



# Nicki Minaj vs Beyoncé? feminism, un/happiness, celebrity

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# Aspirations in austere meritocracy

This concept encapsulates the pivotal tension between the incitement of young people to aspire and invest in the idea of meritocracy and the dramatic erosion of opportunities for upward social mobility. This is an instance of what Lauren Berlant identifies as cruel optimism; young people must remain attached to aspiration, success and happiness in advance of their loss. Happiness is perhaps the ultimate example in which something you desire is an obstacle to your flourishing.



# The pursuit of happiness

‘Is it possible to be against happiness?’ (Will Davies)

Happiness regulates young people’s aspirations by defining some aspirations as ‘happy objects’ to be sought, and others as ‘unhappy objects’ to be avoided.

‘If we arrive at objects with an expectation of how we will be affected by them, this affects how they affect us.’

‘We align ourselves with others by investing in the same objects as the cause of happiness.’



# Happy objects 1: family relationships

Olivia Bolt (SW, 16-17): personal happiness is 'the sort of stuff outside' success 'like getting older, being married, having children and that sort of thing.'

'I think friendship and family are worth more than money, because you could have all the money in the world but not be a happy person. You can't buy happiness can you?' (Tom, SW, 16-17)

It 'is not that good things cause pleasure, but that the experience of pleasure is how some things become good for us over time'. Happy objects are good because we want them and we want them because they are good. They send us in the right direction, as indicated by the approval of our family and friends, their wishes for our futures, and the discourses of appropriate pathways that circulate throughout wider society including via celebrity. Thus happiness is attached to some choices, not others.

# Happy objects 1: celebrities & family

‘I think Will Smith [is happy] because I’ve seen his family and they’re all sort of doing well ... when I’ve seen them on the red carpet they all interact, and he just messes about. ... I think they can have all the money in the world, but that isn’t going to make you happy. And it’s like Katie Price, she’s got all the money but I think none of her relationships are working and she always seems to go downhill after a relationship’s broke.’ (Kirsty, Manchester, 14-15)

‘Obviously, like [Kate] was happy because she fell in love with Prince William ... the princess-ship ... opened up lots of amazing opportunities ... she seems very loveable and everyone seems to like her.’ (Lolita, SW, 16-17)

‘Rather than assuming happiness is simply found in “happy persons,” we can consider how claims to happiness make certain forms of personhood valuable.’ (Sara Ahmed)

# Happy objects 1: Beyoncé

'I don't think I've ever come across someone who doesn't like Beyoncé.' (Orlando, Manchester, 14-15)

Dr Lighty says 'I don't like Beyoncé'

Pringles: What?

George: What?

Lewis J: What? [laughter]

Pringles: You don't like Beyoncé?

George: How can you not like Beyoncé?

Pringles: That's just weird.

Dr Lighty: Then I like her then. [laughter]

Pringles: You can dislike her if you want.

George: Peer pressure.

(London, 16-17)



# Happy objects 2: fulfilling careers

Julia (SW, 16-17), who hopes to become a military police officer, sees her personal happiness as: 'to get somewhere where I feel like I'm doing a job that makes me happy because I'm achieving something, and doing something positive, not just for the money' (alongside, of course, 'a proper little family').

Anonymous (Manchester, 16-17) enjoys and is excited by mathematics and physics, subjects commonly constructed as antithetical to creativity. He wants a job using these: 'the best job ... would probably be the best job that keeps me like awake ... I'll get a job that shows something new every day'.

Joanna (London, 14-15), who wants to act, says: 'I would be really happy if I ended up getting a role in something out there'.

## Happy objects 2: Beyoncé

Tom: And her like values, and what she stands for. Like she's, she's like, isn't she like best friends with Michelle Obama? I swear she is.

Paris: I'd love to be best friends with her. ...

Interviewer: What are her values that you like?

Tom: Like she's quite, is she a feminist? Yeah, because her, all of her, when she goes on tour, ... all of her band are women.

Paris: Yeah, they all are female, aren't they?

Tom: Yeah, there's an all-female band.

Paris: She's just incred-

Joe: She's also a working mum as well. She balances like being a mum as well as like, like when she was pregnant, she released an album as well, so.

Paris: Yeah. And she waited a while to get pregnant. Like they obviously planned for when her, when she wanted to get pregnant, so she could still have a career. (SW, 16-17)



# Sabeen: happiness alien

‘Becoming a feminist can be an alienation from happiness’ putting you out of line with your peers and community as ‘you do not experience happiness from the right things.’

‘No, no, no. I’m not one for getting married. I hate the whole marriage thing. ... I just think if I get married that’ll hold me back. Like I can’t achieve my goals, I can’t do anything if I’ve got a boyfriend or a husband. ... And kids. I don’t like kids. I don’t like babies, they cry a lot. ... I don’t find any point in having children at all.’

‘I would like to be a lawyer’ because ‘you’re making sure they’re happy ... through bringing them justice. ... Like if somebody wants a divorce, they’re unhappy and you know giving them a divorce makes them, like lifts a burden off their shoulders’.

# Sabeen: happiness alien

'I was like, I want to be that. I want to be a part of, in the courts, defending people and having arguments [laughs], which you get paid for. ... Just the control that she had over them'

Dave: Nicki Minaj is the worst out of all of them.

Jerome: She's just

Sabeen: How's she bad?

Ariel: It's the way she dresses.

Sabeen: No, but that's her ... style

Jerome: She doesn't have a style.

Dave: It really is. And no, in all of her music videos you can not see one music videos where she has all of her clothes on. ...

Sabeen: In *Va Va Voom* she's got clothes on.

She's the only good rapper that's a girl. ... She's an independent female. She's put that across through her music.

... Like you don't need a man to pay for you. [boys laughing in background] You know? It's not funny.