

# Mortifying Magazine Moments

By LAURA JOHNSTON

*The 2006 New York Review of Magazines presents the past year's most embarrassing moments in magazine journalism:*

**Worst Issue, Period:** *Vanity Fair's* March 2006. Designer Tom Ford's Hollywood issue, featuring stars in the nude and/or doing weird stuff, wasn't a great idea. At least we didn't have to see Ford naked.

**Biggest Celebrity Cover Oops:** Not that we expect accuracy from celebrity "journalism," but usually they have a rumor or a source or something to back up their "scoops." Not so for *Celebrity Living*, whose Dec. 12, 2005, cover screamed, "Jessica's Baby Weight Battle: She's Finally Pregnant!" Not so much. Jessica Simpson was busy splitting from husband Nick Lachey and was decidedly unpregnant.

**Most Undeserved Praise of the Year:** Samir Husni, the University of Mississippi journalism department chair self-dubbed "Mr. Magazine," lauds *Celebrity Living* as one of the 30 most notable launches of 2005. But what's notable about another trashy magazine from Bonnie Fuller? If we needed any proof that the praise wasn't worth its salt, *Celebrity Living* announced it was folding in April.

**Worst Launch of the Year:** The only launch to surpass *Celebrity Living* in cheesiness would have to be *Chicken Soup for the Soul Magazine*. As if the *Chicken Soup* books were not schmaltzy enough, now we have a magazine that promises "to paint a truly moving portrait of the American soul." We got sick of the book series about a decade ago, and we're sure the magazine would leave our souls standing still.

**Least Child-Friendly:** Studio 17, a prom-dress advertiser, mistakenly included the address of a child-porn website in its ads in the Spring 2005 issues of teeny-bop publications *YM Your Prom* and *Teen Prom*. Fairchild Publications, which published *YM Your Prom*, yanked 200,000 copies of the magazine off the newsstand because of the misprint, but *Hearst Magazines* chose not to pull its *Teen Prom* issue. Either way, the inappropriate URL probably nullified the mandatory you-don't-have-to-have-sex-on-prom-night advice column.

**Way to Stand Up:** Almost a month after an October 2005 agreement fell through, Time Inc. settled a \$20 million lawsuit over a 2003

**Biggest Cover Oops:** Heather Graham, star of the sitcom "Emily's Reasons Why Not," was featured on the cover of the Jan. 27 *Life*—the once-revered magazine reincarnated as newspaper insert—as "TV's Sexiest Star." Too bad she couldn't be found on TV—the show had been canceled 10 days earlier, after only one episode.



*Sports Illustrated* story alleging that Mike Price, the former University of Alabama football coach, had sex with two women in a Pensacola hotel. Price, who was fired from Alabama days before the story was officially released, admitted that he was drunk and patronized a strip club, but said he never had sex with anyone.

Um, OK. *Sports Illustrated* stood by its story, which depended partly on anonymous sources, so why did *Time* cave?

**Worst Error:** While we're not blaming *Newsweek* for all the furor that followed, its May 9, 2005, Periscope item alleging that American interrogators had flushed the Quran down the toilet had unequivocally serious consequences. The story was followed by anti-American riots in Afghanistan that killed at least 15 people. Editor Mark Whitaker at first refused to print a retraction, saying, "We don't know what the ultimate facts are," but after plenty of pressure from the White House, *Newsweek* issued a correction in its May 23 issue. With an allegation that damaging, the story should have been airtight. And without any solid evidence, the magazine should have retracted its story much sooner.

**What Goes Around Comes Around:** According to Gawker.com, *Time* magazine's Dorinda Elliott, who wrote the silver-lining cover story on Ford Motor Co. shortly before the company announced up to 30,000 layoffs on Jan. 23, was laid off by Time Inc. right before Christmas. Bummer.

**Worst Journalistic Invention:** First there was Bennifer. Then, the gossip magazines combined the names of 2005's most overcovered couples—Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie, and Tom Cruise and Katie Holmes—christening them Brangelina and TomKat. Ugh. The celebrity nickname machine really needs to take a rest.

**Most Gullible:** After the April 2005 issue of *Allure* featured an interview with Britney Spears, a columnist at *The Philadelphia Daily News* wrote a spoof of the interview, with fake quotations from Britney. Believing the interview was real, MSNBC.com published an idiotic-sounding quote. Then *Us Weekly* and several newspapers, including *The Washington Post* and the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, picked it up. So although this gem—"Like omigod, I have to tell the maid to buy diapers and get the pool boy to walk the dog? Can't I just make out with Kevin all the time? Being married sucks"—sounds like real Britney, unfortunately it's just another example of failing to fact-check.

Most of the magazine's writers and editors, choose to leave the magazine rather than move with it.

**May 18, 2005**  
The on-again-off-again *Radar*, backed by Mort Zuckerman, relaunched with promises of glory and riches for all.

**May 24, 2005**  
Gruner + Jahr, the German magazine publishing powerhouse, sells most of its American magazines to Meredith Corpora-

tion for \$350 million, effectively ending its foray into the U.S. magazine market. Included in the sale: *Parents*, *Child*, *Fitness* and *Family Circle*.

**June 27, 2005**  
Billionaire financier Joe Mansueto jumps onto the magazine-buying bandwagon, snapping up Inc. and Fast Company for the

bargain price of \$35 million. Former owners Gruner + Jahr bought the magazines five years back for \$500 million. Ouch!