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Celebrity Studies

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1. REALITY TELEVISION AND CELEBRITY

1.1. REALITY TELEVISION

"Reality television" (RTV), though appearing in the 20th century, has grown dramatically in the 21st century. "With cheap to produce, easily replicable, and globally exportable formats, reality programming – from gamedocs to talent searches to docu-soaps – quickly proliferated across cable and broadcast television in ways that reshaped the television landscape" (Meyers and Leppert 2018 p415). Among its cultural impacts is upon "celebrity". It has "expanded and reconfigured contemporary celebrity culture, in part by offering up a new range of 'ordinary' people for celebrification" (Meyers and Leppert 2018 p415).

Andrejevic (2002) observed that "the camera's 'perpetual surveillance' of the daily lives of a reality programme's participants acts as 'the antidote to artificial interactions', allowing audiences to believe that despite any control 'producers have in the editing process', reality TV ultimately presents 'real' people who are just 'being themselves'" (Meyers and Leppert 2018 p415). This has created "a distinct form of 'ordinary celebrity' whose fame is not based on a claim to talent, but on the performance of the private self" (Meyers and Leppert 2018 p415) [1]. This is contrary to the "traditional" conceptions of stardom with the "more glamorous and extraordinary performing self" (p415) (but an ordinary and mostly hidden private self) (Meyers and Leppert 2018) [2].

Holmes (2004) was not convinced by the "authenticity as celebrity" idea, but rather RTV allows "a particularly classed, raced and gendered self" performance "as a viable path to fame" (Meyers and Leppert 2018 p416). RTV or "celebreality" has "also become a vehicle for existing

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[1] Key to the performance of the "authentic self" on RTV is "overwrought emotions" (or what Arcy (2018) called the "digital money shot"). More widely, I would suggest a "TV of the emotions" with "crying documentaries" (eg: medical situations and relatives crying), "shouting TV" (eg: "discussion" programmes), and anxiety- or fear-provoking fiction (eg: storyline of a child kidnapped or killed).

[2] More widely, there is a desire for authenticity, or "real" or "true" or "pure" in life. This can be seen from "extreme marathons" to "pure" forms of religious behaviour or ideology. The embracing of authenticity is in part a reaction to the slick imaging of traditional stars.

- and often fading - traditional celebrities to
(re)construct and (re)circulate their images in ways that
obscure any prior talent-based claims to fame in favour
of the intimacy of ordinariness" (Meyers and Leppert 2018
p416).

Most of RTV celebrity fits Rojek's (2001) concept of
"celetoid" - individuals "who command media attention one
day and are forgotten the next" (quoted in Meyers and
Leppert 2018). There are exceptions (eg: Kim Kardashian;
Jade Goody) who "have parlayed 'just being themselves'
into a longer lasting and farther-reaching fame" (Meyers
and Leppert 2018 p419) [3] [4].

Linked to celebrity is the ability to monetise that
fame (or now, the private self) [5]. "Reality celebrities
that move beyond mere celetoid status... typically do so
through the successful articulation of the ordinary self
to the lifestyle and cultural industries" (Meyers and
Leppert 2018 p419).

The claim of authenticity is seen as ringing hollow
in the clash between "performer" and the producer of such
programmes. Johnston (2018) quoted the example of
transgender teen Jazz Jennings (in 'I Am Jazz' produced
by "TLC"). The "brand Jennings created for herself, based
on a claim to authenticity, clashes with TLC's branding
strategy, which inscribes Jennings within the nuclear
family in an effort to normalise trans identity and a
queer family..." (Meyers and Leppert 2018 p421).

1.2. "CELEBRITY BASHING"

"Celebrity stories" have existed since the late 19th
century, and today are an established part of media
culture (Ouvrein et al 2017). These stories have been
mostly neutral to positive, but negative ones have become
increasingly commonplace (Ouvrein et al 2017). This was
called "celebrity bashing" by Johansson (2006), who
referred to how "newspapers are picking on celebrities or
displaying them making a fool of themselves" (quoted in
Ouvrein et al 2017).

"Celebrity bashing" is where celebrities are the
target of online aggression, or more formally defined as

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[3] I would use the term "celebrity capital" to describe an individual's "ownership" of something to make
them famous in RTV, including a willingness to expose their "dreadful" childhood experiences, to do
"extreme behaviours", or to make a fool of themselves.

[4] Such individuals could be called "professional human beings" to describe living their life in public.

[5] Lagerwey (2018) referred to an individual who does not monetise their fame as "an amateur
celebrity".

"all kinds of online attacking and abuse of celebrities
by journalists and the audience" (Ouvrein et al 2019b
quoted in Ouvrein et al 2021) (appendix 1A) [6] [7]. A few
studies have looked at the perpetrators, and bystanders,
but little on the victims (Ouvrein et al 2021).

Ouvrein et al (2017) investigated the perceptions of
celebrity bashing/critiquing via focus groups of female
13-15 year-olds in Belgium. Four cases were used to aid
the discussion (eg: Cher Lloyd on "X Factor UK" and
online reactions; a "Twitter fight" between Rihanna and a
US TV host).
     The participants tended to disapprove of the
negative comments about the celebrities, but "they were
remarkably fast in judging and blaming the celebrity for
the critical online comments. In the case of Cher Lloyd,
a young singing star overwhelmed by critical online
reader comments after she accepted some fans as her
friends online, the girls concluded that she was partly
responsible for her own suffering: 'It's a bit her own
fault. If she didn't sing or if she didn't admit or
accept those people online, nothing would have happened'
(Focus Group 11)" (Ouvrein et al 2017 p468).
     This "seemed to indicate some form of
'schadenfreude', whereby people enjoy reading about
celebrities' misfortunes because it gives them a better
feeling about themselves" (Ouvrein et al 2017 p471).
     Ouvrein et al (2017) continued: "the girls were
convinced that celebrities should be able to deal with
these comments because being famous was, according to the
respondents, inevitably associated with 'hate messages'.
Indeed, one girl did not feel much sympathy for Cher
Lloyd's experiences and instead referred to the huge
number of children who get bullied but never gain the
opportunity to tell their story" (pp468-469).
     The participants did not equate celebrity bashing
with cyberbullying - "none of the celebrity-critiquing
examples fits into the category of bullying, it was 'just
an expression of your opinion' and 'everyone has the
right to express this opinion', whereas bullying referred
to more extreme behaviours. In two groups, the girls also
referred to the 'distance' element, and more specifically
to the fact that they do not know the celebrity's

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[6] "Graefer (2014) included "the unflattering paparazzi shots of celebrities and the further mocking of
them, either through written comments or through image manipulation" (quoted in Ouvrein et al 2017).
The terms "non-constructive criticism" or "badmouthing" have also used (Ouvrein et al 2017).
[7] Ouvrein et al (2017) stated that "given the lack of clear objective criteria to categorise the seriousness
of negative online comments, the term 'celebrity critiquing' will be used as a collective term here for
all types of negative comments targeted at celebrities" (p462).

character and his or her reactions to the comments, when explaining why these examples should not be categorised as cyberbullying" (Ouvrein et al 2017 p470).

Ouvrein et al (2019a) analysed public comments by famous pop and Hollywood celebrities about the experience of celebrity bashing, while Ouvrein et al (2021) provided first-hand data with interviews of eleven RTV stars (and two RTV show "experts"). "Studying this group is especially relevant because content analyses indicated that both journalists and audience members regularly make fun of reality stars on online news sites or even directly insult them via social media... In addition, these celebrities often experience a 'shot of fame' (ie: becoming very famous in a very short period of time)..., meaning that they are not gradually being used to it, and have no professional team of managers to take care of negative online comments" (Ouvrein et al 2021 pp389-390) [8].

This has been called "celebrification" (Rojek 2001) - "the process of the construction of a celebrity as a negotiation between the media, the audience and the celebrity him/herself... The celebrity image that results from this process is an interplay between three types of performances, namely (i) the professional performance of the celebrity in the public world ('the roles'), (ii) the official private performance that is presented in the public world ('the image') and (iii) the performance of the 'real' celebrity in the offline world ('the personality')" (Ouvrein et al 2021 pp391-392). Grindstaff (2009) has talked of "self-service television" where "the production team offers contestants the materials and prompts they need to construct a celebrity persona" (Ouvrein et al 2021 p392). Thus, RTV can be described as "celebrity-making machines" (Wilcox 2010).

Ouvrein et al (2021) recruited their interviewees from RTV in Belgium. Focusing first on the experience of celebrity bashing, these themes emerged from the interviews:

a) The experience of bashing varied in seriousness and quantity. "For some participants, comments were restricted to some criticism about their physical

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[8] RTV creates emotional closeness because of the "'just' ordinary people" effect, and the ever-increasing interactivity offers "a transfer of power and authority to the viewer, as the online comments of the audience will steer others' meanings and interpretations of the programme" (Ouvrein et al 2021 p391). McDougall and Dixon (2009) coined the term "prosumer society" to describe how the Internet 2.0/social media has allowed everyone to play a more active role in the content therein.

appearance or some personality characteristics, whereas others had to restrict their online and offline activities because of the excessive amount of insulting comments" (Ouvrein et al 2021 p396).

b) The impact of the comments also varied between individuals. One male participant, for example, described the feeling of "being killed online over and over again" (p397). A female participant agreed: "I would not do it again, for me personally, it was too intense and too stressful and my whole life was up-side-down, I had no time for no-one, my emotions, physically and mentally, everything was a mess, I felt like I was smothering myself" (p397).

c) The impact was linked to preparation for the experience. Media training from the production team was common, but not mental preparation. Though, a male participant admitted: "You cannot really prepare for that, or I don't know how to prepare for that, or they didn't explain how to prepare for that. I don't really know whether it is possible" (p398).

d) The responsibility for the bashing by the audience was placed on three groups:

i) Production team - eg: "They say you have a voice in the programme. You have that voice, but not in the content. You have a voice at the first level, for instance when your hair is not looking good. Or when you had a moment that was a bit embarrassing, then you can ask them to leave it out, and they will leave it out. But if you say, I don't like being portrayed like that, they will not listen" (male participant; p398).

ii) Journalists - eg: "There are several newspapers that just post tweets on their website as it is news. In that way, it has an even bigger reach (...) For me, this is crossing a line because the newspaper is doing like the opinion of one person on Twitter is so important that the whole Flanders should know it" ("expert"; p399).

iii) Society generally - eg: "It is like those celebrities are no human being anymore, it is a celebrity. You have the people and you have the celebrities, that is so ridiculous. Every famous person you talk with says the same, they have the same feelings" (male participant; p400).

The researchers also drew out information about the coping strategies used by the interviewees. Most important was whether to read the online comments or not. Some deliberately did, but found ways to deal with it. For example, a female participant said: "They don't know who you really are and they only see such a small piece of the whole picture, so who are they to judge? I try to reassure myself in this way" (p401).

Social support was very important.

"Apart from coping on the individual level, participants also reflected on initiatives to prevent online celebrity bashing. Whereas some participants were convinced that there is not much that can be done to prevent celebrity bashing, others reflected on some kinds of interventions" (Ouvrein et al 2021 p401).

There is a parallel between online celebrity bashing and cyberbullying [9], though not all researchers agree. Ouvrein et al (2021) commented: "Previous research indicated that celebrity bashing is perceived as more acceptable and even entertaining compared with cyberbullying among peers... Due to this higher perceived distance, audience members seem to show less empathy and are less able to correctly estimate the potential impact of the behaviour... These attitudes might more easily convince people to start experimenting with online celebrity bashing" (p403).

1.3. APPENDIX 1A - OUVREIN ET AL (2019b)

Ouvrein et al (2019b) investigated celebrity bashing by adolescents and the influence of norms of their behaviour. In total, 1255 13-15 year-olds in Belgium were surveyed about negative online behaviours generally. Celebrity bashing was defined for the participants as "the intentionally insulting, ridiculing, or trashing of celebrities about their personality, their performance, or physical appearance, as well as the threatening or impersonation of celebrities through online channels" (Ouvrein et al 2019b p945).

Items were adapted from the European Cyberbullying Intervention Project Questionnaire (Del Rey et al 2015), and the Lodz Electronic Aggression Questionnaire (LEAPQ) (Pyzalski 2012). These measured the behaviour of celebrity bashing by the respondents.

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[9] Smith et al (2008) defined cyberbullying as "an aggressive, intentional act carried out by a group or individual using electronic forms of contact, repeatedly and over time, against a victim who cannot easily defend him or herself" (quoted in Ouvrein et al 2017).

Questions were also asked about the attitudes and behaviours of peers, parents, and favourite celebrities on the subject:

- "My friends/parents/favourite celebrities wouldn't mind if I insult or ridicule celebrities online".

- "My friends/parents/favourite celebrities would approve it if I insult or ridicule celebrities online".

- "My friends/parents/favourite celebrities insult or ridicule celebrities online".

The attitudes are known as the injunctive norms, and the behaviour as the descriptive norms. "The results revealed that compared with injunctive norms, descriptive norms are better predictors of adolescents' negative online behaviour toward celebrities" (Ouvrein et al 2019b p937). In other words, it was what important others did rather than what they said that has a greater impact on the adolescents' behaviour.

Around 30% of respondents admitted negative online behaviour towards celebrities in the previous six months. The majority of the behaviours were "mild" (eg: sharing a negative post about a celebrity; commenting negatively on an acting or singing performance). Meanwhile, 45% of respondents admitted to negative online behaviours towards a peer. Ouvrein et al (2019b) commented that "the results showed that adolescents' negative online behaviour directed at celebrities was positively correlated with adolescents' negative online behaviour directed at peers and that injunctive and descriptive norms of celebrity bashing of peers, parents, and celebrities are also associated with the probability to participate in online mild and severe negative behaviour directed at peers, establishing a clear link between the two types of negative online behaviours" (p952).

The data were self-reported with no independent verification. The operationalisation and validation of injunctive and descriptive norms could have involved more items (Ouvrein et al 2019b).

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2. CONTEMPORARY STATE OF BEING FAMOUS

Hamad (2018), commenting on Lady Gaga's marketing of her own fragrance in 2012, saw it as an example of fame as "standardisation". This is a Marxist concept that "popular cultural products can serve capitalism most profitably when they are reduced to simple formulae that are replicated and re-introduced to the mass market with slight variation that produces the illusion of differentiation for the consuming audience" (Hamad 2018 p44). More specifically, Horkheimer and Adorno (1947) talked of "pseudo-individuation" in reference to film stars, who are "presented to audiences in terms of what is individual, unique or different about them, but closer scrutiny reveals standardised commonalities from one example to the next, such as in their collective sporting of fashionable (for the time) hairstyles" (Hamad 2018 p44).

Lady Gaga's fragrance was "the latest in what had by then become an extremely long line of celebrity-branded fragrances" (Hamad 2018 p45) (eg: Jennifer Lopez, Beyonce, David Beckham). Hamad (2018) noted that "practice of celebrity has become highly entrepreneurial in the contemporary era. This is in line with the free-market values of late capitalism and neo-liberalism that have dominated economies, cultures and societies in recent decades" (p45).

This is "the contemporary state of being famous" (Redmond and Holmes 2007) as "celebrities spread out their earning potential and capitalise on their fame by establishing footholds in numerous industries" (Barron 2015 quoted in Hamad 2018).

So, "the fact that it is not fame itself that is novel in today's celebrity culture, but rather the forms it takes, the ways in which it manifests and circulates, and the manner and extent of its permeation of media content, platforms and landscapes" (Hamad 2018 p45). Turner (2004) described it thus: "The contemporary celebrity will usually have emerged from the sports or entertainment industries; they will be highly visible through the media; and their private lives will attract greater public interest than their professional lives. Unlike that of, say, public officials, the celebrity's fame does not necessarily depend on the position or achievements that gave them their prominence in the first instance. Rather, once they are established, their fame is likely to have outstripped the claims to prominence developed within that initial location. Indeed, the modern celebrity may claim no special achievements other

than the attraction of public attention..." (quoted in Hamad 2018).

Crucial here is the "pseudo-event" (Boorstin 1962) - "an event planned and staged entirely for the media, which accrues significance through the scale of its media coverage rather than through any more disinterested assessment of its importance" (Turner 2004 quoted in Hamad 2018). Turner et al (2000) adapted this to "human-pseudo-event". Agents, managers, publicists, and public-relations personnel all "play concrete roles in staging and managing" (Hamad 2018 p49) such "human-pseudo-events".

Sometimes, however, there is the "celebrity 'flashpoint'" - "unpredictable eruptive events which suddenly [break] free of this form of management to become 'real' or uncontrolled events – for many, genuinely moving events – within our everyday lives" (Turner et al 2000 quoted in Hamad 2018) (eg: the death of Princess Diana). Such events feel "authentic", and this has intensified in the 21st century with the proliferation of media (Hamad 2018). "What is new is the discourse of self-disclosure and authenticity enabled by [then] new television formats such as docu-soaps, reality TV and lifestyle programming that allow ordinary people a narrative of self-improvement and empowerment via personal self-disclosure and revelation of one's authentic self" (Biressi and Nunn 2007 quoted in Hamad 2018).

The Internet and social media have taken the "democratic turn" (Turner 2004) of fame even further. Senft (2008) talked of "micro-celebrity".

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3. MEGHAN MARKLE AS SOCIAL PHENOMENON

3.1. FROM POSITIVE TO NEGATIVE

Meghan Markle (MM), a bi-racial American actress married the British Prince Harry in 2018, and became the Duchess of Sussex. The couple later announced their withdrawal from "royal duties" in 2020.

"Representations of Markle at the time of her wedding to Prince Harry in May 2018 were largely celebratory... The event was a watershed moment for representations of the contemporary British monarchy: a spectacle of contradictions as two historic institutions defined by patriarchal tradition - marriage and the monarchy - met with public accolades of feminist progress and modernisation. However, in the months and years following the wedding, coverage became increasingly vitriolic, scapegoating Markle as an abject figure of gendered, classed and racialised inequalities" (Yelin and Clancy 2021a p2). For example, Piers Morgan, writing in the British tabloid the "Daily Mail" has been particularly critical, describing MM as "Me-Me-Meghan", and the couple as "grasping, selfish, scheming Kardashian-wannabes" (Yelin and Clancy 2021a) [10].

Drawing a link with Harry's mother, Princess Diana, over twenty years previously, Yelin and Clancy (2021a) noted how scholars have used MM to explore wider issues of gender, class, race/ethnicity, colonialism and post-colonialism, media, celebrity, and inequalities.

MM's "shifting persona in the public imaginary" (p2) can be linked to "the Celebrity Studies paradigm of moving away from senses of the essential self, or an authentic self, and instead considering public figures as

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[10] Connor (2021) observed: "While both, Prince Harry and his older brother, Prince William married commoners, Prince William's choice of bride, in Catherine Middleton, was generally accepted, because, she is white... For Prince Harry to marry both a 'commoner' and a woman of colour crossed the line for many. The fact, that Meghan is also an American, a divorcee and went to a Catholic school added fuel to the fire of discontent for those who did not support the marriage" (p2).

'star image[s]' (Dyer 1979) which signify various
phenomena" (Yelin and Clancy 2021a p3) [11].

Clancy and Yelin (2020) noted the comments about MM
and feminism in the UK press after her marriage -
"abounding across news, comment and women's magazine
titles alike to position the event as a feminist, post-
racial utopia: a bi-racial, divorced, self-proclaimed
feminist, American actor 'modernising'... an ancient
patriarchal institution" (p372). These authors, however,
felt that "the rush to hail her a new feminist princess
is at points a little strained" (Clancy and Yelin 2020
p372). The wearing of trousers by MM at royal events, for
example, was quoted as evidence, along with her opening
the door for Harry [12].
"This over-statement of the feminist significance of
every small detail of Markle's public appearances shifts
the terms of debate around feminism in the popular
imaginary. As Hamad and Taylor (2015...) argue,
'discursive struggles over the meanings of feminism are
now, perhaps more than ever, largely staged in and
through [...] celebrity interventions'" (Clancy and Yelin
2020 p373).
Clancy and Yelin (2020) continued: "While we are not
discounting that Markle may indeed identify as a
feminist, and may even have aspirations to use her royal
platform for the benefit of women's issues, there are
broader issues at play here around her star image being
used to define contemporary feminism, and how this
feminism is co-opted and policed by institutions with
distinctly anti-feminist principles" (p373) (eg: stopping
her acting career upon marriage). Furthermore, the
"contortions required to maintain this necessary blind
spot are typical of a post-feminist media culture that
celebrates 'defanged, non-oppositional invocations'

[11] Connor (2021) emphasised: "While Meghan has offered some autobiographical commentary on her
identity as a bi-cultural woman, most of what we know about this has been produced by media
representations, and indeed as Yelin and Clancy (2021b) show, even autobiographical texts from
women in the public eye are mediated in some way" (p2).

[12] Carter (2018) coined the term "white wedding femininity", "represented by a gendered identity
based on 19th century notions of female passivity" (Connor 2021 p2). Connor (2021) explained its
evidence in MM's wedding: "Meghan's full-length pure white, boat neck gown, designed by Clare
Waight Keller, the artistic director of French fashion house Givenchy..., epitomises Carter's definition
of 'white wedding femininity'. The five metre-long white silk veil covering her face was held in place
by Queen Mary's diamond bandeau tiara, (loaned to her by the Queen)... further underpins Carter's
description of 'white wedding femininity'. Carter (2018), one of the functions of 'white wedding
femininity' is to provide security and safety for white people, a buffer, from the dark unknown other"
(p2). At the same time, others noted aspects of the ceremony that "explicitly celebrated Black cultures...
The young black musician, cello soloist, Sheku Kanneh-Mason, the Kingdom Choir gospel group, and
the invitation to Bishop Michael Bruce Curry, the first African American head of the Episcopal Church,
all brought Black culture to the front and centre of the wedding ceremony" (Connor 2021 p2).

shorn of emancipatory potential..., pivoting instead on notions of choice. Hailing Markle as feminist enables the monarchy to construct a performance of progress at a time of a 'proliferation of new and old misogynies' (Gill 2016...), whether in the US presidency, online trolls, or neo-nazis" (Clancy and Yelin 2020 p374) (appendix 3A).

Willson (2021) was also sceptical of MM "as a symbolic exemplification of the 'rebirth' of the British monarchy within wider North Atlantic cultural discourse, and Markle's Black heritage has fed a mythology of 'progress' in which the Royal Family are conveniently positioned as enlightened, modern and continually relevant while any suggestion of its imperialist underpinnings are conspicuously muted" (p5).

Andrews (2021) talked of the "delusions of the post-racial moment". Because of the history of British colonialism, Andrews (2021) argued that "the only positive action that the royal family could take in regards to racial inequality would be to abolish itself. If having a Black face in the Whitest of institutions makes Black people feel more connected to the monarchy, then this is the worst possible outcome of Markle's inclusion in the family" (p3). He continued: "Celebrating a Black princess may make us feel better, but it does not change any of the realities of structural racism, Brexit, Windrush or the marked decline in public discourse. It is an illusion, worth only as much as a mirage on the horizon of a desert. By placing faith in the empty symbol, we take our focus off addressing the real problem of racism that is as deep seated as ever" (Andrews 2021 p4).

Furthermore, Andrews (2021) went on: "A famous, independently wealthy actress marrying into the royal family hardly represents the average Black woman. The couple's relationship is more like a fairytale from a movie than real life" (p4) [13].

MM has also been criticised in the media for "her unprincess-like behaviour" by royal biographer Andrew Morton (2018) (eg: playing characters in films depicted having sex or taking drugs). Rowe (1995) has talked of the "unruly woman" to describe "women who, in some way, step outside the boundaries of good womanhood, who end up being labelled too fat, too loud, too slutty, too whatever characteristic women are meant to keep under

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[13] The term "intersectional failure" (Carbado and Crenshaw 2019) has been applied to MM. This refers to "those moments when one form of inequality overrides the intersection with another, in ways which typically work against Black women" (Andrews 2021 p4).

control" (Peterson 2017 quoted in McLennan 2021).

3.2. BI-RACIAL WRINKLE

McLennan (2021) considered MM's biracial identity with the idea of "a new wrinkle", a phrase used in a "Vanity Fair" interview in 2017. McLennan (2021) explained that the "wrinkle" "communicates a number of ideas simultaneously and ambiguously" (p1).

The "wrinkle" motif is usually associated with ageing, but it is used in the article to discuss "race". it use "reduces the complexities of the inclusion of a biracial woman in the British royal family to a 'wrinkle', a minor issue that glosses over racism in relation to the royal family as institution, and in relation to British cultural attitudes. It suggests that if inclusion of such a woman is a problem it is one reserved for the royal family, tabloids and trolls..." (McLennan 2021 p2).

But the terminology of age is part of a "smoothing out" (Meeuf 2017) - ie: a non-normative aspect of the individual is managed by focusing on the normative. "The gendered aspects of ageing (a wrinkled appearance is especially undesirable for women) work to facilitate the process by which Meghan's age is used to 'smooth out' the 'deviation' of her biracial identity" (McLennan 2021 p2).

This is one of three ways that MM's biracial identity as a "wrinkle" is addressed, according to McLennan (2021). Another way is to "preserve the 'wrinkle' by maintaining an understanding of her biracial identity as problematic and disruptive" (p1), while MM herself refuses to "smooth out" her biracial identity (McLennan 2021).

Woldemikael and Woldemikael (2021) noted that "Meghan Markle's conscious cultivation of a biracial identity is an attempt to root herself in an ambiguous in-between space and make claims on both Blackness and whiteness, expanding the limited roles offered to multi-racial individuals" (p1). These authors also saw it as "an assertion that helps expose the fallacy of race as a fixed, biological category and the absurd contradictions that mixed Black and white identity can elicit" (Woldemikael and Woldemikael 2021 p2).

3.3. SLIMNESS AND HEALTHISM

Nunn (2021) focused on the "fetishising" of MM's

slimness that involved "'coded anti-black sentiments'
(Joseph 2012) born out of structural racism and sexism to
present her as an exceptional biracial woman embodying
white standards of beauty and neoliberal values, and
therefore transcending a racialised hierarchy" (p1).

The attention to the slimness of women's bodies is
part of "healthism" discourses. "Emphasising happiness,
healthism enacts the larger neoliberal project of
representing good citizenship through images of
privileged white women who self-discipline according to
neoliberal norms" (Nunn 2021 p1).

Nunn (2021) examined twenty articles on MM's diet
and fitness habits published in the UK and the USA
between 2017 and 2019 (eg: in "Cosmopolitan" and "Vanity
Fair"). Four themes were distinguished - "the apparent
attractiveness of a slender body, the easiness of a
healthy lifestyle, notions of 'indulgence in moderation',
and enthusiasm for fitness or healthy eating" (Nunn 2021
p3).

Together the themes "present self-control and
motivation for healthy living as moral factors
determining one's ability to adopt a healthy lifestyle,
while ignoring intersections of class, race and gender
which impact upon one's access to commodities and
activities promoted by healthism. These themes contribute
to cultural myths of white femininity that depend on
racist juxtapositions of Black women as unmotivated,
incompetent, indulgent, and fat" (Nunn 2021 p3).

Nunn (2021) ended: "Exhorting women to be the best
version of themselves, health and fitness discourses
encourage women to change their appearance, their concept
of fulfilment, and their perception of their bodies. This
obsession with self-surveillance and self-improvement
discourages women from taking risks, which are necessary
to embark on meaningful projects... Moreover, these mono-
cultural discourses encourage women to break from parts
of their identities if their bodies diverge from
normalised images of healthy bodies. Bodies are situated
in histories of images. If these histories are not
recognized, images defining normal and deviant, healthy
and unhealthy, happy and unhappy immanent situations will
continue to control individuals' perceptions of their
ability to accomplish life-affirming projects" (p6).

3.4. MERITOCRACY AND CELEBRITY

Yelin and Paule (2021) considered the "celebrity
values of hard-working meritocracy" of MM, and inherited

power in the form of the royal family. This was done via analysis of interviews with fifty young female teenagers (13-15 years old) in England in 2018. The semi-structured group interviews focused on high-profile women regarded as leaders, and the imagined futures of the participants. No celebrities were mentioned by the researchers, but "were all raised in conversation by the girls themselves. Indeed, Meghan and the royal family only arose in conversation following a discussion of Beyonce which drew upon the vocabulary of royalty to construct her global pop-stardom" (Yelin and Paule 2021 p3).

Certain ideas emerged from the interviews that were relevant here:

a) "Royal celebrity" and the desire for positive social change - "The girls' discussions of Meghan demonstrated the complexities of royal and celebrity status within wider neo-liberal contexts where success and privilege are accounted for through myths of meritocracy. Straddling celebrity and royalty, Meghan brings the myths of meritocracy that underpin celebrity culture (Littler 2004) into contact with the institution which most enshrines inherited power and wealth. The girls were acutely aware of Meghan's special status as celebrity and royal" (Yelin and Paule 2021 p3).

The "royal celebrity" of MM challenged Rojek's (2007) three categories of celebrity: "achieved" (based on talent or accomplishment), "attributed" (eg: reality television stars "manufactured by the media"), and "ascribed" (eg: royalty).

MM was viewed as achieving her celebrity prior to joining the royal family, but then becoming a member was "seen as affording Meghan greater opportunity to change society, despite debate over whether royals have meaningful power, or adequately deploy their wealth and privilege for the benefit of others" (Yelin and Paule 2021 p3).

b) Deserving and undeserving royals - "The girls constructed institutional monarchy as undeserving while at the same time identifying Meghan and Harry as exceptions by which they prove this rule. Meritocratic discourses of labour function to construct elites as if they 'deserve their wealth and status through [depictions] of their hard work' (Mendick et al 2018)" (Yelin and Paule 2021 p4).

This extract from the discussions showed this idea:

Soph: It is a failure, but Harry has helped as well, because he's

helped loads of charities, he's been in the army. He had a really bad childhood because his mum died so he had a bad life, so it's not fair, because he still helps people. [...]

Donna: Do you know who should have the crown, Harry, not Prince Charles or whoever he is, he don't deserve it.

Lily: Prince Charles has taken...

Soph: It's William. Donna: But William doesn't deserve.

Alesha: Because he didn't really *do* anything, all he did was go the army. Lily: [...] It's Prince William that don't do nothing.

Donna: Prince William is just sitting there with his wife and... (waves) Like this!

Soph: Harry deserves it.

Mel: But Harry is younger than William so he's not going to get it. [All talking together.]

Donna: All William did was sit with his wife and get his wife pregnant and have more children (p4).

    c) Hard work - Yelin and Paule (2021) explained: "Discourses of 'hard work' frequently uphold and legitimate inequality under capitalism... However, hard work was integral to the girls' vocabulary of admiration and achievement, underpinning both their criticism of monarchy and their praise of certain celebrities. American singer Beyonce is one star whom the girls we spoke to viewed as a good leader according to these criteria of hard work and social change" (p5).

    d) Royalty - There was a discussion of Beyonce and the term "queen" that has been applied to her - ie: "royal blood outside of institutional monarchy [while] Meghan is celebrated for bringing her 'unroyal' blood into it... The imagined bloodlines of Meghan and Beyonce were discussed as if they offered a source of authenticity for the narratives which circulate in each woman's star image: for Beyonce, 'royal blood' authenticates her superstar status and perceived regal demeanour; for Meghan, its absence makes her a refreshing, more 'authentic' addition to the British royal family..." (Yelin and Paule 2021 p6).

3.5. CONCLUSIONS

    The dichotomy of MM as both a symbol and not a

symbol, Buggs (2021) showed with a series of questions: "Is Meghan Markle a feminist icon beloved by the media and the public, leading the British monarchy into modernity and a future of racial inclusivity? Or is she a manipulated and misguided symbol of a progressive, post-racial world that does not, and likely will never in our lifetimes, exist? Is she Black, biracial, or White-passing? Is she royal or is she not? Is she an outsider intentionally placing pressure on an institution firmly moored in the colonial past, or is she merely a wealthy, accomplished, and well-connected woman who fell in love and had to deal with unexpected rejection from her in-laws?" (pp1-2).

Buggs (2021) argued that symbols are important (as in MM's joining the royal family), but "we must move beyond an investment in symbols if we are to hope for any real substantial social change" (p3) (eg: in relation to power, and privilege).

3.6. APPENDIX 3A - REACTIONS TO CLANCY AND YELIN (2020)

Yelin and Clancy (2021b) reflected upon the media and public reaction to their article. They noted wryly that the reference to "proliferating misogynies soon brought us into first-hand contact with them" (Yelin and Clancy 2021b p176). The researchers described how "a misrepresentation of our work was co-opted to further an agenda we explicitly disagreed with. We term this the distortions of research remediation. The very institutions we critiqued for misrepresenting Markle's feminism did the same to us to further their newly developed anti-Markle agenda" (Yelin and Clancy 2021b p177).

The aggressive reaction on social media (eg: "gendered personal insults") can be seen as "part of a 'continuum between online and offline manifestations of technology-facilitated violence' [Ging and Siapera 2018] against women (Yelin and Clancy 2021b p177). Koulouris (2018) saw the "vehemence" of online misogyny as "the articulation of an increasingly powerful far-right populism buoyed by re-energised forms of post-crisis neoliberalism" (quoted in Yelin and Clancy 2021b).

Yelin and Clancy (2021b) made this point: "While UK universities pressure scholars to disseminate their work in inter/national media outlets, and/or host public social media profiles, they pay little attention to potential risks beyond institutional reputation" (p177). They continued: "We therefore question the moral

responsibility of institutions benefiting from public intellectuals for the well-being of employees in the public eye, in a socio-political context with ever higher costs for 'visible' women, people of colour, trans folk and feminist activism" (Yelin and Clancy 2021b p178).

Working in an auto-ethnographic tradition, Yelin and Clancy (2021b) analysed social media comments after theor appearance in the media to discuss MM and their research. Themes that emerged included:

a) "Anti-feminist silencing" - eg: "SHUT UP YOU MAD MARE" (sic) (p180).

b) Redefining feminism - eg: "Feminism is no longer about womens rights, But, an excuse for sexism anti Men" (sic) (p182).

c) Anti-intellectualism - eg: "Celebrity Studies? This degradation of scholarship should set a new low. Basically - Who cares" (p183).

d) Misuse of the work to justify misogynistic and racist rhetoric - eg: "LOL! She's [MM] now become so disliked & so unpopular that even these 'academics and feminists' are distancing themselves from her" (p186).

Yelin and Clancy (2021b) emphasised: "Our original research was criticising the patriarchal monarchy as an institution, not criticising Markle as an individual. In line with bell hooks, we understand patriarchy as 'imperialist, white supremacist, capitalist' (2013...), and argued that these facets of monarchy were being made palatable by a version of celebrity feminism that emphasises individual progress rather than structural change" (p187).

Yelin and Clancy (2021b) ended: "This article has shown how the consequences of backlash fall upon the individual. It was Markle who became subject to racist and sexist abuse, while the monarchy remained insulated. Likewise, in the current REF [Research Excellence Framework] model, it is individual researchers who weather the risks of visibility, while universities remain largely unscathed. This reflects the neoliberal university more broadly, which 'seek[s] to constitute us as "individual" subjects of knowledge' [The Res-Sisters 2017] in a hyper-competitive environment" (p188).

3.6.1. Celebrity Feminism

"Celebrity feminism" elicits a variety of responses from "claims that this makes feminism more accessible to audiences, particularly young women...; to viewing celebrity feminisms as depoliticised, neo-liberalised, and defanged in their emphasis on vague ideas of 'empowerment'" (Clancy and Yelin 2021 p3).

"Empowerment" was noted in the royal "work" of MM, when she visited the Bristol-based charity "One25" (which provides "food bags" to sex workers, for example) and she wrote messages on bananas like "you are strong" and "you are special" (Clancy and Yelin 2021). This suggested that "sex workers merely need affirmations, wilfully ignoring economic, social and security issues, and suggesting that their dissatisfaction comes from a failure to 'think positive'" (Clancy and Yelin 2021 p3). Gill and Orgad (2016) have talked of "confidence cult(ure)", "whereby women are 'hailed as enterprising and self-managing subjects'... in order to encourage individual responsibility" (Clancy and Yelin 2021 p3).

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4. DEPLATFORMING SEX

4.1. "DEPLATFORMING SEX"

Attwood et al (2021) observed that the concern about "safety" online is "frequently code for ensuring that sexual representations remain at the margins across online and off-line spaces, subject to the capricious whims of governments and, increasingly, other less accountable agencies" (p345).

For these authors, "[S]ocial media platforms have been moderating sexual content for years, encouraging users to flag and report potentially offensive posts, employing content moderators to plough through data, while developing machine learning to identify and remove sexual content" (Attwood et al 2021 p345). "Facebook" and "Tumblr", for example, altered their guidelines to remove nudity, the latter in December 2018. This is, in particular, the response to campaigns and legislation in the USA, like the "2018 Allow States and Victims to Fight Online Sex Trafficking (FOSTA)" (Attwood et al 2021) [14].

This has been called "deplatforming sex" (Molldrem 2018 quoted in Attwood et al 2021) (or the removal of "not safe for work" (NSFW) content [15]) (appendix 4A). The "Tumblr" decision saw "the immediate loss of a vast archive of queer and sexual content" (Attwood et al 2021 pp345-346).

Deplatforming occurs in "subtler forms of censorship", like "shadow banning" (appendix 4B), or in ways "less obvious to the majority of users – modes of deplatforming have been gathering pace as banks and payment providers have quietly removed service from anyone they suspect of having connections to sex work. All of these actions have had serious impacts on individuals' abilities to monetise content and services while probably contributing very little to the supposed

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[14] For example, after FOSTA "a variety of sex workers have had their accounts deleted, while communities ranging from Carnival dancers to athletes had their posts deleted or hidden by Instagram" (Are 2020 p742). Are (2020) quoted her own experience of Instagram's behaviour as a pole dancer performer and instructor.

[15] NSFW is "an acronym widely used on social media to annotate content that you would not want on your screen, should your colleagues see over your shoulder" (Tiidenberg 2016 p1564).

goal of safety for users" (Attwood et al 2021 p346).

Attwood et al (2021) saw this in the context of the work, rights and safety of sex workers, and the limiting of opportunities ("sexual spaces") particular for LGBTQ+ individuals, groups, and communities.

The impact of legislation in the USA on US-based digital platforms is felt even more by sexual minorities and sex workers around the world (Bronstein 2021).

Harvey (2019 quoted in Are 2020) talked of the "aggressive architecture" of social media, which "sees platforms' react with 'active inactivity' instead of protecting their users" (Are 2020 p741). The platforms that give women voice also give users "new opportunities to harass, insult and silence them" (Are 2020 p741). Are (2020) lamented: "It is not sustainable for large parts of their user populations to continue being silenced by and targeted on social media: if social media architecture is kept as it is, offline inequalities may become even greater online, and the value that social media platforms could provide to our society will be lost" (p743).

4.2. "ILLICIT EROTICISMS"

"Webcam modelling" (WCM) or "camming" is "a form of pornographic media that allows participants to negotiate and redefine their understanding of eroticism in real time through interpersonal interactions. In contrast to 'traditional' pornography, where sex scenes are pre-recorded and uploaded onto websites, webcam modelling occurs in real time. The webcam clients are both users and directors who can negotiate with the webcam models in real time to fulfil their erotic fantasies" (Lee 2021 p486). Such performance can face social stigma, but in South Korea, for example, it has been criminalised (Lee 2021).

WCM is part of the internet and digital technologies that have allowed "more avenues for amateur and do-it-yourself pornography... In some interpretations, webcam modelling represents a sense of sexual empowerment and agency, particularly for marginalised groups like the BBW (Big Beautiful Women) and gender non-binary folks" (Lee 2021 p486). WCM can also be seen as safer than "traditional" pornography. "Compared to 'traditional' pornography, where performers have to follow orders from the producers and the directors (who are often male), most webcam models are (theoretically) more at liberty to

perform by their own accord. Even though some webcam
models may feel compelled to put on certain performances
to appear 'authentic' or to enhance their sexual appeal,
this does not mean that these individuals do not derive
some form of sexual agency through their work" (Lee 2021
pp486-487).

Returning to the situation in South Korea, Lee
(2021) presented a case study of websites on "Afreeca
TV", which tries to keep the performers on the "legal
side". "Afreeca TV has its own standards of 'obscenity'
through which it regulates the live performances hosted
on its website. The company enforces these regulations by
hiring individuals to monitor some of the live-streaming
performances, and they also rely on the viewers'
complaints. It appears somewhat paradoxical that the
website relies on viewers to report 'obscene' media that
they have visited the website to enjoy. Such a paradox
provides opportunities for the viewers and the webcam
models to co-opt discourses on obscenity" (Lee 2021
p488).
The reaction to WCM in South Korea can be seen in
the context of "illicit eroticisms", which are "the types
of erotic desires that are characterised as abnormal or
illicit by 'normatively' accepted social standards" (Lee
2021 p489). It is linked to "popular assumptions about
sexual responsibility and normativity" (Lee 2021 p489).
For individuals who engage in such activities, part of
the pleasure is in the illicit aspect. Williams (2010)
has used this idea in reference to "inter-racial
pornography" between Black and White performers in the
USA.
Lee (2021) explained: "The Korean webcam models I
observed identified themselves as illicit and defied
censorship, which they believed to be delimiting the
possibilities of their erotic performances and sources of
income. Based on my observation of Korean webcam models,
their primary motivation for webcam modelling did not
appear to be social activism to challenge sexual norms;
they appeared to be primarily motivated by money and
fame. However, their performances contested anti-
trafficking activists' 'calls for an expanded carceral
state apparatus' that penalises sexuality, sexual
performance, and sexual desires (Bernstein 2012...)"
(p490).
Lee (2021) observed eighty hours of "Afreeca TV"
covering ten webcam models (nine cis women and one trans
woman). The performers made use of the discourse of
"illicitness", as in the case of "Jiggy", who called

herself "the mother of suspensions". Lee (2021) commented: "The webcam models performed as if they were putting their livelihoods at risk by defying censorship. However, based on my observation, they complained about censorship because they received more donations from viewers when they talked about censorship and their resolve to defy it. For instance, a couple of minutes after Jiggy said that she was willing to do anything to satisfy her viewers, one of the viewers tipped her 1005 star balloons (approximately US$100) and the notice of the large sum appeared on the chat. Even before Jiggy could say thank you, the chat room made binging noises as some other viewers tipped her more money. Instead of tipping her for her sexual performances, the viewers were tipping her when she claimed that she was selflessly defying censorship for the viewers' erotic satisfaction" (p492).

This could be taken as empowerment for the performers, but Lee (2021) cautioned against "an overly simplified portrait of the nuanced power dynamics between the models and their viewers" (p493), and gave the example of "Alice" who was "threatened" by her viewers. She had neglected certain requests in the chat room, and received this message from a frustrated viewer: "Based on what you are doing now, if we report you to Afreeca TV, you will definitely get suspended for a few days at a minimum because of your obscenity" (p494).

Lee (2021) reflected on the discourse of illicitness more widely for women: "When women and their sexualities are categorised as illicit, they are seen as the ones who 'make' men commit sexual crimes and lure them into illicitness. The Korean government's survey indicates that 49.3% of Koreans believe sexual violence occurs because women wear revealing clothes; 48.7% believe that sexual assault can be prevented if women act as more sexually reserved... Women's sexuality becomes the problem, not the perpetrators who commit sexually violent crimes. Even though some webcam models may temporarily feel empowered and financially benefit from defining themselves as illicit, I suggest that, from a broader perspective, such illicit eroticism may perpetuate negative gender stereotypes" (p496).

4.3. APPENDIX 4A - "NSFW SELFIES"

Using data from a project on "NSFW self-shooters" on tumblr.com, Tiidenberg (2016) explored the meaning of

posting such selfies [16]. "Bloggers, who take and share sexy selfies, tend to follow a set of common practices in order to protect their 'plausible deniability' (Tiidenberg 2013) — tattoos and birthmarks are blurred; and images are often headless or at least obscure the face. Regardless, these bloggers are 'naked on the internet' (Ray 2007), violating mainstream cultural norms, which deplore public nudity. Being able to experience their blogs and community (a term they all use) as a 'safe space' (Muise 2011) is an important pre-requisite for continuing this practice" (Tiidenberg 2016 p1565).

In terms of theoretical ideas, posting NSFW selfies can be a means of establishing "who one claims to be" and thereby gaining trust from the online community (Tiidenberg 2016). Pettit (1995) used the concept of "trust responsiveness", which is defined as "the disposition to prove reliable under the trust of others" (quoted in Tiidenberg 2016). Van Dijck (2008) described selfies generally as "serving the functions of memory, identity formation, and communication, [but they] also work as currency for social interaction that establishes and reconfirms bonds" (Tiidenberg 2016 p1566).

But once content is publicly posted, Tiidenberg (2016) explained, it acquires "a social afterlife in which the images are gradually detached from their original narratives and the agency of the producers becomes dispersed... Most of my informants have stories of their images ending up in places they would not have envisioned or preferred. Typical examples are dating sites, porn sites, teenager blogs, fat appreciation blogs, pro-ana blogs. This 'runaway' content upsets bloggers for various reasons including safety, self-esteem, influx of unwanted audiences, or moral objections" (p1566).

Another example of "loss of control" of images is "deepfake porn". This is where the face of another person is placed in a picture or a video on a body involved in pornography. It is often female celebrities, and has its origin in a sub-reddit on Reddit (van der Nagel 2020).
"Deepfake porn" images are "not violations by default", but, van der Nagel (2020) observed, they are "image-based sexual abuse that produces sexual content without the consent of the subject" (p426). Citron (2018) talked of a violation of "sexual privacy", while

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[16] "Selfies carry multiple meanings for self-shooters. They are therapeutic, self-revelatory, and indicators of belonging or status... In addition, selfies, like all images in an image-focused culture, work as conversation pieces and carry a certain capital" (Tiidenberg 2016 p1565).

Hargreaves (2018) noted it as related to "creepshots" ("photographs taken on unaware women in public"; van der Nagel 2020 p426), and the "male gaze". "By treating women's faces as a digital resource to be edited onto sexual bodies by artificial intelligence, this reinforces the idea that women exist as sexual objects. The discussion around creepshots on platforms like Reddit rewards and celebrates the men who take them, which furthers toxic masculinity and creates a broader environment in which women's images are understood as consumable, malleable, and brought into being for the enjoyment and gratification of men. This view of images of women is not something created by deepfakes, but is at least as old as the technology of photography" (van der Nagel 2020 p426).

van der Nagel (2020) linked to Berger (1977): "If... every image embodies a way of seeing, then deepfake nudes are a way of seeing women as objects, celebrities as commodified and consumable, and the digital as malleable... Deepfakes might not present accurately filmed porn to us, but the phenomenon tells us a story about power, control, and desire" (p427).

4.4. APPENDIX 4B - "SHADOW BANNING"

"Shadow banning" is to "hide or deprioritise content without informing the user" (Suzor et al 2019 quoted in Are and Paasonen 2021), and Are (2020) believed that it involved targeting "vaguely inappropriate content", including hiding it from the platform's search function.

It is about platforms wanting to protect their brand image and make themselves attractive to advertisers by distancing themselves from "'NSFW' associations", argued Are and Paasonen 2021).

These authors were critical: "The management of sexual content through content removal, blocking and shadow banning ultimately revolves around notions of value: the value placed on different kinds of content, exchanges and users within the social media economy" (Are and Paasonen 2021 p413). They continued: "Although sexual content attracts user engagement, faring well in the social media attention economy, it holds questionable monetary value for platforms operating through the mining, analysis and selling of user data for the purposes of targeted advertising" (Are and Paasanen 2021 p413).

Tiidenberg and van der Nagel (2020) argued that the "'deplatformisation of sex is a result of cold

calculations cloaked in emotional, moralising language'
that tap into lingering moral panics concerning mediated
sex 'which have reinforced the dubious moral status of
sex and popularised the trite diagnosis of
technologically mediated sex as deviant'" (Are and
Paasonen 2021 p414).

   While Salty (2019 quoted in Are and Paasonen 2021)
stated: "Sex can be sold for the benefit of major
corporations like Instagram, Facebook and Victoria's
Secret – but NOT for the benefit of sex workers, and/or
women, trans and non-binary people themselves". Are and
Paasonen (2021) noted the double standards that use the
"lucrative sexiness" of celebrities to attraction viewers
to the platforms, but censor "lay people": "Even as the
2019 Hollywood film 'Hustlers' depicting strippers and
strip club scenes and starring Jennifer Lopez, for
example, was heavily advertised on Instagram and
Facebook, real-life strippers and pole dancers were
shadow banned on, and their accounts removed from, the
same platforms" (p415).

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5. "POST-OLYMPIC BLUES"

"Although contemporary research indicates that Olympic and Paralympic athletes are no more at risk from clinically significant mental health symptoms and conditions than the general population..., there are critical transitions in athletes' lives when the risk of mental distress is increased... A key transition is that of the Olympic to post-Olympic period which can be characterised as a 'crisis transition' (Stambulova 2017...)" (Bradshaw et al 2021 pp1-2).

Holly Bradshaw (HB) participated in three Olympic Games in Pole Vaulting, representing Great Britain, so she was well aware of the "post-Olympic blues" (Howells and Lucassen 2018). Bradshaw et al (2021) organised focus groups with fourteen athletes from the UK with HB as "a researcher as participant". The athletes had competed at Olympic Games in athletics, triathlon, kayaking, and canoeing. The discussions covered the whole Olympics experience as well as the post-Olympic period, and six themes emerged from the analysis:

i) "Olympic dream" - "Olympic participation represented the culmination of years of training and for many, the realisation of a lifetime dream to represent their country at an Olympic Games. The athletes appeared to have internalised the expectation that the Olympic Games would be the most important and fulfilling experience of their lives and subscribed to a dream narrative..." (Bradshaw et al 2021 p6).

ii) "Olympic nightmare" - The athletes talked about "how the dream concurrently became a nightmare; this nightmare involved internal conflict, media intrusion, the perception of the Games as an anti-climax, feelings of isolation, and failure to meet their own and others' expectations" (Bradshaw et al 2021 p6).

iii) "Commodification" - The athletes "described their bodies as functional objects that were dehumanised (P [participant] 12) and commodified into a product that was moulded and existed in order to perform for public consumption which was ultimately disposable" (Bradshaw et al 2021 p7).

There was a division in the team between those who won medals and those who had not. "The public reinforced this feeling of those athletes who had failed to win medals as being unwanted commodities who were disposable as P9 explained: 'As soon as you get back, no interest,

nobody wants to talk to you, did you get a medal? No'"
(Bradshaw et al 2021 p8).

iv) "Perceptions of appropriate support" - Future
funding was linked to medal performance, and athletes
reported a feeling of lack of post-Olympic support
generally. For example, P14 described the problem as
support staff took holidays, were reassigned, or lost
their jobs: "The staff has been with us for eight weeks
at least without seeing their own family and they all
clocked off and I just felt like I was left on my own. I
am not very good either at sort of talking about things
or admitting that I am struggling so I [definitely]
buried it... the two years that followed I had quite a
few little niggles [minor injuries] and never really got
on top of things and I think it was all compounding. The
niggles turned into bigger issues because I couldn't
mentally deal with things and I do put that down to never
dealing with how bad I felt after the Olympics. I don't
think there was ever really much support or understanding
around it" (p9).

v) "Limited preparation" - So much preparation for
the Olympics, but little for afterwards as described by
P12: "We [were] very prepared to perform... so that was
all good but we definitely weren't prepared for
afterwards at all. We were just completely unprepared...
I guess I was just looking at it as I won't think about
[the impacts until] after because that's not an issue and
things went relatively well. I did experience blues after
but... they were quite sporadic" (p11).

vi) "Managing and overcoming" - Athletes had their
own coping mechanisms, including talking to each other,
and avoidance strategies. HB described distancing herself
from the Olympic Games: "It's like a bad break up. Like
someone not knowing you broke up with someone and then
asking about it. Having to relive it" (p11).
Other responses included "partying", and "gardening
as... distraction, a kind of therapy", while "several
athletes reinvested their energy into their sport and re-
evaluated their goals. P1 explained: 'For me my
distraction is setting myself new goals... I have to
change what's happened... contacting person ABC and
planning for the future and that's my distraction and
working towards it every day'" (Bradshaw et al 2021 p12).

Overall, Bradshaw et al (2021) felt that
"irrespective of athletes' performance outcomes, there

was a disconnect between the expectations of the Olympic dream and the reality which was, for some of the athletes, particularly difficult. The athletes felt thoroughly prepared and sufficiently supported for their athletic performances at a number of Olympic Games but felt abandoned in the post-event period. This negatively impacted on both their mental health and the way that they perceived that they had been treated (eg: perceptions of being dehumanised). In discussing future support, the Olympians were firmly in favour of involvement by those individuals who they considered had shared similar experiences (eg: previously competed at an Olympic Games)" (p12).

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