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Katrin Horn

1 On Oct 19, 1899, the front page of *Town Topics: The Journal of Society* featured the following piece of celebrity gossip:

> Miss Elizabeth Marbury is responsible for a statement, in an interview had with her on her return from Europe last Saturday, that Mrs. Cora Potter gave her as her reason for not coming to America to play this season, that she (Mrs. Potter) did not want to be here while her husband, Mr. James Brown Potter, was marrying Miss May Handy, of Richmond, Va.. If Miss Marbury is correctly quoted, and if she correctly quotes Mrs. Potter, this is the first decisive information that the public has had that Mr. and Mrs. James Brown Potter are divorced. (*Town Topics*, Oct 19, 1899)

2 *Town Topics,* published in New York City between 1885 and 1937[1] provided its readers with a combination of society news, financial advice, short stories, and theater reviews. Initially founded as *Andrews' American Queen: A National Society Journal* in 1879,[2] *Town Topics* was bought and then reinvented by brothers E. D. and Colonel William d'Alton Mann. Once overhauled and with William d'Alton Mann reigning as editor from 1891 onwards, the magazine's format remained basically unchanged over the course of its almost 40 years of publication, the only noticeable modifications being a continuous increase in advertisement (especially of the type that relied on photographs) and the addition of an illustrated cover page (in 1921, when the price was increased from 10 to 20 cents). Throughout this time, "Saunterings," *Town Topics*' society column, usually took up the first half of its twelve pages. Written personally by Colonel Mann, under the pseudonym "Saunterer," the column was the magazine's key selling point, as studies of New York's high society attest (see Montgomery; Homberger). The description of *Town Topics* for Adam Matthew's digital collection *Everyday Life & Women in America*, currently the only way of accessing the magazine outside of the New York Public Library, also considers "Saunterings" *Town Topics*' main attraction:

> Under Colonel Mann's leadership the periodical developed into a publication that offered gossip and society news on the much read and highly anticipated social pages. [... and thus] became a must-read for the wealthy members of the great

> families like Vanderbilts, Astors, and Whitneys; as a guide book for the nouveaux riche on where to go and who to be seen with; and for normal people for whom the often shocking gossip about the superrich provided good entertainment. ("Town Topics")

3 Despite its prominent status within the Gilded Age's volatile print market, *Town Topics* has until recently received little scholarly attention.[3] To this day, the best history of the magazine is provided by a 1965-feature (spread over two issues) by Andy Logan in *The New Yorker*, which is, however, mostly interested in the magazine's involvement in a 1905-court case about its use of blackmail. Frank Luther Mott's *A History of American Magazines* calls *Town Topics* "the best-known urban weekly in America" (85) and admits that "for many readers the most important part of the journal" was "Saunterings," which he describes as "the department of social items, gossip, and scandal" (753). Yet, he stresses that the magazine should instead be remembered for its "excellent reviews" and short stories (755). Most histories of US American magazines do not mention *Town Topics* at all. Gossip, it seems, has no place in studies of nineteenth century print culture, which focus instead on supposedly serious innovations like "new journalism" (e.g. Roggenkamp xii), promoted among others by one of Mann's chief rivals, Joseph Pulitzer.[4]

4 In the following, I want to contend that *Town Topics*—and gossip columns more generally—should in fact be considered as essential components of the crucial changes during the 1890s, "when journalists began crafting new techniques and rhetorical strategies for depicting celebrities, innovations that contributed to the creation of a new representational mold that was firmly in place by the 1920s" (Ponce de Leon 6). In contrast to Homberger's and Montgomery's valuable and insightful comments on *Town Topics*' relation to the members of high society it depicted and dissected in its pages,[5] this article will focus on the magazine's mode of address and the way it leveraged the relationship with its readers to create the illusion of private communication. Drawing on Michael Warner's concept of "*a* public" (413) and introducing the notion of public intimacy,[6] this article thus outlines the relevance of mass-mediated gossip to understanding shifts in US American concepts of the public sphere and the burgeoning celebrity culture. Most studies of celebrity gossip magazines place the origins of celebrity culture in the twentieth century.[7] In *Celebrity: A History of Fame*, Andrea McDonnell and Susan Douglas date the history of modern celebrity back to the nineteenth century, but mostly limit themselves to noting the growing numbers of society news in circulation at the time. This article complements and expands on such studies by offering a detailed analysis of how gossip—a supposedly private mode of communication—becomes the basis of the commercial success of an exceedingly public product.

1. Gossip in Private and Public

5 Scandal has been defined as "the public event par excellence" (Adut 5). Gossip on the other hand is "informal, private communication between an individual and a small, selected audience concerning the conduct of absent persons or events" (Merry 275) and a "private use of language, confined to the space of home, family and immediate community" (Cameron 3, see also Ayim 86). Nonetheless, close attention to

"Saunterings" reveals that it is gossip, rather than scandal, which characterizes *Town Topics*' public reporting on celebrities and members of New York's high society.

6 This reporting is, like all gossip, defined by uncertainty (cf. Merry 275) and therefore seems akin to rumor, another form of "unreliable oral information" (White 75). Yet such a conflation ignores the communal aspects of gossip: rumor, unlike gossip, can be relayed impersonally and it can be limited to a single piece of information. Gossip requires connection, narration, and evaluation (275). "Think of gossip... as fiction: fragments of lives transformed into story," Patricia Mayer Spacks suggests (3). In "Saunterings," accordingly, readers are offered select slices of the life of public figures which—when combined over time (a connection faithful readers are expected to be able to make)—give the impression of a coherent narrative of their triumphs and tribulations. A narrative, one might add, in which the moral of the story is to a great extent implied by the tone in which it is told.

7 As a result of prolonged temporal exchange and communication about shared values, gossip—unlike either rumor or scandal—both relies on and enhances feelings of intimacy and belonging, so that the content of gossip might even be "secondary to the process of creating bonds and boundaries" (White 76). Gossip's social function consists in "creat[ing] a sphere of intimacy for the gossipers" (de Backer/van den Bulck, 334); it thus exceeds its potential for spreading news and information, even in mass-mediated contexts. In fact, the association of gossip with the "immediate community" (Cameron 3) emerges not as a paradox within the use of gossip in commercial, public contexts, but rather as the key reason.

8 The Saunterer's piece on Ms. Marbury's hints about Mrs. Potter's impending divorce quoted at the beginning of the essay is emblematic of the way gossip—rather than a more general conception of "society news" in which events are stated in a matter-of-fact way—is incorporated into the magazine's pages. Knight describes the Saunterer's style as "frivolous banter" (51) and claims that "*Town Topics* played on the contradictory desires for privacy and publicity, secrecy and transparency, that made fashionable society tick" (Knight 47). These desires can best be satisfied by gossip, which "[blurs] the boundaries between the personal and the widely known," and thereby "implicitly challenges the separation" of the domestic realm from "what lies outside it" (Spacks 262). Connected to this aspect, but missing from Knight's list of contradictory impulses that make up *Town Topics*' appeal, is the magazine's innovative combination of oral tradition and news-like presentation. The piece does not downplay the uncertainty of its content ("if Ms Marbury is correctly quoted"). Instead, the insights into high society presented in "Saunterings" stress their origins in the intimate sphere of private life at the same time as they emphasize their status as being of public interest: "first decisive information that the public has had." Structurally, then, "Saunterings" mirrors the investigative impulses of oral gossip. To enhance this effect, the column also combines several rhetorical strategies in an attempt to generate intimacy, as detailed below. The magazine thus implements a form of gossip specifically created for a commercial context, namely a form of gossip that brings personal rapport into public discourse.[8]

2. Gossip's Public Sphere

9 While he evokes a mode of communication associated with the domestic and personal, the Saunterer does not address his readers as individuals in a private setting. Despite the pretense of direct communication and the focus on intimate details, *Town Topics* participates in the public, commercial sphere—a fact emphasized by the repeated mentions of correspondents in other cities and abroad as much as by the advertisements that frame the magazine's contents. *Town Topics* further boasts its status as a commercial product by putting its "guaranteed circulation" on the front page[9] and, maybe most overtly, by comparing itself to other news outlets: for instance, in the issue of Jan 6, 1898, the Saunterer claims that other publications steal his stories ("I assume I should feel flattered by the way in which many of the New York daily newspapers pounce upon my paragraphs every Thursday," [4]), then introduces a piece, which presumably deviates in style, by stating he will "tell this as if it were written for the 'Editor's Drawer' of *Harper's Magazine*" (5), attacks Joseph Pulitzer's way of running *New York World* (11), and finally calls William Randolph Hearst's *New York Journal* a "viler imitation of Pulitzer's vile sheet" (12).[10] The unquestionably commercial context of the Saunterer's intimate address in *Town Topics* thus increases the blurring of "the imaginary yet influential boundary between public and private" typical for gossip (Feeley/Frost 5). The gossip column's reliance on a private mode of communication, however, influences its engagement with the public sphere, or more specifically, the kind of public sphere it engages in. The magazine includes sporadic acknowledgments of its role in the public sphere as the basis of democratic political action (such as its endorsements of presidents). In general, however, Michael Warner provides a more productive framework for understanding the public role of gossip than the Habermasian tradition, in which even partial publics relate back to a pre-existing public sphere tied to democratic debate. Warner differentiates between "*the* public" as a "kind of social totality," then "*a* public" as "a concrete audience" to a specific event, and lastly "the kind of public that comes into being only in relation to texts and their circulation" (413). This is precisely the kind of public addressed and created by *Town Topics*: one that "exists by virtue of being addressed" (413). The magazine's readers, through the act of reading and by actively engaging with the private lives of others, become "a public"—one that feels connected as a gossip community beyond personal interaction in the private sphere. Importantly, in terms of rhetorical strategies, Warner insists that public discourse is often too easily constructed as "a speech event involving speaker and addressee" (420). Rather, Warner stresses:

> No single text can create a public... since a public is understood to be an ongoing space of encounter for discourse. Texts themselves do not create publics, but the concatenation of texts through time. Only when a previously existing discourse can be supposed, and when a responding discourse can be postulated, can a text address a public. (420)

10 More so than the traditional modes of "argument and polemic" (420) then, mass-mediated gossip might aid and accommodate the reflexive circulation of discourse needed by *a* public.

3. Celebrities and Public Figures

11 In 1899, Thorstein Veblen was among the first to give an account of the increasing interest in private citizens as public figures and their relevance to a wider social context in his influential study *The Theory of the Leisure Class*. In lieu of an actual aristocracy, he argues, the American upper class distinguishes itself by living their life for the "purposes of reputability" (85). In rural areas, "the sphere of personal acquaintance and neighborhood gossip" (86) will suffice to reach an audience wide enough for this goal. In the urban environment, other means" are needed to exhibit one's status. Besides semi-public demonstrations of taste and wealth at balls and other social events, the press—though not mentioned by Veblen—becomes a key factor for the conspicuous consumption of the leisure class.

12 The American "aristocracy" and their need for an audience was met by a growing number of people outside their immediate social sphere, who also needed them, as Homberger observes: "Copying the aristocrats was the New York style" (6). The middle class's interest in members of high society and other emerging figures of public interest stemmed from a growing investment in upwards social mobility. In New York, where the *nouveau riches* were on an unparalleled rise, established high society therefore kept an even closer reign on who might join their set—Ward McAllister famously published an exclusive list of "the 400" people deemed worthy by Mrs. Astor—while the middle class and the *nouveaux riches* reacted with an increased need for guidance on proper conduct which would allow them to leave their supposed new money-deficiencies behind. Conduct literature had been enormously successful throughout the nineteenth century due to "the conviction that proper manners and social respectability could be purchased and learned" (Kasson 43). Respectability remained important, yet the interest in high society additionally reflected the growing relevance of consumption as a marker of style and class.

13 Especially protagonists like those of the above-quoted gossip item, actress Cora Potter, theater manager Elizabeth Marbury, and Ms. Handy were of key interest as inspirations for how to dress, what entertainment to seek, and where to travel—which *Town Topics* proves by the sheer number of advertisements for hotels, travel destinations, and beauty products. Maureen Montgomery views New York as the foremost representative of such developments and coins the term "display culture" to describe it. In such a culture of display, "lifestyle and social status" (122) were put on display in theaters, museums, and other (semi)public places in the same way that consumer objects would be presented. "The 400 are in the social business," *Town Topics* pointedly summarizes this particular economic exchange in terms of an expected social return on monetary investment in visibility (Dec 6, 1894): "They do not spare pains, expense or advertising for the sake of maintaining a brilliant and refined series of continuous social performances" (qtd. in Montgomery, 122). Simon Morgan makes an even broader claim for the role of public figures at the end of the nineteenth century. He insists that scholarship should move "towards seeing [celebrity] as one of the key drivers of the modernization process," because "[b]y stimulating the production of consumer goods, printed images and periodical literature, celebrity played a crucial role in the growth of the public sphere" (367)—or rather, to use Warner's words, "*a* public of discourse" (414).

14 Mrs. Cora Potter is a prime example of this function of celebrity. *Town Topics* had followed her acting career early on and its theater review section seemed to take equal glee in reporting her success in England as lamenting her lack of talent. On Nov 3, 1887, for example, "At the Play" brandished the subtitle "The Truth about Mrs. Potter," with that truth being that "Mrs. Potter has a lovely face. Mrs. Potter has beautiful bronze-colored hair. But Mrs. Potter is not an actress; and if she ever comes one will have to go through a chrysalis state before the caterpillar amateur can become the butterfly artiste" (10),

15 The paper nonetheless detailed her lavish costumes and hair designs on a regular basis. Outside of the review column, "Saunterings" was equally studious in detailing news about her impending divorce, as when an item on Aug 11, 1887—stating that "the separation of the Brown-Potters has been quite complete since Mrs. Potter's debut on the London stage" (7)—is followed up a month later with the confirmation that "as to Mrs. Potter's domestic relations, I have, I believe, reliable information that Mr. and Mrs. Potter are permanently separated, and will not again live together" (Sep 8, 1887, 11). Ms. Handy, the rumored-to-be new wife of Mrs. Potter's former husband, would be familiar to readers of *Town Topics* too, even though she was not acting on stage or fulfilling any public role—besides that of being a female member of New York's high society. From the first notice of a rumored engagement to regular updates on her summer vacations and to the "perennial reports" about her engagement to Mr. Potter (Aug 7, 1899, 5), Mrs. Handy's treatment in *Town Topics* exemplifies Montgomery's observation that "newspaper publicity became an integral part of life for those active in high society" (141), and for women in particular. Even the source of the story, Ms. Marbury, was a celebrity in her own right: as a theatrical agent, she was herself frequently mentioned in the magazines' reviews of plays and performances. She was also one half of an "interesting duo" (Apr 7, 1890, 5) of celebrity "bachelor women"—together with actress-turned-interior-decorator Elsie DeWolfe, herself supposedly introduced to acting by Cora Potter[11] (Jan 6, 1898, 6). As such, Marbury additionally had her fair share of coverage in "Saunterings," especially concerning her frequent travels to Europe in the company of DeWolfe.[12] Reports on them, their professional and social success, and their consumer choices cemented their position within public discourse—which was, in turn, shaped by the stories about their lives.

16 Due to their respective liminal positions within society—a divorced actress, a woman in a same-sex relationship, and a perpetually engaged woman aging out of marriageable youth—all three women also could potentially cause or be involved in scandals. In his definition of scandal as a "function of mass media" (14), William Cohen contrasts scandal with gossip—from which scandal might result, but from which scandal is also distinct, because Cohen positions gossip firmly *outside* of the public sphere. Ari Adut, too, contrasts scandal and gossip via their relation to publicity: "a scandal... starts with the *publicization* of... transgression... and lasts as long as there is significant and sustained *public interest in it*" (11, emphasis added). *Town Topics*, despite Mott's claim that "Saunterings" was full of "social items, gossip, and scandal" (753), however, did not build its reputation on publishing scandals. Quite to the contrary, its most scandalous scoops were often conditioned upon a so-called subscription to *Fads and Fancies of Representative Americans of the Twentieth Century, being a Portrayal of their Tastes, Diversions and Achievements* (1905).[13] This lucrative blackmail scheme only ended when Edwin Post—husband of Emily Post, who would later become famous for her advice on

social etiquette—exposed the scheme to law enforcement rather than pay the extorted sum (see chapter 15 in Claridge for details). Behind the scenes, *Town Topics* thus profited from hiding scandal. Publicly, however, it dealt almost exclusively in social items and gossip.

4. "Saunterings" as a Community of Gossips

17 One crucial aspect for the presentation of public information as private gossip in *Town Topics* is the Saunterer's stressing that he is not the sole source of information for "Saunterings." Phrases like "I hear" regularly introduce particularly controversial bits of information.[14] In doing so, the column repeatedly reminds readers that its information is sourced from a wide network of informants, including—at least potentially—any number of fellow readers (or even some public figures).[15]

18 Second, readers are invited to contribute their own insights or share their encounters with public figures. They do so regularly in the form of letters to the editor, such as when a "faithful feminine reader" recounts her appointment at the hairdresser's. She is offered to be made up in the style of Cora Potter, but wonders "Do you believe Mrs. Potter's hair owes its beauty to any other fact than that it was lucky enough to grow on her head?" (Nov 24, 1887, 4). Under the headline "He reads Town Topics," a reader who claims to have an address on Wall Street,[16] states that "it frequently struck me that, while not pretending to be a newspaper in the accepted sense, you are continually giving us items of great importance" (Nov 10, 1887, 18). "Saunterings" also includes invitations to correct the reporting or add to it ("I wonder if this Mr. Francis Rutherford is the brother of..." (Jan 6, 1898, 4). In other instances, the Saunterer admits uncertainty—"No positive information can be had, but rumor" (Jan 6, 1898, 7—and hence puts himself on the same level as the interested public. By thus emphasizing (and furthering) how *Town Topics* is embedded in a network of readers and contributors, "Sauntering" rhetorically constructs an imaginary community in which the hierarchy between columnist and readers seems to collapse, thereby evoking the illusion of reciprocal communication and reenacting the intimacy of a private gossip scenario on the public stage.

19 Third, and most important in making up for the lack of personal interaction that usually characterizes gossip as an intimate mode of communication, the Saunterer relies on a specific rhetorical strategy for addressing his readers. In arguing for the conceptual similarities between gossip and the novel, Patricia Mayer Spacks stresses that dialogic communication does not necessitate dialogue per se. Instead, she argues that gossip is characterized by "meaning emerging gradually and cooperatively... meaning not articulated yet mutually understood" (17). In accordance with White's claim that in gossip the creation of bonds trumps the revelation of secrets, *Town Topics* thus does not set itself apart by *what* the Saunterer talks about—in fact, the key contents of his column can often be found (with some delay) in reputable magazines, too. The story of the Potter divorce, for example, makes headlines in 1900, when they go to court in Rhode Island, which is reported, among others, in *The Evening World* (May 3). Instead, "Saunterings" distinguishes itself by *how* it is written. The piece on Ms. Marbury's comments on Mrs. Potter's divorce, for example, sees no need to introduce any of the protagonists (or explain, why Ms. Marbury might be a reliable source). The article thus suggests that his readers know the people he is referring to as well as he

does. “Saunterings” also regularly exudes confidence that its hints and suggestive comments find their right audience in its readers. In ending the article on the Potter divorce—or rather on stating that it will be further delayed—the Saunterer shares that he is “of the opinion that the only reason why Mr. Potter does not marry Miss Handy is that it takes two to make a bargain; and I am not saying which of the two is that delays the bargain” (Oct 19, 1899, 1). Rather than simply list society events, “Saunterings” thus comments, withholds, speculates, and evaluates in a manner typical for gossip, in that such communication stresses the familiarity of gossiper and addressee and a shared set of values.

20 To add to this evocation of intimacy as a feeling of “closeness” and “familiarity” (Wahl 1), the column not only directly addresses its readers, but furthermore reminds them of their shared past and mutual understanding. Interjections like “Idyllic, isn’t it” and “as I have told you before,” specifications such as “To those who remember” or even compliments to the effect of “I am convinced that most of my readers are happily aware” (Jan 6, 1898, 6-12), mark the communication of “Saunterings” as an intimate one, in which “a sense of privacy, even secrecy… transforms the language… into a kind of code not easily penetrable or comprehensible to those outside its boundaries” (Wahl 1).

21 Via these strategies and regardless of the content of specific gossip pieces, the Saunterer is sure to address his readers as people who share the same values, the same interests, and the same background knowledge. They are addressed as people whose good taste he is sure of and whose opinions are as familiar to him as his opinions are to them. The Saunterer’s insistence on the exclusive quality of his insights is thereby contrasted with the inclusivity of his address, which is reflected in the contemporary assertion that its contents were “read upstairs, downstairs, and backstairs” (Edwin Post Jr. qutd. in Logan 55). By the communicative means of intimate address, the social distinction between readers is overruled by their mutual membership in the gossip community of “Saunterings.”

5. Conclusion

22 There is, of course, more to the connection of gossip with community than its evocation of and reliance on intimacy. Many studies on gossip instead stress its role as a form of social control (see, among others, Gluckman, Schoeman, Spacks, or Merry), which Montgomery also views as one of the distinct effects of “Saunterings.” She describes the Saunterer as “acting as a censor of the behavior of those who set the fashion for the rest of society” (5) and as “represent[ing] those conservative forces that restricted modernization by trying to maintain the old ideals and traditions on which American gentility had been founded” (6). Despite the undeniable conservatism of the values transmitted in its content, *Town Topics* (as Montgomery also acknowledges) participates in processes of modernization and transformation of the US American public sphere. The commercial gossip of “Saunterings” mirrors the qualities usually attributed to oral, private gossip: evaluation, breaching of private-public divide, and a sense of intimacy among those gossiping. *Town Topics* thus emerges as one of the first magazines to make gossip so blatantly its biggest commercial asset and one of the first to include the structural and affective elements of oral gossip to their fullest effect into public discourse. “Saunterings” is thereby both an indicator for and a factor in the

transformation of the US American public sphere. Brought about—among other things—by its heightened engagement with celebrities and by offering new modes of interaction, identification, and participation for its readers, "Saunterings" expands and diversifies the kinds of publics addressed in print culture. By doing so, *Town Topics* (and other society magazines which followed similar strategies) might employ "the most primitive form of communication: gossip" (Margolis 9), but they nonetheless (or rather: therefore) crucially add to our understanding of nineteenth-century print culture in general, as well as to the history of celebrity gossip and gossip magazines more specifically.

23 *Town Topics*' celebrity gossip relies on narrative and recognition. Its information is always circular. Its readers need to have prior knowledge of the public figures whose private lives are put on display, in order to feel addressed by the Saunterer's sparse hints and coded comments. They need to encounter the so-called aristocracy in other contexts to be kept interested, which will feed into their engagement with these figures in *Town Topics*, which will in turn fuel their interest in them beyond their appearance in gossip column and so forth. The middle class' copying of styles, the celebrities' mentions in theater bills, the readers' passing by figures of public interest at chic venues like Delmonico's, the "fellow 400"'s encountered at private events—all these aspects feed into "Saunterings" and its specific "context of interaction" (Warner 420).

24 Thus, paradoxically, gossip's invasion of private lives and its invitation to private communication makes it uniquely suited to create a public. For its readers, *Town Topics* and its gossip column feels as if it was addressed "to [them] and addressed to strangers" (418), connecting them to celebrities gossiped about, as well as to the indefinite number of fellow readers of gossip. Importantly, Warner adds: "In the context of a public... strangers can be treated as already belonging to our world" (417). This puts the magazine in stark contrast to other print publications. Daily newspapers, for example, typically present their news in an objective and neutral mode that aims at conveying information in a self-contained manner. They thus target "the public" as a kind of neutral object, a "social totality" (to use Warner's expression). *Town Topics*' public address functions fundamentally differently: it maintains gossip's reliance on community and circularity—the information will be of interest and comprehensible only to the initiated few, and those few will in turn add something to the conversation. The magazine embraces this conversational tone even as it stresses its interaction with strangers. It thus addresses not "*the* public" (Warner 413) as an independent, pre-existing entity, but rather a *specific* public—constituted by the act of mass-mediated gossip and the public intimacy this gossip needs and fosters.

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NOTES

1. *Town Topics* was published each Thursday from 1885 to 1930. With veining commercial success, publication was reduced to semimonthly (1931– Jan. 1937) and monthly, before publication finally ceased in 1937.

2. The exact timeline is hard to reconstruct as volumes are only available from 1887 onwards. The dates given by Mott are: "*Andrews' American Queen,* 1879-83; (2) *American Queen*, 1883-84; (3) *American Queen and Town Topics*, 1885; (4) *Town Topics*, 1885-1937. FIRST ISSUE: Jan. 1, 1879. LAST ISSUE: Nov. 1937.
PERIODICITY: Semimonthly, 1879; weekly, 1880-1931; biweekly, 1931; suspended Oct. 1931-Jan. 1936; monthly, Feb. 1936-Nov. 1937. Regular semiannual vols. 1-104, 1879-1937; v. 105 irregular, with 56 numbers." (751). According to the New York Public Library *Town Topics* continued *American Queen* in 1882. Knight claims that "the brothers William and Eugene Mann took over an existing publication called *Town Topics* in 1885" (44).

3. The most detailed discussions are Knight (relation to market logic), and Homberger and Montgomery (relation to New York's social elite), on which I draw throughout this article.

Beyond that, Sarah Churchwell traces the coverage of the Fitzgeralds' marriage in the magazine. *Town Topics*' reflection of the antisemitism in elite men's clubs in New York City is a topic in Clifton Hood's *In Pursuit of Privilege* (202-203). Sara Sollors has written am unpublished thesis entitled *Town Topics: Scandal, Rumor, and the Press in Edith Wharton's Fiction*, which I unfortunately have not yet been able to access.

4. Pulitzer bought *New York World* only two years prior to the Manns' investment in *Town Topics*—a temporal proximity which might have added to their rivalry.

5. Peter Knight's analysis of the financial advice columns (variously titled "The Game of Speculation," "Whispers of Wall Street," and "The Record of the Financier's Rambles) is the only recent study I could find which addresses *Town Topics*, but is not primarily interested in "Saunterings." Yet even Knight introduces his analysis of *Town Topics*' comments on market affairs and financial concerns with a discussion of its society news (and their structural similarities to advice on financial speculation).

6. Lauren Berlant's influential argument about "the intimate public sphere" relies on the same basic terms as I do, but makes a very different argument than the one I want to propose through the term "public intimacy." Berlant seeks to account for the "privatization of citizenship" (110) by detailing how the "intimate public sphere of the US present tense tenders citizenship as a condition of social membership produced by personal acts and values, especially acts originating in or directed toward the family sphere" (111). I am interested in learning how and to what effect gossip is used to create feelings of intimacy in mediated communications.

7. De Backer and van den Bulck open their discussion of the history of mass media gossip with a reference to 1883, when Pulitzer "started a tabloid journalism trend" (329)—but do not describe this as gossip yet.

8. Beginning in the 1870s, leading women's magazines, such as *Ladies' Housekeeping*, *Godey's Lady's Book*, and *Harper's Bazaar* increasingly added columns with "gossip" (as well as "letter" and "diary") in their respective titles. I read this as an attempt use formats associated with domesticity to distract from women's increasing participation (as authors and readers) in the public sphere. Though my investigation of women's magazines in this regard needs further research, I suggest that *Town Topics* should be understood therefore not as an exception, but rather as a culmination of a broader development.

9. On its title page, *Town Topics* claimed a circulation of "over 20,000" in 1887, "over 38,000" in 1888, "over 42,000" in 1889, "over 52,000" in 1891, "over 63,000" in 1892, "over 75,000" in 1893, at which point is abandoned the practice of putting its circulation on the front page—presumably because it is by then established as one of the leading weeklies.

10. In the same Jan 6, 1898-issue, the Saunterer nonetheless offers his (and by proxy "this community" of readers') condolences to Pulitzer: "Whatever may be the estimate in which this community holds Joseph Pulitzer, the owner and editor of the *World*, no right-minded man or woman can withhold his or her sympathy from him and his wife in the crushing blow that has fallen upon them through the death of their eldest and only daughter, Miss Lucile Pulitzer" (4).

11. For more information on DeWolfe's amateur acting career and Potter's role as mentor, see Smith (24 pp). This personal entanglement of DeWofe / Marbury / Potter is relevant insofar, as readers of *Town Topics* would have been familiar with it and would thus have read Marbury as a reliable source due to her personal relationship with Potter.

12. Mann for the most part limited himself to vague descriptions of the relationship between Elizabeth Marbury and Elsie DeWolfe, even though the two women lived together for several years—both in the US and in France. Comments on Marbury's masculine appearance are frequent though not always negative. According to Logan's history of *Town Topics*, however, Mann was not always so respectful and treated other public figures with overt homophobia—until one married or paid up (62). For another example of a change of heart in "Saunterings," see Churchwell's

summary of *Town Topics*' positive coverage of F. Scott, Zelda Fitzgerald, and their marriage until Fitzgerald features the thinly veiled *Town Topics*-spoof *Town Tattle* in *The Great Gatsby*.

13. To keep up appearances, the lavishly designed over-sized book was indeed published after the court case, in which Mann had to defend himself against accusations of blackmail. Presumably, he and his editors contacted wealthy New Yorkers when *Town Topics* was about to publish a story about one of their indiscretions. Upon payment of an agreed upon sum under the guise of a subscription to the society book, Mann would add the person in question to a list of people about whom the magazine would only publish neutral or positive pieces. Interestingly, while "Sauntererings" was focused on women at least as often (if not more often) than on men, the book *Fads and Fancies* has only entries on male representatives of relevant families. Whether this reflects who was more lucratively extorted by Mann or whether the focus on men was supposed to give the book more gravitas is up for speculation.

14. For example: "I hear, by the way, that... the invalid [a rich, elderly woman, whose niece is fearing for her inheritance] and her professional companion [her masseuse] will reside in New York" (Jan 1, 1891,1); "I hear not a few very ugly stories from the city by the sea, and most of them relate to women that are conducting themselves indiscreetly" (Aug 17, 1893, 1).

15. Alfred Allan Lewis, for example, suggests in his biography of Elsie de Wolfe and her circle of friends that she might have exchanged information for mentions of her name in "Saunterings" early in her career, and that this was common practice among those trying to make a name for themselves (82-83).

16. This particular letter reads like a planted publicity item by the editors. Whether or not, however, such letters were truly written by readers or were fabricated, their inclusion nonetheless points to the magazine's interest in appearing as if their reader's contributions mattered.

ABSTRACTS

The magazine *Town Topics,* published in New York City between 1885 and 1937, is best known for its "complicitous gossip pages [which] both condemned and sustained high society" (Knight 47). The specific characteristics and implications of such gossip, however, have yet to be examined. To this end, this essay analyzes how *Town Topics: The Journal of Society* and specifically its column "Saunterings" addressed its mass audience. Of central concern to this question are the magazine's treatment of public figures and its anticipation of modern celebrity culture, and the gossip column's stylistic evocation of conversational tone. Drawing on Michael Warner's concept of "a public," this essay outlines how gossip, a private mode of communication, is used within the public sphere to create the impression of intimate exchange. Overall, this article illustrates how *Town Topics* differentiated itself from traditional newspapers and magazines, which targeted "the public" as a "social totality" (Warner 413). *Town Topics*, in contrasts, addressed not the public as an independent, pre-existing entity, but as a specific public that was constituted by the act of mass-mediated gossip.

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Keywords: public sphere, gossip, intimacy, celebrity, nineteenth century, magazines

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