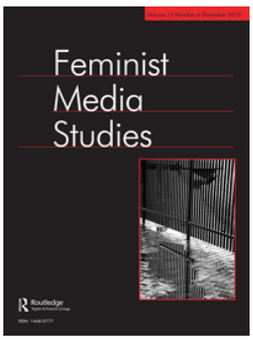

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WELFARE QUEENS, THRIFTY HOUSEWIVES, AND DO-IT-ALL MUMS

Celebrity motherhood and the cultural politics of austerity

Kim Allen, Heather Mendick, Laura Harvey and **Aisha Ahmad**

In this paper, we consider how the cultural politics of austerity within Britain plays out on the celebrity maternal body. We locate austerity as a discursive and disciplinary field and contribute to emerging feminist scholarship exploring how broader political and socio-economic shifts interact with cultural constructions of femininity and motherhood. To analyse the symbolic function of mediated celebrity maternity within austerity, the paper draws on a textual analysis of three celebrity mothers: Kate Middleton, Kim Kardashian, and Beyoncé. This analysis was undertaken as part of a larger qualitative study into celebrity culture and young people's classed and gendered aspirations. We show how these celebrity mothers represent the folk devils and fantasy figures of the maternal under austerity—the thrifty, happy housewife, the benefits mum, and the do-it-all working mum—and attempt to unpick what cultural work they do in the context of austerity within Britain. Through the lens of celebrity motherhood, we offer a feminist critique of austerity as a programme that both consolidates unequal class relations and makes punishing demands on women in general, and mothers in particular.

KEYWORDS austerity; celebrity; motherhood; post-feminism; social class

Introduction

In this paper, we consider how the cultural politics of austerity within Britain plays out on the celebrity maternal body. Locating austerity as a discursive and disciplinary field (Rebecca Bramall 2013), we contribute to an emerging body of feminist scholarship concerned with how broader political and socio-economic shifts interact with cultural constructions of femininity and motherhood.

To explore the symbolic function of mediated celebrity maternity within austerity, the paper draws on a textual analysis of three celebrity mothers: Kate Middleton, Kim Kardashian, and Beyoncé. This analysis was undertaken as part of a larger qualitative study into the role of celebrity in young people's classed and gendered aspirations. Representing the fantasy figures and folk devils of the "maternal feminine" (Angela McRobbie 2013) under austerity—the thrifty, happy housewife, the benefits mum, and the do-it-all working

mum—we attempt to unpick what cultural work these mediated mothers do within the context of austerity. Through the lens of celebrity motherhood, we offer a feminist critique of austerity as a programme that consolidates unequal class relations and makes punishing demands on women generally, and mothers in particular.

Shirkers, Strivers, Thrift, and Frugality: The Financial "Crisis" and Austerity's Moral Register

Since the global financial crisis of 2008, the UK government has implemented a drastic programme of austerity. Conservative Prime Minister, David Cameron, and Chancellor of the Exchequer, George Osborne, have pledged to reduce the deficit and create a "leaner" state through a process of drastic welfare reform, including escalated benefits sanctions and mandatory workfare schemes (Anne Daguerre and David Etherington 2014).

While presented as a "common sense" and "necessary" programme of economic activities, the entanglement of austerity with forms of neoliberal governance has been explored (Stuart Hall and Alan O'Shea 2013; Tracey Jensen and Imogen Tyler 2012; Ruth Levitas 2012). In an austerity package that has decimated forms of social security and cut public services, responsibility for solving the economic crisis has been transferred from financial elites to the state and then to the general public. In these ways, austerity provides an opportunity to advance neoliberal economic agendas, shrinking the state while protecting the interests of capitalism. Indeed, through deregulation, tax breaks, and further advancing the privatisation and financialisation processes started by Thatcher decades earlier, austerity has facilitated a flow of wealth and power upwards (Will Davies 2014; David Harvey 2014).

As Anita Biressi and Heather Nunn argue, neoliberal austerity values and discourses have extended into the cultural arena where they are "deployed to marshal, harness and legitimise certain kinds of conduct and attitudes and to marginalise others—all in the service of sustaining the neoliberal project" (2013, 12). Austerity can be understood as 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 2012).

From film to television, an array of mediated forms concerned with austerity have emerged, infused by a moral register which brings forth requirements on individuals to conduct themselves according to sensibilities of enterprise, resilience, thrift, and hard work. A key feature of austerity culture is the shaming of those deemed "work-shy" or insufficiently austere (Tracey Jensen 2013), animated in a swathe of reality television programmes about welfare recipients such as *Benefits Street* (Channel 4 2014). Described as "poverty porn," these shows are frequently mobilised by politicians as evidence of a society plagued by welfare dependency and moral breakdown (Kim Allen, Imogen Tyler, and Sara De Benedictis 2014; Tracey Jensen 2014).

The exemplary and Othered subject positions saturating these cultural texts—the thrifty, self-sufficient, hard-working citizen versus the feckless benefits scrounger—resonate deeply with "shirkers and strivers" of the UK government's political rhetoric in which those who work hard have been pitted against those who prefer "sleeping off a life on benefits" (George Osborne 2012). As the spectre of the "moral underclass" and undeserving poor comes to suffuse debates about welfare reform, poverty and economic inactivity are explained as resulting from behavioural deficiencies (bad choices, laziness,

and irresponsibility) rather than structural inequalities systematically produced by neoliberal economies (Imogen Tyler 2013). This opposition between those who work and those who do not erases how most people on benefits and in poverty are in paid work (Tom MacInnes, Hannah Aldridge, Sabrina Bushe, Peter Kenway, and Adam Tinson 2013), a fact that, if recognised, unravels this binary. The portrayal of austerity as a moral crisis may be understood as a form of "ideological displacement" (Hall et al. 1978 in Emma Dowling and David Harvie 2014, 872) that defends the logic of neoliberal capitalism by scapegoating vulnerable groups.

The Gendering of Austerity, Celebrity Culture, and the New "Maternal Feminine"

Despite repeated claims that "we're all in it together," the effects of austerity are not equally felt. A growth in casualised and low paid work, public sector job losses (where women make up the majority of employees), a weakening of maternity rights, and greater welfare conditionality have created new social risks which fall heavily on women, and mothers in particular (The Fawcett Society 2012; The Feminist Fightback Collective 2011).

According to Jensen and Tyler (2012), public narratives of austerity "coalesce around the institution of the family and parenting perhaps more substantively and intensively than any other site." Indeed, given the disproportionate impact of austerity measures on women, feminist scholarship has begun to demonstrate the distinctly gendered subject positions ushered in since 2008 and unpick how current struggles around maternity, femininity, and family play out within popular culture (Allen, Tyler, and De Benedictis 2014; Biressi and Nunn 2013; Bramall 2013; Jo Littler 2013; McRobbie 2013; Diane Negra 2013; Diane Negra and Yvonne Tasker 2014). In this paper, we draw upon and extend this work by analysing new data from a two-year research study of celebrity and young people's aspirations. Exploring how configurations of what McRobbie (2013) calls the "maternal feminine" are made real within the representational field of celebrity, we provide an original contribution to feminist scholarship on the cultural and gender politics of austerity. Firstly, we make a substantive contribution by mapping celebrity maternities and analysing these in relation to the cultural regime of austerity; secondly, we make a methodological contribution to this field through drawing on new empirical data systematically tracking celebrity representations.

With their wealth and status, the celebrity mothers discussed here occupy a radically different location to ordinary mothers feeling the brunt of welfare cuts. However, we argue that mediated celebrity operates as a form of "visual media governmentality" (McRobbie 2013), propping up ideas about which ways of doing motherhood are valued (or not) within the current conjecture. Further, while these celebrities are transnational in their appeal, we are specifically interested in their framing and function in the UK context of austerity and its relation to neoliberal governmentality.

The Study: Approaching Mediated Celebrity Maternity

"The role of celebrity in young people's classed and gendered aspirations" explored how young people engage with discourses of aspiration circulating within celebrity representations. It combined interviews with young people aged between fourteen and seventeen in England with case studies of the public mediation of twelve celebrities:

Mario Balotelli, Beyoncé, Bill Gates, Emma Watson, Justin Bieber, Kate Middleton, Katie Price, Kim Kardashian, Nicki Minaj, Prince Harry, Tom Daley, and Will Smith. These twelve celebrities were selected from those celebrities who generated most discussion among participants.

In this paper we use data collected for three of the four case study celebrities who were pregnant or new mothers during the project. Kate Middleton gave birth to George Alexander Louis, first son of Prince William in July 2013. American reality TV star, socialite, and model Kim Kardashian gave birth to her first child, North West, with African-American rapper Kanye West, also in July 2013. African-American singer Beyoncé gave birth to daughter Blue Ivy in January 2012 to husband Jay-Z, and her role as a new mother was a prominent theme in her mediation. Katie Price was also pregnant during this period. However, from the four mothers in our case studies, we selected the three that best exemplify patterns in configurations of the maternal feminine within austerity. Very similar classed and racialised discourses were found in Price and Kardashian's mediated maternity and as such we chose Kardashian as a case to examine these. While both Kardashian and Beyoncé are American celebrities, our focus is on how these figures, alongside Middleton, are being read within the cultural and political context of the UK. Both are global figures within circuits of celebrity that operate within and go beyond national boundaries, as reflected by our sampling strategy that draws on national press coverage alongside transnational social media. Indeed we selected them as case studies because of their significance for young people in England who were interviewed for this study.

For each celebrity, we tracked their media representation across six months (February–July 2013) sampling three main data sources supplemented by three additional sources (see Table 1).[1] Data sources varied for each celebrity, informed by our participants' discussions about where they received information about celebrities and to include traditional and new media such as social media platforms Twitter and YouTube. We sampled news articles, tweets, and videos which were popular (judged by viewing and sharing figures) and containing material relevant to the study's focus. Data—including images and written text—were coded using NVivo. The data used here emerged from a number of thematic codes including: gender, family and relationships, work and achievements, and bodies.

Our decision to include social media acknowledges the increasingly complex "circuits of celebrity gossip" within the contemporary mediascape (David Beer and Ruth Penfold-Mounce 2009). Social media affords new opportunities for the collective production of celebrity. Further, these "spaces of sociability" (Tracey Jensen and Jessica Ringrose 2014, 374) call attention to more ambivalent or hostile engagements with popular culture than

TABLE 1
Celebrity case study data sources

Celebrity	Data source 1	Date source 2	Data source 3
Kate	*The Sun*	Online biographies	YouTube videos: three of Kate's public speeches; *When Kate Met William: A Tale of Two Lives* (documentary, ITV, 2011)
Kim	*The Sun*	Twitter	Selected clips from *The Kardashians* (TV series); TV interview with Oprah Winfrey
Beyoncé	*The Sun*	Selected music videos	*Life is But a Dream* (documentary, HBO, 2013)

are conceptualised within studies of fandom. Celebrity pregnancies and motherhood are collective cultural experiences, historically subject to a gaze that converts private affairs into public matters (Meredith Nash 2006). As our study attests, the growth of social media enables an intensification of the collective consumption and surveillance of the maternal body.

In what follows, we examine how austerity's distinct aesthetics, moral tropes, and sensibilities cluster around and settle upon particular celebrity bodies. We understand celebrity as a "hierarchical domain of value formation characterised by struggles over the social worth and meaning of selected classed, gendered and racialised bodies" (Imogen Tyler and Bruce Bennett 2010). We draw on feminist scholarship exploring how social divisions are (re)produced through the policing of morality within the cultural realm (Jensen and Ringrose 2014; Beverly Skeggs and Helen Wood 2011; Imogen Tyler 2008). Popular culture offers what Skeggs and Wood (2011) call a "grammar of conduct" through which the moral worth of selves on display is evaluated.

We also draw on Tyler's (2013) work on social abjection to consider how representational forms are mobilised to service neoliberalism. Tyler provides a "figurative methodology" concerned with how social types—such as the chav or asylum seeker—operate as "symbolic and material scapegoats, the mediating agencies through which the social decomposition effected by market deregulation and welfare retrenchment are legitimated" (2013, 73). Tyler's work calls for analysis that attends to the "revolting aesthetics" by which some objects are deemed disgusting and made socially abject, tracking how these circulate across various spaces (e.g., policy speeches, news media). We are concerned not just with those celebrity mothers who generate disgust or contempt, but equally (and relatedly) those who figure as desirable.

In the sections below, we trace how Kate Middleton, Kim Kardashian, and Beyoncé come to figure as the exemplary and abject figures of austerity's maternal feminine: respectively, the thrifty happy housewife, the benefits mum, and the do-it-all working mum. Our analysis maps the dominant discourses circulating across celebrity culture that are embodied in these maternal figures, however we recognise that all of these are subject to contestation, an issue we return to in the conclusion.

Thrifty Princesses and Happy Housewives: Retreatism and White Middle-Class Respectability

Embedded within austerity's aesthetic sensibilities is a nostalgic evocation of past periods of enforced national austerity, including wartime iconography and slogans like "Keep Calm and Carry On" (Bramall 2013; Jensen 2013). This was captured in a series of national events in the summers of 2011 and 2012 including the Royal Wedding and Golden Jubilee celebrations, and coincided with a "renewed fascination with aristocratic elites" (Negra and Tasker 2014, 10) in TV shows like *Downton Abbey* (ITV) and *Life is Toff* (BBC3). As the Royal Family play a role in the cultural work of austerity, it is not surprising that Kate Middleton has been subject to an extraordinary level of symbolic loading. Three themes figure in Middleton's mediated maternity: thrift and ordinariness; domesticity and retreatism; and the respectable maternal body.

Combining traits associated with the "yummy mummy" (Kim Allen and Jayne Osgood 2009; Littler 2013) with a distinct set of aesthetics and sensibilities aligned with austerity, the happy, thrifty, home-front housewife has been identified as a contemporary exemplar

for recessionary times (Biressi and Nunn 2013; Bramall 2013; Negra 2013). Emblematic of the cultural coding of fiscal prudence as a moral project, she figures as "an ideal response to austerity and a solution to the family's [and nation's] waste" (Jensen 2013, 17). As Negra writes on recessionary popular culture, "female thrift 'works' for an era of adjusted economic realities ... with female consumer resourcefulness becoming a new theme on many fronts" (2013, 124).

The virtuous sensibilities of frugality and sacrifice are central themes in Middleton's mediated maternity. In July 2013, a figure of "new thrift" culture, Kirstie Allsopp,[2] publicly endorsed Middleton and Prince William on daytime television as "the most frugal ... the poster boys and girls for the 'make do and mend' generation." Newspapers regularly reported on her tendency to wear the same dress twice with her "modest" choice of high-street brands such as *TKMax* framed as evidence of her "careful approach to shopping" (Amber Graafland 2013). Other stories focused on Middleton preparing a "humble nursery" in a "modest" two-bedroom house (*Hello Magazine* 2013) and buying inexpensive baby products from high-street shop *Mothercare*.

"Ordinariness" has historically played a role in justifying the wealth and privilege of the Royals (Michael Billig 1992). It is both significant and unsurprising then that it has a particular "discursive ascendancy" (Nick Couldry 2001) in current times. In Middleton's positioning as a "thrifty Royal," her ordinariness is symbolised through high-street brands and restrained spending and reinforced by an emphasis on her "humble" roots (despite the fact that Middleton attended a series of private schools and has very wealthy parents). For example, one online biography describes Middleton as coming from "a decidedly working-class stock of coal miners and builders" (Biography.com). Another newspaper article, referencing her "commoner" grandparents and mother's upbringing in a "council flat," describe the Middletons as "aspirational achievers, and self-made New Money ... the acme of middle-class success, forged through energy, enterprise and sheer hard work" (Michael Thornton 2013).

The TV documentary, *When Kate Met William: A Tale of Two Lives* (ITV 2011), provides a fascinating example of the media's crafting of Middleton as normal. Telling the story of "the girl who rose from 'humble beginnings' to become one of the world's most famous women," it deploys visual and narrative tropes to generate a sense of the ordinary and familiar. Montage footage of the garden of a semi-detached suburban house with a child's climbing frame, and framed pictures of a young Middleton in school uniform, provide a visual backdrop. Over this, the narrator and talking heads emphasise the Middleton's "Victorian semi," her parents "regular" jobs as an airhostess and flight dispatcher, and their modest income. Through the crafting of this Cinderella story of a normal girl catapulted into the world of wealth and privilege, Middleton's celebrity, like Princess Diana before her, represents a "curious variant of the myth of success" (Couldry 2001, 230).

Relatedly, Middleton's public role and duties are stressed repeatedly. In a televised interview (Sky News 2010) following her engagement to Prince William—one of her first (and few) televised public speaking events—Middleton emphasises her commitment to working hard at being a Royal:

> I've been working very hard for the family business, and sometimes those days are long days and you know ... I think everyone who I work with can see I am there pulling my weight and that's really what matters to me ... It's obviously nerve-wracking, because ... I don't know the ropes, William is obviously used to it, but no, I'm willing to learn quickly and work hard ... I really hope I can make a difference.

Becoming a Royal is constituted as a job that demands hard work, a public duty carrying a responsibility to make a difference. Through figuring Middleton as working hard and giving back, and as in tune with the national mood of restraint, she becomes "like us." Making Middleton ordinary tempers accusations of unjustified privilege associated with elites (Billig 1992; Laura Harvey, Heather Mendick, and Kim Allen 2015). As a key figure of austerity, Middleton performs a tremendous amount of ideological work in defusing resentment at the growing inequalities unleashed since 2008, as the wealth of the global "1%" has continued to grow under austerity (Danny Dorling 2014).

The second and related theme is the figuring of the "domestic" as a site of contentment and related romance of retreat. News articles reported on Middleton becoming a "domestic goddess" by learning to bake bread in order to "keep her man happy" (Perez Hilton 2013). Middleton's retreat to the home is also symbolised by her scant public appearances and passive demeanour, largely appearing as silent accompaniment to her husband. The celebration of the domestic has become a benchmark of successful femininity, with homemaking and childcare coded as sites of happiness and moral worth (Littler 2013; McRobbie 2013). It is in a distinctly middle-class and heterosexual family unit (and planned parenting) where we find this maternal figure.

The return to retro-domestic femininities and the fetishisation of the home is not new. As Diane Negra (2009) argues, retreatism has long-formed a master-narrative within post-feminist popular culture, offering the "promise of coming back to oneself in the process of coming home" (2009, 7). Yet when read within the context of austerity, these take on particular significance. As Littler reminds us "a reinvigorated romanticisation of the housewife [has emerged] ... at exactly the same time as neoliberal policies have sought to cut back on and avoid providing state daycare provision" (2013, 232). Retreatist fantasies conceal and depoliticise the gender inequalities unleashed by austerity, specifically the offloading of the costs of social reproduction onto the unwaged work of women (Dowling and Harvie 2014, 876). Thus while we appreciate Bramall's (2013) insistence on resisting reading austerity's fetishisation of the domestic as entirely ideologically compliant with conservative gender regimes, we argue that the figure of the happy housewife does considerable cultural work for a government determined to revive "traditional" family values and cut public spending. The constitution of childcare as a personal matter and not as "real work" is a central premise of the shift to a post-welfare state (Sylvia Federici 2014).

Middleton is a conduit for austerity's more desirable forms of the maternal feminine. Associated with the planned maternity and resources of upper middle-class women, her symbolic traction is "inextricably tied up with expansive norms of respectable middle-class life" to which young women must aspire (McRobbie 2013, 130). Indeed, the classed—and raced—inscription of the good maternal subject is evident in the final theme within her mediation: the respectable maternal body. Middleton's was frequently described as "demure," "poised," "elegant," and "chic," while her respectable maternity was signalled by her neat and hardly visible bump. Indeed, Middleton was (and continues to be) celebrated as a role model for young women and mothers, including Kardashian, to whom we now turn.

Work-Shy Mothers, Excessive Consumers and Unruly Bodies: Celebrity Culture's Benefits Mum

Kardashian's maternity was subject to immense judgment, and unlike Middleton, she figured as a cautionary tale for expectant mothers. Kardashian's class and raced position are

complex and worthy of discussion. The daughter of a wealthy lawyer, Kardashian's lack of humble beginnings marks her as different from British working-class celebrities like Kerry Katona or Jade Goody[3] who have been positioned as celebrity "chav mums" (Tyler and Bennett 2010). However, she lacks valued forms of cultural capital, frequently derided as stupid, trashy, and excessive. Her association with reality TV and a sex-tape scandal render Kardashian a popular reference point for "improper fame." Finally, due to her ethnic ambiguity, the centrality of her large bottom within her mediation—historically associated with blackness (Patricia Hill-Collins 2005)—and her high-profile relationships with black men, Kardashian is arguably more proximate to blackness than whiteness. Located outside of the realm of respectable, "pure white" middle-class femininity, as we demonstrate below, Kardashian is a convenient vessel for anxieties and moral judgments circulating within austerity. Three key themes characterise her mediated maternity and work to position her as an abject figure: criticism of her lack of hard work and excessive spending; a scrutiny of her unruly pregnant body; and judgment of her sexual conduct.

Central to producing Kardashian as the wrong kind of mother (and neoliberal subject) is the absence of legitimised "work" as a basis for her fame. News articles in tabloid and broadsheet press frequently referred to her as "famous for being famous," a publicity-generating machine whose fame is built on controversy not merit. For example, the *Guardian* newspaper branded her an "attention-obsessed numbskull" (Leo Benedictus 2013). Kardashian's figuring as the wrong kind of celebrity can be found in media coverage of *Vogue* editor Anna Wintour's reported attempts to ban Kardashian from the annual Met Gala, an event attended by high society's "great and good." Kardashian was constructed as an unwanted celebrity guest and shamed for her fashion "faux-pas" (Eleanor Gower 2013). In this failed Pygmalion narrative, Kardashian is unable to display the appropriate taste, cultural capital, or talent to pass in elite circles. The absence of work from Kardashian's celebrity was also a dominant feature of mass circulated joke tweets:[4]

> That awkward moment when Kim Kardashian's kid grows up and asks her why she's famous
>
> You know Kim Kardashian is bad when you miss Paris Hilton[5]
>
> (Anonymised tweets)

Kardashian is frequently cited, by politicians including President Obama and educational professionals, as a bad role model for young people, promoting desires for fame and materialism over achievement based on hard work. Femininity and working-classness are frequently called upon in debates about the "crisis of fame" in which contemporary celebrity is seen to have become detached from work, merit, or talent (Kim Allen and Heather Mendick 2013; Diane Negra and Su Holmes 2008). These classed and gendered hierarchies of proper/improper fame (and reward) are revived in contexts of restraint. As the "shirker versus striver" rhetoric exemplifies, intelligibility under austerity hinges on individuals being able to evidence their willingness to work *hard*, as the government has sought to address a so-called "something for nothing" culture of entitlement and welfare dependency. This moral injunction is underlined by punitive benefits sanctions and workfare programmes which force people into employment, even if this is precarious or unpaid.

At times of restricted resources, it is not just who gets what and on what basis that is important, but what individuals do with what they have, as austerity is characterised by an intense scrutiny of welfare recipients' consumption practices (Jensen 2013). Anxieties about

over-consumption saturate media reports and online discussion focusing on Kardashian's "out of control" spending. Deemed vulgar and immoral, Kardashian's consumer habits regularly feature in mass circulated tweets by *Twitter* handles such as "Injustice Facts" which state "Kim Kardashian spends $380,000 a year on clothes and shoes, enough to buy 300,000 impoverished children a decent pair of shoes."

Such headlines and tweets seek to generate resentment and anger, deploying familiar discourses of fairness and deservingness that inflect neoliberal framings of welfare reform (Hall and O'Shea 2013). Kardashian's role within these practices resonates with patterns we identify elsewhere, showing how working-class and black female celebrities (rather than political or financial elites) become objects of contempt within young people's meaning-making about contemporary inequalities (Harvey, Mendick, and Allen 2015).

Kardashian is Othered within a moral universe defined by a "double discourse of frugality and productivity" (Biressi and Nunn 2013, 183–184). She is constituted as parasitic, feeding off the celebrity (rather than the welfare) system and illegitimately spending money that has not been earned the "right" way. Thus, Kardashian becomes a symbolic metaphor for austerity's benefits mum. Indeed, as austerity measures have targeted an apparently over-generous welfare state, both the media and politicians have frequently reported on a crisis of leech-like families (or "benefits broods") who live off welfare, headed by single mothers. Like the "chav mum" (Tyler 2008) and "welfare queen" (Ann Marie Hancock 2004), austerity's benefits mum has emerged as a central figure of contempt in the current crisis. In this hyper-visibility of the benefits mum across media and policy discourse, we see how austerity has afforded opportunities to reboot classed and racialised discourses that have historically positioned black and working-class mothers outside of the hegemonic ideal of white, middle-class maternity (Val Gillies 2007; Ann Phoenix 1991). The cultural work performed by austerity's benefits mum has been discussed elsewhere; for example in analysis of the figure of White Dee, the unemployed single mother and central protagonist of Channel 4's *Benefits Street* (Allen, Tyler, and De Benedictis 2014); and the discourses of the "feral mother" in the wake of the 2011 English riots (Sara De Benedictis 2012). Kardashian comes to circulate alongside these abject maternal figures within austerity's moral universe.

Distinctions around austerity's maternal feminine are also manifest through judgments of the pregnant body and sexuality. Here, the role of disgust in making "social divisions sensate" (Skeggs and Wood 2011, 71) is clearly apparent, as corporeal successes and failings are read as signs of moral character (McRobbie 2013). Indeed, this was clearly animated in a highly-constructed "battle of the bumps" between Kardashian and Middleton within mainstream and social media. Pitted against each other, Kardashian's maternal body was deemed lacking:

> #KateMiddleton, Duchess Of Cambridge is like comparing a 5 star hotel (Kate) to a @HolidayInn
>
> Wow, the daily mail compared Kate Middleton to @KimKardashian. That's like comparing full health to having scabies ...
>
> (Anonymised tweets)

Kardashian's pregnant body was subject to a harsh gaze which judged it to be excessively fleshy and hyper-sexualised. Media reports voyeuristically described her as "flaunting her lady lumps" (Ellie Ross 2013), her clothing regularly criticised as inappropriately "racy," "risqué," and in poor taste:

> Always prone to the odd fashion howler, the reality star seems to have gone to pieces during pregnancy. Too tight, too short or just plain trashy … her recent outfits are a daily reminder of how not to flatter a bump … If you want to get it wrong, follow Kimmy's golden rules. (Ross 2013)

The vitriolic shaming of Kardashian's maternal body was evocatively captured in an image of her swollen feet in high-heeled shoes towards the end of her pregnancy. This image not only featured in numerous news stories but began to trend on Twitter, becoming a symbol of her "disgusting" status. As comments on online forums demonstrate, the public are invited to participate in evaluating Kardashian's body for evidence of her unsuitability for motherhood:

> 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 … How proud she must be. Total train wreck. Women should pass a basic IQ test before they're allowed to get pregnant. (Reader comment 2013)

Here, Kardashian's body is inscribed with classed and raced judgments: references to fake tans, tight clothes, multiple sexual partners, and having a child out of wedlock resonate with cultural representations of working-class women as vulgar, fecund, and immoral. News reports and online discussions about Kardashian's pregnancy were equally imbued by a fixation on her relationships with black men and (at the time) unmarried status. Tweets and memes carried pornographic imagery focusing on her bottom and vagina. Due to their violent nature, we do not reproduce them here. However, we provide one example of one mass-circulated meme (Figure 1). Entitled "Kim Kardashian's body count," this listed the names of her alleged sexual partners.

Again, tweets and memes draw upon stigmatising discourses of sexual excess that have historically positioned working-class and black women as bad mothers. The easy fertility read on to Kardashian's maternity and concern around her unwed status are similarly animated in broader debates around mothers within austerity, characterised by a "constant advocacy of stable forms of family life" (McRobbie 2013, 121). Indeed, as lone parenting and family breakdown have been blamed for producing cultures of welfare dependency (David Cameron 2014), the government have introduced punitive benefits sanctions on large families and interventions aimed at "troubled families" while repeatedly asserting the place of marriage at "the heart of stable families" (Iain Duncan Smith 2014).

In online spaces, the pregnant body becomes public property. The forensic examination and shaming of Kardashian's body through close-ups of her feet, bottom, and breasts replicate the pornographic visual techniques deployed within reality TV—such as the "judgment shot" which invite viewers to take up (and gain pleasure from) practices of moral evaluation (Skeggs and Wood 2011). As with televisual forms, our gaze is taken to Kardashian's corporeality, and in finding this lacking, we establish our superiority:

> Looking at kim kardashian pregnant makes me feel 1000000x better about myself
> I hope kim kardashian gets so fat she implodes, that would be legit
> (Anonymised tweets)

The highly charged nature of this online material is representative of what Emma A. Jane (2014) calls "e-bile": forms of "recreational nastiness" that characterise the

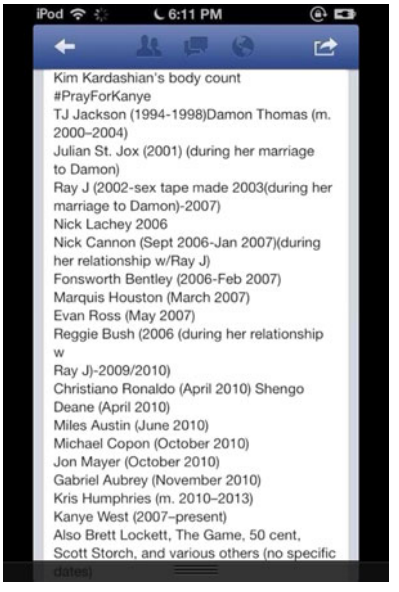

FIGURE 1
"Kim Kardashian's body count"—circulated image from Twitter, 2013

dominant tenor of the internet and fall most heavily on women. Kardashian's mediated maternity provides an insight into the gendered, classed, and raced nature of performances of disgust within participatory practices of contemporary popular culture (Jensen and Ringrose 2014; Tyler 2013). Furthermore, the materialising of Kardashian's body within "the virtual" for others to seize and shame, illustrates how these spaces "re-stage the collective ownership and shaming of [women's] bodies in new ways" (Jessica Ringrose and Laura Harvey 2015, 206).

So far we have traced the disgust reactions generated by Kardashian's mediated maternity to stigmatising discourses associated with working-class and black mothers. Intensified and rebooted within contexts of austerity, these work to produce her as the symbolic Other to more desirable forms of the maternal feminine embodied by Middleton. However, while we have shown Middleton to do significant ideological work in relation to austerity, there are limits to her exemplary status. As McRobbie writes, "female labour power is far too important to the post-industrial economy for any [government] to be an advocate of long-term stay-at-home wives and mothers" (2013, 121), especially one set on reducing the cost of welfare. Thus, austerity's ideal mother must not fully retreat, but must carefully balance her career with childcare. While Middleton's mediation includes an assertion of her public work, she retreats too far into the private realm and—like Kardashian—is unable to display the productivity and self-sufficiency demanded by austerity. It is thus to another celebrity mother that we now turn.

Turning to Beyoncé: Austerity's Do-it-All Working Mum

Given the classed and raced constructions of the "good mother," it may be surprising that the figure of exemplary maternity is found in Beyoncé. Three themes contribute to this figuring: hard work; post-feminist sexual respectability; and the work–home life balance.

A defining feature of Beyoncé's celebrity is her work ethic, a commitment to "hard work" forming a central narrative arc within the biography of her by Andrew Vaughn (2012), which opens with the following lines:

> Beyoncé possessed two very rare talents. The first was an innate ability to sing and dance, but the other was probably more important. Beyoncé knew that talent alone was never enough. Practice, dedication, and sacrifice were every bit as important as raw talent. (2012, 7)

This is a repeated motif in the book, with references to "remarkable work ethic" (8), her experience of seeing hard work and entrepreneurship through her childhood, and her "tireless determination" to achieve career success (32), while on the final page we are reminded that she is "a self-confessed workaholic" (156). Newspaper stories of her European tour emphasised her long working hours and physical exhaustion. Beyoncé's work ethic is often symbolised aesthetically and through a stress on her body: she is frequently described as pushing her body to the limits, while images focus on her muscular thighs and sweat-drenched body. Even an event which could appear like an avoidance of hard work—her decision not to sing live at Obama's inauguration—is explained in terms of her work ethic: "I am a perfectionist and one thing about me, I practice until my feet bleed and I did not have time to rehearse with the orchestra" (Beyoncé quoted in Alison Malony 2013).

Beyoncé's embodiment of the virtue of hard work can also be found in memes circulating online containing quotes from the star such as "whenever I feel bad, I use that feeling to motivate me to work harder," or the caption "you have the same 24 hours as Beyoncé," the latter playfully mocking the reader for their relative lack of productivity. Through the repeated assertion of Beyoncé's drive, she embodies the values of productivity and self-sufficiency that are the hallmarks of successful selfhood under austerity. Indeed, as Negra (2013) notes, "spectacles" of enterprise across popular culture are particularly useful in an economic context that threatens to unravel powerful mythologies of meritocracy and aspirationalism. Furthermore, as a black woman not born into privilege, she perpetuates the meritocratic notion that hard work still pays, even in austere times.

Further, while Beyoncé is renowned for spending millions on champagne, private jets, and mansions, accusations of illegitimate consumption are diffused and relocated as deserved through her association with hard work and charity. This includes her participation in the *Chime for Change* campaign for female empowerment and "giving back" in the wake of Hurricane Katrina (Vaughn 2012).

Second, Beyoncé's media image combines a sexual assertiveness with a claim to "respectability." Music videos and photo shoots are replete with a highly-sexualised aesthetic, and shortly after giving birth she took part in a "sexy" photo shoot with celebrity photographer Terry Richardson. The centrality of sexual desirability to Beyoncé's mediated maternity echoes Littler's (2013) description of the Yummy Mummy. Littler documents a shift from the Western Christian history of maternal asexuality to the overt sexualisation of motherhood, where mothers must avoid dowdiness at all costs. As Beyoncé's mediation is testament, this is a very carefully managed and circumscribed sexuality. There is a long history of claiming respectability within Beyoncé's mediation. In a line filling an entire page in her biography, Beyoncé states "there's a line between sexy and nasty, and Destiny's Child is sexy, yes we are, but we're never nasty" (Vaughn 2012, 34). Reporting the Richardson shoot *The Sun* newspaper notes: "Beyoncé rarely strips off

for the lads' mags—but this time she goes all out as her boobs hang perilously out of the bottom of her top as she leans towards the camera" (*The Sun* 2013). Not only is this event constructed as a rarity, Beyoncé is positioned as in control of her image. The positioning of Beyoncé as an agentic, post-feminist subject is also achieved within accompanying commentary emphasising the hard work required to achieve the post-baby body (Rosalind Gill 2007; Littler 2013).

An emphasis on parody, art, and creativity also plays a role in mediating Beyoncé's sexuality. For example, the video for *Single Ladies (Put a Ring on It)* deploys black-and-white photography, stylish direction, and a dance routine paying homage to esteemed choreographer Bob Fosse. Beyoncé uses parody to distance herself from the more risqué characters she performs on stage or film, and her "alter-ego" Sasha Fierce: "Sasha Fierce is the fun, more sensual, more aggressive, more outspoken side and more glamorous side that comes out when I'm on stage" (in Vaughn 2012, 131). Asserting a distinction between the public and private self, and the knowing performance of sexiness, helps to prevent stigmatising discourses of abject hyper-sexuality sticking to the "real" Beyoncé.

Also important is Beyoncé's high-profile marriage to her husband, rapper Jay-Z (Shaun Carter) and use of her married name on her 2013 "Mrs Carter" tour and advertising campaign for high-street fashion retailer H&M. Reports of the tour asserted a conservative set of gender relations: "Here she is in regal attire to promote her new tour, named in honour of the man who wears the trousers in her house" (Gordon Smart 2013). Through celebrating the domestic, heterosexual unit of marriage, and the "appropriate" fertility it stands for, accusations of being the wrong kind of sexual subject are diffused and the desirability of the family is affirmed.

A third theme is the "work–life" balance and a particular articulation of feminism within this. Beyoncé s commitment to both work and family is a key feature of her biography, media reports, and online discussions. Despite aspects of her mediation that romanticise the domestic, this is not a total retreat into the home and family unit (as found in Middleton's maternity). Rather, Beyoncé's mediated maternity is defined by a stated refusal to retreat too much, and a desire to maintain career success alongside a happy home life. In *Life is But a Dream* (HBO 2013) a dual assertion of career independence and motherhood is manifest in a commitment to working throughout her pregnancy. Over footage of her performance at the Billboard music awards, Beyoncé's voiceover explains: "Nobody knew I was pregnant during that performance and I'm cool with that. I'm not interested in a free ride. But it absolutely proved to me that women have to work much harder to make it in this world." Tellingly, this performance is of the post-feminist anthem *Run The World (Girls)*. In her song, *Bow Down (Bitches)* she states: "I took some time to live my life; But don't think I'm just his little wife; Don't get it twisted, get it twisted; This my shit, bow down bitches." This theme plays to a long tradition of female independence recurring throughout her music.

A thorough exploration of the complexities of Beyoncé's articulation of feminism is beyond the scope of this paper. However, the place of feminism within her mediated maternity is usefully read through recent scholarship exploring Facebook's Sheryl Sandberg's "Lean In" feminism (McRobbie 2013; Catherine Rottenberg 2013). Calling on women to "dream big" and be more confident in the workplace, Sandberg is seen to represent a form of neoliberal feminism. Unpicking its discursive register, Rottenberg (2013) illustrates how this popular (and populist) articulation of feminism focuses on women's

behaviours as barriers to success, thereby deflecting attention from economic, social, and cultural forces producing gender (and intersecting) inequality (particularly that experienced by working-class women). In this individualised and internalised revolution, women must take ultimate responsibility for their success through practices of self-care across all realms including motherhood. As motherhood is translated as a site for ultimate personal fulfilment and emancipation, the new feminist subject must pursue one's professional ambitions without abandoning desires for a fulfilling family life. Beyoncé's mediated maternity is replete with references to the work–family balance and self-care:

> After giving birth, there's a moment of rediscovering who you are and making sure you still have your goals and that you're still taking care of yourself as a woman ... I wanted to make sure I still was this strong woman with my business and also making time for my child and balancing the two. (John Hiscock 2013)

Given the decimation of forms of state-supported childcare under austerity, alongside the greater need for women's labour market participation, the careful tailoring of the work–life balance plays a crucial role in forms of post-feminist maternity demanded by neoliberal austerity. More than the happy housewife, the "do-it-all" working mother is perfectly in sync with austerity's demand for self-responsible, productive maternal citizenship. As the challenges and effects brought about by neoliberalism and welfare reform are recoded as private matters to be managed individually, mothers must become more enterprising and self-sufficient. Thus in her celebrity incarnation and in representations of more "ordinary" (but still affluent) mothers such as the "mumpreneur" (Kim Allen and Yvette Taylor 2012; Littler 2013), the lived experiences of women located at the sharp end of the cuts are effaced.

Conclusion

This paper has been concerned with the role of celebrity motherhood in articulating and registering broader anxieties around maternity, femininity, and family life within austerity. We have argued that celebrity mothers do a great deal of work in registering and shaping normative ideas about which ways of doing motherhood are valuable and which are not in times of "crisis." Drawing on original data, we have shown how cultural representations coincide and collude with political and economic imperatives. Our analysis has detailed a cultural regime which trains us to detect the deficient citizenship of individuals, a task whose occupation works as a shield for the deficiencies of the state. Identifying how these celebrity mothers become figurative props in the moral universe of David Cameron's "hard-working" Britain, our analysis illustrates what Biressi and Nunn call a "discursive and pragmatic alliance between government, economics and entertainment" (2013, 145). Maternal subject positions made available by austerity are imbued by classed and raced discourses that have historically shaped normative ideas about "good" and "bad" mothers. However, we have argued that austere femininities are not carried by classed and raced bodies in entirely predictable ways. These disruptive configurations prompt us to think about what figures of celebrity maternity make possible and impossible and for whom. Indeed, mediated celebrity motherhood not only registers the maternal transformations taking place under austerity, it also invites consumers of popular culture, particularly young women, to judge themselves and others against these models of successful (and abject) femininity and

maternity. For young women, particularly those who are not white or middle class, the figuring of a black female as a popular exemplar of desirable femininity and maternity is arguably positive. Yet, in many ways, it is not surprising that Beyoncé comes to figure in this way: as it becomes more expansive and innovative, neoliberal capitalism seizes *any* body that can do its work.

There is much value to critically interrogating not just what subject positions celebrity makes available but also how these are taken up and resisted by young women as they negotiate the competing demands of contemporary femininity. The participants in our study engaged in energetic debates about work, aspiration, and motherhood through their talk about celebrity. This included resisting and reworking dominant ideas around "good" and "bad" mothers that circulate within celebrity (Heather Mendick, Kim Allen, and Laura Harvey 2015). Likewise, while we have traced the dominant discourses that work to position these mothers, even within public discourse these mediations of desirable and abject maternity are subject to contestation and struggle. For example, while Kardashian may be a figure of disgust, she also commands a huge fanbase. Similarly, Middleton has been subject to public critique in ways that destabilise her aspirational status: for example, in 2013 author Hilary Mantel labelled Middleton "the plastic princess . . . a jointed doll on which certain rags are hung" (Hilary Mantel 2013). Further, parodying the pathologising discourses framing working-class mothers (discussed in this article), workers' union boss Dave Prentis criticised state funding of the Royal Family at a time of drastic welfare cuts by comparing Middleton to "young women having babies to get state handouts" (Steven Swinford 2013). Beyoncé has similarly been subject to criticism, notably when bell hooks identified Beyoncé as "anti-feminist" and a "terrorist" in her "damaging" impact on girls (bell hooks 2014). While marginal compared to the dominant discourses outlined in this paper, such energetic debates illuminate how mediated motherhood—like austerity—is a conflicted terrain, and indicate the importance of continuing the kinds of struggles over meaning that we engage with in this article.

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NOTES

1. These included news stories collected via Google news alerts from a range of international news outlets.
2. Allsopp is a British television presenter of property shows and author of several books on home crafts.
3. Kerry Katona was in the British female pop band Atomic Kitten and a reality TV star; Jade Goody became famous in the UK *Big Brother* in 2002.
4. The tweets selected were top retweets in *Twitter* searches for the celebrity.

5. Paris Hilton is a Hollywood socialite and great granddaughter of Conrad Hilton of Hilton Hotels.

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