ Joe Saltzman. “Analyzing the Images of the Journalist in Popular Culture: A Unique Method of Studying the Public’s Perception of Its Journalists and the News Media,” p. 36.

²⁸⁷ Episode 5: “You Don’t Know Jack,” *Dirt*. (36:01).

MCDANIEL’S BUSINESS ASSOCIATE: You see, first, Maurice is gonna chop off your dick. And then, he’s gonna slice it into bite-sized pieces to make it easier to chew. But then we’re gonna simmer it with some tomato and some fennel, if you had some. (He is talking to Barrow after he and another associate tie him up and sit him at the head of his dining room table.)

²⁸⁸ *Ibid.* (48:07).

SPILLER: You worthless piece of shit! (She screams as she storms in Barrow’s office.)

BARROW: No, listen to me! They came into my house. They were gonna cut my dick off and feed it to me. (He is talking about McDaniel’s business associates who came into his house and tied him up, demanding to know who sourced the Andre G murder story.)

SPILLER: You gave up a source.

BARROW: They were going to kill me.

SPILLER: He’s done. They don’t even know if he’s gonna live.

²⁸⁹ Episode 9: “This Is Not Your Father’s Hostage Situation,” *Dirt*. (39:30).

The maid punches Barrow. Barrow hits her back and knocks her out.

²⁹⁰ Episode 8: “The Thing Under the Bed,” *Dirt*. (09:55).

Barrow stares at McPhearson’s butt as she makes a fresh pot of coffee.

²⁹¹ Episode 1: “Pilot,” *Dirt*. (26: 32).

Barrow walks away and blatantly checks out a female co-worker’s butt.

²⁹² Episode 10: “The Sexxx Issue,” *Dirt*. (05:15).

BARROW: You wanna know what’s really awesome?

BLONDE GIRL AT THE BAR: What?

BARROW: That tattoo in the small of your back.

BLONDE GIRL: It keeps going. Wanna see? (As she shows Barrow her whole tattoo, McPhearson kisses Barrow and then kisses her. Barrow watches McPhearson kiss the blonde.)

BARROW: Shall we move this to a more private venue? (They go into a room where Barrow sits on the couch, while McPhearson and the blonde girl make out with each other on top of him. Then the blonde girl strips for them on top of the coffee table.)

BARROW: Why do I get the feeling you’ve done this before? (He is talking to McPhearson.)

²⁹³ Episode 2: “Blogan,” *Dirt*. (15:49).

SPILLER: Oh, she’s like 23. She’s way too old for you. (As Barrow checks out the young blonde intern who walks in and out of Spiller’s office to hand her files.)

BARROW: No, 23’s good.

²⁹⁴ Episode 3: “Ovophagy,” *Dirt*. (41:47).

BARROW: Solid cover. See, I knew if I’d pushed your buttons just right you could pull it outta your ass.

SPILLER: You don’t get to talk about my ass.

BARROW: It’s a compliment. Good first issue, nice ass, too.

²⁹⁵ Episode 7: “Come Together,” *Dirt*. (05:45).

BARROW: Willa, right? I’m Brent Barrow.

MCPHEARSON: Oh, of course you are. Oh, I’m sorry. I mean, of course I know. I know who you are.

BARROW: It’s alright. That story—the reverend who molested his kid and knocked up her cheerleader friend is juicy. You’re a very talented young woman.

MCPHEARSON: Oh. Thank you, Mr. Barrow.

BARROW: What are you workin’ on now?

MCPHEARSON: Um, it’s the same story. The reverend’s daughter told me she’s the one who killed her best friend.

BARROW: She confessed that to you?

MCPHEARSON: Yeah the cops don’t even know yet. Lucy thinks that the confession cover might hit the stands before she’s even arrested. Chuck and I are going back today to get her full interview.

BARROW: No, no. No, you don’t need to share your byline with an old boozier. Tell Lucy to show you more respect. You’re editorial material, Willa.

MCPHEARSON: Thank you.

BARROW: Listen, please. Workers like you make my job an honor and a pleasure. (As he rubs her right shoulder and walks away.)

²⁹⁶ *Ibid.* (22:20).

BARROW: What are you gonna do to celebrate? (He is talking about McPhearson’s cover story.)

MCPHEARSON: Some of the gang told me they’d take me out for a drink.

BARROW: Well what about after?

²⁹⁷ *Ibid.* (36:48).

MCPHEARSON: Lucy thinks I’m an amateur. I’m so pissed at myself.

BARROW: Close your eyes and tell me what color you see. It’s a little trick I learned from a bushman in Zimbabwe. What have you got to lose?

MCPHEARSON: Ok. Red.

BARROW: Put that red right there. (As he pulls her hair away from her face.)

BARROW: Now, see it run down. Down your shoulder, down your arm, onto your wrist, your hand, fingers. (As he runs his hands all the way down McPhearson’s body.)

MCPHEARSON: What are you doing?

BARROW: No, shhhh. Don't talk, don't look. Just...no feeling's bad if you know what to do with it. (He is holding her hand.)

BARROW: What are you feeling right now? (As he touches her face and kisses her.)

²⁹⁸ Ibid. (41:20).

Barrow and McPhearson sleep together. She smiles and picks up a copy of the magazine when he leaves the room. She is still in his bed.

²⁹⁹ Ibid. (41:53).

³⁰⁰ Episode 9: "This Is Not Your Father's Hostage Situation," *Dirt*. (07:38).

BARROW: Look—

MCPHEARSON: Did I say you could speak? Is it still in your ass? Better be. Meet me in the supply closet in 20 minutes.

³⁰¹ Episode 8: "The Thing Under the Bed," *Dirt*. (20:28).

BARROW: How much is Lucy paying? (He is talking to Willa with his hands up her skirt. He is in his office, eating oysters with a bottle of wine on his coffee table.)

MCPHEARSON: We can talk dirty but we can't talk *Dirt*.

BARROW: Any more rules?

MCPHEARSON: How about a pre-not-nup? Six weeks, and then we both walk away. No obligations, no expectations.

BARROW: No crying.

MCPHEARSON: No cards at Christmas.

BARROW: Option to extend? (As McPhearson pulls his hands out of her.)

BARROW: I thought we were negotiating?

MCPHEARSON: I told you, work.

³⁰² Episode 9: "This Is Not Your Father's Hostage Situation," *Dirt*. (23:37).

MCPHEARSON: Besides, I'm the one in control. He's the one with the three-inch butt plug in his ass. (She is talking to the maid about her relationship with Barrow.)

³⁰³ Episode 6: "The Secret Lives of Altar Girls," *Dirt*. (18:38).

SPILLER: You only worry about your image.

BARROW: I'm worried about the magazine's image. What we publish has consequences.

³⁰⁴ Episode 4: "What to Expect When You're Expecting," *Dirt*. (38:56).

BARROW: Beyond that, these photos, they're smut. Publishing them is just...sensationalism. (He is talking about the photos of Andre G's head in McDaniel's wine cellar.)

SPILLER: This coming from a man who's never had a magazine subscription he could read with his pants on.

³⁰⁵ Episode 5: “You Don’t Know Jack,” *Dirt*. (19:53).

MCDANIEL’S BUSINESS ASSOCIATE: Now, you can sit up here in your big ass expensive office, in your \$2,000 suit and your five buck tie and that punk ass haircut and you gonna look me in my black face and you gonna tell me you don’t know shit? Come on, man. You da man. You know every detail that happens in this office, don’t you? Am I right? Am I right? Am I right? (He is confronting Barrow about the Andre G murder story.)

³⁰⁶ Episode 9: “This Is Not Your Father’s Hostage Situation,” *Dirt*. (19:40).

MAID: I can tell a lot about a man from his office. Your friend has no photos, no girlfriend, no wife, and no smiling children watching him from inside the frame while he does his work. Just things, nothing that tells us why he’s here. (She is talking to McPhearson about Barrow while the three of them are locked in the supply closet during the hostage situation.)

³⁰⁷ Joe Saltzman. “Analyzing the Images of the Journalist in Popular Culture: A Unique Method of Studying the Public’s Perception of Its Journalists and the News Media,” p. 39.

Chapter 6: Gibson Horne, the Media Owner

Tabloid tycoon Gibson Horne is the owner of *Dirt Now* magazine. Horne only appears in four episodes of *Dirt* during the first season. However, his presence looms in every episode as if to remind Spiller that she does not always have the final say about the publication and she certainly does not have as much power as she may think.

Researchers have found typical images of media owners in film and television to be very negative.³⁰⁸ Media owners are “amoral and affluent,”³⁰⁹ functioning as the villains of their media outlets. Furthermore, media moguls are often “money mad or power hungry” and frequently “ignore the press’s duty to the public.”³¹⁰ On the contrary, Horne does not come across as a villain or even as a disreputable businessman. He is aloof enough in the series to be considered a smart and serious businessman who knows how the media work.

William Randolph Hearst is likely “the most familiar real-life publisher in American history.”³¹¹ Hearst changed journalism “with his sensational coverage of crime, sex, and disasters, his attacks on the rich.”³¹² Horne’s tabloid focuses on similar sensational coverage of the elite. As publisher, editor, and proprietor, Hearst had many professional responsibilities.³¹³ Unlike Hearst, Horne functions only as owner of *Dirt Now*, with a 30 percent interest in the company.³¹⁴ He never reports, writes, or edits anything for *Dirt Now*, and he leaves the publishing up to Barrow. This representation of Horne and Barrow highlights some of the differences between these fictional media owners and publishers and the real life ones.

In earlier representations of journalism, media owners often took on the role of publisher. Not so with Horne. As publisher, Barrow is subordinate to Horne. As Horne's watchdog, Barrow constantly reminds Spiller of Horne's expectations for her and *Dirt Now*³¹⁵—especially fiscal responsibility.³¹⁶ Spiller calls Barrow “Gibson's little warrior.”³¹⁷ Though Spiller gets annoyed with Barrow as Horne's messenger, she goes to him when she wants to know if Horne is serious about firing her.³¹⁸ Next to Horne, Barrow knows the most about the business side of the publication—an area Spiller is often left out of.

Horne is the only one able to control Spiller. He threatens to replace Spiller with her nemesis, Harrod.³¹⁹ While he genuinely likes Spiller as a person, he warns her not to mistake his fondness for weakness because “I will tolerate a lot of things, but I will not tolerate someone losing my money.”³²⁰ His biggest issue with Spiller is not what she publishes, but her “outta control” spending³²¹ and issues with magazine overhead, sell-through, and efficiencies. He tells Spiller that her inability to control *Dirt Now's* budget is a serious problem and if she does not fix it he will bury her.³²²

Spiller takes Horne seriously and decides to combine *Dirt* and *Now* magazines into one publication in order to cut their overhead by not just the 20 percent Horne demands, but by a projected 50 percent.³²³ Initially, Horne is not thrilled with the idea. He tells Spiller, “When I bought *Now* magazine I thought I paid my way to legitimacy. I bought an institution.”³²⁴ He does not hold the more sensational *Dirt* magazine to as high a standard as he does the more lifestyle-focused *Now*. Horne tells Spiller if *Now* magazine is culturally irrelevant, then so is he. Spiller tells Horne that there is still time to

change and adapt to contemporary culture to satisfy their readers. He asks her, “Is this the shape we want for the culture?”³²⁵ He understands that the industry he works in has a powerful impact on society. He is not excited about combining the magazines, but he gives Spiller the opportunity to try it out.³²⁶ If she fails, he warns her, Harrod will have her job.

Horne is known for living by economic theories like, “let the marketplace decide”³²⁷ and “scared money doesn’t make money.”³²⁸ He knows how to make money and he is good at running a successful tabloid. When Horne is angry with Spiller for bailing Konkey out of jail with *Dirt Now*’s money, she responds, “Oh what’s a few million to you? You just made that clearing your throat.”³²⁹ Clearly, Horne has made a lot of money for himself and his tabloid. That is not a secret around Hollywood, either. When Dawson’s lawyer threatens Spiller and Barrow with a lawsuit, he tells them they “will settle for everything in Gibson Horne’s portfolio.”³³⁰ Horne is serious about his money and his investment in *Dirt Now*. He will fire any employee who becomes a liability. When Gage tells a group of reporters he gave Spiller Mallory’s sex tape in return for favorable coverage in *Dirt Now*, Horne threatens to fire Spiller. Barrow tells Spiller it is not about a lawsuit, rather “the perception that *Dirt Now* magazine trades stories with celebrities.”³³¹ Like many other images of media owners in film and television, Horne personifies the journalist as “a victim of a business that wants profit at any price.”³³²

Even though Horne has to constantly keep Spiller on track and always threatens her job, he admits when he is wrong.³³³ He even calls Spiller “Sweet Pea.”³³⁴ He is

likable and slightly intimidating because he is straightforward with his employees and serious about his job and about his money. He gives the impression that as a media owner, he is omnipotent. He does not need to be in the office every day from 9:00 to 5:00 because he has made his expectations perfectly clear.

Chapter 6 Endnotes

³⁰⁸ “Those who own the media in films and TV programs—whether publishers of newspapers or owners of broadcasting and new media—have often tried to use the media for their own ends.” Loren Ghiglione and Joe Saltzman. “Fact or Fiction: Hollywood Looks at the News,” p. 18.

³⁰⁹ Ibid.

³¹⁰ Ibid.

³¹¹ Ibid.

³¹² Ibid.

³¹³ *Biographical Directory of the United States Congress*, “William Randolph Hearst.” <http://bioguide.congress.gov/scripts/biodisplay.pl?index=H000429/>. (Accessed March 2008).

³¹⁴ Episode 1: “Pilot,” *Dirt*. (26:00).

³¹⁵ Episode 12: “Caught on Tape,” *Dirt*. (01:16).

BARROW: Numbers don’t lie. *Dirt Now* had a huge launch, but it’s slipping. The *Sexxx* issue was a disaster.

SPILLER: OK, well if you factor out the Walmart boycott the *Sexxx* issue pumped our newsstand by 20 percent.

BARROW: Yes. Factor it in and our net took a 10 percent hit.

SPILLER: We launched a new book and became one of the top celebrity weeklies in the nation.

BARROW: Gibson Horne is not interested in last month. He expects to be top dog. The *Hostage Memorial* issue didn’t move, *Sexxx*, *TueLu*. Hard to justify that beefed-up security budget for an editor whose circulation numbers are trending down.

SPILLER: OK, so I need a big cover. What a great idea, Brent. Thank god, you’re here. Tell Gibson to relax. I’ll deliver a monster cover. I always do.

³¹⁶ Episode 1: “Pilot,” *Dirt*. (26:00)

BARROW: Gib asked me to look at some sales spending ratios, and someone needs a little intervention. (He is talking to Spiller about her reckless spending.)

³¹⁷ Ibid. (29:36).

³¹⁸ Episode 13: “Ita Missa Est,” *Dirt*. (17:16).

SPILLER: OK, no bullshit. Is Gibson floating my job out to Tina Harrod? (As she storms into Barrow's office.)

³¹⁹ Episode 2: "Blogan," *Dirt*. (08:10).

HORNE: Lucy, are you familiar with Tina Harrod?"

SPILLER: The one who disgraced her magazine by Photoshopping the cover?

HORNE: No, the one who got her newsstand up over 150 percent in less than a year. She's got some very interesting ideas about our operation.

SPILLER: Are you talking about bringing her in under me?

HORNE: Instead of you.

³²⁰ Ibid.

³²¹ Ibid.

HORNE: See, Brent's been bringing me up to speed on the numbers and it seems to me your spending's outta control. (Talking to Spiller.)

³²² Ibid.

³²³ Ibid. (42:25).

SPILLER: You will never forget this moment. This is what we both live for. You wanna cut your overhead by 20 percent? How bout 50? We combined the magazines. One monster publication. The credibility of *Now* with all the lurid fun of *Dirt*.

HORNE: Hmm. A glossy tabloid.

SPILLER: It is more than that. No, this is *People* magazine with a healthy dose of screw you. It's the *National Enquirer* without the penis enlargement ads. Walmart mommy will love it and so will the rich sorority girls.

³²⁴ Ibid.

³²⁵ Ibid.

SPILLER: *Now* magazine brought America to the second half of the 20th century. It was solid and it was dependable, but it is over. It's culturally irrelevant.

HORNE: Well, then I'm culturally irrelevant.

SPILLER: No. Not if you change. Not if you charge the old with the new. Look at Blair and Logan. These are two has-beens that became huge because they joined forces. We have the chance to shape American culture.

HORNE: Is this the shape we want for the culture?

³²⁶ Episode 3: "Ovophagy," *Dirt*. (01:08).

KONKEY: Lucy's magazines were in trouble so she convinced Gibson Horne to merge them into one.

³²⁷ Episode 2: “Blogan,” *Dirt*. (42:25).

SPILLER: You’re the one who always says let the marketplace decide. (She is talking to Horne.)

³²⁸ Episode 5: “You Don’t Know Jack,” *Dirt*. (28:23).

SPILLER: You always told me, scared money doesn’t make money. (She is talking to Horne.)

³²⁹ *Ibid.* (29:12).

³³⁰ Episode 7: “Come Together,” *Dirt*. (30:39).

³³¹ Episode 12: “Caught on Tape,” *Dirt*. (17: 58).

SPILLER: This is bullshit! He’s going to fire me over an allegation?

BARROW: Or, you know, merely suspend. Nothing’s definitive.

SPILLER: There is nothing that ties me to this story, nothing. Tell him to take me to court.

BARROW: You’ve already been tried sweetie, by the highest court of the land—the court of public opinion.

SPILLER: OK, I’ll counter sue. Defamation of character and slander.

BARROW: It’s not about the goddamn lawsuit, Spiller. It’s about the perception that *Dirt Now* magazine trades stories with celebrities. Now, I’m not asking if it’s true or false, I don’t want to know. But blackmail? That’s a serious allegation.

³³² Joe Saltzman. “Analyzing the Images of the Journalist in Popular Culture: A Unique Method of Studying the Public’s Perception of Its Journalists and the News Media,” p. 26.

³³³ Episode 5: “You Don’t Know Jack,” *Dirt*. (28:23).

HORNE: I heard my magazine went and bailed out some psychotic photographer. Then I thought, what kind of idiot would risk my holding, not to mention their entire career, over some pap who nabs the occasional saggin’ titties and rumpled asses on some future Hollywood square? (He says this to Spiller about how she bailed Konkey out of jail when he got arrested for trespassing on Dawson’s private property.)

SPILLER: Do you mind if I speak frankly?

HORNE: No, by all means.

SPILLER: Why do you give a shit? Have you seen the sell-through? Fifty-nine percent. *People* magazine would suck your dick for those numbers.

HORNE: You haven’t answered my question yet. Am I gonna get—

SPILLER: Sued? Yea, most likely. But that price tag is going to pale compared to what you’ll pull in. And besides, you always told me scared money doesn’t make money.

HORNE: Neither does stupid money.

SPILLER: Oh, what's a few million to you? You just made that clearing your throat. Don Konkey had this week's cover sitting inside of him. It was business. It was really good business.

HORNE: OK. What's the cover?

SPILLER: Photos of Jack Dawson fondling another guy's nutsack.

HORNE: Jack Dawson? Well that's not your average Hollywood fag story. I'll give you that. Oh Lucy, well, I guess I came all this way for nothing.

SPILLER: No, actually I think it's a pretty good time to talk about my raise.

³³⁴ Ibid. (29:12).

HORNE: Well, I guess I came all this way for nothing.

SPILLER: No, actually I think it's a pretty good time to talk about my raise.

HORNE: Have a seat, Sweet Pea.

Chapter 7: Chuck Lafoon, the Investigative Reporter

Spiller calls in Chuck Lafoon, the *Dirt Now* “spooks and kooks guy,”³³⁵ to solve the Walnut Valley cheerleader murder. Lafoon appears in *Dirt* as the investigative reporter for two episodes. According to Hugo de Burgh’s *Investigative Journalism: Context and Practice*, “an investigative journalist is a man or woman whose profession it is to discover the truth and to identify lapses from it in whatever media may be available. The act of doing this generally is...distinct from apparently similar work done by police, lawyers, auditors, and regulatory bodies in that it is not limited as to target, not legally founded, and closely connected to publicity.”³³⁶ Lafoon functions a lot like a detective for *Dirt Now*’s crime stories.

Lafoon has experience, credentials, two Pope Awards, and one Peabody³³⁷ Award.³³⁸ He has a history with Spiller and actually taught her a lot of what she knows about journalism.³³⁹ In Walnut Valley, Lafoon tells McPhearson, “Everything [Spiller] knows about reporting she learned from me.”³⁴⁰ Lafoon was Spiller’s mentor when they worked together at the *Tribune* a number of years ago.³⁴¹ Not intimidated by Spiller, he is one of the few characters to challenge her. He does not ask Spiller for permission and he does things his way.³⁴² For example, he tells Spiller she is not being objective on the Walnut Valley cheerleader murder story because her father’s suicide leads her to become emotionally involved with the case.³⁴³ Also, when Spiller shows Lafoon her cover on the story, Lafoon tells her that it is not accurate.³⁴⁴ She argues with him, calling the cover a sales tool, and Lafoon angrily replies, “This is why I don’t do this anymore. I get sent in

to get facts and they get twisted around to make the cover work.”³⁴⁵ He cares more about the accuracy of his stories than about increasing *Dirt Now*'s circulation.

Investigative reporters, like war correspondents, “always work tirelessly to aid the public.”³⁴⁶ Lafoon's investigative reporting is not typically as hard-hitting as other traditional print investigative reporters' may be. When Spiller tells him she needs him on the Walnut Valley cheerleader murder story, Lafoon replies, “You already have me up to my ears in nuts and sluts. I got *Family Keeps Pet Hippo in Living Room* and *Idaho Potato Looks Like Virgin Mary*.”³⁴⁷ While he does take his job seriously, he does not hold it to high standards. He tells McPhearson he “was a respected journalist”³⁴⁸ when he worked for the *Tribune*. *Dirt* mocks the seriousness of investigative journalists who work for tabloids.

Investigative reporters “usually risk life and limb to get the story that will help the public.”³⁴⁹ Because they are often threatened or beaten up, they become “legitimate heroes.”³⁵⁰ Investigative journalists in film and television “often end up dead.”³⁵¹ Lafoon never risks his life—he never even gets into verbal confrontations. Although his work with McPhearson on the cheerleader murder results in justice being served, Lafoon does not ever become a hero. While he is a voice for traditional journalistic ethics—he understands objectivity and does not believe in distorting stories to increase sales—he takes part in the twisted tabloid world even though he looks down on his own job. This makes it difficult to see Lafoon as more honorable than the rest of the *Dirt Now* employees.

Lafoon does seem to be an expert on how to investigate and report on crimes.³⁵² Even though the Walnut Valley district attorney tells him the department agreed they would not talk to the press,³⁵³ Lafoon manages to manipulate the district attorney into telling him that Amber Carmichael, the murdered cheerleader, was pregnant.³⁵⁴ He does this by telling the district attorney that people become heroes in cases like Carmichael's by bringing justice to their communities.³⁵⁵ Like Spiller, Lafoon has to pay for exclusive information. He pays the medical examiner \$20,000 for her report on Carmichael.³⁵⁶ Because Lafoon works for *Dirt Now*, his job becomes more about getting the exclusive story than solving the crime.

Lafoon's reputation as an investigative reporter extends to Walnut Valley.³⁵⁷ His character is relatively likable, but falls into the-journalist-as-an-alcoholic stereotype.³⁵⁸ Holding a drink in his hand almost every time he is in Spiller's office,³⁵⁹ he is the only journalist in *Dirt* with an alcohol problem.³⁶⁰

His biggest contribution to *Dirt Now* is giving McPhearson pointers on how to be a good reporter and helping along her career. "You want to be a good reporter?" he asks her. "Remember this: everyone wants to tell their story. You've gotta cultivate your source one question at a time. Sometimes, no questions."³⁶¹ Even though Lafoon is brought in to solve the Walnut Valley cheerleader murder, he lets McPhearson take the byline—giving her her first cover story.³⁶² He comforts McPhearson when she thinks she makes a mistake on the cover story. He even calls her his protégé.³⁶³ While he may not feel strong loyalties to *Dirt Now*, he demonstrates a passion for the field of journalism.

Chapter 7 Endnotes

³³⁵ Episode 6: “The Secret Lives of Altar Girls,” *Dirt*. (05:47).

³³⁶ Hugo de Burgh (ed). *Investigative Journalism: Context and Practice*, London, England and New York, NY: Routledge, 2006. p. 9.

³³⁷ According to the Peabody Awards Web site, “first presented in 1941, the George Foster Peabody Awards recognize distinguished achievement and meritorious service by broadcasters, cable and Webcasters, producing organizations, and individuals. The awards program is administered by the Grady College of Journalism and Mass Communication at the University of Georgia. Selection is made each spring by the Peabody Board, a 16-member panel of distinguished academics, television critics, industry practitioners, and experts in culture and the arts.” “George Foster Peabody Awards,” (University of Georgia), http://www.peabody.uga.edu/overview_history/index.php. (accessed March 2008).

³³⁸ Episode 6: “The Secret Lives of Altar Girls,” *Dirt*. (03:29).

³³⁹ *Ibid.* (04:24).

SPILLER: She seems hungry. Maybe she’ll learn something from you.
LAFOON: Like you did?

³⁴⁰ *Ibid.* (05:47).

³⁴¹ *Ibid.*

³⁴² Episode 7: “Come Together,” *Dirt*. (07:12).

MCPHEARSON: Will you clear it with Lucy?
LAFOON: We’ll tell her after.

³⁴³ Episode 6: “The Secret Lives of Altar Girls,” *Dirt*. (19:49).

LAFOON: You’re not objective.

SPILLER: Excuse me?

LAFOON: This story, I know why you’re so obsessed by it...it’s the girl. I remember way back one night you got drunk at McLooty’s and told me the whole story of your father’s suicide. How you found his body when you were 15, how you never understood why he did it. You were 15, just like this girl. You said you died that day. Your words, ‘I died that day.’ You said that’s why you wanted to be a reporter, so you can know the why of things.

³⁴⁴ *Ibid.* (41:06).

(A cover flashes on the conference room's projection screen with a photo of the reverend and the headline *He did it! Rev's Shocking Admission!*)

SPILLER: What do you think?

LAFOON: I think it's not accurate.

SPILLER: Excuse me?

LAFOON: It implies he killed the girl.

SPILLER: He's her minister, he got her pregnant, she's murdered. Readers will draw their own conclusions.

LAFOON: Off a headline that reads *He Did It?*

SPILLER: It refers to getting her pregnant.

LAFOON: Oh please. The cover's a lie and you know it.

³⁴⁵ Ibid.

³⁴⁶ Joe Saltzman. "Analyzing the Images of the Journalist in Popular Culture: A Unique Method of Studying the Public's Perception of Its Journalists and the News Media," p. 36.

³⁴⁷ Episode 6: "The Secret Lives of Altar Girls," *Dirt*. (03:29).

³⁴⁸ Ibid. (05:47).

³⁴⁹ Joe Saltzman. "Analyzing the Images of the Journalist in Popular Culture: A Unique Method of Studying the Public's Perception of Its Journalists and the News Media," p. 36.

³⁵⁰ Ibid.

³⁵¹ Ibid.

³⁵² Episode 6: "The Secret Lives of Altar Girls," *Dirt*. (008:22).

LAFOON: Local cops, they got nothing.

MCPHEARSON: How can you tell?

LAFOON: No one's talking to them, they're talking to no one.

MCPHEARSON: Well maybe they're just being respectful?

LAFOON: Their mistake. Killer isn't ID'd in the first 24 hours, probably won't be. No one in this crowd's gonna give up any dirt on the girl. No dirt, no suspect.

MCPHEARSON: Well if they're not gonna give it up for their own cops, what makes you think that they're gonna talk to us?

LAFOON: We're in a church. Maybe we can get a blessing from the reverend.

³⁵³ Ibid. (16:13).

DISTRICT ATTORNEY: The chief and I agreed we are not talking to the press.

LAFOON: On the record... (He is following the Walnut Valley district attorney out of the City Hall building.)

DISTRICT ATTORNEY: It is a matter in our local justice system. We are gonna let the system do the work.

LAFOON: Thanks, that's great. (He is writing down what the district attorney is saying on a reporter's notepad.)

LAFOON: Seriously. No, I get it. Let the system do the work. It's a strong quote. Aloof, in charge, gives the sense you're closing in. Have you worked a lot of big high-profile murder cases?

DISTRICT ATTORNEY: High profile? This is Walnut Valley.

³⁵⁴ Ibid.

DISTRICT ATTORNEY: Alright. The Emmy's report won't be out for a couple of days. But the victim, the girl, she was pregnant. (He tells Lafoon the twist of the case.)

³⁵⁵ Ibid.

LAFOON: That's an amazing guy. The book-worthy cases always have great characters like that, a leading man making the case, and a twist. You gotta have a twist.

³⁵⁶ Ibid. (40:25).

LAFOON: These stories always need great characters, a hero making the case. Could be the medical examiner.

MEDICAL EXAMINER: You can drop the sales pitch. *National Enquirer's* already offered me 10 grand for a first look at my report. So, what's it really worth?"

LAFOON: This small town's just not as quaint as it used to be, is it? Twenty grand, cash. And that's exclusive. No one else sees it.

MEDICAL EXAMINER: OK.

³⁵⁷ Ibid. (16:13).

DISTRICT ATTORNEY: Blue—you're Chuck LaFoon. I knew I knew you. I read your book. Did you read his book? (He asks McPhearson.)

³⁵⁸ Ibid. (03:29).

SPILLER: OK. I want Willa McPhearson to go with you.

LAFOON: You think a chaperone can keep me on the wagon?

³⁵⁹ Ibid. (19:49).

Lafoon is drinking dark liquor on the rocks in Spiller's office.

³⁶⁰ Ibid.

LAFOON: You can start negating my concern by focusing on my alcoholism. I can see I'm a drunk.

³⁶¹ Ibid. (06:50).

³⁶² Episode 7: "Come Together," *Dirt*. (07:12).

MCPHEARSON: Look, Chuck, she's a sexual abuse victim. I don't want her to clam up because there's a man in the room.

LAFoon: Little Willa wants to fly solo and not share her byline.

MCPHEARSON: It's nothing personal. It's just, Lucy's wrong. I don't need help with this.

LAFoon: I agree.

MCPHEARSON: Really?

LAFoon: You got my blessing.

³⁶³ Ibid. (33:10).

LAFoon: Seen this? (As he holds up the *Dirt Now* issue of Sweet's confession while McPhearson wipes up the entire pot of coffee she spilled in the break room.)

LAFoon: She didn't do it, Chuck. She was covering for her father. (She is upset. She thinks her cover story is inaccurate.)

LAFoon: Cops found the baton, plenty of prints. Maddy, not Daddy.

MCPHEARSON: That's because it was her baton.

LAFoon: The medical examiner matched the angle and depth of Amber's stab wounds to Maddy's height and weight. Innocent until proven guilty, of course. Arise my little protégé, and join the ranks. (As he helps McPhearson up off the floor.)

MCPHEARSON: I shouldn't have cut you out. I wasn't ready.

LAFoon: You did great.

MCPHEARSON: No. I didn't handle it right. I let her get to me.

LAFoon: When it stops getting to you, that's when you're in trouble.

Chapter 8: Kenny, the Assistant

As editor-in-chief, Spiller is the only *Dirt* character given an assistant.³⁶⁴ Kenny (Ankur Bhatt)—who is never given a last name—does not appear until the third episode.³⁶⁵ Spiller introduces her assistant³⁶⁶ to Konkey as “Lenny.” Kenny attempts to correct her only to have Spiller reply, “Whatever.”³⁶⁷ Spiller does not seem to care much about Kenny as a person. It does not matter to her what his name is or when his child will be born. What matters is his efficiency. Like every other *Dirt Now* employee, Kenny is easily disposable and replaceable and Spiller does not get attached.

Kenny struggles through the stereotypical assistant-just-can’t-seem-to-get-it-right-with-his-boss dilemma. When Naomi (Alexi Wasser), a female reporter, asks Kenny how his new job is going, he sarcastically replies, “Well, my penmanship sucks and I was only a half an hour early this morning, which I guess is still considered late. On the bright side, her coffee was a perfect shade of shit, so I’m happy.”³⁶⁸ Kenny’s job description includes taking phone calls and messages for Spiller, reminding her of appointments and, of course, making sure she always has a fresh cup of coffee,³⁶⁹ a cold bottle of artesian water or an aspirin.³⁷⁰ Initially Kenny has trouble getting Spiller’s coffee to resemble the “Spanish leather” color she prefers it to be.³⁷¹

Kenny even takes care of some of Spiller’s personal messages and appointments which have nothing to do with *Dirt Now*, such as when he reminds Spiller that she has to get her mother’s sunglasses and hat before she picks her mother up from her plastic surgery.³⁷² It does not take Kenny long to figure out how difficult it is to please Spiller.

Yet, Kenny does not get discouraged easily. He tries to understand how Spiller works and not to take her sarcastic remarks personally.

Naomi is the only character who seems to pay any attention to Kenny. When he starts out at *Dirt Now* she tries to give him a few pointers on how to avoid vexing Spiller. She warns Kenny that Spiller's last assistant was fired after she caught him on the phone with his wedding caterer.³⁷³ Unfortunately for Kenny, his wedding is also in the works. Spiller finds out about Kenny's unborn child and future wedding and warns him that he "better not be planning wedding shit on my dime." Kenny, seemingly more confident around Spiller, sarcastically remarks, "I'm on my lunch, and it's actually baby shit."³⁷⁴

It does not take long for Kenny to get comfortable with his position and with Spiller's unpredictable orders. Kenny manages to keep his personal life from interfering with his work at *Dirt Now*. He only makes one meager attempt to talk to Spiller about the floral arrangements for his wedding; she tells him she is not interested.³⁷⁵ As annoyed as Spiller claims to be with personal life getting in the way of *Dirt Now*, she does allow Kenny to leave early from work one day for Lamaze class.³⁷⁶

Eventually Kenny begins to understand what *Dirt Now* means to Spiller³⁷⁷ and starts to get the hang of his job. He is ready to grab Spiller's purse out of her hands and replace it with a steaming cup of Spanish-leather colored coffee as soon as she gets to the office.³⁷⁸ It appears as though Spiller prefers Kenny to her last assistant, even though he comes with a bit more personal baggage. Regardless of how tolerable Spiller may have been finding Kenny, his character does not live through the ninth episode. When former child star Winter takes Spiller and the rest of *Dirt Now* hostage, he shoots and kills

Kenny.³⁷⁹ Naomi is the one most affected by Kenny's murder; Spiller does not seem fazed. In fact, no one brings Kenny up after the hostage situation. The offices of *Dirt Now* return to normal and Spiller moves on with her career, without an assistant. The fact that Spiller continues on with the daily operations of *Dirt Now* without even so much as pausing to acknowledge the death of her assistant is a testament to her personal values and her priorities.

Chapter 8 Endnotes

³⁶⁴ According to the U.S. Department of Labor's bureau of labor statistics, "editors often have assistants, many of whom hold entry-level jobs. These assistants, frequently called copy editors, review copy for errors in grammar, punctuation, and spelling and check the copy for readability, style, and agreement with editorial policy. They suggest revisions, such as changing words and rearranging sentences and paragraphs, to improve clarity or accuracy. They also carry out research for writers and verify facts, dates, and statistics. In addition, they may arrange page layouts of articles, photographs, and advertising; compose headlines; and prepare copy for printing. *Publication assistants* who work for publishing houses may read and evaluate manuscripts submitted by freelance writers, proofread printers' galleys, and answer letters about published material. Assistants on small newspapers or in radio stations compile articles available from wire services or the Internet, answer phones, and make photocopies," "Assistants," (U.S. Department of Labor), <http://stats.bls.gov/oco/ocos089.htm>. (accessed March 2008).

³⁶⁵ Episode 3: "Ovophagy," *Dirt*. (15:42).

³⁶⁶ The word *assistant* dates back to the 15th century. By definition, an assistant is "somebody who works to somebody else's instructions,"³⁶⁶ or in other words, "a subordinate to another person." "Assistant," (Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary), <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/assistant> (accessed March 2008).

³⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

KENNY: Your brother called about dinner again.

SPILLER: Lenny this is Don, Don this is my new assistant, Lenny.

KENNY: Kenny. (He corrects Spiller.)

SPILLER: Whatever.

³⁶⁸ Episode 4: "What to Expect When You're Expecting," *Dirt*. (12:48).

NAOMI: So, how's it going?

KENNY: Well, my penmanship sucks and I was only a half an hour early this morning, which I guess is still considered late. On the bright side, her coffee was a perfect shade of shit, so I'm happy.

³⁶⁹ *Ibid.* (04:54).

KENNY: Does Mom have a name?

SPILLER: Well, I like Bitch Face but why don't we just stick with Dorothy?

KENNY: OK. February 20, Dorothy's wedding.

SPILLER: That can't be the date.

KENNY: Well, yesterday's the 18th, today's the 19th so...is there a problem?

SPILLER: Where's my coffee?

³⁷⁰ Episode 8: “The Thing Under the Bed,” *Dirt*. (06:22).

SPILLER: Kenny, aspirin!

³⁷¹ Episode 4: “What to Expect When You’re Expecting,” *Dirt*. (04:39).

KENNY: Oh, and here’s your coffee.

SPILLER: That’s not Spanish leather. (As she picks up a color chart to indicate the color she likes her coffee to be.)

SPILLER: That’s rawhide. Use the color chip until you get it.

³⁷² Episode 8: “The Thing Under the Bed,” *Dirt*. (17:32).

KENNY: And don’t forget, stop at Mom’s house. Get her hat and sunglasses.

SPILLER: Mom’s? What are we, brother and sister now?

³⁷³ Episode 4: “What to Expect When You’re Expecting,” *Dirt*. (12:48).

NAOMI: You’re going to do fine, just as long as you don’t make the mistake the last guy did.

KENNY: What’s that?

NAOMI: Get married.

KENNY: What do you mean?

NAOMI: Last guy was getting married. All his wedding prep interfered with his work. She canned his ass after she caught him on the phone with his caterer.

KENNY: Shit.

NAOMI: Are you getting married?

KENNY: I have to. Because of the baby.

³⁷⁴ Episode 5: “You Don’t Know Jack,” *Dirt*. (23:03).

³⁷⁵ Episode 6: “The Secret Lives of Altar Girls,” *Dirt*. (07:28).

KENNY: So we’ll do the flowers ourselves. Fine, I’ll call then, I will. I gotta go. (He is on the phone at his desk, talking about his wedding.)

KENNY: Sorry. People hear it’s a wedding and the prices triple.

SPILLER: Not interested. (As she keeps walking past him.)

³⁷⁶ Episode 8: “The Thing Under the Bed,” *Dirt*. (17:32).

SPILLER: What?

KENNY: OK if I leave? I have a Lamaze class.

SPILLER: Fine.

³⁷⁷ *Ibid.* (17:58).

SPILLER: I’ll sleep when they put a stake in my heart. (As she gets up and walks out of her office.)

MCPHEARSON: She’s not kidding, is she?

KENNY: Nope.

³⁷⁸ Episode 9: “This Is Not Your Father’s Hostage Situation,” *Dirt*. (04:55).

The moment Spiller walks into the *Dirt Now* office, Kenny brings her a mug of coffee and takes her purse.

³⁷⁹ *Ibid.* (37:02).

WINTER: Hey Kenny, can you go get me a drink? (He is getting frustrated that the office is now more focused on getting their story out rather than him with his gun.)

KENNY: Um, can you just give me one second?” (He is flipping through photos with Naomi, seemingly uninterested in Winter.)

WINTER: What did you say?

KENNY: We’re just finishing up. The drinks are in the fridge. It’s right over there.

SAMMY: Oh, OK, no problem. I’ll go get the drink. Um, that’s a really good one. Use that one. (He is talking about one of the pictures that Kenny is flipping through for the story.)

WINTER: Oh, ah, Kenny... (He turns around and walks away from Kenny and Naomi. Then he turns back around and shoots and kills Kenny.)

WINTER: Wow. (He seems surprised with his actions. He is smiling, happy to have some leverage back on the situation.)

Chapter 9: *Dirt Now*, the Tabloid Publication

Together, editor-in-chief Spiller, paparazzo Konkey, reporter McPhearson, publisher Barrow, owner Horne, investigative reporter Lafoon, and assistant Kenny make up the heart of the *Dirt Now* tabloid team. Every character functions differently to put out weekly covers that wow readers and to keep the publication running smoothly.

New York City, New York, may be the media capital of the world and editorial home for more than 350 magazines,³⁸⁰ but Hollywood, California, is the entertainment capital³⁸¹ and the feeding ground for a different breed of publications: the tabloid magazine. The *Dirt* series films in Hollywood,³⁸² where *Dirt Now* focuses on celebrity and scandal rather than fashion or politics. The entertainment industry provides Spiller and the staff of *Dirt Now* with weekly opportunities to expose the scandals of A-list celebrities. Spiller never seems to run out of potential material for her publication, but cover selection is critical. Celebrity drug dealer Garbo (Carly Pope) thinks Spiller has such an abundance of juicy gossip because, “This is Hollywood, *betrayal* should have its on star on the walk.”³⁸³ Celebrity thrives in the competitive entertainment industry in Hollywood, but the celebrities know there is always someone watching their every move. That someone is *Dirt Now*.

Tabloid journalism differs from other journalism primarily because of its content. The word *tabloid*³⁸⁴ dates back to 1901 and is often used to describe publications known for their sensationalist style, “featuring stories of violence, crime, or scandal presented in a sensational manner.”³⁸⁵ *Dirt Now* publishes weekly, giving the staff significantly more

rushed schedules than monthly magazines, but not as rushed as dailies. Like print newspapers, *Dirt Now's* editorial staff wants it to be the publication to break the news and the first to get the story to readers. Because of this, *Dirt Now* sometimes functions more like a daily newspaper with looming deadlines and late nights, than as a typical monthly magazine. *Dirt* gives viewers a first-hand view of how a tabloid is run. Every episode focuses on getting the next cover by any means possible—the cover the other tabloids won't be able to get.

Tabloids aren't a modern phenomenon. They have been around for more than one thousand years in one form or another simply because people have always wanted to be in on the hottest gossip of the day. For example, the epigram, a brief and witty piece of verse, was the “most convenient ancient form for gossip, news, or propaganda.”³⁸⁶ Early “journalists” figured out in the 15th century that the public wanted to read about scandal, violence, and crime.³⁸⁷ Many early tabloid journalists did not “worry about what was real or false.”³⁸⁸ The modern-day tabloid journalists of *Dirt Now* exemplify some of the qualities of early tabloid journalists.

Yellow journalism thrived in the 1890s as a form of journalism that “choked up the news channels on which the common people depended with a shrieking, gaudy, sensation-loving, devil-may-care kind of journalism.”³⁸⁹ It wasn't until the 1930s through the 1950s that “Hollywood gossip columnists... achieved enormous power”³⁹⁰ when they developed the practice of reporting on the gritty details of celebrity life. Journalists have chronicled the behavior of the celebrities the public watches on the silver screen for nearly 80 years.

Although modern tabloid journalism seems to have recently exploded (transcending print publications—broadcast and cable channels today are filled with entertainment magazine programs including *Access Hollywood*, *Entertainment Tonight*, and *TMZ* and the Internet is home to the gossip blogger), even “the earliest local news merchant was branded a gossip, a busybody, a witch, and treated with contempt in life and literature.”³⁹¹ While people have always been quick to decry gossip and exploitation, they continue to buy publications like *Dirt Now*. It appears as though the public has a love-hate relationship with tabloids like *Dirt Now* and shows like *Access Hollywood*. On the one hand, people often decry the means—such as hidden cameras or undercover reporting³⁹²—that tabloid journalists use to get their stories; yet, they snap their publications up at the supermarket.

Dirt demonstrates how tabloids like *Dirt Now* function as an important (arguably necessary) role in the “checks and balances” of celebrity society. Often, *Dirt Now* has exclusive, scandalous information on someone, which translates to power over that person.³⁹³ Hollywood’s A-list celebrities, like the general public, share a love-hate relationship with *Dirt Now* and other tabloid publications. Although celebrities often cringe at pictures of themselves with cellulite circled or stories focusing on their illegal drug addictions, these same celebrities realize that publications like *Dirt Now* have the ability to boost their careers and create them as celebrities by reporting on them.³⁹⁴ The celebrities in *Dirt* know that good coverage in a popular tabloid is invaluable.³⁹⁵ Gage explains how this system works to a group of paparazzi when asked about his and

Mallory's sex tape, "Come on, you guys know how this works. You get good press. You wash Lucy Spiller's hands, she gives you good coverage in her magazines."³⁹⁶

A-list celebrities like Mallory or McLaren get into *Dirt Now* because the hottest celebrities sell the tabloid.³⁹⁷ Those with careers on the down slope have to be involved in something truly incredible to get Spiller's attention.³⁹⁸

At one point Winter, a disgruntled former child star, gets so upset with Spiller and *Dirt Now* because the tabloid will not run a story on him that he holds the entire *Dirt Now* office hostage³⁹⁹ and even kills Spiller's assistant. Once the Winter hostage situation is picked up nationally by broadcast outlets, Spiller agrees to do the story from inside the crisis,⁴⁰⁰ because she knows that *now* people will want to read about Winter again. Spiller knows how the media work. When Gage breaks down and panics about being accused of raping Mallory and selling the sex tape to *Dirt Now*, he begs Spiller to help him look good in the media again. "Stick to my script," she tells him, "I'll get your life back on track."⁴⁰¹ But Spiller does not usually do things for other people just to be nice. She always thinks about how any situation can benefit *Dirt Now*. Even though she helps Gage look good to the public again, she makes sure he gives her publication credit.⁴⁰²

Directors want the most popular actors to star in their films and can tell who is popular by flipping through *Dirt Now*.⁴⁰³ Even celebrities who claim to loathe *Dirt Now* are shown reading or buying copies whether the stories about them are good or bad.⁴⁰⁴ *Dirt Now* has a huge impact on the lives of the celebrities it features. As much as celebrities claim to be bothered by paparazzi following them, TV shows like *Access Hollywood* talking about them, and tabloids like *Dirt Now* exploiting them, some stars

may need publications like *Dirt Now* to remain in the public eye. For them, it may be far worse to be out of the public eye than to be in it for something controversial.⁴⁰⁵

Just as good press can be great for a celebrity's career, bad press can be detrimental. When Spiller invites Mallory to *Dirt Now* to show her that they have proof that she leaked her own sex tape, Mallory panics. She begs Spiller to keep her secret in the "infamous vault," where Spiller keeps her best stories,⁴⁰⁶ and tells her, "This could be our secret, if you kept it. Johnny Gage has already taken the blame for this, it's over. I can give you anything, exclusives. *Dirt Now* can be my magazine. We can be a great team, Lucy. I'll give you stories, and you'll give me covers. That's how it works right?" Spiller calmly replies, "I'm not for sale, Julia." Mallory then gets down on her knees and begs, "I know. I didn't mean that. You're not; I am. I'm the one for sale. I'll be your star. I'll feed you anything you need. I told you I knew about this vault, just keep the story on the inside and you can own me. I don't mind being owned."⁴⁰⁷ Spiller chooses to run the sex tape story anyway, figuring the money *Dirt Now* would make from sales would exceed the benefits from blackmailing Mallory for tips and stories.⁴⁰⁸

While *Dirt* focuses on the consequences of irresponsible journalism, the series also highlights the entertainment industry as an entity that is arguably equally corrupt. For example, even though Konkey has pictures of Dawson and Leo engaging in homosexual activity, Dawson blatantly lies about the origin of the photographs and blames tabloids on publishing anything they want without caring about accuracy. Dawson tells *Access Hollywood*, "Tabloids will print anything to sell a paper...even if they have

to make it up.”⁴⁰⁹ Both *Dirt Now* journalists and Hollywood celebrities are involved in a twisted relationship where they use one another for fame and fortune.

With the publication of the written word comes the threat of libel lawsuits.⁴¹⁰ Spiller not only pushes her racy covers because she thinks they are sourced legitimately, she also pushes them because the money *Dirt Now* would rake in from sales would be significantly more than the publication would have to pay in damages if a lawsuit ever did develop.⁴¹¹ As long as *Dirt Now*'s stories come from reliable sources, Spiller is willing to publish them. Spiller is never threatened by the looming legal department of *Dirt Now*. She always focuses on getting the cover out first and dealing with the mess it may leave later.⁴¹² However, a responsible journalist would likely not disregard the law in the name of getting a story.

When *Dirt Now* exposes action star Dawson as a closeted homosexual, Dawson sends his lawyers to speak with Spiller and Barrow about a possible lawsuit. Spiller and Barrow take control of the conversation by giving Dawson's lawyer the option to continue with the lawsuit, when Barrow explains that *Dirt Now* will have their “lawyers call every gigolo, masseuse, trainer, pool boy, and ass toy Jack's ever employed. All the rumors, innuendos, and impressions become facts of the case and that means we can publish them. I mean that should be worth, what do you think, five covers, at least? Jack Dawson will be America's proud, gay icon.”⁴¹³ When Spiller tells the lawyer his second option is to drop the lawsuit the lawyer replies, “The damage has been done, people. There's not enough money to indemnify you against the lawsuit we will bring. One year from today, you will all be working for Jack Dawson, well, until he fires you.” Both

Barrow and Spiller smile confidently as the lawyer leaves their office. *Dirt Now* doesn't flinch at the threat of a lawsuit when its sources are solid.

Dirt Now is threatened with another lawsuit when Mallory accuses Spiller of "bartering with a rapist"⁴¹⁴ to get hold of her sex tape. The lawsuit never develops, though, because Spiller finds out that Mallory leaked her own tape to boost her career.⁴¹⁵ Again, *Dirt Now* relies on blackmail and bribery to keep lawsuits to a minimum.

Many people believe photos in magazines are tampered with in order to portray a specific image,⁴¹⁶ often by using Adobe Photoshop software.⁴¹⁷ *Dirt* addresses this issue. When Spiller shows her brother the proof of the cover that will expose Dawson as a homosexual, she tells her brother that *Dirt Now's* photo department will Photoshop Leo's face out so readers won't recognize him.⁴¹⁸ Although the publication isn't tampering with the image to change its meaning, they still tamper with it to change it. Spiller brings up the issue of using Photoshop to doctor tabloid photographs on one other occasion. She tells *Dirt Now* owner Gibson Horne that Tina Harrod "disgraced her magazine by Photoshopping the cover."⁴¹⁹ Spiller shows contempt for other tabloids that use Photoshop, but she is not above using the software when it will benefit her.⁴²⁰

One reason the viewer may have trouble trusting the journalism behind *Dirt Now* is that many of the tabloid's articles are superficial. *Dirt Now* does write some lighter stories about such items as well-endowed actors and celebrity camel toe.⁴²¹ Some viewers might find such stories to be ill-spirited and vindictive because, "if the end result is not in the public interest, then no matter what the journalist does, no matter how much he or she struggles with his or her conscience or tries to do the right thing, evil has won out."⁴²² So

if viewers do not believe *Dirt Now*'s salacious articles do anything to serve the public interest, they are more likely to look down on the staff of the magazine and characters in the series. On the other hand, this could be precisely why viewers are interested in the series. After all, it's why tabloids sell. An important question to address is who can really decide what news is in a time when anyone with an Internet connection can call him or herself a journalist. *Dirt Now* never tries to sell issues under the pretense that its stories contain the level of hard news in publications like the *USA Today* or the *Time*. However, the publication does break entertainment news and does provide stories that affect a number of people—regardless of whether or not their reporting is fair and ethical.

As with every publication and TV show, *Dirt Now* functions as much as a business as it does a tabloid. Sales of each issue depend on its appeal to the readers. Spiller typically knows how to put a cover out there that will sell each week. Tabloids "lived or died on the marketability of the product."⁴²³ The daily hurly-burly of the modish offices of *Dirt Now* boils down to the simple economic theory of supply and demand: write what sells or don't keep your job. Even inchoate journalists realized that "the only sure way to attract readers was to be inventive, to write lively, vigorous prose, and to stick in the sensational whenever possible."⁴²⁴ The staff of *Dirt Now* practices this kind of journalism because it understands that, as in the old days, scandal and gossip with screaming headlines sells the most.

Dirt Now often breaks stories before broadcast and print journalists.⁴²⁵ When other media outlets get word of the tabloid's story they have to credit *Dirt Now* as breaking the story or having the exclusive⁴²⁶ on their newscast.⁴²⁷ Coverage such as this

is invaluable for *Dirt Now* because those watching will know they have to buy a copy of the magazine to get the full, exclusive story first.⁴²⁸

In yet another feat to increase profit, Spiller explains the merger of *Dirt* and *Now* to her staff. “It’s called ovophagy. Sharks battling in the womb, devouring their brothers and sisters until only the fittest survive, which is why we’re all here today. Lucky us. *Now* magazine is venerable, respected, and hemorrhaging cash. *Dirt* has solid sales but its readers will always be low-rent so the ad revenue isn’t there. These two magazines cannot survive. So I thought about the sharks turning a liability into a source of nutrition. As of today, *Dirt* and *Now* are merging into one new single publication. A tabloid with class. All the fun of *Dirt* with the prestige of *Now*.”⁴²⁹ But by merging the publications into one, the magazine will have to cut staff. *Dirt* touches on issues of real-life journalists today who are dealing with layoffs due to declining readership and budget cuts. At *Dirt Now*, stories matter more than employees.

Spiller always emphasizes the importance of reporting accurately. *Dirt Now* can only survive at the top of the tabloid food chain if its breaking stories are both sensational and accurate—not speculation or hearsay.⁴³⁰ Spiller makes that clear during that same conference room meeting, saying, “I believe in the truth above all else. And this (points to new cover of *Dirt Now* on the projection screen) is truth. We have to be sharks. If we succeed, there’s room for about half of you to stay. If we fail, we’re all finished, including me. We have one week to prove our right to survive, or, get eaten alive.”⁴³¹ Spiller cares more about the life of the new tabloid than the jobs of *Dirt* and *Now* employees. She wants the publication to survive, above all else.

The tabloid publishes one salacious cover after another: a small-town preacher, who was having sex with his own daughter, impregnated his daughter's best friend whom his daughter then murders;⁴³² an issue focusing on salacious celebrity sex scandals;⁴³³ and an issue on how hip-hop artist Andre G's manager, McDaniel, cut off Andre G's head and stored it in his wine cellar.⁴³⁴ However outrageous, extreme, or seemingly impossible these stories are, the events they describe occur throughout the show's plot. But the accuracy of Spiller's stories does not excuse the level of blackmail, bribery, manipulation, and deception involved in getting those stories.

While there are a number of glossy pages inside *Dirt Now*, Spiller focuses on the cover. Since sales depend on the cover, Spiller doesn't settle for just anything and doesn't believe there is ever a slow week in Hollywood.⁴³⁵ She constantly reminds her staff that there is always something out there and it is their job to find it. She constantly challenges her staff to get in the field and get the best story. "I need a cover, you need jobs. Seems like the perfect match, no? This is Hollywood, someone is getting screwed and somebody out there cannot wait to tell you about it. There's a cover out there somewhere, OK? It's not going to just walk through the front door."⁴³⁶

Spiller is willing to take chances with her covers. She instinctively realizes that things are not what they seem. When she hears about the murder of a high school cheerleader in the small town of Walnut Valley, she sends her staff to find out her "secret life,"⁴³⁷ without any proof of it. Spiller calls in an investigative reporter, saying, "I need hard journalism, M.E. reports, D.A.'s office,"⁴³⁸ which reminds viewers that as sensational as a story may seem, Spiller always wants *Dirt Now* to be accurate. The same

standards go for photographs. Even though Konkey has photos of a B-list celebrity dancing sexually with another woman at a lesbian strip club, Spiller demands more photos that prove the celebrity is indeed a lesbian before publishing what she has.⁴³⁹ *Dirt Now* doesn't care about stories on the winner of *Best New Model*.⁴⁴⁰ Spiller makes it clear that her magazine needs something more than the obvious—the sensational.

Although *Dirt Now* is a fictional publication, the competition Spiller refers to is real tabloids like *People*, *US Weekly*, *OK*, and *Star*.⁴⁴¹ While *Dirt Now* frequently refers to the competition, other tabloids never one-up the edgy publication. The threat keeps the staff moving. Spiller's goal is to never let another tabloid break a story or beat her cover. The competition matters most when they are going for the same cover story.⁴⁴² Spiller is always ready to trash a mediocre idea in the works for something extreme—as long as her angle is more innovative than the competition's.⁴⁴³ Spiller focuses on breaking stories and getting the story other publications will not have, figuring out what angle the competition will likely take and topping it.⁴⁴⁴ She often has to tweak her staff's ideas for stories during pitch meetings in order to make sure *Dirt Now* has the most extreme angle⁴⁴⁵ and often says things like, "Everyone's gonna cover the mystery angle. This new magazine has to break stories. Solve it. That's a cover."⁴⁴⁶

Harrod is the one person who poses a threat to Spiller's position as editor-in-chief. Harrod is the editor of one of *Dirt Now*'s competitors—the only fictional tabloid competition. The idea of Harrod taking Spiller's job truly scares Spiller. Harrod is the only competitor who seems to be a legitimate threat.⁴⁴⁷ Initially very likable, Harrod remembers the names of the interns who worked for her years ago. She shows more

emotion and affection than Spiller, masking her manipulative side. She orders photographers to follow Spiller so she can upset Mallory with photos of Spiller and McLaren together.⁴⁴⁸ While she pretends to want to be friends with Spiller, she really is out to scoop her. This implies that tabloid journalists are all relatively the same—manipulative and self-serving.

Some of the series' plots function as a satire or a parody of current-day Hollywood—seemingly to comment on the superficial sensation on which tabloids target. For example, Spiller pitches a cover story she wants to do about two blonde celebrities, Tuesday Nelson and Lulu Kagel. The young heiresses are strikingly similar to Paris Hilton and Nicole Richie.⁴⁴⁹ Additionally, celebrities appear on the *Tami G* talk show, which looks very similar to the *Oprah* talk show.⁴⁵⁰ The season finale opens with Spiller at a fashion show for the *Best New Model Show*, a play on the real *America's Next Top Model*.⁴⁵¹ *Dirt* constantly uses fiction to comment on reality.

Dirt provides immense insight to the daily inner workings of a tabloid publication. *Dirt Now* employees do not necessarily appear overworked, though they are challenged to get the story and get it first. Rarely sitting at their desks, they are always on the move. They do not seem underpaid, either. They dress and groom well. Some members of the *Dirt Now* staff are more disposable than others. Spiller is quick to fire those she believes do not share her vision or her dedication and moves on with her next order of business. One of the older male employees speaks up at the meeting about *Dirt* and *Now* becoming *Dirt Now*, saying, "With due respect, I'm not gonna be part of the dismantling of an American journalistic icon." Spiller is quick to fire back, "Of course

you're not, because, with due respect, you're fired. Now get out. And anyone else who wants to keep doing the same old tired crap, please feel free to leave. Those of you who want to do something new, do real reporting, break stories, stay."⁴⁵² *Dirt Now* needs complete employee dedication all the time. The tabloid industry is competitive, and *Dirt* shows this by communicating that the *Dirt Now* employees are only as good as their next article.

Fast-paced pitch meetings take place in the conference room where Spiller sits or stands at the head of the table in front of flat-screen television sets. Reporters pack the oval-shaped conference table and quickly shout out ideas for the upcoming issue by passing around a "pitch ball."⁴⁵³ Spiller often barks out what she expects for the next issue as she walks out the door, leaving her staff to scramble to get the stories. She wastes no time; she cannot afford to. These meetings happen every episode and suggest that a tabloid staff functions as a team. Although Spiller has the final word on stories, her reporters largely fill the inside pages.

Unlike most newspaper offices, the office of *Dirt Now* is chic and modern. Scenes of the lively office whiz by in fast motion to imply the pace of work, with reporters moving, on their cell phones, on their slick Apple Macs, and so on.⁴⁵⁴ The conference room has flat-screen televisions and projection screens on the wall. Spiller's blood-red office is huge, complete with a Chaise lounge, elliptical machine,⁴⁵⁵ and dressing room. She has a separate room that used to be a bank vault where she keeps her most sensitive material. Similarly, Barrow's office has leather furniture and a bar that takes up the length of one entire wall.⁴⁵⁶ The *Dirt Now* office is filled with name-brand swag for

Spiller and her reporters.⁴⁵⁷ The publication even has a corporate jet.⁴⁵⁸ Always on the move, Spiller rarely sits at her desk. She multitasks around the office—signs papers, talks on her phone, and orders people around. The job appears glamorous compared to editors at other hard news print publications. Because of this, viewers get the image that tabloid publications move fast and have a lot of money.

Another reason viewers may assume tabloids like *Dirt Now* have a lot of money is the cash they spend to get exclusive sources, access to people, and photo opportunities. Spiller offers to pay \$600,000 for a lead on a story that *Dirt Now* is competing for with *People* magazine.⁴⁵⁹ She ends up paying \$700,000 for a story about a “B-lister on a shitcom,”⁴⁶⁰ that she doesn’t even know will be worth running. She hopes the money the tabloid makes from sales will justify the money *Dirt Now* shells out for leads.

Sometimes the only way *Dirt Now* can get an exclusive story is by paying incredible sums of money. Other times, Spiller uses information she has on someone as blackmail, often forcing that person to give her information on someone else. For example, Spiller knows superstar Gage was a male hustler before he became famous, and that he got his first movie role by performing oral sex on a director. Because Gage would never want this information to get out, he gives Spiller gossip on other celebrities.⁴⁶¹

Sometimes, the tables turn and *Dirt Now* has to do something for someone else. When Winter takes the *Dirt Now* staff hostage, he explains that Spiller *owes* him a story because when he was a big star he chose her, a reporter from *TV Guide*, to do his story.⁴⁶² He thinks he helped boost her career when she was young. He now thinks it is Spiller’s turn to give his career a boost. Unwritten rules and secret verbal contracts keep the

system functioning. The information game works best when both sides have something to gain.⁴⁶³

Even though Spiller's job is to put celebrities in the public eye, she prefers to stay out of it herself. When Spiller meets McLaren in her car (to ask him why he agreed to allow *Vanity Fair* to do a profile on him when he is supposed to be exclusive to *Dirt Now*), she realizes that there are paparazzi after their picture.⁴⁶⁴ Suddenly, the irony shows when she becomes a story. She attempts to speed away from the photographers, driving dangerously with McLaren in the passenger seat yelling, "Holy shit, Lucy, it's not like they have guns!" Spiller replies, "No it's worse, he has cameras."⁴⁶⁵ She is completely aware of their power, but that does not affect the stories she continues to put out.

The *Dirt Now* staff believes its publication constitutes honorable American journalism. They hold themselves and their publication to the standards of a reputable news medium. Reginald (Traber Burns) expresses his faith in *Now* magazine when he says to Spiller, "*Now* has been a pillar of the American journalistic landscape for over 70 years. We survived McCarthyism, we can certainly survive a dipping in sales."⁴⁶⁶ Regardless of how *Dirt Now* compares to traditional journalism, Spiller focuses on the future of the publication rather than the past. Because of this, *Dirt Now* is innovative and relevant.⁴⁶⁷ But because the tabloid journalists behind the publication function with disregard for traditional journalism ethics and morals, it is difficult to validate their twisted view of what is right and wrong.

Through the 13 episodes, viewers form relationships with the characters and opinions about tabloids. While viewers might not always agree with the methods and means *Dirt Now* uses to get the story, *Dirt* gives viewers an inside look at how a real-life tabloid publication functions. *Dirt Now* is a force to be reckoned with in Hollywood, and “while it may be true that tabloid journalism tends to trivialize who and what we are, it always involves visceral emotions: love, hate, joy, fear.”⁴⁶⁸ *Dirt* shows that *Dirt Now* is not afraid to tap into those emotions and to push the limits, week after week.

Chapter 9 Endnotes

³⁸⁰ “Media of New York City,” (Wikipedia), http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Media_of_New_York_City (accessed February 2008).

³⁸¹ “Los Angeles Media and Research,” (Discover Los Angeles), <http://www.discoverlosangeles.com/los-angeles-page.php?tid=2240&pageid=420> (accessed March 2008).

³⁸² FX Network Web site.

³⁸³ Episode 5: “You Don’t Know Jack,” *Dirt*. (11:31).

³⁸⁴ Word history: Tabloid was registered as a proprietary name for a brand of tablet in 1884 by Burroughs, Wellcome, and Company. It was the underlying notion of "compression" or "condensation" that led to its application to newspapers of small page size and "condensed" versions of news stories that emerged at the beginning of the 20th century.” “Tabloid” (MSN Encarta Online Dictionary), http://encarta.msn.com/dictionary_1861698690/tabloid.html (accessed March 2008).

³⁸⁵ “Tabloid,” (Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary), <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/tabloid> (accessed March 2008).

³⁸⁶ Joe Saltzman. “Analyzing the Images of the Journalist in Popular Culture: A Unique Method of Studying the Public’s Perception of Its Journalists and the News Media,” p. 10.

³⁸⁷ Ibid. p. 12.

³⁸⁸ Ibid. p. 13.

³⁸⁹ Michael Emery and Edwin Emery. *The Press and America: An Interpretative History of the Mass Media*. Prentice Hall Professional Technical, 1991. p. 227.

³⁹⁰ Joe Saltzman. “Analyzing the Images of the Journalist in Popular Culture: A Unique Method of Studying the Public’s Perception of Its Journalists and the News Media,” p. 34.

³⁹¹ Ibid. p. 9.

³⁹² Episode 9: “This Is Not Your Father’s Hostage Situation,” *Dirt*. (05:55).

SPILLER: OK, let's do a little good cop, bad cop. Terry and Willa, I want you to help Dana deal with her guilt while you two become drinking buddies with the Perez camp, see what you can get out of them. (She is talking about the Prichard story that is falling apart.)

³⁹³ "The more valuable the news, the greater the power," Joe Saltzman. "Analyzing the Images of the Journalist in Popular Culture: A Unique Method of Studying the Public's Perception of Its Journalists and the News Media," p. 7.

³⁹⁴ Episode 9: "This Is Not Your Father's Hostage Situation," *Dirt*. (08:49).

GAGE: Where's the love?

SPILLER: Come again?

GAGE: Johnny Gage has disappeared from the pages of *Dirt Now*. What's with that?

SPILLER: Well, I guess we ran out of different ways to tell about you screwing strippers.

GAGE: I want a cover.

SPILLER: And I want a private jet. *Dirt Now's* not gonna blow you over some half-ass speculation.

³⁹⁵ *Ibid.* (22:25).

SPILLER: Let me do my job the way I know how and I will make you a star.

³⁹⁶ Episode 12: "Caught on Tape," *Dirt*. (11:31).

³⁹⁷ *Ibid.* (03:28).

MCLAREN: All I can say is, since there started to be real heat around me, people in the press wanted to be my friend. And I'm not gonna say who. (He is talking to Mallory about her sex tape.)

³⁹⁸ Episode 9: "This Is Not Your Father's Hostage Situation," *Dirt*. (07:54).

KENNY: Sammy Winter called again, said it was about a follow-up interview?

SPILLER: I think we've done enough stories on Sammy Winter and his futile attempt at rehab, his prostitutes, the trials and tribulations of being a child star. So, unless he's banging an Olsen twin or he has bought some ad space, I don't give a shit.

³⁹⁹ *Ibid.* (11:50).

(Spiller and Konkey walk out of Spiller's office and hear gun shots in their office. The employees scream.)

WINTER: Stay down! Get back! (He shouts as he shoots into the air.)

WINTER: If anybody wants to get cute, I've got enough explosives here to blow us all into pizza toppings. (As he unzips his jacket to show the bombs strapped to his body.)

⁴⁰⁰ *Ibid.* (21:52).

SPILLER: I've got a deal for you.

WINTER: I'm all ears, baby. What've you got for me?

SPILLER: Let's scrap the bullshit questions. You let me tell the first-person story from inside the crisis, and I will give you the mother of all covers.

⁴⁰¹ Episode 12: "Caught on Tape," *Dirt*. (25:30).

⁴⁰² *Ibid.* (31:13).

GAGE: Guys please, I'm here to apologize to Julia Mallory, to Lucy Spiller, and my fans. I lied about Lucy Spiller. I never gave her the sex tape. I gave it to one of my drug dealers. He was threatening me and there is no excuse. I blamed Lucy Spiller because I was angry that I had fallen off the pages of her magazine, one of the most important publications in the entertainment industry. And worse than that, what I did to Lucy Spiller and *Dirt Now* is what I did to Julia Mallory. I know we were both using and drinking that night, but my drugged-out state is no excuse for my behavior. I'm committing myself to a live-in alcohol and drug rehabilitation facility for as long as it takes for me to get well and sober. Thank you. (He says this to a group of paparazzi and news cameras.)

⁴⁰³ Episode 3: "Ovophagy," *Dirt*. (09:49).

TEDDY: Kid's on fire. You better watch yourself, Jack. The press he's getting...you get too pushy on this next deal and I might just have to give the part to him. (He is the director at lunch (played by Richard Portnow) with McLaren. He says this, about McLaren, to Dawson who's staring in a three-part action-adventure series).

⁴⁰⁴ Episode 7: "Come Together," *Dirt*. (26:36).

McLaren comes back to Julia's and finds a copy of *Dirt Now* on her bed with a picture of her freaking out and the headline: *Mallory's Mess*.

⁴⁰⁵ Episode 9: "This Is Not Your Father's Hostage Situation," *Dirt*. (21:00).

WINTER: Really? It just got picked up nationally. This is my white Bronco. (As he sees a live broadcast of the hostage situation, *The Sammy Winter Saga*, on *Dirt Now's* television sets.)

⁴⁰⁶ Episode 12: "Caught on Tape," *Dirt*. (10:31).

SPILLER: I keep some very sensitive things in there.

BODYGUARD: The room used to be a bank vault. Unless you left it unlocked, only the most skilled criminal would be able to get in. And you would know if he did.

⁴⁰⁷ *Ibid.* (38:40).

⁴⁰⁸ *Ibid.* (39:48).

(Spiller spreads out the issue with the cover *Mallory Exposed!* And the picture of Mallory buying the phone card on the cover.)

MCPHEARSON: You know, there's still time to walk it back.

SPILLER: What?

MCPHEARSON: If you wanna put the story back in the vault, there's still time.

SPILLER: Going soft on me? Are you worried bout hurting her feelings?

MCPHEARSON: Actually I was wondering if you were the one going soft? Isn't the smart play to put the story in the vault?

SPILLER: This is a great cover, yup. America's fallen sweetheart sold her sex tape for press, sympathy, to rekindle her career. It almost worked.

MCPHEARSON: If we just let it work. Leverage over a star like Julia Mallory has to be worth a lot more in the long run than just one cover.

SPILLER: Is that what you think this whole thing is about? Leverage and power?

MCPHEARSON: No, I'm just trying to think several steps ahead like you usually do.

SPILLER: We go with the story, print the truth.

⁴⁰⁹ Episode 7: "Come Together," *Dirt*. (39:05).

⁴¹⁰ Libel is common law and state law—not federal law. Libel is a *false, unprivileged* statement of fact about (of and concerning) an *identifiable person* that holds him or her up to *ridicule* or *contempt* (i.e., injures his *reputation*). Reputation is not synonymous with character; reputation is what people think about an individual. Opinion is absolutely protected, and there is no such thing as a false opinion. This is because the marketplace of ideas, when functioning properly, corrects opinion—not the Supreme Court. Libel was an accepted doctrine at the time the Founding Fathers gathered to draw up the Constitution of the United States of America. Rather, what the Founding Fathers had in mind when they enacted the First Amendment was the issue of prior restraint. The First Amendment was originally intended to only apply to the federal government. It was the adoption of the Fourteenth Amendment in 1868 that applied the First Amendment to the states. Clay Calvert and Don R. Pember. *Mass Media Law*, p. 158-189.

⁴¹¹ Episode 5: "You Don't Know Jack," *Dirt*. (28:23).

HORNE: Am I gonna get—

SPILLER: Sued? Yeah, most likely. But that price tag is going to pale compared to what you'll pull in. And besides, you always told me, scared money doesn't make money.

⁴¹² Episode 4: "What to Expect When You're Expecting," *Dirt*. (25:27).

SPILLER: OK, listen up everyone. We're gonna crash a cover on Andre G's murder. Check it out. (As she walks into the conference room and flips up her laptop to show the other reporters her ideas for the cover.)

ANONYMOUS MALE REPORTER: What do you have? (Spiller shows a *Dirt Now* cover with a picture of Andre G's head and *R.I.P. Andre G!* Everyone gasps.)

ANONYMOUS MALE REPORTER: You can't put that on the cover, Lucy.

SPILLER: We're gonna poly-bag it with an explicit warning label. (She shows the cover with the bag over it and *Warning: Explicit! Shocking Andre G Murder!!!*)

SPILLER: And run the head shot inside.

ANONYMOUS WHITE FEMALE REPORTER: That is fantastic!

SPILLER: Isn't it? Alright, keep Barrow out of the loop. He had a shit fit last time. This time we have photos. The LAPD will be notified when we go to press. Lets get to work.

⁴¹³ Episode 7: "Come Together," *Dirt*. (30:39).

⁴¹⁴ Episode 12: "Caught on Tape," *Dirt*. (17:10).

TAMI G: Now, you are filing lawsuits against the major tabloids?

MALLORY: Tabloids, distributors, anyone who's looking to profit from the video. Lucy Spiller bartered with a rapist and he's profiting from his crime.

⁴¹⁵ *Ibid.* (37:50).

Spiller walks Mallory into the vault to show her the surveillance tape of Mallory buying the phone card that was used to tip off the media to the existence of the sex tape, proving that Mallory leaked her own sex tape.

⁴¹⁶ In a study titled "Photo Tampering Throughout History," Professor of Computer Science at Dartmouth University Hany Farid writes, "Photography lost its innocence many years ago. In as early as the 1860s, photographs were already being manipulated, only a few decades after Niepce created the first photograph in 1814. With the advent of high-resolution digital cameras, powerful personal computers, and sophisticated photo-editing software, the manipulation of digital images is becoming more common," (Dartmouth College), <http://www.cs.dartmouth.edu/farid/research/digitaltampering/> (accessed March 2008).

⁴¹⁷ Professional photographers use this software because "Adobe Photoshop CS3 and Adobe Photoshop Lightroom® are the perfect complements. Use Lightroom to import, manage, adjust, and present large volumes of digital photographs, and use Photoshop to more thoroughly refine individual images. Together, Photoshop Lightroom and Photoshop work the way the digital photographer works, letting you efficiently and seamlessly process all of your digital images," "Adobe Photoshop," (Adobe Photoshop Web Site), http://www.adobe.com/digitalimag/ps_pse_comparison.html#photographer (accessed March 2008).

⁴¹⁸ Episode 5: "You Don't Know Jack," *Dirt*. (26:57).

SPILLER: I think the one with his hands down your pants is a keeper. (She is talking about the photos recovered from Konkey's stomach.)

LEO: Wow.

SPILLER: What is it?

LEO: You can really see it's me.

SPILLER: Not for long. Photoshop the shit out of his face.

DANIELLE: Not a problem.

SPILLER: When Danielle's done, Mom won't even know it's you.

⁴¹⁹ Episode 2: "Blogan," *Dirt*. (08:10).

HORNE: Lucy, are you familiar with Tina Harrod? (He asks Spiller an obvious question because Harrod is Spiller's nemesis.)

SPILLER: The one who disgraced her magazine by Photoshopping the cover?

⁴²⁰ The abstract for the *Journal of Mass Media Ethics: Digital Alteration of Photographs in Consumer Magazines*, says "digital manipulation of photographs raises a different set of questions for magazine editors than it does for newspaper editors. Interviews with editors of 13 consumer magazines reveal that digital alteration depends largely on the editorial profile of the magazine. All editors interviewed refused to digitally manipulate news photos; however, opinions varied on the treatment of feature and cover photos," http://www.leaonline.com/doi/abs/10.1207/s15327728jmme0603_5?cookieSet=1&journalCode=jmme. (Accessed March 2008).

⁴²¹ Episode 10: "The Sexxx Issue," *Dirt*. (08:41).

NAOMI: Battle of the bulge. Who's packing among Hollywood leading men.

SPILLER: OK, and make sure why you're at it, see who's faking it.

ANONYMOUS MALE REPORTER: Celebrity camel toe.

⁴²² Joe Saltzman. "Analyzing the Images of the Journalist in Popular Culture: A Unique Method of Studying the Public's Perception of Its Journalists and the News Media," p. 29.

⁴²³ *Ibid.* p. 16.

⁴²⁴ *Ibid.* p. 18.

⁴²⁵ Episode 12: "Caught on Tape," *Dirt*. (41:19).

(Mallory pulls up <http://www.perezhilton.com> on her laptop and finds a blog posting of the photo of her buying the phone card used to leak her own sex tape with *LIAR* on it. She turns her attention to the television.)

ENTERTAINMENT BROADCAST REPORTER: Well, Julia Mallory may have fooled us once, but she's not going to fool us again. We're hearing reports today that the actress will have to drop her lawsuit, according to *Dirt Now*. The magazine's upcoming issue promises to expose Julia Mallory's involvement in leaking her own sex tape. (For the entertainment news broadcast on 16news.)

ENTERTAINMENT BROADCAST REPORTER: *Dirt Now* magazine will run a story tomorrow saying they have proof that Julia Mallory leaked her own sex tape... (Mallory hears this as she flips the channel to an *Access Hollywood* broadcast.)

⁴²⁶ Episode 11: "Pap Smear," *Dirt*. (44:18).

ENTERTAINMENT BROADCAST REPORTER: Tuesday Nelson's secret affair with her best friend's fiancé, artist Tommy Spiro. But only *Dirt Now* has the exclusive story that it was Spiro who engineered the trysts and even leaked the news of the cheating to a rogue paparazzi agency...

⁴²⁷ Episode 6: "The Secret Lives of Altar Girls," *Dirt*. (42:01).

(Spiller watches the broadcast news coverage of police arresting the reverend and taking him in cuffs out of his church.)

NEWS BROADCAST REPORTER: Reverend Thomas Sweet was arrested today for the murder of 15-year-old Amber Carmichael in Walnut Valley, California. *Dirt Now's* new issue says, according to coroner's reports, Reverend Sweet was the father of the victim's unborn child.

⁴²⁸ Ibid. (18:02).

SPILLER: Tell me the networks are using our name. (As she watches live broadcasts from Walnut Valley about what the *Dirt Now* investigative team just discovered about Carmichael's murder.)

ANONYMOUS FEMALE REPORTER: We got them all different exclusives in exchange for crediting us with breaking the story in the new issue.

SPILLER: The numbers should be great, I'm glad we got the West Coast draw.

⁴²⁹ Episode 3: "Ovophagy," *Dirt*. (01:22).

⁴³⁰ Episode 13: "Ita Missa Est," *Dirt*. (07:28).

SPILLER: Track the autopsy. (She is talking to McPhearson about the model that died on the *Best New Model* runway.)

MCPHEARSON: She was anorexic, I mean her liver probably...

SPILLER: Probably? Until you can show me your doctorate, maybe you should just flash your tits to the coroner and find out for sure.

⁴³¹ Episode 3: "Ovophagy," *Dirt*. (02:54).

⁴³² Episode 7: "Come Together," *Dirt*. (00:56).

KONKEY: The magazine is doing this big story about this cheerleader murder. Turns out the murdered girl was involved with the town preacher. Oh, and she was pregnant. He was also sleeping with his daughter.

⁴³³ Episode 10: "The Sexxx Issue," *Dirt*. (08:02).

SPILLER: We bag it and make it look like you have to see the inside. It's our first annual. It has to be great. It has to be startling. It has to be fun. Come on, sex, celebrity, scandal, bring it. (As she flashes a cover on the projection that's poly-bagged with the headline: *The Sexxx Issue*.)

⁴³⁴ Episode 3: "Ovophagy," *Dirt*. (31:43).

TYREESE: Andre G is dead. They killed him. His manager, Tweety McDaniel, we all hang out. There's a group of us.

SPILLER: Poker buddies, right?

TYREESE: Yeah, pretty much. So one day Andre G just stops coming. Stories get out he's missin', got into gang stuff, you know. Nobody knows. Couple a months later, 'nother one of Twitty's clients, he makes a joke. Says he's getting better offers from other labels. Twitty just goes cold. Says Andre G tried to leave him too. Asked if he wanted to visit Andre, little lesson in loyalty, he called it.

SPILLER: Visit him?

TYREESE: Twitty had his head, OK? In a jar. He said, 'See, nobody leaves me. I got him right here and he's still makin' money for me.

⁴³⁵ Ibid. (04:08).

ANONYMOUS FEMALE REPORTER: What about a cover on Hollywood meds. Who's taking what.

SPILLER: It's a great chip, not a cover. Work it out. Next.

⁴³⁶ Episode 5: "You Don't Know Jack," *Dirt*. (01:42).

⁴³⁷ Episode 6: "The Secret Lives of Altar Girls," *Dirt*. (02:11).

SPILLER: "Four-hundred thousand for an exclusive on the wedding and some waiter with a cell phone cam scoops us?"

ANONYMOUS FEMALE REPORTER: They're crap images, people want to see the glam.

SPILLER: People want to see the glam? What is that, a Shakira lyric? I want to see an exclusive! What do we know about this dead cheerleader?

ANONYMOUS MALE REPORTER: Amber Carmichael. Disappeared at a pep rally. Found the next day in the woods behind their high school. Not a lot on the wires. No arrests yet, small town story.

SPILLER: How small a town?

ANONYMOUS MALE REPORTER: Uh... Walnut Valley. 'Bout an hour and a half out of L.A. Population, 11,000. (Meanwhile Spiller projects a cover with the headline *Cheerleader Murder: Her Secret Life*.)

SPILLER: Now that's a solid cover.

ANONYMOUS FEMALE REPORTER: It's a great cover, but I mean, we have about two days to close and we don't even have a reason to think she had a secret life.

SPILLER: Everyone has a secret life. She was murdered! Her secret life is our next cover. You better all get to work.

⁴³⁸ Ibid. (03:29).

⁴³⁹ Episode 8: "The Thing Under the Bed," *Dirt*. (24:20).

SPILLER: You're pitching girl on girl? You better have more than one dance. (She is talking about the photos of Prichard dancing with a girl at a lesbian strip club.)

⁴⁴⁰ Episode 13: "Ita Missa Est," *Dirt*. (03:20).

BEST NEW MODEL HOST: Look, America is shitting itself for the *Best New Model* finale. (She is a parody of Tyra Banks and her show is a parody of *America's Next Top Model*.)

SPILLER: You get me a photo of America shitting itself and I'll put that on the cover.

HOST: Bet if I chopped off one of their heads you'd put it on the cover.

SPILLER: I just might.

⁴⁴¹ Episode 5: "You Don't Know Jack," *Dirt*. (31:49).

SPILLER: *People, US, OK, Star*, everyone's going full bore on your girlfriend's episode today. (She is talking to McLaren about Mallory's breakdown at his photo shoot.)

⁴⁴² Episode 6: "The Secret Lives of Altar Girls," *Dirt*. (19:25).

SPILLER: The competition on this case is about to get intense. We need to continue breaking this story. If we do, we won't get just one more cover, we'll get five. *Explosive Reveal of Unborn Baby's Father, The Arrest, Perp Walk, Trial, Justice...* This girl is dead. I want to know who. I want to know what. I want to know why.

⁴⁴³ Episode 4: "What to Expect When You're Expecting," *Dirt*. (06:24).

SPILLER: OK everybody, change of plans. We're dropping our three cover options.

ANONYMOUS MALE REPORTER: Why? We're almost there with *Hero Pets*.

SPILLER: You just answered your own question. And also because of this, Terry?

TERRY: My source at *People* tells me they're running this photo on their next cover with the headline: *Let Us Live In Peace*. It's supposed to be Andre G in seclusion in the Virgin Islands. (She is played by Shauna Stoddart.)

ANONYMOUS FEMALE REPORTER: Just in time for the release of his new CD. What a coincidence.

SPILLER: Yeah, I think it's bullshit. Widow G and Andre's manager are making huge bucks off these new CDs. My sources say that Andre G was murdered. Some sort of dispute with his manager, Twitty McDaniel. Yeah, Elliott?

ELLIOTT: I'll cover all the businesses in St. Croix. If he's there, someone's had to have seen him. (He is played by Glen Badyna.)

SPILLER: OK, good. And Adam, check out his girlfriend's relationship with Twitty.

ANONYMOUS MALE REPORTER: OK. I'll talk to the cops. They don't usually keep an open Missing Persons file on someone who's in seclusion.

TERRY: I know someone at Raputiata Records. Let me see what I can dig up on Twitty and Andre's relationship.

SPILLER: OK. I want the truth guys. And just as badly, I want to make *People* magazine suffer. We have 12 hours.

⁴⁴⁴ Episode 12: “Caught on Tape,” *Dirt*. (09:16).

SPILLER: OK, everyone’s gonna be going after Johnny Gage and Holt and Julia. I want you to get a shot that no one else has. Consoling, fighting, arguments—doesn’t matter. Just get their private life.” (She is telling Konkey how to go about getting the shot for the sex tape story.)

⁴⁴⁵ *Ibid.* (08:41).

SPILLER: Get them [the details] quietly. I don’t want anyone to think that we’re digging there. Let everyone else think that the story is just the video tape and the aftermath. (She is talking about the story on how Mallory’s sex tape was leaked.)

⁴⁴⁶ Episode 3: “Ovophagy,” *Dirt*. (03:36).

⁴⁴⁷ Episode 13: “Ita Missa Est,” *Dirt*. (03:20).

BEST NEW MODEL HOST: Maybe I should pitch the cover to Tina Harrod?

SPILLER: I’m sure it’s just the kind of pap Tina’s magazine would gobble up. Course, they only have two-thirds the circulation of *Dirt Now*.

HOST: Oh, I wasn’t talking about her magazine. I heard she’s taking over yours.

⁴⁴⁸ *Ibid.* (39:12).

MALLORY: You said on the phone you might be able to do an article?

HARROD: Oh yeah, yeah. You mean to repair the damage of the sex tape and all that? You’re just trying to keep your career afloat. That Lucy Spiller, she had no right. No right. You just got caught in Lucy’s celebrity dollhouse. You didn’t do anything wrong, your boyfriend was her source. None of this press is your fault so please just know that you really have to know that. (She just got off the phone with Spiller where she invited her to dinner. Now she is comforting Mallory.)

HARROD: He was more than her source. (She shows Mallory the photos of Spiller and McLaren in her car proving it was Harrod who had Spiller followed.)

HARROD: I’m so sorry, sweetie. (She is pretending to be the good guy.)

⁴⁴⁹ Episode 11: “Pap Smeared,” *Dirt*. (01:52).

SPILLER: It’s the story of misplaced trust. Of deception and betrayal. Not by our enemies, but by our friends. It’s the story of America’s favorite spoiled celebantes, the inseparable Tuesday Nelson and Lulu Kagel, famous for being famous. (The scene flashes to the girls, clad in oversized sunglasses as the paparazzi swarm the two while they shop.)

SPILLER: You shop where they shop, party where they party, wear what they wear, and get up close and personal with Lulu’s fiancé, boho artist Tommy Spiro—who pisses on the press, who won’t sit for an interview, and is currently getting it on the side from his true love’s best friend forever, Tuesday. Yup. My source is solid. If we move fast enough we can expose this little bastard before he ruins this precious friendship. OK, this is our cover. Go on my little monkeys.

⁴⁵⁰ Episode 11: “Caught on Tape,” *Dirt*. (17:10).

Mallory appears on the *Tami G* talk show to talk about her sex tape.

⁴⁵¹ Episode 13: “Ita Missa Est,” *Dirt*. (03:20).

⁴⁵² Episode 3: “Ovophagy,” *Dirt*. (02:32).

⁴⁵³ Ibid. (03:30).

SPILLER: First off, we need some hot-ass cover tries. Who wants Cosmo, the pitch ball?” (She tosses a white stuffed (possibly with beans) clown-faced ball with red troll-like hair in her conference room during a pitch meeting for the launch of the new *Dirt Now* magazine.)

⁴⁵⁴ Episode 4: “What to Expect When You’re Expecting,” *Dirt*. (04:35).

⁴⁵⁵ Episode 2: “Blogan,” *Dirt*. (24:44).

Spiller works out on an elliptical machine in her office.

⁴⁵⁶ Episode 8: “The Thing Under the Bed,” *Dirt*. (40:05).

There is a giant bar in Barrow’s office with shelves that take up an entire wall.

⁴⁵⁷ Episode 2: “Blogan,” *Dirt*. (10:24).

SPILLER: There’s about \$20,000 worth of swag here. *Now* needs help. Anybody who can come up with a really great exclusive on Blogan gets to pick something from the pile.

⁴⁵⁸ Episode 11: “Pap Smear,” *Dirt*. (27:33).

BARROW: Listen, I’ve got a sales call in San Francisco on Friday. We could have the corporate jet...

⁴⁵⁹ Episode 8: “The Thing Under the Bed,” *Dirt*. (10:36).

SPILLER: Congratulations, your gut’s a winner. We’re in the game. I’ve offered \$600,000, but I don’t like dancing in the dark. I’m gonna team you up with Don Konkey.

⁴⁶⁰ Ibid. (24:44).

⁴⁶¹ Episode 12: “Caught on Tape,” *Dirt*. (25:30).

SPILLER: I remember everything. I remember you getting bitch-slapped. I remember you cowering in the corner. I remember you pissing your pants. Not your finest hour. And not one word of it made it in the pages of my magazine. (She is talking to Gage about his cowardly reaction during the hostage situation.)

GAGE: I know. Thank you, Lucy.

SPILLER: Oh, you’re thanking me? Here, in private. Well, I’m not a very private person

these days, Johnny, thanks to you.

GAGE: Lucy.

SPILLER: But let's forget about the very embarrassing performance during the hostage siege. I could've always gone with the big story: *Johnny Gage Was a Male Hustler Before He Became a Star*.

GAGE: Jesus Christ, Lucy.

Spiller: I have done nothing but protect you. *Cheap Callboy Gets His First Movie Role By Blowing a Director Named Harvey Ross*. I could destroy you with one issue. But I keep your secret safe, in my vault.

⁴⁶² Episode 9: "This Is Not Your Father's Hostage Situation," *Dirt*. (16:13).

WINTER: I pick a young go-getter named Lucy Spiller, yeah, at *TV Guide*. (He is talking about how Spiller was going to do a cover for him on the Top 20 show that he was a child star on.

WINTER: I pick her over all the others to do my exclusive. Ring a bell, Lucy?

SPILLER: Of course it does. That's right, I was gonna do a cover.

WINTER: And you said you owed me. Those were your words Lucy, your words, *you owe me*. Well I'm here to collect.

⁴⁶³ Episode 12: "Caught on Tape," *Dirt*. (13:01).

PEREZ HILTON: My bread and butter is anonymous tips. Why would I tell you anything about how I got the video?

MCPHEARSON: You don't compete with magazines like *Dirt Now*, Perez. You know, I could slip you stories that were about to hit the magazine early, things to make your site hotter. All I need are details on how the tape was uploaded. (She is trying to get Hilton to tell her how the Mallory sex tape was leaked.)

⁴⁶⁴ Episode 13: "Ita Missa Est," *Dirt*. (31:49).

(McLaren gets in Spiller's car to talk about why he is allowing *Vanity Fair* to do a profile on him when he should be exclusive to *Dirt Now*. When Spiller realizes that they're being followed/watched by paparazzi she takes off on a crazy chase.)

SPILLER: Given both our situations, we're a story.

MCLAREN: Yeah? How do you figure?

SPILLER: I'd run it.

⁴⁶⁵ *Ibid.* (32:33).

⁴⁶⁶ Episode 3: "Ovophagy," *Dirt*. (02:06).

⁴⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

SPILLER: First of all, Reginald, I know how you hate a mixed metaphor, so I would have to call you on the whole pillar-of-the-landscape thing. Pillars don't hold up

landscapes. Secondly, thank you for your look backwards. That will be the last look in that direction that anyone in these offices ever takes.

⁴⁶⁸ Joe Saltzman. "Analyzing the Images of the Journalist in Popular Culture: A Unique Method of Studying the Public's Perception of Its Journalists and the News Media," p. 12.

Chapter 10: *Dirt* Folds

FX's edgy *Dirt* premiered "to decent ratings."⁴⁶⁹ During the 10 p.m. hour, Nielsen Media (which measures viewers who watch live as well as viewers who play back the recording on a digital video recorder on the same day) recorded an average of 3.74 million total viewers with 2.1 million aged 18 to 49.⁴⁷⁰ An 11 p.m. encore of the show averaged 2.6 million viewers.⁴⁷¹ *Dirt's* audience for the premiere was smaller than that of other FX original premieres such as *The Shield* (in March 2002) and *Rescue Me* (July 2004), but bigger than *Nip/Tuck's* July 2003 premiere.⁴⁷² "The show's first-season finale, which featured a much-publicized kiss between [Courteney] Cox and her former *Friends* co-star Jennifer Aniston, drew 2.4 million total viewers in March 2007."⁴⁷³ Overall, season one's 13 episodes averaged 1.9 million viewers.⁴⁷⁴

Real-life publications were quick to review *Dirt*, most with little praise. "FX's enviable reputation with originals is stained by *Dirt*," *Variety's* Brian Lowry said of the show's first season. "The show falls thuddingly flat, feeling tired, gratuitous in its dirty doings, and a trifle narcissistic." Lowry compares *Dirt* to a "trashy version of *Just Shoot Me*."⁴⁷⁵

Tim Goodman of the *San Francisco Chronicle* found irony in the show, saying, "As the *Dirt Now* magazine team kept tabs on fictional celebrities and their embarrassing downfalls, *Dirt* often felt like a show struggling under the weight of this elaborate faux-Hollywood world. It was striving for commentary on fame, media vultures and power, but many of the characters in the pages of the magazine failed to hold our interest."⁴⁷⁶

Similarly, the A.V. Club's Nathan Rabin was far from impressed with the cast of *Dirt*. "As with far superior explorations of the dark side of the human psyche, like *Profit*, *Mad Men*, and *Action*, there's a transgressive kick in seeing just how far the characters will go," Rabin said. "Of course, the aforementioned shows offered neat little bonuses like fascinating, multidimensional characters and terrific dialogue. The best *Dirt* can offer is industrial doses of sex and sleaze, augmented by T&A, rampant drug abuse, and threesomes, threesomes, threesomes."⁴⁷⁷

Due to dismal reviews and the negative effects of the 2007 Writers Guild of America strike, season two of *Dirt* was slated for a 13-episode run, but only seven aired before the show was canceled. *Dirt's* ratings "were down significantly in season two."⁴⁷⁸ While the pilot aired on January 2, 2007, to 3.74 million viewers overall with a 1.8 rating/5 share in adults aged 18 to 49, its finale drew only 1.06 million viewers overall and earned a 0.6/2 in the same age group.⁴⁷⁹ The second season averaged a "54 percent slide from the 3.7 million who tuned in for the series premiere in January 2007."⁴⁸⁰

To put *Dirt's* second-season ratings into perspective, veteran crime drama *Law and Order* returned for its 18th season in spring 2008 with higher ratings—an average of 3.8 million viewers aged 18 to 49— than its 17th.⁴⁸¹ It is more likely that long-running series like *Law and Order* or *CSI* have a more substantial effect on how the public view journalists than the season and a half of *Dirt* that drew a minimal audience.

The demise of FX's *Dirt* may foretell current trends in the tabloid publishing industry. Weeklies like the fictional *Dirt Now* thrive on breaking the story. The Internet offers instantaneous and often free content via gossip blogs. Web sites like Perez Hilton,

TMZ, Pop Sugar, Pink Is The New Blog, and the Superficial bring celebrity news and scandal to millions of Web surfers at the click of a mouse button. The general public can get hour-by-hour updates on juicy stories with photos and video clips rather than buying a hard copy once a week.

“There is a real generational change going on at the moment and many young consumers are using Web sites for their gossip,” Ellis Cashmore, author of the book *Celebrity Culture*, said in an article in the UK’s *Independent*. “These sites are updated several times a day and are free. Consumers may not see any point in buying a copy of *Heat!* or *Hello!* at the end of the week.”

He added: “Although circulation is falling, it has to be remembered that in most cases they are falling from a very high starting point as they have had a lot of early success.”⁴⁸²

Though many tabloids are experiencing a drop in circulation and sales, some weeklies are still reaping a profit (such as *OK* and *US Weekly*). “Celebrity culture is not on the wane, though. You only have to look at the number of people who queue up at auditions of reality TV shows in the hope of becoming celebrities themselves,” said celebrity publicist Max Clifford in an article in the *Independent*.⁴⁸³

A report by the Institute of Practitioners in Advertising in July 2008 showed that advertisers were moving toward the Internet and away from traditional media. The report found companies were opting for the Internet over traditional ads in radio, newspapers, magazines, and television.⁴⁸⁴ Although the Internet is the newest news outlet, consumers still desire stories of celebrity scandal.

Chapter 10 Endnotes

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Chapter 11: *Dirt* in the Realm of Film and Television

The characters in *Dirt* are hardly different from the array of tabloid journalists in film and television seen over the years. Although *Dirt* premiered in 2007, the images of the tabloid editor-in-chief, publisher, paparazzi, reporters, and investigative journalists in the series are not that far off from the images of tabloid journalists presented in 1931 in the crime film *Five Star Final*—one of the most devastating portraits of the tabloid journalist in film and television history.

The tabloid journalists in *Five Star Final* lose sight of ethical and moral standards in the name of getting the story just like the characters in *Dirt*. Like Spiller, Edward G. Robinson (Joseph W. Randall) is the obsessive-compulsive city editor of the *New York Gazette*, a notorious muckraking tabloid representative of other popular 1920s scandal sheets. Like Spiller, Robinson is obsessed with getting the story that will result in the highest possible profit. In a feat to increase circulation, Robinson revives a series on a scandalous tale of sex and murder—from twenty years ago—that involved a secretary who shot the man that impregnated her but refused to marry her. Since the crime, the secretary happily married and raised a daughter. She reacts with horror at the tabloid's desire to renew the story because it will likely wreak havoc on her now happy family.⁴⁸⁵ Like Spiller, Robinson does not care about the people behind the stories, just what the stories can do for his job and his publication.

Like Spiller, Konkey, and McPhearson, the *Five Star Final* journalists misrepresent themselves (one reporter pretends to be a priest) and they disregard the

privacy for the secretary and her family. They publish the explicit expose (although accurate, it is hardly fair) that brings the secretary and her husband such shame they both commit suicide. The daughter is so distraught she attempts to murder the tabloid's publisher.⁴⁸⁶

Five Star Final represents “an uncompromising look at the consequences of journalistic irresponsibility.”⁴⁸⁷ While the 1930s may seem far removed from today's society, the values upheld by the *Five Star Final's* tabloid journalists parallel those of the journalists of *Dirt Now*: getting the story and superior circulation trumps all that is ethical and moral. Some of the film's character's actions are so repulsive they result in suicide and attempted murder. Some of *Dirt's* characters are equally corrupt, their actions also resulting in physical violence and death threats. The tabloid journalists of *Five Star Final* and *Dirt* focus first on sensational scandal and profit where they often overstep the boundaries of honest and fair journalism.

Another example of how far the media will go to reap a profit is the 1941 comedy-drama *Meet John Doe*. Ann Mitchell (Barbara Stanwyck) is furious at being fired from her job as a newspaper columnist and prints a fraudulent “John Doe” letter that threatens suicide in protest of political and societal injustices. Eventually, the paper rehires Mitchell as well as another reporter to impersonate the fictional John Doe since the suicide note caused a whirlwind of attention across the nation—translating to soaring newspaper sales. Mitchell milks the John Doe stories for all they are worth, until the tales evolve into a political movement resulting in actual suicide attempts.⁴⁸⁸ Even though the film is 70 years old, *Meet John Doe* is a “sobering film [that] remains an important social

commentary.”⁴⁸⁹ The film’s journalists abuse the power of the press by publishing false stories as a circulation tool. Like *Dirt*’s tabloid journalists, the characters of *Meet John Doe* uphold values clouded by sensationalism and profit.

The 1951 film *Ace in the Hole* is a drama that examines the media’s relationship with the news it reports. Described as “cynical, unethical, and unscrupulous,” newspaperman Charles “Chuck” Tatum (Kirk Douglas) has a history of alcoholism, adultery, and slander, as well as being fired from eleven publications. Tatum goes so far as to manipulate and prolong the rescue of a man trapped in a collapsed cave so he can get more front-page articles out of the story.⁴⁹⁰ Movie reviewer Roger Ebert called the film a “portrait of rotten journalism and the public’s insatiable appetite for it.” He went on to say, “It’s easy to blame the press for its portraits of self-destructing celebrities, philandering preachers, corrupt politicians, or bragging serial killers, but who loves those stories? The public does.”⁴⁹¹ *Ace in the Hole*’s depiction of a scandal-seeking male reporter in the early 1950s blames not only the journalist “who masterminds a media circus,” but also the public which demonstrates an appetite for the salacious—a similar theme in *Dirt*.

Spiller’s do-whatever-it-takes-to-get-the-story attitude is not unique to *Dirt*. This representation of cutthroat journalism has existed in film and television for years. For example, *Network* is a 1976 four-time Academy Award winning satirical film about the fictional Union Broadcasting System (UBS) television network’s struggle with poor ratings. Diana Christensen (Faye Dunaway) represents a woman willing to do nearly anything to get ahead in the business—similar to McPhearson’s motivation to get ahead.

An entertainment producer, Christensen goes to such extremes as to cut a deal with left-wing terrorists robbing banks for a news series based on terrorism.⁴⁹² Like Spiller, Christensen is a “lone wolf”⁴⁹³ completely engulfed in ratings and profit. According to *Network* writer Paddy Chayefsky, “The message of *Network* was when do we say, ‘Hold it!’ A human life is a hell of a lot more important than your lousy dollar.”⁴⁹⁴ Both *Network* and *Dirt* show viewers what happens when journalists go to far in the name of profit.

Films that portray the tabloid journalist as unethical and amoral abound. Similar to the above examples are: *The Front Page* (1931) where a tabloid editor and reporter conspire to hide a fugitive cop killer so they can secure an exclusive interview with the convicted felon,⁴⁹⁵ *Slander* (1956) depicts a corrupt magazine publisher who puts circulation above all else only to be murdered by his own mother because he had ruined so many lives,⁴⁹⁶ and the made-for-television *Scandal Sheet* (1985) where a tabloid publisher targets an actor on the verge of a career comeback with the sole goal of selling more issues.⁴⁹⁷

Journalists in film and television throughout the 19th and 20th centuries are consistently corrupt and exceptionally unethical; and it is these images that provide the public with reason to loathe this type of journalism. Although 80 years has passed since film and television first portrayed an obsessed tabloid scandalmonger, the image of the tabloid journalists in *Dirt* show little has changed since then.

Chapter 11 Endnotes

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Chapter 12: Conclusion

Images of the tabloid journalist in *Dirt* are not that much different from images of the tabloid journalist presented 80 years ago when novels, television, and film portrayed tabloid journalists as villains who destroyed lives and published inaccurate and unfair stories. Because of this, the public's disgust with tabloid journalists has not changed much either.

Spiller abuses the power of the press when she relies on manipulation and blackmail to get her sources to speak up. Although paparazzo Konkey sets himself above the typical pack of menacing Hollywood paparazzi by understanding how a photograph tells a story, he trespasses and misrepresents himself. Reporter McPhearson also misrepresents herself and uses bribery and manipulation to get sources to talk to her. With these depictions, *Dirt* seems to give viewers an accurate representation of what some real tabloid journalists go through to get a story. But however accurate these images are, they are hardly admirable or honorable.

The likable actors playing the tabloid journalists in *Dirt* are pleasant and enjoyable to watch, giving their evil characters a level of humanity and a personality with characteristics that make their actions seem less objectionable at times. This is consistent with journalists in film and television throughout history. Popular actors that the public loves have played scandalous journalists and sometimes the audience forgives these journalists for their unethical actions because of their affection for them. Although this dichotomy exists, the journalists in *Dirt* do terrible things. Throughout the 13 episodes

nearly all of the journalists in *Dirt* deceive, bribe, blackmail, manipulate, cheat, bully, and pay people off for information. These actions are not representative of good journalism and the *Dirt Now* journalists are far from journalist heroes.

Although the series had a short run and is now off the air, the images viewers see in *Dirt* are important because they depict a corrupt world of competitive journalism consistent with film and television representations throughout history. The series' tabloid journalists adhere to the same system of values other tabloid journalists in film and television do, where every ethic fades in the face of getting the story. Although the journalists in *Dirt* hold accurate reporting to a high standard, they sacrifice all morals and ethics that stand in the way of the story.

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**Appendix A: Episode List of the Complete First Season of the FX
Network Original Series *Dirt***

Episode 1: “Pilot,” *Dirt*. First aired January 2, 2002, FX Networks. ABC Studios, FX, and Coquette Productions. Directed by Matthew Carnahan. Written by Matthew Carnahan.

In the series premiere of *Dirt*, editor-in-chief of weekly tabloids *Dirt* and *Now* Lucy Spiller (Courteney Cox) sets up married-with-children basketball star Prince Tyreese (Rick Fox) with a hooker. Spiller blackmails Tyreese with the photos paparazzo Don Konkey (Ian Hart) took of him doing cocaine and having sex with the hooker in his hot tub using a strap-on. Konkey convinces struggling actor Holt McLaren (Josh Stewart) to trade information on Hollywood scandals with Spiller in return for favorable coverage in her magazines. Celebrity A-lister Kira Klay (Shannyn Sossamon) overdoses on cocaine and dies after finding out *Dirt* was going to expose her pregnancy.

Episode 2: “Blogan,” *Dirt*. First aired January 9, 2007, FX Networks. ABC Studios, FX, and Coquette Productions. Directed by Chris Long. Written by Matthew Carnahan.

Dirt and *Now*'s owner Gibson Horne (Timothy Bottoms) tells Lucy Spiller if she doesn't get control of her reckless spending he will fire her. Spiller sends Don Konkey to Kira Klay's funeral so he can get cover photos of her corpse inside the casket for *Now*. Spiller focuses her *Dirt* cover on exposing Hollywood power couple known as “Blogan” for faking their pregnancy and being too vain to carry their own child. Novice reporter Willa McPhearson (Alex Breckenridge) sets out to prove to Spiller that she is thick-skinned enough for the job. Holt McLaren asks Spiller to run a story on his girlfriend, celebrity Julia Mallory (Laura Allen) because she is having trouble dealing with Kira Klay's death. Spiller approaches Horne about merging the two weeklies into one super tabloid.

Episode 3: “Ovophagy,” *Dirt*. First aired January 16, 2007, FX Networks. ABC Studios, FX, and Coquette Productions. Directed by Paris Barclay. Written by Joel Fields.

Lucy Spiller needs a big cover for the lunch of *Dirt Now*. When Spiller sends Willa McPhearson to find out if Christian pop star Connie Chris (Kate Linae) is in rehab for using drugs, McPhearson ends up taking drugs to prove to the celebrity drug dealer Garbo (Carly Pope) she is not a nark. After cutting off his finger, Konkey is able to get access to Chris's hospital room and finds out she is taking a professional break because she burned her entire face freebasing heroine and epinephrine. Spiller orders her staff to look into the mysterious disappearance of hip-hop artist Andre G. Prince Tyreese follows Konkey into the *Dirt Now* parking garage and realizes Spiller was the one who set him up. Spiller uses the photos she has of Tyreese to get him to give her dirt on Andre G. Tyreese tells Spiller that Andre G's manager, Twitty McDaniel (Billy Brown), murdered the singer and has his head in a jar.

Episode 4: “What to Expect When You’re Expecting,” *Dirt*. First aired January 23, 2007, FX Networks. ABC Studios, FX, and Coquette Productions. Directed by Paris Barclay. Written by Dawn Prestwich and Nicole Yorkin.

Lucy Spiller continues to blackmail Prince Tyreese until he tells her where Twitty McDaniel is keeping Andre G’s head. Don Konkey gets the cover shot of Andre G’s head in a jar that McDaniel keeps in his wine cellar. Spiller has Konkey follow her brother Leo (Will McCormack) and finds out he is sleeping with married-with-children action star Jack Dawson (Grant Show). Leo is furious with Spiller. McPherson gets into another sticky situation when a source says he will only give her the information she wants if she lets him satisfy his foot fetish by masturbating to the sight of her feet. Spiller tries to break in her new assistant, Kenny (Ankur Bhatt).

Episode 5: “You Don’t Know Jack,” *Dirt*. First aired January 30, 2007, FX Networks. ABC Studios, FX, and Coquette Productions. Directed by Chris Long. Written by Dave Flebotte.

Lucy Spiller publishes the photos Don Konkey took of her brother, Leo, and action star Jack Dawson kissing. Leo tells Spiller, against her recommendation, to publish the photos that out the celebrity. Spiller has to bail Konkey out of jail after he is arrested for trespassing on Dawson’s private property to get the photos. After being tied up and told he was going to get his penis cut off and fed to him, publisher Brent Barrow (Jeffrey Nordling) gives up Spiller’s anonymous source on the Andre G murder story. Because of this, Prince Tyreese is beaten almost to death. Willa McPhearson gets more confident in her skills as a reporter.

Episode 6: “The Secret Lives of Altar Girls,” *Dirt*. First aired February 6, 2007, FX Networks. ABC Studios, FX, and Coquette Productions. Directed by Jesse Bochco. Written by Joel Fields.

Lucy Spiller calls in her old mentor and *Dirt Now*’s investigative reporter Chuck Lafoon (Paul Reubens) to go with Willa McPhearson to Walnut Valley, Calif., to investigate the murder of a high school cheerleader. McPhearson gets her first cover story when she gets Maddy Sweet (Stephanie Turner) to admit to murdering her best friend, Amber Carmichael, because she was jealous that her father, the town minister, got her pregnant. The reverend was also sleeping with his daughter. Spiller and Holt McLaren begin an affair.

Episode 7: “Come Together,” *Dirt*. First aired February 13, 2007, FX Networks. ABC Studios, FX, and Coquette Productions. Directed by Adam Arkin. Written by Rebecca Dameron.

Jack Dawson’s lawyer threatens *Dirt Now* with a libel lawsuit. Leo’s guilt over the situation turns to anger toward Lucy Spiller for publishing the photos. Leo leaves town to get away from Spiller. Willa McPhearson starts to doubt her reporting when she realizes she is becoming too emotionally involved in Maddy Sweet and the Walnut Valley cheerleader murder story. Don Konkey gets photographs of Julia Mallory in a complete

drug-induced state and Spiller helps Holt McLaren get her into rehab. McPhearson begins an affair with Brent Barrow.

Episode 8: “The Thing Under the Bed,” *Dirt*. First aired February 20, 2007, FX Networks. ABC Studios, FX, and Coquette Productions. Directed by Dean White. Written by Sally Robinson.

Willa McPhearson has an instinct about a celebrity wedding and teams up with Don Konkey to crack the story. They find out that B-list sitcom celebrity Dana Pritchard (Kristin Minter) is getting married to another woman. A stalker leaves candid photographs of Spiller in her home and car. Spiller is so overworked she is having trouble sleeping. Spiller still can't get in touch with her brother, Leo.

Episode 9: “This Is Not Your Father’s Hostage Situation,” *Dirt*. First aired February 27, 2007, FX Networks. ABC Studios, FX, and Coquette Productions. Former child star Sammy Winter (Vincent Gallo) takes the *Dirt Now* staff hostage. Lucy Spiller convinces him to allow them to produce an entire issue about him from the viewpoint inside the hostage situation. Winter kills Spiller’s assistant, Kenny, to prove that he is serious about getting good publicity. Actor Johnny Gage (Johann Urb) asks Spiller to put him back in the pages of *Dirt Now*.

Episode 10: “The Sexxx Issue,” *Dirt*. First aired March 6, 2007, FX Networks. ABC Studios, FX, and Coquette Productions. Directed by Lev L. Spiro. Written by Matthew Carnahan.

Lucy Spiller wants the staff to focus entirely on celebrity sex stories for the next issue because she wants everyone to have fun post-hostage workweek. Willa McPhearson and Brent Barrow have a threesome with a young girl they meet at a bar. The girl’s father tries to bring a lawsuit against *Dirt Now*, saying the two of them raped his underage daughter. He tells Spiller he will settle for three covers for his rising-star daughter. Spiller finds out the girl is not underage and that her father initiated the threesome in order to get her publicity. Spiller gives Holt McLaren the only two copies she has of his girlfriend and Johnny Gage’s sex tape. Spiller hires a secret security team to try to catch her stalker.

Episode 11: “Pap Smear,” *Dirt*. First aired March 13, 2007, FX Networks. ABC Studios, FX, and Coquette Productions. Directed by Chris Long. Written by Albert Kim.

Lucy Spiller sends Don Konkey out to get photos of best friend celebutantes Tuesday Nelson and Lulu Kagel because Lulu’s fiancée is cheating on her with Tuesday. Novice paparazzo Marqui Jackson (Lukas Haas) follows Konkey in hopes of learning the craft of photography. Jackson gets beaten almost to death by a group of gang-banger paparazzi. Spiller’s stalker puts photos of Spiller undressing on every computer screen in *Dirt Now*’s office. Willa McPhearson ends her affair with Brent Barrow because he is interfering with her work.

Episode 12: “Caught on Tape,” *Dirt*. First aired March 20, 2007, FX Networks. ABC Studios, FX, and Coquette Productions. Directed by Frederick King Keller. Written by Joel Fields.

Lucy Spiller and Willa McPhearson learn that Julia Mallory leaked her own sex tape to boost her ailing acting career. Don Konkey’s schizophrenia acts up and he has hallucinations of Holt McLaren telling him he has to kill Spiller.

Episode 13: “Ita Missa Est,” *Dirt*. First aired March 27, 2007, FX Networks. ABC Studios, FX, and Coquette Productions. Directed by Matthew Carnahan. Written by Matthew Carnahan.

Lucy Spiller lunches with Tina Harrod (Jennifer Aniston) to talk about the rumors that Harrod is out for Spiller’s job. Spiller’s security team finds Konkey in the desert just before he slits his own throat. Spiller finds out her brother Leo is her stalker. Spiller and Holt McLaren are followed and photographed by the paparazzi. Harrod shows the photos to Julia Mallory and outs McLaren for being Spiller’s source. Mallory sneaks into Spiller’s house and attacks her with a butcher knife, stabbing Spiller in the stomach. Spiller calls Konkey to get to her house and get the photographs before he calls for help.