



Media

### **All Jessica, All The Time**

Lacey Rose, 10.06.06, 8:30 AM ET

If you're a Jessica Simpson fan, you may be headed to the theaters this weekend to see her in *Employee of the Month*. But if you can't make it to **Lionsgate's** new movie, fear not: You can catch Simpson's song stylings on her new album, *A Public Affair*. Or you can find her at the newsstand--the 26-year-old is currently on the cover of *Allure*, but she's certain to be on the front of *US Weekly*, *People* or *Star* sometime soon. You can also buy her new line of "Hair U Wear" wigs. Or her "Dessert Beauty" line of edible "bath and body" treats.

It's no secret that the old scarcity model of celebrity culture--regular people only got a glimpse of famous people, which made them want to see them that much more--vanished sometime in the CompuServe era. You can get as much access to Simpson and a slew of other instant stars as you want, whenever you want it.

But if the customer is always right, Simpson and her ilk may be taking the wrong approach--apparently you can get too much of a good thing.

According to Encino, Calif.-based E-Poll Market Research, which ranks more than 2,800 celebrities on 46 different personality attributes, Simpson's "overexposed" score went from 17% in September 2003 to 41% in mid-2006. (The average for most celebrities at the peak of their careers is between 3% and 7%.) During that same period, Simpson's "talented" score dropped from 36% to a disappointing 28%. Other stars the public would supposedly like to see less of include Tom Cruise, Anna Nicole Smith and both Britney Spears and her husband Kevin Federline.

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"It's a challenge because celebrity in many ways is defined by how much exposure you get," explains Robert Thompson, the founding director of the Center for the Study of Popular Television at Syracuse University. "But the perfect equation is to get as much exposure as you possibly can right up to the moment when it gets to be too much, and then you want to pull back."

Simpson may be a classic case in point. Once a would-be Britney, Simpson had made little impact in the celebrity culture until 2003, when the MTV cameras arrived at her house. Then a three-season reality TV stint on the cable network's *Newlyweds*, made her--and to a lesser degree her husband, Nick Lachey--household names.

But now that the show, and her marriage, are over, Simpson is best known as a tabloid star--better known for who she is, not what she does. She's had a modestly successful recording career--her newest album is the fifth she has recorded for Sony BMG, the joint venture between Sony and Bertelsmann A.G.--but she can't draw much of a crowd in concert. And while her first film--last year's remake of *The Dukes of Hazzard*--drew a reasonable \$80 million at theaters, it's unclear that she'll ever be able to play anyone other than Jessica Simpson. So how long can fame itself keep you famous?

"To date, [MTV's] *Newlyweds* is her magnum opus," says Thompson. "Jessica Simpson is probably not going to be one of these stars that continues to be a star from generation to generation."

Deadpan media image consultant Michael Sands: "I don't think she's a Meryl Streep. I think her cache is that she's more popular in the tabloids."

Then again, some stars only exist because of media ubiquity, notes *Star* magazine's Bonnie Fuller, American Media's chief editorial director.

"For somebody who is less talented, it can often give them a career that they wouldn't have had at all," she says. "It may not last for that long, but it does give them something for a while."

OK, say Simpson wants to extend her career lifespan. Any advice?

"People have short memories and short attention spans, which is sort of a byproduct of all of this," says publicist Ken Sunshine. "But it is certainly more difficult if you're overexposed on an obvious level. It's very difficult to then be taken seriously and judged on your art form as opposed to your celebrity."

Publicist Lizzie Grubman's advice for Simpson: "All she needs is some sort of success--a hit movie, a hit TV show or a hit single--for her to rebound in a very positive way."

Thompson adds, "The best advice is easy to give and very difficult to follow, which is you've got to keep churning out work that people want to consume. In the end, you can only maintain long-term celebrity if in fact you're good at doing what you do."

Even if it is grabbing headlines.

[In Pictures: The Most Overexposed Celebrities](#)