

### **Case Study: Tara Palmer Tomkinson and the 'It' Girls**

Tara Palmer Tomkinson has become one of the most well-known British celebrities over the last ten years. At the age of 20, she was photographed for *Tatler* magazine as the original 'It' Girl. This term was coined in popular culture to refer to young women from the upper classes who were 'famous for being famous', having insufficient talent or achievements to warrant the amount of attention they received in the public eye. Tara grew up in a wealthy family who owned a 1200 acre farm estate, and boarded at a high status public school. She was discovered by the mass media whilst pursuing a modelling career and the resultant publicity led her into a new lifestyle of celebrity. Tara was presented as a 'surrogate sister' of Princes William and Harry, dated a wealthy restaurateur and was invited to write a column for *The Sunday Times* about her activities with the 'jet-set' society. After suffering from addictions to alcohol and other drugs, she made a come-back in the world of fashion and was recently invited to take part in the reality TV show, *I'm a Celebrity – Get Me Out of Here!*.

#### **Questions:**

1. Would you say that Tara Palmer Tomkinson was a member of the British upper class?
2. How do you think Tara's family background and 'status situation' have affected her life chances?
3. In the mass media's construction of the 'It' Girl, what kinds of cultural values and qualities are presented as being desirable?
4. How much power do you think the 'It' Girls have in relation to other kinds of wealthy, upper class people?
5. To what extent does the revering of these celebrities suggest we live in an open, meritocratic society?