One of the most noticeable aspects of consumer magazine covers – and indeed consumer media in general – is that they are sites in which celebrities are both constructed as such and made widely visible. Celebrities are both subjects and objects. Each celebrity is of course an individual human being who has achieved wide public recognition for a particular reason, such as exceptional sporting or creative talent. But celebrities are also immaterial commodities: their names and reputations are marketable and profitable objects to which a great deal of value (both economic and cultural) is attached. This chapter takes as its starting point an acknowledgement of the importance of celebrity to consumer culture. The question that it asks about magazine covers in particular is: what is it about the material characteristics of this media form that make it such a prominent site for the appearance of celebrity? And what can we learn about consumerist mediation in general from the material processes which construct the hyperreal world of celebrity on magazine covers? The argument made here is that the material elements of full-colour printing, smooth shiny paper and airbrushing combine to produce a core material dynamic of consumerist discourses which can be summarized as *glossiness*. The celebrity is but one, albeit a particularly powerful and common, media site in which glossiness manifests.

To develop this argument, this chapter is organized as follows. The first section defines celebrity in relation to the literature, and provides an account of the ways in which celebrity imagery appears on consumer magazine covers, with a focus on what is termed ‘hyperreal portraiture’. The second section provides an account of the material processes that construct the magazine cover as a full-colour glossy artefact and discusses the ‘perfection’ of celebrity portraits in relation to those processes. The final section brings together the two preceding
sections in order to develop a synthetic argument about celebrity as the personification of gloss, and glossiness in turn as a key mediator of hyperreal consumerism.

**Celebrities on the magazine cover**

Celebrities are people who are ‘well-known for being well-known’ and who become present in the public eye through presence in the media (Giles, 2000: 5). Some celebrities’ fame is established in the media due to success in the creative industries, sport or other areas in the public view, but some achieve fame purely due to appearing in the media. ‘Ordinary social life becomes glamorous by virtue of being mediated’ (Couldry, 2001: 171). With the rise of reality TV, ‘normal’ people are celebritized through shows like *Big Brother*: Jade Goody was an unremarkable ordinary Londoner with a ‘kebab-belly’ and a ‘criminal dad’ before she got onto TV and became ‘the first reality-TV millionairess’ in the UK (Johnson, 2004: 54). Such celebritized ordinary people who become famous overnight are ‘celetoids’, that is, ‘a media-generated, compressed, concentrated form of attributed celebrity’ (Rojek, 2001: 18), which is typically fleeting. One day a celetoid might be all over the media, the next they are forgotten. Celebrities, on the other hand, are consistently well-known, and their images function as intertextual signs ‘informed by the circulation of significant information about the celebrity in newspapers, magazines, interview programs, fanzines, rumours, and so on’ (Marshall, 1997: 58). The presence of celebrities on magazine covers is an important manifestation of a culture of fame that plays out in consumer media and public space more broadly.

Celebrity faces and names are a kind of currency that consumer magazines trade upon, relying on their fame and desirability (proven through other media such as films, music or television series) to buoy sales. Consumer magazine publishers and celebrities are enmeshed in a close symbiotic relationship. Each needs the other to sell – the former, magazine commodities featuring the face of the celebrity, the latter, any cultural or consumer products (films, pop songs, perfumes) with which they are associated. Magazines play an important role in constructing celebrity status and image, and images of celebrity play an important role in the magazine economy: ‘editors track the success of each issue by checking sales figures produced by the chosen celebrity’ featured on the cover (Turner et al., 2000: 137). Celebrities are subject to the whims of fashion, and different celebrity faces will sell magazines at different times. For example, there was a time when ‘you only had