

NOTE:

This is a very interesting talk given by Kim Allen which originally contained many images of Kate Middleton and Kim Kardashian and compared representations of maternity in both traditional and social media. Unfortunately, due to copyright law we have had to exclude the images. We recommend that before watching the presentation, you search on the following "Kate Middleton pregnant newspaper and magazine photos" and "Kim Kardashian pregnant newspaper and magazine photos". This should give you an impression of the different ways in which these 2 women are represented in the media which underpins some of the content of Kim's talk. Please see the link to the project blog where these issues are discussed in more detail <http://www.celebyouth.org/from-kardashian-e-bile-to-will-smith-fever-case-study-data-collection-and-a-sociologist-on-the-move/>

'DISGUSTING CELEBRITIES' - CELEBRITY MOTHERHOOD AND THE CULTURAL POLITICS OF AUSTERITY

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With Heather Mendick and Laura Harvey (Brunel)

Lancaster University, 5th February 2014



CelebYouth.org



THE GENDERING OF AUSTERITY

‘We’re all in this together’ (George Osborne, 2009)

‘She-cession’ (European Women’s Lobby, 2012)

Austerity packages ‘spell a tipping point for women’s equality’
(Fawcett, 2012)

‘The discourse of cuts and austerity is a **neo-liberal shock doctrine** providing an excuse for further appropriation of social resources by the rich... The language of austerity merely constitutes an **excuse to further concentrate power** and wealth in a few private hands’ (Levitas , 2012: 322).

AUSTERITY AND A A DISCURSIVE AND DISCIPLINARY FIELD

Austerity as not just an economic programme of reform but a **discursive and disciplinary field** with distinct subject positions, aesthetics, sensibilities and discursive repertoires (Bramall, 2013)

A 'cultural object... and **subject-making discourse**' (Jensen and Tyler 2013)

'Strivers vs. Skivers'

AUSTERITY AND THE CULTURAL REALM

Neoliberal austerity values have ‘extended into the cultural arena where these discourses are deployed to marshal, harness and legitimise certain kinds of conduct and attitudes and to marginalise others in the service of sustaining the neoliberal project’ (Biressi and Nunn, 2013: 12).

Television, morality and the ‘grammar of conduct’ (Wood & Skeggs, 2004: 206)

AUSTERITY'S 'MATERNAL FEMININE'

'The frugal 'home front' austerity housewife, controller of the family ration book, **as a central figure in the work of austerity** is regarded as useful and appropriate. These practices can be worked up as **ideal responses** to austerity. Significantly these are practices which are understood to be located in home, in the **sphere of domesticity**. Through the reiterated association of these practices with qualities conventionally associated with femininity, this work gets coded as work for women... **Austerity discourses serve to position austere femininity as a privileged subjectivity in the contemporary context'** (Bramall, 2013:18)

'In the midst of these contexts—comprising a collective social failure that makes it very hard to combine work and childcare in equitable and supportive fashion—there has been a fetishization of the maternal. This fixation has taken a number of forms [including] a reinvigorated romanticization of the housewife... at exactly the same time as neoliberal policies have sought to cut back on and avoid providing state daycare provision...The idealization of motherhood works to obscure the effects of these policies as it renders looking after children a thoroughly private issue'

(Littler, 2013: 232).

A distinctly middle-class maternity is perfectly in sync with neoliberalism's regressive welfare reform.

THE 'BENEFITS MUM' : AUSTERITY'S OTHER

'This model of maternal citizenship is counter-posed ... by an abject maternal figure – typically a single mother with several children fathered by different men, reliant on benefits, living in a council house, and with an appearance which suggests lack of attention to body image, all of which within today's moral universe imply fecklessness, promiscuity and inadequate parenting' (McRobbie 2013: 122)

THE 'DEBATING CHAMBER' OF CELEBRITY MOTHERHOOD

Celebrity culture as a site within which broader anxieties and perceived crises around family, welfare, maternity and femininity within austerity crystallise

A key 'debating chamber' for maternal transformations and ideological battles (McRobbie 2013)

- What do these figures of mediated celebrity maternity indicate about contemporary ideas of femininity and parenting?
- How are they 'actively used within a particular social context to shape ideas about what a mother's role is and should be?

DISGUSTING CELEBRITIES AND THE THEATRE OF NEOLIBERALISM

Social abjection, disgust and figurative methodology (Tyler, 2013)

“These ideological conductors are **symbolic and material scapegoats**, the mediating agencies through which the social decomposition effected by market deregulation and welfare retrenchment are legitimated. Through these figures, existing historical beliefs and prejudices about particular populations coalesce with **the current fears and anxieties** of precarious populations’ (2013: 73)

Disgust: an ‘aversive emotion’ experienced physically but ‘saturated with socially stigmatizing meanings and values’ (Ngai 2005) and ‘histories of articulation’ (Ahmed 2004) which bind signs of disgust to objects.

Condensed figures of disgust as ‘consensus apparatus’

THE STUDY: 'CELEBRITY CULTURE AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S CLASSED AND GENDERED ASPIRATIONS'

With Heather Mendick and Laura Harvey (Brunel)

Group and individual interviews with young people (14-17 years) about their aspirations and engagement with celebrity

Textual analysis of 12 celebrity case studies (drawn from young people's talk)

Textual analysis of media coverage of each over 6 months across key outlets including public and media discussion about them

Sources include: key texts / outputs (e.g. the celebrity's films, biographies, music); 'traditional' press (e.g. national papers) and social media (e.g. Twitter; YouTube)



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CELEBRITY MATERNITY

3 of the 12 case study celebrities – Kate Middleton, Kim Kardashian and Katie Price – were pregnant in the space of our data collection period

Intrigued by connections between the media representations, public discussion and young people's talk about these celebrities and broader debates around motherhood under austerity

THRIFTY HOUSEWIVES AND CELEBRITY WELFARE QUEENS: LABOUR, MERIT AND CONSUMPTION

Dave: 'celebrities like Kim Kardashian are at the bottom of the celebrity pit'.

Naomi: 'I just think that there's people who work really hard to become someone ... say like a really famous actress she's not just become famous she's had to work to be, not just, it's not just about the famous part, but she's had to work to be known that she's good at something, or him. Whereas they are just famous for being who they are really. Being a Kardashian'.

‘Here's to the kids who wonder why Kim Kardashian is famous.’

‘You know Kim Kardashian is bad when you sort of miss Paris Hilton’

‘Everybody wants to be famous and not work for it, Sorry but pulling a kim kardashian is hard now, easy in 2007’

‘I like how on my birthday i get presents and money, i get paid for being born, i get paid for living its like being Kim Kardashian for a day’



Sky TV, Special Brew, Superkings...those benefit cuts in full

By RICHARD LITTLEJOHN
UPDATED: 07:53, 3 February 2012

‘Are you not struck by the number of people on them who manage to combine complaining about welfare reform with being able to afford to buy copious amounts of cigarettes, have lots of tattoos, and watch Sky TV on the obligatory widescreen television?’ (Conservative backbencher Philip Davies , [The Mirror, 2013](#)).

EXCLUSIVE: Lord and Lady of the Manor! Kanye West and Kim Kardashian continue their spending splurge as they kit out Bel Air mansion with SIX £125k beds

By LOUISE SAUNDERS

'The Duchess flaunted her growing baby bump in the affordable maternity dress she's so practical and stylish!... we think it's so cool that she sported such an affordable find! The Duchess really is so down-to-earth' ([Hollywood Life](#))

'[Kate Middleton](#) and [Prince William](#) are said to be planning a modest nursery for their royal baby...."They have a small nursery prepped," a source told *US Weekly*. "But it's humble. Kate felt it wasn't worth the money to go all-out."
([Hello Magazine](#))

'The Royal Family are the most frugal. They're the poster boys and girls for 'make do and mend' (Kirstie Alsop, *This Morning*, 23 July 2013).

Duchess Of Cambridge 'Preparing Humble Nursery' For Royal Baby

Kate Middleton has been frugal when it comes to designing home for her child

'Kate Middleton already has the crown jewels on lock, but gurl is committed to going the extra mile to make her man happy ...even when she's pregnant! According to royal sources, Kate has been taking cooking lessons from new housekeeper'



The image is a screenshot of the Mirror News website. At the top left, the 'Mirror' logo is in white on a red background, followed by 'NEWS' in large black letters. To the right of the logo is the tagline 'Real news, real entertainment ... in real time' with a megaphone icon. In the top right corner, there is a link that says 'How we use cookies'. Below the logo and tagline is a navigation menu with buttons for 'FRONT PAGE', 'NEWS' (which is highlighted in red), 'SPORT', '3AM', 'TV', 'LIFESTYLE', 'MONEY', 'PLAY', and 'OPINION'. To the right of the navigation menu is a search bar with the word 'Search' and a magnifying glass icon. Below the navigation menu, there is a breadcrumb trail: 'M · News · UK News · Kate Middleton pregnant'. The main headline is in large, bold black text: 'Kate Middleton urged to "get her Royal orbs out" to help encourage women to breastfeed their babies'.

'BAD MOTHERS': HYPER SEXUALITY, INTERRACIAL MIXING AND EASY FERTILITY

Kim Kardashian is pregnant? Can't wait for the E! Special. Maybe this time they'll actually shove a camera up the vagina.

Kim Kardashian's baby will be the whitest person to ever see her vagina.

If her name is Kim Kardashian. She prefers the black D.

When Kim Kardashian's kids finds her sextape, they're going to be like "damn mommy, that ain't daddy...."



Why the middle class aren't breeding any more: It's a profound social shift no one talks about - but it could transform the face of Britain

“The bearing and raising of children has largely become the province of the lower classes. It’s a kind of reverse Darwinism where the traditional markers of success make one less likely to reproduce.” (Daily Mail, May 2013)

“Lots of hair color, fake tanning, tight clothes and high heels.... does this girl know anything about child development and how to be a good mother? She's a total embarrassment to women everywhere. Still married to another man and not divorced. And not married to the baby's daddy. How proud she must be. Total train wreck. Women should pass a basic IQ test before they are allowed to get pregnant.” (Reader comment)

EXCESSIVE BODIES AND UNRESPECTABLE FEMININITIES: THE CASE OF KIM KARDASHIAN'S SWOLLEN FEET

It is not uncommon for Kate Middleton to have impeccable taste in clothes. But her fashion choices have bumped up a notch since becoming pregnant. The Duchess of Cambridge is halfway through her pregnancy, and it is still hard to see a bump. No tight clothes for her! Kim Kardashian, are you listening? The prince's wife is a lesson to pregnant women everywhere

Two pregnant women, two very different approaches to pregnancy. Whilst one - Kate Middleton - retains her usual, beautiful poise and decorum the other - Kim Kardashian - hasn't.

*‘In this realm [of popular culture], the benchmarks and boundaries of female success are established; it is here that new norms of failure symbolised in the abject body of the ‘single mother’ and in the bodies of her untidy children or ‘brood’ are to be found. In this visual field **vulnerability and dependency are graphically equated with personal carelessness, with being overweight, and badly dressed,** and these in turn become ‘performance indicators’ signaling inadequate life planning, and what Wendy Brown calls ‘mismanaged lives’ (McRobbie, 2013, 131)*

REVOLTING AESTHETICS, POLITICS AND CELEBRITY MATERNITY

“Theoretical and creative work on the maternal is central to the future of radical feminist politics: a site of knowledge which can really challenge predominant understandings of what a subject is and can be. ‘Maternal labour’ has the potential to disrupt classic economic, political and sociological understandings of work, capital, reproduction and exchange. Indeed thinking with, and from, the maternal generates alternatives to neoliberal discourses of reflexive individualism which have stultified political resistance to global capitalism”

(Tyler, 2008: Why the Maternal Now?)