

(S4,E4) Gwyneth Paltrow, Bone Broth & Rich People in Ski Accidents

Sometimes for these episodes I have a whole thing planned, and then something happens and I spend 15 hours in an internet rabbit hole reading about all of the various ins and outs of a specific thing. So, this episode started off being about romance and cannibalism in cinema, but it's been side-tracked by the lives of the wealthy. Eat the rich, I guess? See what I did there? I'm funny.

Anyway, Gwyneth Paltrow has been all over my social media timelines for like a solid month now. At first it was lifestyle recommendation-related outrage, which has been so regular since Gwyneth launched her brand Goop in 2008 that I can pretty effectively dodge it if I decide I can't deal with being told to only eat kale and shove crystals up myself. But then I saw a picture of Gwyneth in court looking like a wealthy woman on trial for murder and realised I had no idea what was going on. So, we're finding out together.

I'm Alex – this is Pop Culture Boner, the podcast edition, and today I'm thinking about the Gwyneth Paltrow Incident.

Ok look, normally when I do this podcast, I really try my best to make it say something. I think pop culture is usually saying something about us whether we want it to or not. So even if I'm thinking about something silly and

niche, like Juggalos or action movie fight choreography, I try to make sure it has a point of view about the world. And right now, I can't tell you if that's what's going to happen with this episode. Because sometimes, with the sheer amount of information that's available right now, I just get a vague sense that Something Is Happening through a person passive-aggressively posting about it. I literally forgot the state election was on until the night before when someone posted a takedown of someone in a fringe party and I thought, "Shit... who's running again?"

The point is, I've mostly managed to optimise my social algorithms to be either exactly the content I like, or a soul-grindingly apocalyptic vision of a world in decline. And even then, frankly, Elon Musk's version of Twitter has completely fucked up the way I filter through news, so I'm mostly getting the worst of the worst, nothing at all, or some weird punch through of indeterminate origin about like... the Barbie movie casting. It's great for my mental health. No follow up questions.

Anyway, this is what happened with Gwyneth Paltrow. Some Goop based stuff she said on a podcast was one of the weird punch-through things. I had to endure weeks of discourse about

bone broth and detoxing and 2000s diet culture. So when it started to die down I breathed a sigh of relief and prepared to not hear about Gwyneth for another 3 years or so, until she came out with a \$15,000 rose quartz cranial implant that killed you the second you had thoughts of carbohydrates or something. Instead, mere days later, an image of Gwyneth in a courtroom wearing a chunky white knit and glasses with minimal makeup came up in my feed with the caption "No one has ever looked more on trial for murder at a ski resort". And I thought, "wait... was the bone broth-related discourse simply a decoy to distract from the fact that Gwyneth Paltrow murdered a man on a ski field?" And look maybe. I don't know.

So, while I can't promise that this episode will have anything particularly intelligent to say, I can promise that it will get to the bottom of this whole ski trial thing and the sudden resurgence of Gwyneth Paltrow into our social media timelines and collective consciousness. You're coming with me bucko. We're going to solve this, whether you like it or not.

Ok so look, you probably know who Gwyneth Paltrow is, but let's start with some background anyway because it's important to remind ourselves how we got here. Gwyneth Kate Paltrow Falchuk was born September 27, 1972. Her parents are actress Blythe Danner, and TV producer Bruce Paltrow. Steven Spielberg is her godfather. As far as nepotism babies go, she was fairly inoffensive, working her way through some smaller parts in big films before taking the titular role in the 1996 adaptation of Emma. She fully hit her stride in 1998, starring in five high-profile releases that year which resulted

in her eventually winning an Oscar for Shakespeare in Love in 1999. In the early 2000s, she took some time off to raise her kids with Coldplay singer Chris Martin, then had a string of bombs, and her career faltered a little. And I think it's this period of faltering, limited box office success and new motherhood that laid the groundwork for what we now know to be the Gwyneth Paltrow-ness of it all. In 2008, she launched her lifestyle newsletter and website Goop – so named for her initials (GP) and the fact that someone told her successful digital companies usually have multiple O's in the name. The site's slogan is 'Nourish the inner aspect', which is a foreshadowing of its eventual schtick. Early tips included things like "police your thoughts" and "avoid white foods", as well as a kabbalah routine for family unity and tips of detoxifying your body. I've talked before in my episode on Paris Hilton in season 2 about the fact that the 2000s were not kind to female stars, and it was pretty fashionable to get a bit of a hate train going on any woman with any form of public profile. The New York Times, while writing scathingly about the existence of Goop as a venture, also noted that there was an intense wave of criticism around the site which was overshadowing the rest of Gwyneth's career. For her part, Gwyneth said at the time "People get a hit of energy when they are negative about something. And they do not understand that they do not have a happy life."

Which is exactly the sort of thing people love to be told by rich folks, and so of course the criticism continued. As it turns out, at least some of the criticism was kind of justified. Goop has been hit with

a bunch of consumer affairs lawsuits regarding unsubstantiated claims being made about the products sold on the website. This includes \$145,000 for claims that a \$66 insertable jade egg can balance your hormones and regulate your period. Even the controversies that didn't end up with a price tag attached to them were some combination of comically horrific and actively dangerous. Take for example, the promotion of a coffee enema, which at a minimum was a \$135 for zero benefit, and at worst resurfaced a readily debunked cancer treatment that killed two patients as a luxury item. Eventually, reports of pseudoscientific bs-ing were coming so thick and fast that in 2018 the site had to put up disclaimers on their articles as either being "Supported by science" or "For your enjoyment".

Additionally, and perhaps most egregiously, Goop's regular conferences regularly platform conspiracy weirdos, vaccine sceptics and affluent grifters. Like Kelly Brogan, a "holistic psychiatrist" who doesn't believe that HIV is real, thinks that COVID-19 related deaths and illnesses are caused by being scared of COVID-19 and was identified as one of the 12 accounts that make up 65% of the vaccine misinformation on the internet. Oh, and she also believes that the coffee enemas will treat your depression. So, you know... next time you're feeling like your mental illness is catching up with you, try simply not being mentally ill, by shoving an entire coffee directly up your ass. For your enjoyment, obviously. Gotta be careful with those labels.

Anyway, I give you this background, because it brings us to a month ago where I, a person who had not thought

about Gwyneth Paltrow in like 3 years, was suddenly being bombarded with Paltrow content. In early March, she appeared on a podcast called The Art of Being Well with Dr. Will Cole. Now, Will Cole, as far as I can tell, is not actually a doctor. He is an Institution of Functional Medicine Certified Practitioner, and a Chiropractor. Being a chiropractor means he can technically call himself 'doctor' as a title. But he's not like... a medical doctor. That's not important to this story necessarily. And no shade to chiropractors – I love my chiropractor. But she's not a medical doctor and neither is Will Cole. It's just fun to note the layers of grift here. Anyway, in the episode, Gwyneth discusses her diet which includes fasting until midday before a hearty cup of bone broth for lunch. She says, ""I usually eat something (at) about 12, and in the morning I'll have some things that won't spike my blood sugar – that's why I like coffee. But I really like soup for lunch: I have bone broth for lunch a lot of the days."

Now this, perhaps understandably, sparked a fair bit of backlash from people, since it's essentially describing a very, very restrictive diet that many people could readily identify as disordered eating. Most people were horrified, though there were a small contingent who praised her for being transparent on how she maintains her figure. Which notably, was not the point of the episode. Either way, Gwyneth came out a few days later and said that this was intended as a "a transparent look at a conversation between me and my doctor" to show how she deals with the effects of long COVID. Suffice to say, this did not actually help her case since many people correctly

identified that starvation is generally not considered good for healing.

She's really into the term "inflammation" to describe what's been happening with her body following her initial COVID infection, and she says that she eats this way some days to try and "calm the system down". Now, much like the man Gwyneth is conversing in this podcast episode, I'm not a doctor. But I am a pop culture observer, and this line of thinking tracks pretty accurately for Gwyneth, who has been trying to "detox" her system and calm inflammation every which way since Goop launched in 2008. I simply do not have the time or wherewithal to go into the flawed logic of perpetual detox. The podcast Maintenance Phase has some great episodes that talk about detoxing and cleanses, if you want more info in that space, I'll link them in the notes. Anyway, all of this smacked of classic Goop rage-bait, we all fell for it, and there was two full weeks of nothing but Gwyneth discourse on the timeline.

This included impassioned take downs of bone broth as a meal and starvation as a health practice, impassioned defences of Gwyneth's right to hoe into her broth without days of commentary, and even more impassioned take downs of the long reaching arm of diet culture. It was all a lot, but I think the main thing I took from it is that, especially in the aftermath COVID-19's global spread, the commentariat are a lot less accommodating of pseudoscientific hand-waving over potentially harmful rhetoric than they have been.

If I'm being optimistic, I'd say having hundreds of thousands of people die, and then watching a portion of the chunk

left behind become viciously invested in a total abandonment of reality has made people ever-so-slightly more scientifically or medically literate. At least when it comes to COVID-19 related stuff. Perhaps Gwyneth could have gotten away with this one, as she has at least twice a year for the last 15 years Goop has been running, if she hadn't insisted she was treating her long COVID.

So, I think what comes next is some combination of algorithmic fluke and classic American love of courtroom spectacle. See, as it turns out, in between scarfing down bone broth and coffee, Gwyneth had managed to get herself into a spot of bother on a ski slope, and was currently facing off a 70-something year old optometrist in a Utah courtroom. And for some reason she was doing so in a chunky white knit sweater that screamed "Why your honour I simply could not have killed that man. I was at the lodge, you see? Why yes, my maid can corroborate my story, why do you ask?"

So, we all got about a 15 minute break from Gwyneth before suddenly, having been fed nothing but Gwyneth content for two weeks straight, the algorithm sensed prominent cheekbones and shapely jaw in amongst the data and starting pushing it toward the surface. And Americans... the world really, but Americans truly, madly, deeply love a courtroom drama. So people kept sharing and commenting, until we were once again locked into a two week cycle of only seeing Gwyneth's weird little rich woman lifestyle again. And if you, like me, hadn't really been paying attention, you might have thought "Wait, what did she actually kill a guy? Is she just out and walking around after

she killed a guy? That seems unlikely and yet we know the justice system is fatally flawed and favours the rich. Who's to say?"

So, in 2016, Gwyneth and her then-new husband, writer and producer Brian Falchuk, booked a ski trip to help blend their two families. They paid over \$9,000 for private ski lessons. Seems weird to me to be as rich as Paltrow is and not already know how to ski. Anyway. At some point during the session, Paltrow was accused of careening into the back of Terry Sanderson, a retired 76-year-old optometrist, causing him to fall. Paltrow was then accused of speeding off down the slope, without stopping to check if Sanderson was ok, leaving him with a concussion and life-changing injuries which have fundamentally altered who he is as a person. Sanderson's lawyers called in his daughters to detail the increasingly erratic behaviour from their father. Their claim was that Gwyneth's reckless hit and run ruined not only their dad's life, but their relationship with him. Initially, Sanderson filed a civil suit for \$3.1 million in damages, which was dismissed. He then filed a second suit for \$300,000.

Paltrow filed a countersuit, taking a page out of Taylor Swift's book and suing for a symbolic \$1, plus legal fees. In Paltrow's version of events, Sanderson crashed into her, causing her to fall. When asked about the implications of the fall for her, Paltrow said, "Well, I lost half-a-day of skiing". Paltrow's lawyers claimed his erratic behaviour was the result not of the ski incident but of pre-existing conditions accelerated by old age – essentially they accused him of having dementia.

Sanderson's suit, according to her, was the result of someone seeking to exploit her fame and money to his own gain. This was, of course, not helped by the fact that Sanderson sent an email following the collision to his daughters with the subject line "I'm famous".

The trial had a lot of weird highlights – including Sanderson's own lawyer being an unrepentant Paltrow fan girl, who at one point said she bet Gwyneth had a cooler outfit on than every other skier on the slopes that day. Skip to the end, Paltrow was found to not be at fault for the accident. In an absolutely unhinged display of rich white woman fury, after the verdict was read out, Paltrow leant into Sanderson and whispered "I wish you well" on her way out the door. It's all very embarrassing.

Now, normally I wouldn't even bother talking about something like this in a full episode, because wealthy people suing each other over skiing mishaps is the kind of thing that breaks me out in rage hives. But what I found so fascinating about publicity surrounding this trial was not so much the level of cut-through it received on social media, but the fact that it seemed to genuinely act as a redemption arc for Paltrow, literally four days after the ink had dried on the last article written about her promotion of health misinformation and disordered eating. Somehow, people seem to have interpreted this specific event as a "stars, they're just like us" relatable moment from Paltrow.

A lot of the discourse has centred on her wardrobe – every day Gwyneth showed up to court in an array of obviously

expensive but unbranded clothes in neutral and earthy tones. The white knit sweater I've mentioned was paired with a long green wool coat and boots, then there was a simple white shirt with a black cardigan and long black skirt, next came a soft grey loosely fitted suit. There are whole threads on Twitter dedicated to identifying the brands she's wearing on visuals alone – so yes, the coat is probably from The Row and will probably set you back \$5,000 at an absolute minimum, but it's very hard to tell because nothing she's wearing is branded.

Writing for the New York Times, Vanessa Friedman points out that celebrities often struggle to dress for court, because they either signal too much privilege – like Martha Stewart and her Hermes bags – or they go too costume-y in a play for innocence – like Winona Ryder during her shoplifting trial. She argues that Paltrow is using so-called stealth-wealth wardrobe to play to the local crowd, even when she isn't on the stand. She's walking a fine line, as the article points out:

"She can't be too much of an entitled, out-of-touch rich person, and she can't be too woo-woo about "her truth." She can't deny her own profile, but she can't lean into it. She can't risk playing into the many stereotypes that already exist in the public mind about who she is and what her value system may be."

And it seems to have worked. Gwyneth Paltrow, a woman who works hard to be the most unrelatable woman on earth and has rarely made any bones about it, has suddenly captured the hearts of Park City, Utah and the collective internet, simply

by dressing neutrally and projecting a vague apologetic air that everyone in the court has to go through this with her. It's been so effective that I've hardly seen any negative commentary on Paltrow and have instead seen multiple people argue for the redemption of Paltrow in a similar vein to other much-maligned female stars of the 2000s. Which is exactly the opposite of what was happening a mere week prior.

Like I said up top, I usually try to have a point to these episodes. I don't know if there is one here, other than to illustrate the fact that the court of public opinion turns on a dime depending on which shiny object has been dangled in front of it. And if we know that's the case, maybe we can use that to our advantage for other, more important things than the skiing habits of rich people. Oh, that and like... don't do coffee enemas. They're bad for you.

Well, that was a quick Paltrow episode. The layers of disappointment I felt when I discovered that she wasn't actually on trial for murder on the bunny slopes of Utah was palpable. One can only dream. Anyway, if you have any thoughts on which crystals would pair appropriately my cream alpaca coat for maximum health and wealth, talk to me about it next time you see me at the pub! Peace!



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