The role of Celebrity in Young People’s Classed and Gendered Aspirations

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Political context
Context: Celebrity as ‘eroding aspiration’

“Kids nowadays just want to be famous. If you ask little girls, they either want to be footballers' wives or win The X Factor ... Our society is in danger of being Barbie-dolled.” - Barbara Follett MP, 2008

“X Factor culture fuelled the UK riots... Kids are meant to 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 have made success out of serious hard work.” - Iain Duncan Smith, 2011

David Cameron: too many British children want to be popstars and footballers

David Cameron met with school children in Monrovia today and said that too many children in Britain wanted to be "popstars and footballers" when they grow up.
1) What discourses of aspiration circulate in celebrity representations?

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

3) How are the discourses of aspiration in celebrity and their uses classed and gendered?
Data collection

6 secondary schools (11-18) in England, rural and urban, reflective of local demographics

24 group interviews with 6 students each (Year 10 & Year 12)

Follow up individual interviews with about 8 students per school

12 celebrity case studies
Group interviews:

We asked about:

• Favourite/ disliked celebrities
• Any celebrities they would like to be/ have their job/ life
• What makes someone a celebrity
• How they consume celebrity culture

We are now exploring themes and patterns in the group interview data.
‘He trained so hard he vomited’: Displaying your worth

Dave: I think it can go two ways, You’re either a celebrity who’s earned what you have, or you’re a celebrity who got lucky.

Kim: And so what, what do you, okay, so for those who’ve earned what they’ve got, what’s that through, do you think? Is it talent, or hard work?

Dave: It’s talent. Talent, obviously. Like Usain Bolt, he is, he has a lot of talent for running, but he also has to train that talent for. I think it’s been twelve years that he’s competed.

Jerome: Do you remember that thing we watched in German, where the, *The Life of Usain Bolt*, and he trained so hard that he actually vomited.
What counts as ‘hard work’? The significance of class and gender

Dave: Reality TV stars and models like Kim Kardashian, they’re at the **bottom of the celebrity pit** ... they’ve done nothing.

Saafi: You know Kim Kardashian all she did was a sex tape [laughter] and then got famous ... I think they appreciate it more when **they’ve had to work for it**. I don’t like it when it's like they've not had to do anything to get that and they’re gonna take it for granted.

Kirsty: **They’d have to work for it**, I think. I think it would be better if they worked for it.
Ally: And how did she do modelling? What did she do? Oh, just lift up her top, simple.

Mavie: I’m not being funny, you always bring in the newspaper and flash that around anyway. ...

Ally: That’s one of the **worst ways you can earn money**. It’s a rather **sad** way of earning money as well.

Mavie: I don’t think you can judge people.

Ally: She’s **not talented** in any way, is she?

Mavie: She’s got a **good business**.

Luigi: Yeah, she’s **made a lot for herself**, even though she...

Ally: Yeah, she’s got a good business, but is it her that created it? And is it her that done all the stuff? No.

Mavie: Yeah, for her kids.

Ally: She’s not a business woman, I’m telling you now, **Katie Price is not a business woman**.

Mavie: She owns Mamas and Papas. ...

Ally: But, she’s not a business woman, she’s **pathetic**, honestly

Mavie: No, she **made it all**.
Knowledge Transfer
Increasing impact for CelebYouth findings
Aims of the Knowledge Transfer:

*Increasing impact and significance of findings from our project*

*Funded by Brunel University*
Phase 1 of KT:

- Maintaining our website: www.celebyouth.org
- Increasing our use of Mailchimp
- Twitter presence
- Facebook presence
- Building links through writing blogs for websites and organisations
- Carry out stakeholder interviews with key people in the field of youth work, education, teaching, NGOs.
Phase 2: Developing Materials

- Develop and build on the relationships established in phase 1
- Develop materials on YouTube and True Tube
- Take up recommendations made by the stakeholder interviews: establishing links with In defence of Youth Work, Pete Fraser and Claire Nix
Phase 3: Marketing findings

• Deliver 6 workshops through key conferences (aims to be identified)
• Workshops will be through our links with Career Development Institute, Gender Education Institute, Media Education Association and Runnymede Trust
What have we done so far:

• Blogs posts on our website on the role of ‘celebrity YouTubers’ and coming out; Beyoncé, Rachel Dolezal and authenticity, Young people’s aspirations and the power of stories

• Interviewed Tania De St Croix a postdoctoral researcher and spokesperson for the organisation ‘In Defence of Youth Work’

• Interviewed Pete Fraser expert in Media Education

• Interviewed Claire Nix from the National Institute for Careers Education and Counselling
• Written a blog post entitled: ‘Celebrity talk and the problems of inequality’ for the website Open Democracy, this post was based on the article by the research team ‘Extraordinary acts and ordinary pleasures: rhetorics of inequality in young people’s talk about celebrity’ in Discourse and Society

• Written but yet to be published blog on celebrities and motherhood for the website ‘The F Word’
Any questions?