OVERVIEW

• Celebrity culture – where is the audience?
• Youth, celebrity and everyday life
• Researching audiences
• The CelebYouth project

• Imagination exercises
• Analysing celebrity talk
RESEARCHING AUDIENCES

• Audiences negotiating media

• Young people and everyday cultural practices e.g. Archer et al., 2010; Buckingham & Bragg 2004; Hollingworth 2015; Inthorn & Street 2011; Richards 2011; Nayak and Kehily 2008

• Celebrity talk as ‘performance practices’ (Duits, 2010: 249)
Important studies, but “work has often tended to be sporadic or small scale” (Barker et al., 2015: 1).

Why is so much of the field of celebrity studies reluctant to engage with audiences through empirical data collection? Why, when it does, do the researchers focus on fan cultures, and neglect more everyday, ambivalent and even hostile engagements with contemporary celebrity culture? Is the shift to empirical audiences one that celebrity studies both desires and fears because of its potential to disrupt and transform the field? (Mendick et al., 2015: 374)
YOUTH, CELEBRITY AND EVERYDAY LIFE

*X-Factor* culture fuelled the UK riots ... Kids believe that their stepping stone to massive money is the *X Factor*. Luck is great, but most of life is hard work. We do not celebrate people who’ve made success out of serious hard work.

Dr Bennett says it’s “patronising” to assume teenagers taking interest in celebrity are being “sucked into” lifestyles which promote instant gratification. I say, on the contrary, it’s patronising to assume that teenagers wouldn’t be interested in breast cancer, adoption or countless other important discussion points, without their favourite celebrity opening his or her mouth first...So, I’d like to save the University of London some time. It doesn’t need a conference to discover what we already know: that teenagers are perfectly capable of learning about moral, political, economic and cultural issues without a pop star spelling it out for them.
Despite the clear indication that soap opera listening pervaded all groups, the methodologies of the studies suggested that soap opera enjoyment had to be explained as some kind of lack on the part of listeners: the psychological need of women for advice, a social or emotional lack, educational deprivation, the inability to enjoy other types of programming, and so forth. (Allen, 1985, p.25)
Fiction and fantasy... function by making life in the present pleasurable, or at least livable, but this does not by any means exclude radical political activity or consciousness. (p.135)
“The constant, active, playful discussions about soap operas open up possibilities for us to understand how social groups can take a somewhat ambiguous television text and incorporate it into existing gossip networks that provide outlets for a kind of politics in which subordinated groups can be validated and heard.” (p.2)
Cann, V. (2014) Only girls like that!: gender-appropriate taste in contemporary youth cultures. Paper presented at Celebrity Studies Conference, University of East Anglia, UK.
Celebrity Studies Journal
ESRC-funded study (2012-14) exploring:

• What discourses of aspiration circulate in celebrity representations?

• How do young people use these discourses in constructing their aspirations?

• How are these shaped by class and gender?

**Methods:**

• Six secondary schools (11-18) in England

• Group and individual interviews with 144 young people (aged 14-17) about their aspirations

• Textual analysis of 12 case study celebrities
Tom Daley, Nicki Minaj, Mario Balotelli, Bill Gates, Beyoncé
Kate Middleton, Katie Price, Emma Watson, Prince Harry, Kim Kardashian, Will Smith, Justin Bieber
IMAGINATION EXERCISES — IN PRACTICE

Tom Daley, Nicki Minaj, Mario Balotelli, Bill Gates, Beyoncé

Kate Middleton, Katie Price, Emma Watson, Prince Harry, Kim Kardashian, Will Smith, Justin Bieber
'I would probably want to be friends with Will Smith, he’s quite cool, quite a flamboyant man. And erm I probably wouldn't want to be friends with, [pause] probably Balotelli...Because like he’s always in the papers about he’s like rebelling against stuff, and stuff like that.

And is there anybody else who you’d want to be friends with?

Erm. Probably Prince Harry...He’s quite a cool guy, yeah, pretty laid back. Even though he’s part of the royal family he’s erm, yeah he’s pretty cool.
“He sets fireworks off out of his bathroom window and, you know, he would just be so much fun to hang around with”
- Rick, boy, 16-17, White British, London

“I’d be very careful around him. You know. Because if he misses a penalty he starts beating up the ground on the floor and stuff, you know. If I tell him he had got a question wrong in class, you know, I don’t know what he’d do. [both laugh]” – Lewis J, boy, 16-17, White British, London

“I think he’d be naughty...he’s maybe stupid....
Or just bored of education’ – Boo, boy, 16-17, Manchester

“He’s a bit like Marmite. You either love him or you hate him...He said like, I can’t, he said if anyone’s racist to me I’ll go to jail because I’ll kill them [slightly laughing] or something like that, so it’s quite a bold statement which is why I like Balotelli” – Herbert, boy, 14-15, white, rural

“He just likes to mess around, and like getting into trouble, but not into too much.” – Syndicate, boy, 14-15, mixed race, London
“Good nature, good personality, and nice... I think Will Smith is a good example of a good role model because he’s real... he wants to do well in life, wants to achieve something.” - Schmidt, boy, 16-17, mixed race, London

“He just seems down-to-earth and hilarious ....not the most well-behaved student, but quite clever.” - Dumbledore, boy, 16-17, White British, rural

“I don’t know what else to say, he’s just really funny...I’d love to be friends with Will Smith” – Edward, boy, 16-17, Black African, London

“He’d fit in with like my group of people that I hang around with, coz he’s funny and they all like tell jokes... they don’t like mess about, but they’re a bit laid back when it comes to like break time and that.” - Tim Jimmy, boy, 14-15, White British, London

“I think he’d be like the joker in the class.” - Charlie Sheen, boy, 16-17, Asian, London
HARRY: THE ‘ULTIMATE LAD’, ORDINARINESS & THE BUFFER OF PRIVILEGE

“He just seems so funny. Like he acts how everyone wants the royals to act. He’s still like a lad I suppose...he comes across as this down to earth guy and he’d just be fun to hang around with” – Rick, boy, 16-17, White British, London

“He might just do crazy things like, you know, flying helicopters to go and pick up his girlfriend, that would be fun.” - Olivia, girl, 16-17, White British, rural

“He does stuff that isn’t really prince like. ... I’d probably see him like maybe having a laugh in class, but like getting on with the work... it’s probably like his character and personality that makes me say that.” – Peter, 14-15, White British, rural

“He'll be like down to earth quite different to like compared with the queen as well....more like ordinary people...he's like involved in loads of like in the army and everything, because I think he would, like he would take interest in like studies” – Aliyah, girl, 16-17, Pakistan, Manchester
CELEBRITY TALK

Talk about celebrity is more than just talk about celebrity
‘Common sense’ stories about money

• Are there different stories about different kinds of wealth/money?
• Do participants agree/disagree? What are points of contestation?
• What role might social class, gender and ethnicity play in stories about wealth and money?
CELEBRITY TALK — MONEY AND INEQUALITY

• Managing contradictions of austere meritocracy
• Thrift and conspicuous consumption
• Making sense of inequality through celebrity talk
FINAL QUESTIONS AND COMMENTS

For more information about the project see www.clebyouth.org
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