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**Chapter 17**

**Introduction**

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## CHAPTER 17

### The Good, the Bad, and the Broken:

#### Forms and Functions of Neoliberal Celebrity Relationships

Neil Ewen

Certainly one can identify with and fantasize about a fictional entity; the actual existence of celebrities as living humans, the fact that they are somehow now, speaking or kissing or brushing their teeth, gives celebrity fantasy and celebrity identification their power. They require not only pursuing but arriving at a real self... That self is *the destination*... both the overall backdrop of authenticity and specific truths are essential to pleasure.

--Joshua Gamson<sup>i</sup>

Fantasy is the means by which people hoard idealizing theories and tableaux about how they and the world 'add up to something'. What happens when those fantasies start to fray – depression, disassociation, pragmatism, cynicism, optimism, activism, or an incoherent mash?

--Lauren Berlant<sup>ii</sup>

As Su Holmes and Sean Redmond point out, 'adulation, identification and emulation are key motifs in the study of celebrity culture'.<sup>iii</sup> Blossoming out of the seminal star studies work of, among others, Richard Dyer<sup>iv</sup> – which illustrated that the value of film stardom was cultural as well as economic, with stars providing personalities with whom the audience invest emotionally – much recent critical writing on the social and affective functions of celebrity has sought to understand how, in the contemporary world, 'anomic, atomized individuals reach out for idealized stars and celebrities in what might be called a self-directed healing process'.<sup>v</sup>

This process has been viewed in various lights, some more negative than others. Richard Schickel, for instance, writes about the public investment in celebrity as being a form of popular hysteria, underpinned by an 'illusion of intimacy' whereby stars and celebrities provide emotional connections previously maintained through relationships with friends and

family.<sup>vi</sup> Likewise, but in a different register, Cooper Lawrence suggests that while narcissism often underpins the behaviour of both the famous and those who desire fame, celebrities act as a common currency that reveals the fragility of social bonds in contemporary daily life.<sup>vii</sup> Meanwhile, Chris Rojek's influential theoretical work on 'para-social' relationships investigates the aura and charisma of stars, considers the meanings that these stars embody, and (put crudely) argues that celebrity is a kind of replacement for religion in a secular age<sup>viii</sup>; while Graeme Turner explains that 'as human relations attenuate and fragment under the pressure of contemporary political and social conditions', leaving an 'affective deficit in modern life', celebrity has the potential to be used 'as a means of constructing a new dimension of community through the media'. One way this happens, Turner suggests, is through gossip and debate about celebrities, which should be understood as intimate spheres in which people find connection.<sup>ix</sup>

However – as many of the essays in the present volume point out, and as the volume as a whole has sought to address – the majority of this critical work has, thus far at least, focused on the appeal, meanings, and affects of individual celebrities. Accordingly, this chapter considers some of the particular affective functions of celebrity relationships, romantic and familial, in contemporary western media culture, and suggests that if, as much contemporary criticism agrees, the defining cultural symptoms of neoliberalism are anxiety and foreboding arising from globalization, the financialization of capitalism, and the dissolution of institutions that previously structured society<sup>x</sup>, we might also wish to consider that a significant affective function of today's celebrity relationships concerns their potential to alleviate these symptoms, however temporarily, through the generation of comfort and pleasure in their audiences.

Accepting this suggestion, however, requires acknowledgement from the beginning that it is a complex diagnosis. While I agree with Mary Evans' suggestion that neoliberalism

endorses ‘an every-person-for-themselves view of the world’ that has led to ‘ideas about “love” inevitably [becoming] confused and confusing’, and that ‘[at] its worst, what individuals think of as love has become another form of consumption’, I want to advance and complicate her further suggestion that many ordinary people consider celebrity relationships to be an antidote to the ‘emotional barrenness’ of neoliberalism.<sup>xi</sup> Evans writes that ‘many people turn to the artificial cream on the hard neo-liberal cake: the cream of celebrity culture’; that in performances ‘often related to consumerist fantasies of transformation’, ‘these famous, and infamous others, offer a form of comfort, a reassurance that people are still falling in love, still making families and still, simply, having emotional lives’. All of which is true. But, if we go further and recognize that there are different types of famous relationships that generate different types of pleasure (not to mention that there are different types of audiences with varying degrees of awareness about the various processes of celebrity culture<sup>xii</sup>), the notion of the celebrity relationship as a fantasy of comfort and escape becomes less straightforward.

As such, the main aim of this chapter is to interrogate and problematize this formulation. In what follows, I suggest that while different types of celebrity relationships all satisfy the economic imperative of generating profit, the media tends to privilege certain types over others. Where each relationship features on the hierarchy, I suggest, rests mainly on conceptions of talent and on how faithfully or not the relationship in question adheres to certain cultural expectations about love, coupledness, and marriage, both formally and in terms of morality. ‘Good’ relationships (for lack of a better term) – the ones that we are repeatedly encouraged to fantasize about – are invariably closed narratives with ‘happy ever after’ endings, which are elaborated as vehicles of conservative and neo-traditional values, with their participants shown to adhere to notions such as monogamy, ‘faithfulness’ to each other, and ‘settling down’ together. Conversely, ‘bad’ relationships – the ones we are encouraged to

sit in judgement over – are those that betray these expectations in that their fragmented narratives, often positioned as occurring because of supposed lapses of morality, or an inability or refusal to act ‘properly’, resist satisfying the desire for closure.

These judgements are inflected by assumptions about class and status, both in terms of the participants in the relationships and in terms of the means by which they have achieved fame: it is no coincidence, for instance, that a couple such as the Beckhams (one of the couples I examine below) are currently closer to being considered ‘stars’ than their former status as ‘celebrities’ now that they have been together for a long time, are seen to perform consistently the ideal of a happy family, are now extremely wealthy, and have the ability to manage their reputations in ways that they did not in the past; likewise, it is not a mistake that ‘celetoids’, such as those reality television contestants so beloved by tabloid culture in part for their constant cycle of on/off relationships, have little scope to mould their personas, and are often described as ‘trashy’.<sup>xiii</sup> As such, in celebrity relationships, the generation and management of ‘aura’ and ‘charisma’ are both of central importance and circumscribed by status.

In terms of this last point, we should recognize that revelling in the ‘misfortunes’ of the on/off celebrity relationship is also a type of pleasure and escape. Meanwhile, we should also recognize the problems inherent in idealizing seemingly perfect celebrity unions by bearing in mind Laura Kipnis’ point about how ‘the couple form as currently practiced is an ambivalent one’ that attempts the impossible process of reconciling a list of seemingly irreconcilable opposites: ‘the yearning for intimacy...the desire for autonomy’, ‘the comfort and security of routine’... ‘its soul-deadening predictability’.<sup>xiv</sup> This I see as useful alongside Lauren Berlant’s concept of ‘cruel optimism’, which she posits as a dynamic that underpins the everyday relations of people attempting to live out fantasies of ‘the good life’. Under neoliberalism, as the ‘blueprint has faded’ and the fantasy becomes ‘more fantasmatic, with

less and less relation to how people can live'<sup>xv</sup>, cruel optimism, as a structure of feeling, defines the ranges of affect and emotion that people feel about their 'compromised conditions of possibility' which might include a range of feelings other than, or alongside, optimism, such as pessimism or even despair.<sup>xvi</sup> In light of this work, then, fantasy can be seen to be a precondition of all celebrity relationships. And, to be sure, the underlying tensions that Kipness and Berlant highlight, are part of the attraction of 'good' celebrity relationships: at any point the fantasy might fragment to reveal the ambivalence that these theorists suggest lies at the heart of all relationships.

To conclude the chapter, I consider the affects of those instances whereby 'good' celebrity relationships disintegrate, betraying explicitly their promise of providing pleasurable fantasies of intimacy and bliss. If 'good' celebrity couples articulate cultural desires for idealized relationships, and 'bad' celebrity couples are examples of how not to live, then it is highly productive and necessary to take into account the 'good' couple turned 'bad': what we might call the 'broken' couple or the 'anti-couple'.<sup>xvii</sup> While I outline different types of 'anti-couple', I argue that the ways in which the disintegration of these 'good' relationships is narrativized in the media simultaneously provides certain pleasure (in that we revel in the nitty-gritty of the failed couple's exposed private lives), serves to reveal the artifice of all celebrity relationships (in that the processes of their re-narrativization are laid bare), and reinforces dominant conservative discourses (in that the morality of the narrativization becomes explicit).

### **Fantasies of the Future in the Era of Neoliberalism**

Over the last couple of years I have taken to performing a little exercise with my media studies undergraduates in entry-level classes on ideology. I have carried out this

activity maybe eight or ten times, and both the process and results are notable for their uncanny consistency. Each time it plays out almost exactly as follows.<sup>xviii</sup>

I begin by asking for a volunteer willing to share, and be questioned about, their dreams and ambitions for the future in order that we might consider the possibility that the stories we tell ourselves about ourselves, and the fantasies that help structure our lives, are not natural, but rather shaped by external forces such as, for example, the mainstream media. Then, in silence, I look around the room as each student does their best to avoid eye contact. I emphasize that the brave participant will not be compelled to divulge any private information, and that simply saying ‘pass’ will mean that we move on to the next question without hesitation. And then I point out that the volunteer would really be helping me out since my plan for the rest of the class is predicated on the exercise going off smoothly. (This is not strictly true, but it’s a strategy that has yet to fail). Following this, a lone female student raises her hand.<sup>xix</sup>

After thanking her, I ask the student to imagine her life when she’s around about my age – I am 35 – and the exchange begins: ‘Are you married?’ (YES); ‘Do you have kids?’ (YES); ‘Where do you live?’ (SOMEWHERE AFFLUENT); ‘Do you own your home?’ (YES); ‘Do you take vacations regularly?’ (YES); ‘Where do you holiday?’ (ABROAD, SOMEWHERE SUNNY). We then try to work out how she’s going to get there. I ask: ‘How old are you?’ (18/19); ‘Have you met the person you will marry yet?’ (NO/PROBABLY NOT); ‘How old will you be when you have kids?’ (HHMMmmmm... NOT SURE, BUT NOT TOO OLD). ‘But by my age?’ (YES).

Then things begin to get interesting. I inquire about the hesitation over children and a strict set of rules emerges: career, stable relationship, and home ownership before marriage; marriage before kids. And then I dig deeper. ‘Will your home be nice?’ (YES); ‘Nicer than average?’ (YES). ‘OK, so let’s say it’s a little over the UK’s average house price of a quarter

of a million pounds?’ (OK).<sup>xx</sup> ‘And you’re going to find a partner and buy this house before you get married and before you have children?’ (YES).

You might guess where it goes from here. To cut a long story short, I ask them to share their dreams of what Berlant calls the ‘good life’, and I smash those fantasies into fragments. I point to the debt the average student will carry as s/he enters a barren and hostile job market<sup>xxi</sup>; I point to the fact that wages have been stagnating for decades and declining in real terms for years<sup>xxii</sup>; I point to the huge rise of short-term, temporary, and zero-hours contracts that now define the post-industrial economies of western nations<sup>xxiii</sup>; and I ask them to consider how, in this economic environment, they will raise the kind of deposit that a bank will demand to secure a mortgage on their dream home.<sup>xxiv</sup> I itemize this reality not to be cruel, but in an attempt to expose their fantasies as fantasies and to encourage them to ponder a number of questions, among them: Why are our dreams so divorced from reality when many of our parents have fulfilled similar dreams? From where do these fantasies emerge? And why are these dreams so consistent and so uniform every time I perform this exercise? One thing that becomes clear by the time we are done: the ripe old age of 35 seems much less far away to them than it did at the beginning of the class.<sup>xxv</sup> Indeed, when one student stated that she wanted to be debt-free before getting a mortgage, we calculated that she would likely be in her mid-70s by the day of her wedding.

My sense from the repeated performance of this exercise, and the class discussions that follow, is that, when challenged, these students are largely aware that their fantasies are unrealizable.<sup>xxvi</sup> How could they not be when they have spent their entire adolescence immersed in the banal drip-drip of (often uncritical<sup>xxvii</sup>) news media stories about financial crises, multiple-dip recessions, and the ‘need’ for austerity? The stories these young adults tell themselves about their futures, and, perhaps more to the point, the ones they *perform* when questioned in a public forum, can perhaps be most productively considered as coping



mechanisms<sup>xxviii</sup> employed as a means to deal with the fact that they have come of age at the very time during which the world they been trained to expect to enter has entirely disappeared. Not only do these freshmen lack any sense of what it was like to live in a pre-9/11 world free from the multiple anxieties attending the ‘War on Terror’, they have the added misfortune of being the first cohort of adults for generations to enter a world utterly at odds with that of their parents in terms of aspirational life trajectory. Indeed, the typical meritocratic stories that their parents and teachers would likely have told them as children about a desirable progression through life – work hard at school, enter university and gain a degree, get a job, buy a house, get married, have kids – are now almost entirely redundant as a practical guide. As Richard Sennett (among many others) has shown, increasingly since the 1970s, alterations to the base of western economies have had a monumental impact on the organization of work culture, which, in turn, has profoundly transformed the ways individuals and groups live out, and – crucially – imagine, their lives.<sup>xxix</sup> Of the post-2008 American context, David Graeber writes:

There has been a good deal of discussion of late of the erosion of the American middle class, but most of it misses out on the fact that the ‘middle class’ in the United States has never primarily been an economic category. It has always had everything to do with that feeling of stability and security that comes from being able to simply assume that – whatever one might think about politicians – everyday institutions like the police, education system, health clinics, and even credit providers are basically on your side [...] The growing sense, on the part of Americans, is that the institutional structures that surround them are not really there to help them – even, that they are dark and inimical forces – is a direct consequence of the financialization of capitalism.<sup>xxx</sup>

Increasingly, the familiar assumptions of prosperity resulting from ‘hard work’ that defined Anglo-American post-second world war society have dissolved: for the majority of workers, wages have long stagnated and benefits such as pensions have largely disappeared or have been eroded to the point of relative inconsequence, with the result that today’s middle-class children cannot reasonably expect to enjoy a higher standard of living than their parents.<sup>xxxix</sup> In this context, as Evans suggests, one of the key points to note about celebrity couples and families is that they enact fantasies that these socio-cultural losses can be overcome through emotional connection.

### **Fantasies as Retrenchment**

As critical work on postfeminism has suggested<sup>xxxix</sup>, this era of neoliberal anxiety is also one of cultural retrenchment. It is also, then, a time during which these good life fantasies demand to be read ideologically and critically. It is no coincidence that at a time of increasing economic stratification and deep social transformation – including anxieties about relatively high rates of divorce<sup>xxxix</sup>, changes to marriage laws<sup>xxxix</sup>, increasing figures of single-occupant households<sup>xxxix</sup>, and the emergence of a ‘boomerang generation’ of adults who have little choice but to remain, or return to, living with parents<sup>xxxix</sup> – that the ‘traditional’, exclusionary, version of the couple finding love and eventually settling down to middle-class life is the one that remains the most dominant in western media culture. Meanwhile, it should be noted that although alternative versions of this model have become more visible since the mid-1980s, mediated relationships are still overwhelmingly circumscribed by heteronormativity and neo-traditional gender roles.<sup>xxxix</sup>

At the same time as this fantasy is becoming less attainable, it is repeatedly the one that the average person is encouraged to desire through the daily consumption of media and

the living of everyday life. Laura Kipnis, provocatively but hardly unreasonably, suggests that romantic coupledness – a key part of this fantasy – constitutes ‘omnipresent propaganda beaming into our psyches on an hourly basis: the millions of images of lovestruck couples looming over us from movie screens, televisions, billboards, magazines, incessantly strong-arming us onboard the love train’.<sup>xxxviii</sup> Even if one rejects the idea of false-consciousness (as I do, with certain reservations), it is clear that this type of story and the morality behind it – considered as part of a much wider trend and underpinning the narratives of fairy tales to action flicks, from news reports to video games – elaborates a logic, a vocabulary, a consciousness, a worldview, and a model to which many people aspire, primarily because of its ubiquity, familiarity, and repetition.<sup>xxxix</sup>

These discourses are thoroughly ideological; their repeated elaborations, even in their most banal variants, are profoundly political. As Michael Cobb writes, ‘[Family politics] are not wedge issues but central biopolitical concerns that ferociously animate our present and future politics. Marriage, gay or not, and for that matter most forms of coupledness, are at the heart of this political life’.<sup>xl</sup> As such, we should bear in mind Jacqueline Rose’s contention that ‘fantasy...is never only inward-turning; it always contains a historical reference in so far as it involves, alongside the attempt to arrest the present, a journey through the past’.<sup>xli</sup> When, for example, in July 2013, the *Daily Mail*’s website *MailOnline* set ‘a new global record of 134 million web traffic users ... propelled by news stories including the Royal birth [of Prince George]’<sup>xlii</sup>, the subject matter was hardly coincidental.

Coverage of celebrities has been central to the success of *MailOnline*, which has been since 2012 the most visited English-language newspaper website in the world<sup>xliii</sup>, and it is worth paying particular attention to the ways in which it uses celebrity culture as a vehicle for the reproduction of traditional discourses of coupledness and relationships. Much has made of the so-called ‘sidebar of shame’, a series of links to stories of ‘celebrity misdemeanors’,

which runs down the right hand side of the screen on every page, and tends to house pictures of young, scantily-clad women, often going to or coming home from nights out, sometimes in ‘compromising’ situations. Writing about the website’s formal properties – similar to those used on other popular websites such as *Buzzfeed* – Jemima Kiss suggests the layout taps into ‘an almost primeval instinct [whereby] our brain rewards each tantalizing discovery, keeping us stuck to the screen and scrolling’, while Henry Mance suggests that it ‘means the next guilty pleasure is never far away’.<sup>xliv</sup> This focus on what might be considered the more salacious aspects of celebrity culture, and the clear positioning of the viewer as voyeur and judge, is, however, only one example among many of the ways that celebrity culture is presented on the website. On any given day a typical front page comprises celebrations of the British royal family, articles concerning the lifestyles of affluent power couples from Britain’s ruling class, as well as picture-heavy pieces about Hollywood superstar couples and their families. But, paying close attention to the website over a longer period also reveals other patterns, and an almost pathological repetition of ‘traditional’ fantasies featuring ‘ordinary’ couples and families. Regular visitors to *MailOnline* may begin to notice, for instance, a trend of stories about elderly, long-lasting couples who are presented as having spent entire lifetimes together ‘never having a crossed word’ (or some such clichéd nonsense) before dying within hours of each other: their fleeting, posthumous celebrity presented as an example to us all (as well as being an ironic award for their long, probably painfully ordinary lives).<sup>xlv</sup>

*MailOnline*, then, can be seen as a microcosm of the mainstream media’s treatment of celebrity culture juxtaposing the ‘immoral’ or ‘unacceptable’ behavior of ‘low class’ celebrities with examples of ‘higher end’ celebrities who largely conform to conservative notions of rectitude. In the discursive frame, this behavior is inseparable from the wider debates about traditional notions of love, coupledness, and families discussed by writers such

as Kipnis and Cobb. It becomes clear that celebrity culture is a key vehicle for the discussion of ‘traditional’ morality and the regulation and judgment of public conduct<sup>xlvi</sup>, in an ostentatious and hypocritical process from which the media profits by exhibiting in intimate detail the very content it purports to abhor (regularly young, under-clothed women, positioned as ‘betraying’ their femininity).<sup>xlvii</sup>

### **The Celebrity Couple Hierarchy**

Among other things, *MailOnline* highlights the need to acknowledge that the affective function of celebrity relationships are ideological and multifaceted: if they act as fantasies of escape from ‘reality’, then that escape happens variously across an emotional spectrum from awe to disgust; if some celebrity couples provide aspirational models, others are positioned as abject. Of course, any number of categories, some no doubt more useful than others, might be identified or conjured in an attempt to gain critical and theoretical orientation amid the maelstrom of celebrity alliances. Most obviously, perhaps, we might choose to divide them into binary camps according to a familiar star / celebrity split.<sup>xlviii</sup>

*Star couples* (such as, say, Brangelina) generate pleasure, perhaps primarily, by providing an ideal to which many ordinary people aspire in that they project the appearance of successfully maintaining a happy romantic coupling within a ‘traditional’ family unit, all the while retaining the capacity to seemingly transcend the drudgery of everyday life. Their ability to manage their privacy and reproduce the intangible ‘aura’ that is often said to have characterized golden era Hollywood stars symbiotically intensifies with increases in wealth, and endurance as a couple.

Further down the hierarchy we would find *celebrity couples*, for whom the audience finds pleasure not in perceiving the ‘finished products of semiotic labour’<sup>xliv</sup> but in observing the constant cycle of what Diane Negra calls the ‘making, un-making, and re-making’ of

celebrity relationships, which has emerged and been increasingly emphasized through recent developments in technology, cultural value, and audience expectation.<sup>1</sup> This category of celebrity alliance typically involves individuals moving from relationship to relationship, usually, but not always, without those involved ever becoming defined by their association with a single significant other, while audience pleasure in observing these relationships may manifest variously, for example: fascination with the banal, everyday minutia of other people's lives lived out in public; feelings of immersion and/or familiarity in the melodrama of complicated relationships; satisfaction at being positioned as a judge or arbiter; *schadenfreude* in observing bad luck or misery.<sup>li</sup> Alongside outlets like *MailOnline*, certain forms of reality TV are probably the most obvious sites of this type of fame in the contemporary media landscape. As Misha Kavka notes, reality TV has latterly 'disengag[ed] from its documentary roots and [has become] a self-conscious participant in the rituals of self-commodification and self-legitimation that define contemporary celebrity culture'.<sup>lii</sup>

The hierarchy of this proposed categorisation between the *star couple* / 'good' couple, and the *celebrity couple* / 'bad' couple, is influenced heavily by a number of different structuring elements. One such element might regard talent and the extent to which their stardom and 'aura' have been 'achieved'. While it may be possible to judge Pitt and Jolie as more individually and collectively talented or superior as a star couple to a pair of inferior contemporary Hollywood actors, the judgement gets complicated if we cross boundaries of, say, time and genre, not to mention, discipline. How do we judge the individual and combined talents and/or aura of Brangelina in comparison to Gilbo?<sup>liiii</sup> How might we compare them to Audrey Hollander and Otto Bauer?<sup>liiv</sup> In other words, we might note that notions of talent in certain spheres are not only somewhat arbitrary and difficult to pin down (especially if we compare acting to something like baseball, a sport in which statistics offer clues as to levels of ability<sup>liv</sup>), they are always circumscribed within the boundaries of their

own production contexts with specific rules, logics, and values. So, while Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie would likely be considered more worthy of fame – and thus find themselves higher up the hierarchy – than, say, a couple of *Big Brother* contestants whose relationship lasts for a few weeks over the lifetime of the series, this might be the case primarily because Pitt and Jolie’s skill at their craft is commonly perceived to be of more value than the self-publicity skills of the average reality television contestant.

Brangelina is useful here in another way, namely as an example of the ways that celebrity couples are brands whose meanings are continually up for contestation and whose construction requires constant attention and management, no matter the levels of talent involved. During their early life together, after meeting on the set of *Mr. & Mrs. Smith* (Liman, 2005), Pitt and Jolie were subjected to widespread censure in the media, and often described as a ‘bad’ couple. Jolie was the ‘other woman’ in the disintegration of the ‘good’ couple comprising Pitt and Jennifer Aniston; and the allegation that Jolie and Pitt had an on-set affair while he was still married to the popular Aniston resulted in the media painting Jolie (already a ‘problematic’ individual female celebrity, known for her transgressive behavior)<sup>lvi</sup> as a marriage-breaking seductress and Pitt as a philanderer who had broken the heart of ‘America’s Sweetheart’.<sup>lvii</sup>

So, Brangelina’s rehabilitation and rebranding as a couple invested in global philanthropy, both through their charity work and the adoption of children from the global south<sup>lviii</sup>, is evidence of the labor that goes into the production of celebrity couples whose position in the good / bad hierarchy is always contingent and positional. And, at least in this instance, the labor in becoming a good celebrity couple is more about their maintenance of their happy romantic union and the presentation of their happy family than it is about any value for their on-screen work. In fact, both Pitt and Jolie had previously lauded for their talent with Oscar nominations / awards long before becoming a couple; theoretically, then,

the work of branding themselves as a faithful couple and hands-on parents has done more to highlight their talent than the other way around. As such, this reading of Brangelina suggests that morality is at least as important achievement in the positioning of celebrity couples and that there is pre-existing set of cultural expectations to which celebrity couples must comply if they are to attain the aura of superstardom.

### **The Beckhams and the Fantasy of Meritocracy**

Brangelina's rehabilitation is contained within a romance narrative corroborated by their 'good works', and, at least while it holds, has culminated as them being an extremely prominent example of a traditional, but ultra-modern, happy family.<sup>lix</sup> But the rehabilitation process from bad couple to good couple is layered with other issues and meanings depending on the context of the particular couple or family's production. In the case of the Beckhams, another high-profile celebrity couple who rode out years of turbulent media treatment to become settled as a fantasy version of a family unit, the key to understanding their appeal is the notion of meritocracy. Although David and Victoria were already established as 'Britain's most famous celebrity couple'<sup>lix</sup> for almost a decade before their move to Los Angeles in 2007, their subsequent success in projecting themselves as a mutually supportive, stable couple, successful in both individual and collective endeavors, and who are regularly pictured traversing the globe with kids in tow, has further elevated their status and generated an aura previously unimaginable. At the heart of their appeal (especially from a British perspective) are the ways in which they have risen from humble beginnings to transcend the boundaries of their class and national backgrounds, providing a fantasy that material wealth, emotional happiness, and geographical mobility can be earned in an era in which those pathways are disappearing in the 'real' world.



Having enjoyed a distinguished soccer career playing at the highest level while becoming a cultural phenomenon – like no other player before him exploiting English soccer’s burgeoning neoliberal economy<sup>lxi</sup>, challenging notions of traditional English sporting masculinity<sup>lxii</sup>, and becoming the focus of sustained media and academic attention as an icon<sup>lxiii</sup> – David was, by 2007, assumed to be easing his way into retirement by heading to a far-off competition of dubious standing, having been disregarded as a player by the England national team. And while Victoria had been one-fifth of The Spice Girls, a girl-band that had enjoyed huge success in the late 1990s, her solo career had long since ground to a halt. By the mid-naughties she was best known as the ‘Queen of the WAGs’: WAG being an acronym for ‘Wives and Girlfriends’, women who are at once visibly supportive of their partners and perfect versions of the postfeminist edict that links independence with hyper-femininity and conspicuous consumption.<sup>lxiv</sup>

From the moment they arrived in LA, however, David and Victoria’s image was carefully choreographed by their manager, the former svengali of The Spice Girls, Simon Fuller. David was reinvented as an ambassadorial figure for numerous causes (as a figurehead for the MLS, as part of the official delegation that sought to bring the 2012 Olympics to London, as an official ‘mentor’ to the England players at the 2010 World Cup, and as a part of the London 2012 opening ceremony), while Victoria moved on from being the epitome of neo-traditional postfeminism as ‘the Queen of the WAGs’ to become a successful, independent and award-winning fashion designer. All the while their status as a couple and family was constantly referenced and reinforced in the media, and it became clear that their meanings – both individually and collectively – had shifted dramatically. This is implied in the change of title of the second edition of Andrew Morton’s biography of the couple.<sup>lxv</sup> On its first publication in 2000, the book was entitled *Posh & Becks*, gesturing towards an informality and familiarity with a couple whose private lives were, at the time, a

daily source of speculation and gossip. In 2007 – upon their arrival in LA – the revised edition was re-named *The Beckhams*, suggesting a distance and even a regality<sup>lxvi</sup> that symbiotically performed and confirmed their flight from the realms of banal celebrity coupledness.

Morton suggests that step was a result of Victoria's coming of age in Los Angeles: 'Her new career as a full-time stylist and trend-maker defined her as a woman with a real flair for fashion', he writes. 'She began to feel truly valued for herself, not for her image'.<sup>lxvii</sup> This intensified over the next few years, as her ability as a fashion designer was recognised internationally. In 2011, the website *stylist.co.uk* took stock when Victoria won a prestigious award for 'Best Emerging Luxury Brand':

This lauded award marks an incredible year for the mum-of-four whose label is said to be on course for a £60million turnover for 2011. Not bad for a label that began in 2008 with a small salon style presentation. There was an initial disdain at the idea of a former Spice Girl turning her hand to luxury fashion but Beckham won the notoriously hard-nosed fashion pack and now has everyone from Jennifer Lopez to Eva Longoria sporting her dresses and bags.<sup>lxviii</sup>

Meanwhile David's reputation had evolved just as dramatically. As Blake Morrison wrote in the *Guardian*:

These days he's the image of mobility – an emissary of intercontinental understanding, equally content to hang out with Sepp Blatter, Nelson Mandela or Tom Cruise. [...] In 2000, Beckham seemed to symbolise the worst of our culture (narcissism, celebrity worship and ostentatious wealth). In 2010, he stands for hard

work, charity, perseverance, family values and global harmony. It's almost a surprise that he didn't attend the climate change conference in Copenhagen. But doubtless he'll be at the next one.<sup>lxix</sup>

Because of their wealth, status, and careers, the Beckhams are today perhaps the example *par excellence* of the neoliberal fantasy couple and family. They are mobile, unbound by local concerns, free of worries about finances, and unburdened by political conviction or identity. Zygmunt Bauman argues that in today's 'liquid modernity', long-term, stable relationships have lost their relevance for ordinary people because the economy demands a short-term, flexible workforce.<sup>lxx</sup> However, the genius of the Beckhams is that, as they traverse the globe, they manage to successfully position the traditional image of a family unit at the centre of their brand. It is an image that is at once imbued with deep nostalgia and an impossible model for ordinary people. In Bauman's terms the usual connotations of family with home and stability may seem in contradiction to their liquid modernity, but their symbiosis under the Beckham brand underscores that their collective celebrity far exceeds the sum of its parts.

### **'Anti-Couples' and The Tragic Coupling of Oscar and Reeva**

While seeking to highlight the constructed nature of all celebrity couples, I have suggested that the notion of 'happy', 'enduring' relationships needs to be deconstructed. I have also suggested that the observation of the daily production of celebrity is one of the pleasures that define lower rank celebrity relationships, while the pleasure in fantasizing about the stable 'happiness' of higher rank stars results, in part, from the protection from intrusion they manage to accrue. This, though, is a problem for the star couple, because the higher they rise up the hierarchy, the bigger the potential fall. The inherent tension here is

clear: the more a relationship creates an aura, the more the audience wants to know the behind-the-scenes details; and the more the audience wants to know, the higher the expectation becomes for a performance of righteousness. Brangelina and the Beckhams, more than anything else, perhaps, should be recognized not for their respective individual and collective talents, nor for the ‘good work’ that they do, nor even for the comfort or ‘inspiration’ that they provide ‘ordinary’ folks in the era of anxiety: they should be recognized for their mastery of giving their audiences just enough to want more, while keeping private the tensions and existential crises that Kipnis and Berlant illustrate are inherent to all emotional formations.<sup>lxxi</sup> In other words, the production of the ‘happy-ever-after’, enduring celebrity relationship is a carefully orchestrated process of show and tell: something that is perhaps more difficult to manage successfully compared to an individual celebrity because the image is a constant negotiation of different moving parts.

Since we have already examined the ‘bad’ couple turned ‘good’, another category that may be of particular critical value, is one that covers those relationships defined primarily by breakdown and disintegration; relationships that actively resist being read as having ‘happy endings’; relationships that fail and/or refuse to abide by the hegemonic cultural script; relationships whereby the public status of each of the individuals involved becomes subsumed by a new collective identity after their end. From the point of fragmentation onwards, the two (but, potentially, more) individuals comprising the union become imaginatively inseparable as the media weaves them back together in posthumous narratives, and for evermore they become locked together in an uncanny coupling. These alliances are usually, but not necessarily, of a romantic nature; and they may be termed as celebrity ‘anti-couple’ relationships.<sup>lxxii</sup>

This category, of course, could itself be divided itself into numerous subsections. We might think, for instance, of Romantic and non-Romantic celebrity ‘anti-couples’. Romantic

celebrity anti-couple narratives of ‘making and un-making’ are closely associated with notions of idealism and/or notions of genius, and whose (usually) tragic endings have been written as leaving legacies of unrealized positive potential. The subsequent process of mythologization suggests that these relationships touch a cultural nerve, and they become celebrated to the point of being seared into the collective memory of western popular culture. These are couples that may exist, or have existed, in real-life or in fiction (in fact, as I have been gesturing toward all along, as managed media ‘texts’ all celebrity relationships might be considered, to some degree, fictional) – Bonnie and Clyde, Thelma and Louise, John Lennon and Yoko Ono, Kurt Cobain and Courtney Love (to name just a few examples) – while the identifications and affects at play in the narrative processes of their couplings and un-couplings are various and multi-faceted: the pleasure in the blossoming of their unions, the pain at their disintegrations, the mixed feelings involved in the ways they are remembered (to simplify greatly these points).<sup>lxxiii</sup>

Non-Romantic celebrity anti-couples tend to be associated with transgression of dominant cultural values and/or tragedy of various forms, and might include, for example, the serial killers Fred and Rosemary West, ‘the Moors Murderers’ Myra Hindley and Ian Brady, the Manson Family, and other cult groupings.<sup>lxxiv</sup> As David Schmid suggests in his compelling work on individual serial killers and celebrity<sup>lxxv</sup>, identification with these figures is ‘complicated’. It is ‘affective as well as intellectual, composed of admiration and resentment, envy and contempt...’ Widening the focus from individual celebrity deviants to consider the politics and affective functions of their unions is certainly an area ripe for research.

In recent years, perhaps the most (in)famous example of a non-romantic celebrity anti-couple is the South African pairing, Oscar Pistorius and Reeva Steenkamp.<sup>lxxvi</sup> Pistorius, whose legs were amputated below the knee in infancy, achieved international stardom by

becoming a Paralympic sprint champion, by becoming the first amputee to win an able-bodied world track medal, and by competing at the London 2012 Summer Olympics. His artificial limbs, or blades, earned him the nickname, ‘Blade Runner’.<sup>lxxvii</sup> Steenkamp was a successful model and television personality in South Africa before her death at Pistorius’ hand on the night of Valentine’s Day, 2013, at which point the pair had been romantically involved for approximately three months. According to Pistorius, the couple were sleeping in his Pretoria home when he was awoken by a noise; he then shot her through the restroom door believing her to be an intruder.<sup>lxxviii</sup> After a lengthy court case that attracted global media attention, Pistorius was sentenced to five years in prison for culpable homicide, having been cleared of Steenkamp’s murder.

There is obviously much that could be said about Pistorius and Steenkamp as a celebrity anti-couple. In the context of the present discussion, however, the key points I want to emphasize are to do with the production of different types of pleasure, the revelation of artifice, and the discourses of morality that colored the entire affair. Due to the fact that their relationship was still very young at the time of the tragedy, the South African media was still in the process of establishing the story of their romantic relationship, and up to that point interest was created in ways typical of the production of any new celebrity couple whereby the media and couple engaged in a mutually beneficial relationship. By February 2013, it was yet to be clear what kind of celebrity couple Pistorius and Steenkamp was going to be.

As the tragedy broke, however, this trajectory was altered, and the narrative exploded instantaneously into fragments that were then collected and re-narrativized in numerous ways and from multiple points of view. Out of the control of any party (the couple and their publicists, the media, or as is usual at early points of celebrity relationships, a mixture of both) this process performed three main functions.

First, it exposed a hunger for details (about the events of the night, and about the personalities of the actors), and signified a shift in the types of pleasure that the couple had provided thus far, from light entertainment and escapism to horror, disbelief, fascination, and any number of other emotions. The familiar injunction to establish the ‘truth’ was expressed alongside rumor, speculation, and innuendo. Details from officials, such as the police, overlapped with emotional statements from the couple’s families and friends, and testimonies of varying relevance of people who claimed to have been in the vicinity of the crime scene at the time of the shooting. In time the case also came to serve as a touchstone for wider issues, such as the condition of post-apartheid South Africa.<sup>lxxix</sup>

Secondly, the episode revealed explicitly the artifice of celebrity coupledness. The pair’s histories – individual and collective – were re-narrativized and revaluated in order to piece together theories about what had happened on the night of Steenkamp’s death. Different accounts and new ‘revelations’ about, for instance, Oscar’s alleged previous maltreatment of Reeva, and his love of guns - details that had not characterized his narrative before – were laid bare.<sup>lxxx</sup>

Thirdly, the pre-existing cultural script of celebrity relationships, and the morality that underpins it, became explicit, in that modes of behavior and character were judged openly in the public sphere, with the more distasteful discourses of celebrity coupledness became exaggerated and revealed as obviously problematic in its elaboration. The British tabloid *The Sun*, for example, felt it appropriate to report the story with a full-length picture of Steenkamp in a bikini on its front page alongside the headline: ‘Valentine’s Horror: 03.00: 3 Shots. Screams. Silence...03:10: 3 more shots. Blade Runner Pistorius “Murders Lover”’.<sup>lxxxi</sup> In ‘normal’ circumstances, as a model, her body would be her primary value to tabloid press as the female part of the celebrity couple, something that would go largely unnoticed and uncommented upon. In light of her death, though, its value is simultaneously intensified and

reduced: in terms of the former, not only was the image meant to titillate, but it suggested that the fact that she was beautiful made the crime worse than if it had involved a ‘normal’ woman; in terms of the latter it reduced her value to being a good-looking corpse.<sup>lxxxii</sup> In this process of the relationship’s disintegration, the misogyny of the culture simply could not be ignored.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has covered a lot of ground. In broad strokes, I have attempted to set up some key categories of celebrity relationships while trying to be mindful that there are significant overlaps and contradictions within and between them, and recognizing that there is clearly much, much more to be said about both the categories and the relationships I have offered as examples. I have attempted to take into account aspects of the production of celebrity relationships, whilst trying to make sense of the multiplicity of meanings and affective power attached to these relationships. The best I can do at this point is to emphasize that I am aware of the incompleteness of, for instance, trying to condense a reading of a case such as Pistorius and Steenkamp into a few pages, and ask that the reader consider these examples as gestural towards larger trends and the basis for further examination.

The frame of this analysis has been historically and culturally specific, with the focus being aimed at western media culture in the neoliberal context. I have suggested that the discourse of celebrity relationships is structured by pre-existing cultural assumptions and rules regarding aspects such as talent and morality, and that some celebrity relationships are valued more than others because of judgements about a mixture of their abilities and behavior. But let’s be clear: capitalism at its core desires one thing above all – surplus profit – and does not discriminate. Put bluntly, the media industries profit financially from all types of celebrity relationships – good and bad, long and short, whole and fragmented – and that



the discourse underpinning this culture is structured by judgements about talent and rectitude serves, first of all, to reproduce the system economically. Star and celebrity relationships have always been judged in these terms, and have always had the affective potential to stimulate a range of emotions, from sheer joy and awe to sadness and compassion. Perhaps the thing that makes their functions novel in the latest phase of capitalism, however, is that under neoliberalism celebrity relationships serve not only as fantasies of material wealth (which has always set stars apart), but as fantasies of happiness and companionship that conform to a script that is increasingly difficult to follow. In other words, celebrity relationships today act as vehicles of nostalgia not necessarily for a past world, but for a way of imagining the world that feels safe, comforting, and appealing. Of course, the life narratives the parents of my students told their children were in the past not always realized, and following this cultural script was in no way a guarantee of economic success and emotional well-being (if counter-cultural history tells us anything, it is of the misery the system from which the script emerged created for untold numbers of marginalized men, women, and children, no matter how much the post-war welfare state is romanticized today). However, this narrative of working hard to achieve the good life is now so well established in the collective imagination, through years of repetition in western media culture, that its fragmentation – as a result of the dissolution of institutions, rise of individualist ideology, and changes to the economic base – has engendered an anxiety about loneliness, isolation, and broken dreams for the future that the emotional functions of celebrity relationships are well placed to assuage, albeit in myriad ways.

## **Acknowledgements**

Thanks to my former students at Portsmouth, especially those who raised their hands. Thanks to Sean Redmond for planting a seed. And thanks, as ever, to Shelley Cobb.

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<sup>i</sup> Joshua Gamson, *Claims to Fame: Celebrity in Contemporary America* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1994), 171.

<sup>ii</sup> Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, (London and Durham: Duke, 2011), 2.

<sup>iii</sup> Su Holmes and Sean Redmond, *Framing Celebrity: New Directions in Celebrity Culture* (London: Routledge, 2006), 2.

<sup>iv</sup> Richard Dyer, *Stars* 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: BFI, 1998), (orig. ed. 1979); *Heavenly Bodies: Film Stars and Society* (London: BFI/Macmillan, 1986).

<sup>v</sup> Holmes and Redmond, *Framing Celebrity*, 3.

<sup>vi</sup> Richard Schickel, *Intimate Strangers: The Culture of Celebrity in America* (New York: Doubleday, 1985).

<sup>vii</sup> Cooper Lawrence, *The Cult of Celebrity: What Our Fascination With The Stars Reveals About Us* (Guildford, CT: Skirt!, 2009).

<sup>viii</sup> Chris Rojek, *Celebrity* (London: Reaktion, 2001); *Fame Attack: The Inflation of Celebrity and its Consequences* (London: Bloomsbury, 2012).

<sup>ix</sup> Graeme Turner, *Understanding Celebrity* 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: Sage, 2014).

<sup>x</sup> There is a large and growing body of literature on, variously, the processes and/or affects of neoliberalism. See, for instance, Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, Paul Mason, *Why It's Still Kicking Off Everywhere* (London: Verso, 2013); Richard Sennett, *The Culture of the New Capitalism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006); David Graeber, *The Democracy Project: A History, a Crisis, a Movement* (London: Allen Lane, 2013). A useful article by the Institute of Precarious Consciousness, 'Six Theses on Anxiety', argues that 'Each phase of capitalism has its own dominant reactive affect': 'In the modern era (until the post-war settlement), the dominant affect was *misery* [...] When misery stopped working as a control strategy, capitalism switched to boredom [...] In contemporary capitalism, the dominant reactive affect is *anxiety*.' See 'We Are All Very Anxious', [weareplanc.org: <http://www.weareplanc.org/we-are-all-very-anxious#f1>](http://www.weareplanc.org/we-are-all-very-anxious#f1). Christian Garland and Stephen Harper usefully question the value of the term 'neoliberalism' in media studies, in their article, 'Did Somebody Say Neoliberalism? On the Uses and Limitations of a Critical Concept in Media and Communication Studies', *tripleC*, 10(2), 2012, 413-424. While I am sympathetic in some ways to their argument that the term

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‘neoliberalism’ offers little significant advance over the term ‘capitalism’ I tend to remain of the view that the former remains useful in describing both the period since the mid-1970s (a.k.a.: ‘late capitalism’), and a logic that constitutes ‘the death of the social’, in the words of Henry Giroux, who explains: ‘Neoliberalism’ is a particular political and economic and social project that not only consolidates class power in the hands of the one percent, but operates off the assumption that economics can divorce itself from social costs, that it doesn’t have to deal with matters of ethical and social responsibility”. See: Michael Nevradakis, ‘Henry Giroux on the Rise of Neoliberalism’ 19 Oct 2014, *Truthout*: <<http://www.truth-out.org/opinion/item/26885-henry-giroux-on-the-rise-of-neoliberalism>>.

<sup>xi</sup> Mary Evans, ‘Love in a time of neo-liberalism’, Opendemocracy.net, 6 November 2014:

<<https://www.opendemocracy.net/transformation/mary-evans/love-in-time-of-neo-liberalism>>

<sup>xii</sup> In Gamson’s influential formulation, fans were understood as engaging with their subjects across an ‘axis of belief and disbelief’, from traditional believers to postmodern sceptics. See: Joshua Gamson, *Claims to Fame*, 149. See also: Gray, et al. (eds.) *Fandom: Identities and Communities in a Mediated World* (New York, NYU, 2007). My focus here is on the ways in which these relationships are positioned in the media and their affective functions. Clearly more work needs to be done of the relationships between different (groups of) fans and celebrity couples.

<sup>xiii</sup> Rojek’s influential model of ‘ascribed’, ‘achieved’, and ‘attributed’ celebrity is elaborated in *Celebrity*, while he theorises the ‘celetoid’ in *Fame Attack*.

<sup>xiv</sup> Laura Kipnis, *Against Love: A Polemic* (New York: Vintage, 2004), 34-35.

<sup>xv</sup> Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, 11.

<sup>xvi</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>xvii</sup> I am indebted here to Sean Redmond, who in his role as reader of this volume’s proposal for the publisher suggested that material on what he called ‘anti-star couples’ would be a useful addition. This chapter forms my first tentative steps at formulating thoughts on this topic, one that is rich with possibility for future work.

<sup>xviii</sup> These exercises were carried out in various lectures and seminars at the University of Portsmouth, UK, between 2012 and 2014. The examples are gestural and are not underpinned by a systematic collection of data.

<sup>xix</sup> It would be interesting to speculate about reasons for the consistency in the gender of volunteers to share willingly intimate details in this type of public setting. Angela McRobbie has suggested that young women are particularly hailed by postfeminist neoliberalism, in its invitation to ‘come forward’ and be ‘visible’ in the new economy by succeeding at school and in family planning, with the view to becoming productive citizens and the

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‘privileged subjects’ of consumerism that is their reward. See: Angela McRobbie, *The Aftermath of Feminism: Gender, Culture and Social Changes* (London: Sage, 2009); particularly chapter three: ‘Top Girls? Young Women and the New Sexual Contract’. There are clearly also myriad other factors involved in the dynamics of these classroom interactions that, alas, there is no room to discuss here. Some are clearly more tangible than others, but might include: background of the students in terms of class, race, sexuality, etc; the tone and delivery of my performance as a teacher, the amount of ‘trust’ I managed to attain with the students; the ‘mood’ of the room; etc.

<sup>xx</sup> In September 2014 the average UK house price was £272,000. See: Philip Inman, ‘UK house prices hit new record as London average breaks £500,000’, *theguardian.com*, 16 September 2014:

<<http://www.theguardian.com/business/2014/sep/16/house-prices-record-bubble-interest-rates-uk>>.

<sup>xxi</sup> Andrew Ross, *Creditocracy: And The Case For Debt Refusal* (New York: OR Books, 2014).

<sup>xxii</sup> David Harvey, *The Enigma of Capital and the Crises of Capitalism* (London: Profile Books, 2010); Paul Mason, *Why It’s Still Kicking Off*.

<sup>xxiii</sup> Andrew Ross, *Nice Work If You Can Get It: Life and Labor in Precarious Times* (New York: New York University Press, 2009); Richard Sennett, *The Culture of the New Capitalism*.

<sup>xxiv</sup> Consumer website *which.co.uk* highlights the levels of savings required to secure a mortgage in the UK. For example: ‘The cheapest mortgage deals on the market will typically require you to have a 40% deposit or more, so on a £150,000 property this would mean a deposit of £60,000’. Of course, buyers can get mortgages with smaller deposits, but on a punitive sliding scale in terms of interest on the amount lent. The website also points out that these amounts come before ‘extra costs’, such as ‘legal fees’ and ‘land registry fees’, which add up to many thousands of extra pounds up front. See: <<http://www.which.co.uk/money/mortgages-and-property/guides/mortgage-deposit-explained/how-much-deposit-do-i-need-for-a-mortgage/>>

<sup>xxv</sup> I should add that I attempt to make this process as cheerful as possible by pointing to myself, an adjunct lecturer, as being in the same boat as them, albeit a little further down the river.

<sup>xxvi</sup> One of the reasons I feel comfortable carrying out the exercise is precisely because of this awareness. If I thought the students were genuinely innocent to the realities of the world and the struggles that surely await them, I would be much more hesitant to broach the subject. It is precisely this widespread familiarity that makes it so productive as an exercise in that it is something to which almost everyone relates and has direct experience. In the era of media fragmentation and dispersal, there are increasingly fewer texts about which we can say the same.

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<sup>xxvii</sup> See, for example: Julien Mercille, *The Political Economy and Media Coverage of the European Economic Crisis: The Case of Ireland* (London: Routledge, 2015), esp. Ch. 3: 'The Crisis and the Role of the Media'.

Mercille writes: 'In sum, the media have provided extensive support for economic and political elites' strategy of austerity. This does not mean that such messages are always absorbed uncritically by the population, but nevertheless, they contribute to frame the debate in a way favourable to the government and private sector', 29.

<sup>xxviii</sup> I borrow the term 'coping mechanisms' and, later, 'drudgery of everyday life' from Melissa Gregg's brilliant essay on contemporary office culture, 'On Friday Night Drinks: Workplace Affects in the Age of the Cubicle', in Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth (eds.), *The Affect Theory Reader* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2010), 250-268.

<sup>xxix</sup> Sennett, *The Culture of the New Capitalism*.

<sup>xxx</sup> Graeber, *The Democracy Project*, xix.

<sup>xxxi</sup> See: Tom de Castella, 'Have young people never had it so bad?', *bbc.co.uk*, 5 Feb 2013:

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-21302065>.

<sup>xxxii</sup> See, for example: Rosalind Gill, 'Rewriting the Romance: New Femininities in Chick Lit?', *Feminist Media Studies*, 6:4, December 2006, 487-504; Diane Negra, *What a Girl Wants: Fantasizing the Reclamation of Self in Postfeminism* (London: Routledge, 2009).

<sup>xxxiii</sup> Detailed figures for England and Wales can be found on the website of the Office for National Statistics, *ons.gov.uk*: <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/vsob1/divorces-in-england-and-wales/2011/index.html>. Detailed figures for the US can be found on the website of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *cdc.gov*: <http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/fastats/marriage-divorce.htm>. Both illustrate that the commonly cited figure of one in two marriages ending in divorce are roughly accurate.

<sup>xxxiv</sup> Shelley Cobb, 'Ellen and Portia's Postfeminist Wedding', this volume.

<sup>xxxv</sup> See: Eric Klinenberg, *Going Solo: The Extraordinary Rise and Surprising Appeal of Living Alone* (London: Duckworth, 2014).

<sup>xxxvi</sup> See: 'Large increase in 20 to 34-year-olds living with parents since 1996', *ons.gov.uk*: <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/family-demography/young-adults-living-with-parents/2013/sty-young-adults.html>.

<sup>xxxvii</sup> Angela McRobbie, 'Postfeminism and Popular Culture: Bridget Jones and the New Gender Regime', *Feminist Media Studies*, 4:3, November 2004.

<sup>xxxviii</sup> Kipnis, *Against Love*, 33-34.

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<sup>xxxix</sup> Heteronormative versions of coupled life and the ‘traditional’ nuclear family have long been the subjects of detailed critiques from a variety of angles, and have animated such thinkers as Weber, Marx, Freud, and Deleuze and Guattari. Recent years have seen a growing body of literature that carries on this tradition, often in provocative fashion, including Kipnis’ *Against Love* and Michael Cobb, *Single: Arguments for the Uncoupled* (New York: NYU, 2012). Cobb writes of the tyranny of ‘a world slavishly devoted to the supremacy of the couple’, 8.

<sup>xi</sup> Micheal Cobb, *Single: Arguments for the Uncoupled* (New York: New York University, 2012), 17-18.

<sup>xii</sup> Jacqueline Rose, *States of Fantasy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 5.

<sup>xiii</sup> Mark Sweney, ‘MailOnline records 134m users in July’, 5 August, 2013, [theguardian.com](http://www.theguardian.com):

<<http://www.theguardian.com/media/2013/aug/05/mail-online-royal-birth>>.

<sup>xiii</sup> ‘MailOnline overtakes NY Times as top online newspaper’, 26 January 2012, [bbc.co.uk](http://www.bbc.co.uk):

<<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/entertainment-arts-16743645>>

<sup>xiv</sup> Jemima Kiss, ‘A new medium seeks old skills’, *British Journalism Review*, 25:3, 2014, 33-38:

<[http://bjr.org.uk/data/2014/no3\\_kiss](http://bjr.org.uk/data/2014/no3_kiss)>; Henry Mance, ‘MailOnline and the next page for the “sidebar of shame”’, 24 September 2014, [ft.com](http://www.ft.com): <<http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/cf2e53d2-425e-11e4-a9f4-00144feabdc0.html?siteedition=uk#axzz3KvhkMmgK>>.

<sup>xiv</sup> A Google search of ‘Daily Mail Couples Die Together’ reveals tens of examples from the last couple of years, including stories entitled: “‘Close your eyes, I’m coming with you’”: Devoted husband’s last words to his dying wife - just hours before he died by her side of a broken heart’; ‘Brazilian couple dies in the same hospital room just 40 minutes apart after 65 years of marriage’; ‘Extraordinary love story of couple married for 72 years who died holding hands just an hour apart - and how wife’s heartbeat kept her dead husband’s heart monitor going’, and ‘Couple dies 16 hours apart after 76-year marriage that saw them “flirting until the end”’. To be fair, MailOnline is not the only publication in which these types of articles appear, though the extent of their repetition does suggest an obsession with this particular curiosity.

<sup>xvi</sup> See: Sofia Johansson, “‘Sometimes you wanna hate celebrities’”: tabloid readers and celebrity coverage’, in Holmes and Redmond, *Framing Celebrity*, 343-358. Johansson writes: ‘the main reason for the social currency of tabloid celebrity stories is just this: they stimulate debates about fundamental moral and social issues, contributing to create an experience of community’, 349.

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<sup>xlvii</sup> Much feminist scholarship has shown that female celebrities are more closely scrutinised and more harshly criticised than their male counterparts. See, for example: Su Holmes and Diane Negra (eds.) *In the Limelight and Under the Microscope: Forms and Functions of Female Celebrity* (New York: Continuum, 2011).

<sup>xlviii</sup> The difference between stars and celebrities is much debated in star and celebrity studies. Often, ‘stardom’ is defined by ‘aura’ and ‘charisma’ that eclipses the processes of fabrication that are front and center in ‘celebrity’. See, for example: John Potts, *A History of Charisma* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), and Ellis Cashmore, *Celebrity Culture* 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: Routledge, 2014).

<sup>xlix</sup> Barry King, ‘Stardom and symbolic degeneracy: television and the transformation of the stars as public symbols’, *Semiotica*, 92 (1-2), 1992: 3.

<sup>l</sup> Diane Negra, ‘The Making, Un-making, and Re-making of Robsten’, this volume.

<sup>li</sup> See: Steve Cross and Jo Littler, ‘Celebrity and Schadenfreude’, *Cultural Studies*, 24: 3, 2010: 395 – 417.

<sup>lii</sup> Misha Kavka, *Reality TV* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), 9-10.

<sup>liii</sup> See: Michael Williams, “‘Gilbo-Garbage’ or ‘The Champion Lovemakers of Two Nations’”: Uncoupling Greta Garbo and John Gilbert’, in this volume.

<sup>liv</sup> See: Beccy Collings, ‘Audrey Hollander and Otto Bauer: The Perfect (Pornographic) Marriage’, in this volume.

<sup>lv</sup> Even basing judgements in sports on empirical data is problematic. See: Bill Shaikin, ‘Not Everyone in Baseball Bought into “Moneyball”’, *latimes.com*, 11 September 2011:

<http://articles.latimes.com/2011/sep/11/sports/la-sp-0912-money-ball-20110912>.

<sup>lvi</sup> Brooks Barnes, ‘Angelina Jolie’s Carefully Orchestrated Image’, *The New York Times*. November 20, 2008.

<sup>lvii</sup> Leslie Bennetts, ‘The Unsinkable Jennifer Aniston’, *vanityfair.com*:

<http://www.vanityfair.com/culture/features/2005/09/aniston200509>.

<sup>lviii</sup> Jo Littler, “‘I Feel Your Pain’”: Cosmopolitan Charity and the Public Fashioning of the Celebrity Soul’, *Social Semiotics*, 18:2, 2008, 237-251.

<sup>lix</sup> Diane Negra, ‘The Fertile Valley of Celebrity: Brangelina’, *The Velvet Light Trap*, Vol. 65, 2010:

[http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/the\\_velvet\\_light\\_trap/v065/65.negra.html#fig01](http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/the_velvet_light_trap/v065/65.negra.html#fig01).

<sup>lx</sup> Andrew Morton, *The Beckhams* (London: Michael O’Mara Books, 2007).

<sup>lxi</sup> David Goldblatt, *The Game of Their Lives: The Meaning and Making of English Football* (London: Viking, 2014).

<sup>lxii</sup> Garry Whannel, *Media Sport Stars: Masculinities and Moralities* (London: Routledge, 2002).

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<sup>lxiii</sup> See, for example: Ellis Cashmore, *Beckham*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Cambridge: Polity, 2004).

<sup>lxiv</sup> The term 'WAG' originated in the mid-2000s and initially described the wives and girlfriends of sportsmen, usually soccer players, in the UK. It has since exceeded this context and is commonly used to describe 'supportive' women in fields from sports to politics and everything in between. My co-authored conference paper with Shelley Cobb, delivered at the Celebrity Studies 2014 biennial conference, is currently in production as an article. See the abstract: Cobb and Ewen, 'Behind Every Man? The Value of the Celebrity WAG in Western Media Culture', academia.edu:

[https://www.academia.edu/5377639/Behind\\_Every\\_Man\\_The\\_Value\\_of\\_the\\_Celebrity\\_WAG\\_in\\_Western\\_Media\\_Culture](https://www.academia.edu/5377639/Behind_Every_Man_The_Value_of_the_Celebrity_WAG_in_Western_Media_Culture)

<sup>lxv</sup> Andrew Morton, *Posh & Becks* (Michael O'Mara, 2000).

<sup>lxvi</sup> I use this word advisedly. Victoria had long fashioned, and had fashioned, an image based on upward class mobility and royalty: in the Spice Girls, her nickname was 'Posh' Spice; on their wedding day she and David (in)famously sat on thrones and she adorned a crown; and as I have already pointed to, the British media christened her 'Queen of the WAGs'. Morton's involvement in telling their story did this image no harm either: he made his name as a biographer of Diana, Princess of Wales back in the 1990s.

<sup>lxvii</sup> Morton, *The Beckhams*, 286.

<sup>lxviii</sup> 'Victoria Beckham Wins Fashion Award', *stylist.com*, 2011: <<http://www.stylist.co.uk/fashion/victoria-beckham-wins-fashion-award>>.

<sup>lxix</sup> Blake Morrison, 'David Beckham: Icons of the Decade', *Guardian*, 22 December 2009.

<sup>lxx</sup> Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Love* (Cambridge: Polity, 2003).

<sup>lxxi</sup> Creating an image based on morality is a dangerous game; one that Freudian critics might suggest is bound to fail eventually. Jacqueline Rose writes: '...if moralism backfires, it is not just for reasons of hypocrisy, but because the law, in order to be effective, has to draw on pleasure; the more intense the moral fervour, the greater the sexual charge that is *already there*. It was one of Freud's most valuable insights to stress that moral conscience can only work by drawing on the very energies it is trying to tame (where else could they go?). Which means that morality, not only but especially in the sexual field, has a stunning propensity to defeat itself'. Jacqueline Rose, *States of Fantasy*, 57.

<sup>lxxii</sup> Sean Redmond writes about individual celebrity breakdown in terms of 'fame damage' as 'a potent form of identification and an increasingly common way of stars and celebrities to be produced and consumed'. This



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informs my work here on the fragmentation of celebrity relationships. Sean Redmond, 'Intimate Fame Everywhere', in Holmes and Redmond, *Framing Celebrity*, 27-46.

<sup>lxxiii</sup> These affects and emotions are also to a large degree subjective, and, of course, highly variable.

<sup>lxxiv</sup> Work on this would have to take into account Rojek's writing on transgressive celebrity. See: Rojeck, *Celebrity*.

<sup>lxxv</sup> David Schmid, 'Idols of Destruction: Celebrity and the Serial Killer', in Holmes and Redmond, *Framing Celebrity*, 295-310.

<sup>lxxvi</sup> cf. my earlier comment about celebrity couples as media texts: the Pistorius/Steenkamp case serves to remind us that behind the mediation of celebrity always lays a real person. As such, I want to acknowledge that while I find this tragedy fascinating in many ways, I remain mindful that a real woman lost her life and her family and friends suffered a terrible loss. This was something not always acknowledged by the media in discussing it as a 'case' or a 'text': Suzanne Moore, for instance, took to task, among others, her fellow *Guardian* columnist Simon Jenkins for writing an entire commentary without mentioning Reeva Steenkamp's name once, something Moore understood, rightly, as symptomatic of the misogyny in the coverage of the case. Suzanne Moore, 'Reeva Steenkamp was the Victim of Male Violence. That is the Real Story', *theguardian.com*, 22 October 2014: <<http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/oct/22/discussion-of-reeva-steenkamp-killing-has-sidelined-male-violence>>. The trending #HerNameWasReeva served the same purpose across social media platforms.

<sup>lxxvii</sup> 'Oscar Pistorius biography', *biography.com*, 19 December 2014: <<http://www.biography.com/people/oscar-pistorius-20910935>>.

<sup>lxxviii</sup> Sarah Lyall, 'Apologetic and Sobbing, Pistorius Testifies He Killed His Girlfriend By Mistake', *NYTimes.com*, 7 April 2014: <<http://nyti.ms/1hSs3Lq>>.

<sup>lxxix</sup> Margie Orford, 'Heart of Oscar's Defence: Imagined Threat of a Black Stranger', *Daily Maverick*, 4 April 2014: <<http://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2014-03-03-heart-of-oscars-defence-imagined-threat-of-a-black-stranger#.Uz8xpCi9x20>>; Ché Ramsden, 'Oscar Pistorius: The South African Story', *opendemocracy.net*, 12 September 2014: <<https://www.opendemocracy.net/5050/che-ramsdn/oscar-pistorius-south-african-story>>.

<sup>lxxx</sup> Amy Davidson, 'Oscar Pistorius's Trigger', *The New Yorker*, 11 April 2014.

<sup>lxxxi</sup> 15<sup>th</sup> February 2013.

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<sup>lxxxii</sup> Suzanne Moore called the *Sun*'s front page 'lechery over a corpse'. See: Roy Greenslade, 'The Sun's Oscar Pistorius Front Page: "Lechery Over a Corpse"', *theguardian.com*, 15 February 2013: <<http://www.theguardian.com/media/greenslade/2013/feb/15/sun-oscar-pistorius>>.

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## Introduction

We all know that in celeb land, two big names – think Victoria and David, Beyoncé and Jay-Z – equals more than twice the influence.

--Clare Geraghty<sup>lxxxii</sup>

Power couples and other kinds of celebrity relationships are extremely visible in the everyday circulation of celebrity identity in today's western media, yet up to this point they have received very little sustained scholarly attention. One key signifier of the attraction, ubiquity, power, and cultural value of celebrity relationships is the recent rise of what is referred to as the portmanteau, but is also known as the uni-name / blended name / combined name / composite / name-mesh / bundled celebrity couple.<sup>lxxxii</sup> Among the most recognizable names in this trend are *Brangelina* (Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie), *Tomkat* (Tom Cruise and Katie Holmes), *Bennifer* (Ben Affleck and Jennifer Lopez / Ben Affleck and Jennifer Garner), *Kimye* (Kim Kardashian and Kanye West), and *Billary* (Bill Clinton and Hillary Clinton). Further down the celebrity hierarchy we find such names as reality TV couple *Speidi* (Spencer Pratt and Heidi Montag) and the former Disney Channel alumni *Zanessa* (Zac Efron and Vanessa Hudgens). The portmanteau phenomenon arises in a number of chapters in this volume and is dealt with in different ways. While it is well known that Douglas Fairbanks and Mary Pickford's four-storey, twenty-five room Beverly Hills mansion was named *Pickfair* by the press way back in 1919, the film historian Michael Williams, in his chapter here, has uncovered what might be the first instance of a celebrity couple portmanteau in his original archival research on Greta Garbo and John Gilbert: a fan letter from 1928 that pronounces the couple *Gilbo*, a name that stuck with the pair.

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The portmanteau couple appeared in various forms sporadically throughout the twentieth century. Examples mentioned in this volume include various business ventures, such as *Desilu*, the production company of the married couple Desi Arnaz and Lucille Ball who shot to fame in the 1950s hit television show *I Love Lucy* (CBS, 1951-1957), and *Lenono Music*, the name of John Lennon and Yoko Ono's publishing company established in 1980. As the academic and celebrity reporter Vanessa Diaz shows in her chapter, however, the portmanteau couple accelerated as a phenomenon in the mid-2000s when People Magazine's New York bureau (where Diaz worked) conjured the juggernaut term *Brangelina*. As Diaz writes, although *Bennifer*'s first iteration (comprising Affleck and Lopez) had at that point enjoyed a modest degree of cultural currency for a couple of years, the advent of *Brangelina* in 2005 saw a 'snowball' effect on the use of portmanteaus. Diaz's chapter stands out in this volume for its inside perspective of the celebrity media industry, explaining the processes behind the use of the term, before going on to examine what she calls its 'social meanings'.

While the rise of the portmanteau is indicative of the ubiquity of celebrity couple in contemporary western media culture, 'the blending of celebrity couples' names', as Diaz argues, is also 'an exclusionary practice that predominantly promotes white heteronormativity': as of yet, no gay or lesbian celebrity couples have been given a portmanteau, and *Kimye* is the only portmanteau couple that includes a person of color. In her chapter here, Maria Pramaggiore suggests that the portmanteau 'thoroughly endorses heterosexual hegemony'. The fact that there are other white, heterosexual couples that do not have celebrity portmanteaus does not discount either of their arguments, but goes to show that the power and reach of the celebrity power couple is not easily quantified. The Beckhams are a couple that, as Neil Ewen points to in his chapter, have had a name change – from *Posh n' Becks* to *The Beckhams* – that appears to signal both their movement across

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class boundaries and their current identity as a famous family whose children are part of their group identity. They are not the only famous family with celebrity currency in the media, of course – Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie, Beyonce and Jay Z, Will Smith and Jada Pinkett-Smith – are all high-profile examples of celebrity couples with children who, to varying degrees, are recognized as celebrities themselves, but whose famous families add exponential value to their commercial and cultural appeal.

The public fascination with these celebrity relationships is evinced in many ways: from the space they are given in celebrity magazines to the airtime on entertainment shows and to the words written about them on celebrity gossip websites. They also circulate beyond the celebrity gossip sphere. The celebrity ‘listicle’ (a short form of writing made popular by bloggers that uses lists to structure the content) often goes viral on social media and there are many variations on the celebrity couple or family given prominence and cultural capital by mainstream publications: *Forbes* has one list for the ‘highest earning celebrity couples’ and another for the ‘world’s most powerful couples’, *US Weekly* lists ‘Hollywood’s gay power couples’, *The Guardian* lists the ten best power couples, and *Men’s Health* details the ‘hottest’ celebrity couples. Families appear in *Glamour*’s list of ‘acting dynasties’, the *Huffington Post*’s ‘seventeen gorgeous celebrity families, and *Marie Claire*’s ‘famous Hollywood families’. Taken together, the chapters that make up this volume respond in various ways to this expanding celebrity couple universe.

**INSERT Intro fig.1 HERE**

**Fig.1: The Beckhams Out and About in Los Angeles, 19 April 2008.**

**Photo: Galo Ramírez**

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Of course, the present volume is not only concerned with portmanteau celebrity couples, but a wide variety of celebrity relationships, and the politics that inform their identities. *First Comes Love* therefore intervenes into star and celebrity studies by placing front and center different types of celebrity relationships, focusing on their production and reception and the multiple meanings they generate. It challenges the now established critical position that individualism is at the heart of stardom and celebrity. As Martin Barker<sup>lxxxii</sup> and P. David Marshall<sup>lxxxii</sup> have shown, interest in fame has a long history, however it is now generally accepted that it was not until the institutionalization of film studies in the university during the 1970s and 1980s that academic studies of stardom blossomed as an area of scholarship. Film studies provided the foundation from where this focus on the individual performer arose, rising particularly out of the seminal work of heavyweight scholars such as Richard DeCordova<sup>lxxxii</sup>, who investigated the ‘picture personalities’ of the early twentieth century, and Richard Dyer<sup>lxxxii</sup>, who paid close attention to the film star as a cultural text and highlighted that stars should be acknowledged as ideological ‘signs’ whose power said something profound about their socio-historical contexts. In his *Heavenly Bodies*, first published in 1986, Dyer writes: ‘Stars articulate...ideas of personhood, in large measure showing up the notion of the individual but also at times registering the doubts and anxieties attendant on it’<sup>lxxxii</sup>.

This focus on the individual continued as the study of celebrity emerged and expanded from its star studies origins, with many of its now canonical texts emphasizing and reproducing the power and importance of the single celebrity. P. David Marshall’s *Celebrity and Power: Fame in Contemporary Culture* (1997), for example, ‘addresses the way the celebrity has been represented, critiqued, and celebrated, in order to clarify the articulation of power that the celebrity embodies as an individual’<sup>lxxxii</sup>. Meanwhile, Chris Rojek’s

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foundational taxonomy, elaborated in *Celebrity* (2001), configures ‘ascribed’ celebrity – whereby fame follows from bloodline – as a remnant of the past, which serves to emphasize that ‘achieved’ celebrity – which comes as a result of talent and/or labor – as being particular to the contemporary, relatively democratized world. Rojek notes that ‘celebrity divides *the individual* from ordinary social life’, and suggests that ‘To be a celebrity is to be recognized as different’.<sup>lxxxii</sup> As Graeme Turner notes in the second edition of *Understanding Celebrity* (2014) – an updated version of another highly influential text – ‘Most accounts of the history of celebrity relate it to, among other things, the pairing of the growth of individualism with the rise of democracy’.<sup>lxxxiii</sup> Turner himself flirts with critiquing the power of collective celebrity in a discussion about ‘brand-bands’ in general, and the Spice Girls in particular, arguing that the girl-band’s celebrity power was always more than the sum of its parts; however, this assessment is fairly brief and it remains underexploited as a point of inquiry.<sup>lxxxiii</sup> Moreover, Su Holmes and Sean Redmond’s influential collection of essays, *Framing Celebrity: New Directions in Celebrity Culture* (2006)<sup>lxxxiii</sup>, begins by elaborating the desires for fame embodied by Redmond’s fictional creation ‘Leif Memphis’, in an entertaining and ironic commentary of the narcissistic individualism associated with contemporary celebrity culture: ‘I want to be a star. I want to be adored. I want to see and hear the screams of *my* fans and the roar of an ecstatic applause’.<sup>lxxxiii</sup> The importance and the power of the individual celebrity are therefore indisputable. In many cases, however, the construction of even the single celebrity is bound up in discourses of companionship that have yet to be taken into account by academic celebrity studies.

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This volume is split into four sections – *Golden Couples*, *Kinship*, *Marriage*, and *Love* – which were dictated by the process of its production. As editors, we were not prescriptive in terms of content, or of interpretations of central concepts such as ‘cultural politics’, and we gave our contributors relatively free reign to approach their subjects in any manner they so chose. Beyond making key decisions, such as limiting the historical scope of the book so that it reached only so far back as the early twentieth century (something we elaborate upon below), the volume was shaped by our contributors’ imaginations and intellectual interests. There are obvious risks to this approach, such as the potential for a lack of cohesion that may manifest politically or thematically. As it turned out, however, the quality of the chapters we received more than assuaged our anxieties. While there is no ‘party line’ on methodological or ideological approach, the diversity of the individual threads has, we think, created a rich and complex tapestry that we hope will be of interest to many readers. In the process of production, key themes and concerns quickly began to emerge and the sections that structure the final draft began to make themselves clear. Each section has its own short introduction (which includes summaries of the individual chapters), but we should note here that we began with a section on the early Hollywood period because of its centrality to the historiography of stardom and celebrity that we outline above. We should also note that the volume is weighted towards the present, with the scholarship in the opening section providing historical context for later chapters that engage with, and critique, the ways celebrity relationships dramatize companionship in a contemporary world in which neoliberal policies have increasingly compromised the pursuit of togetherness and community. The sections are not hermeneutically sealed: so, for example, themes of marriage, or (especially) love, bleed out of their respective sections and can be found coloring chapters located elsewhere. However, it is true to say that, by and large, each section theme is a particular focus of the chapters within it. The astute reader will identify other motifs not granted their



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own sections – such as the importance of weddings, sex, and branding, to name but three – and will likely find other connections not highlighted here.

The reader will also note many celebrity examples that this book does not cover, as well as limitations of historical, geographical, and theoretical scope. We have already noted the issue of history, and are aware that the history of celebrity couples and relationships could be extended much further into the past. Indeed, this volume grew out of an academic conference that showcased presentations of original research on celebrity relationships that went back as far as the French Revolution in 1789. Due to restrictions of length, and our desire for the volume to have a clear(ish) underlying chronological trajectory, we made the decision before commissioning the chapters to impose this historical boundary. In terms of geography, we acknowledge from the outset that the volume is considerably western-centric. Partly this is due to our own locations (and limitations) as scholars, but is also a reflection of the ways that Hollywood has dominated studies of stars and celebrities thus far. While the volume does include excellent contributions on non-western subjects (see, for example, the chapters by Zeglen and Dwyer), there is clearly much more theoretical and critical work to be done in terms of charting and examining celebrity relationships from outside our limited geographical context.

In terms of practical and theoretical methodology, there is also much more room for expanding the study of celebrity relationships in the future. As the title suggests, the focus of this volume falls particularly on cultural aspects and textual functions of celebrity couples and kinship relations. While each chapter is aware of its own peculiar socio-historical and cultural context, and many attend to issues of production, few of the chapters here (with perhaps the exception of Diaz and Leppert) anatomize the conditions of production to the kind of extent of, say, a book like Turner, Bonner, and Marshall's *Fame Games: The Production of Celebrity in Australia* (2000).<sup>lxxxiii</sup> As such, we would welcome future

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interventions into this area that explore in more detail the celebrity production industries, taking into account such aspects as publicity, management, and the work of agents. We would also encourage a wider diversity of theoretical approaches. This volume does not include, for example, sociological work on reception that details and scrutinizes gossip sites and other forms of celebrity fan culture, such as fan fiction, in terms of the ways these areas interact with celebrity relationships. Furthermore, in terms of content, we would like to see emerge a wider coverage of themes and the different industries from which celebrity couples and relationships. Future research might take into account couples from the realms of sport, literature, politics, business, royal families other than the British monarchy, music, and fashion, to name but a few: and, of course, more relationships that straddle industries and cross disciplinary and national boundaries.

Finally, we are also very aware that many readers will be disappointed that their favorite celebrity couple or family does not feature in this volume. One of the peer reviewers of the proposal for *First Comes Love* commented that to satisfy every expectation the anthology would need to run to 50 volumes. We thought it rude to ask for that many from Bloomsbury. But we do hope this is a beginning and not an end.

<sup>lxxxii</sup> Clare Geraghty, 'Perfect Pairs: The New Power of Two', *MailOnline*, 15 April 2012:

<<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/home/you/article-2128307/Carey-Mulligan-Marcus-Mumford-The-new-British-power-couples-.html>>.

<sup>lxxxiii</sup> Linda Ruth Williams is one of the few writers to have previously interrogated this phenomenon. See: 'Brangelina: Celebrity, Credibility, and the Composite Überstar', in Murray Pomerance, *Shining In Shadows: Movie Stars of the 2000s* (London: Rutgers University Press, 2012), 200-219.

<sup>lxxxiiii</sup> Martin Barker, 'Introduction' in Thomas Austin and Martin Barker (eds.), *Contemporary Hollywood Stardom* (London: Arnold, 1-24).

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- <sup>lxxxii</sup> P. David Marshall, *Celebrity and Power: Fame in Contemporary Culture* (Minneapolis: Minnesota University, new ed. 2014), xi-xlvi.
- <sup>lxxxii</sup> Richard DeCordova, *Picture Personalities: The Emergence of the Star System in America* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1990).
- <sup>lxxxii</sup> Richard Dyer, *Stars* (London: BFI, 1998); Richard Dyer, *Heavenly Bodies: Film Stars and Society* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 2004).
- <sup>lxxxii</sup> Richard Dyer, *Heavenly Bodies*, 9.
- <sup>lxxxii</sup> Marshall, *Celebrity and Power*, 4.
- <sup>lxxxii</sup> Chris Rojek, *Celebrity* (London: Reaktion, 2001), 177, our emphasis.
- <sup>lxxxii</sup> Graeme Turner, *Understanding Celebrity* (London: SAGE, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 2014), 27.
- <sup>lxxxii</sup> *Ibid.*, 62.
- <sup>lxxxii</sup> Su Holmes and Sean Redmond, *Framing Celebrity: New Directions in Celebrity Culture* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2006).
- <sup>lxxxii</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.
- <sup>lxxxii</sup> Graeme Turner, Frances Bonner, and P. David Marshall, *Fame Games: The Production of Celebrity in Australia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

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## I.

### Golden Couples

In *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960*, David Bordwell, Janet Staiger, and Kristin Thompson estimate that 85-95% of mass culture movies before 1960 contained a significant romance element.<sup>lxxxii</sup> As the dominant form of mass entertainment in the first half of the twentieth century, Classical Hollywood undoubtedly had the power to shape hegemonic western notions of romance and intimacy. In her analysis of screen couples like Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers and Katherine Hepburn and Spencer Tracy, Martha Nochimson is more interested in how the couples' on-screen performances

articulated a multifaceted fantasy universe in which the various couples they played... create a nuanced portrait of passionate connection [...] The screen couple in its most significant form has a significance beyond business and basic narrative issues. It is about the way we process information about eroticism and intimacy'.<sup>lxxxii</sup>

The chapters by Michael Williams and Michael Hammond in this section show how issues of fantasy, business, eroticism and intimacy – which Nochimson identifies as central to the analysis of the screen couple – also structure the representation of Golden-era couples' off-screen celebrity lives. In fact, their investigations of fan magazines of the 1920s and 1930s suggest that these issues are even more explicitly at play in the discursive negotiation of stardom between the stars, the studios, and the fans.

Of one of the few real-life couples in her book, Hepburn and Tracy, Nochimson says, “‘belief’ in the characters they played, and thus in the ideological positions they espoused,

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depended upon what the public believed about Hepburn and Tracy as private persons'.<sup>lxxxii</sup>

Williams and Hammond take this idea further by showing how what the public believed about the couples and the ideological positions of the roles they played were more complicated than Nochimson's statement allows; partly because of the ways the studios had a hand in managing the image of the stars both on screen and off, and partly because of the agency of individual fans who may not have 'believed' certain narratives of the star couples so easily. Importantly, both chapters consider how the polysemic formation of the star couple, as an entity that is interconnected with the individual stars' identities but also distinct from them at the same time, is 'related to contradictions in ideology – whether within the dominant ideology, or between it and other subordinated/revolutionary ideologies'.<sup>lxxxii</sup> By situating the celebrity lives of their star couples in their socio-historical context, Williams and Hammond articulate a foundation for understanding the ways public discourses of love, sexual attraction, and marriage (key themes running through the present volume as a whole) not only constructed the image of the celebrity couples' lives but also how they contributed to public perceptions of these discursive signifiers of coupledness.

Though much of the historiography of stardom and celebrity focuses on Hollywood and its stars in the 1920s and 1930s, during this period new forms of celebrity came into existence outside the Hollywood sphere. As Sarah Churchwell shows in her chapter here, 'the symbiotic relationship between celebrity and American aristocracy began to flourish in the early 1920s'. In his history of the gossip columnist Walter Winchell, Neal Gabler shows how publicity came to be the source of social power over wealth, breeding, or talent, and he says that 'social authority in the early thirties had been turned on its head: it is now derived from the media'.<sup>lxxxii</sup> Churchwell's close analysis of the celebrity coupledness of Scott and Zelda Fitzgerald demonstrates how contemporary concepts of celebrity should not be seen as just

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developments of star theory and analysis, but that celebrity has been an important sign of status in American culture since the earliest decades of the twentieth century.

Like Williams and Hammond, Churchwell's analysis is based on original archival research. This methodology allows all three chapters in this section to shed new light on this early period of stardom and celebrity in two important ways. First, all three chapters chart an unwritten history of early twentieth-century stardom and celebrity by showing how important couples were to the fan magazines and gossip columns of the time period. Second, they challenge not only Barry King's assertion that 'from the perspective of the audience...stars appear as finished products of semiotic labor'<sup>lxxxii</sup>, but they also illustrate that the contemporary obsession with the production of celebrity has long historical roots. Taken together, these chapters demonstrate that the semiotic labor of stardom has long been a process of change and maintenance; furthermore, they show that the changing private lives of these stars always seeped through and informed the ways they appeared in the imaginations of the public.

In his chapter, "'Gilbo-Garbage' or 'The Champion Lovemakers of Two Nations': Uncoupling Greta Garbo and John Gilbert', Michael Williams's excavation of the history of early celebrity coupledness reveals possibly the first celebrity portmanteau of two Hollywood stars – 'Gilbo'. He shows how the couples' 'on screen romance slipped to off-screen passion' and how the off-screen passion seemed to inform their onscreen liaison in a way that troubled some fans. He argues that 'Gilbo' – a term created by a fan – 'was a term that granted [fans] agency to express their views not only about the couple but about what a star should be and how they should behave'. He considers this particular form of fan agency as emblematic of the final years of the silent era when the phenomenon of the individual star as a remote and divinized being, of which Garbo is the exemplar, reached 'such mythic heights that the pedestal was bound to wobble'.

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Sarah Churchwell picks up the theme of the changing status of fame in the 1920s, and in her chapter, “‘The Most Envied Couple in America in 1921’: Making the Social Register in the Scrapbooks of F. Scott and Zelda Fitzgerald’, she shows how ‘the Fitzgeralds understood the capacity of envy to operate as itself a status symbol, one that they catalogued and commodified in [their] scrapbooks.’ That the Fitzgeralds loved fame and glamour is widely agreed amongst scholars. However, Churchwell uses their scrapbooks of various news and gossip items about them (both individually and as a couple) and a close reading of Scott Fitzgerald’s long out-of-print essay ‘Rolling Junk’, to suggest that ‘the tendency has been for the Fitzgeralds’ audience to psychologize this value system [of acclaim and envy] as a symptom of the couple’s pathologies’, when rather, as she argues, it is ‘symptomatic more generally of the era they are widely held to have epitomized’.

After Williams’ focus on the agency of fans in the production of celebrity and Churchwell’s focus on the self-production of celebrity, Michael Hammond turns to the Hollywood studios’ management and re-production of Clark Gable’s and Carole Lombard’s star coupledness. In his chapter, “‘Good Fellowship’: Carole Lombard and Clark Gable’, Hammond argues that though Gable was still married and Lombard was recently divorced when they first became a public couple in 1935, ‘their respective studios (Paramount and MGM) worked to “normalize” their relationship as pragmatic and in touch with changing attitudes toward marriage as the Great Depression wore on’. As he notes, the economic crash of 1929 and its aftereffects meant that ‘marriage was simply too expensive for many young couples’, and he suggests that as a celebrity couple, Gable and Lombard ‘offered a model for childless working couples... that chimed with broader attitudes toward coupling that the times demanded’.

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<sup>lxxxii</sup> David Bordwell, Janet Staiger, and Kristin Thompson, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), 16.

<sup>lxxxii</sup> Martha Nochimson, *Screen Couple Chemistry: The Power of 2* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002), 6-7.

<sup>lxxxii</sup> *Ibid.*, 189.

<sup>lxxxii</sup> Richard Dyer, *Stars* (London: BFI, 2002), 26

<sup>lxxxii</sup> Cited in Graeme Turner, *Understanding Celebrity, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition* (London: SAGE Publications, 2014), 24.

<sup>lxxxii</sup> Barry King, 'Stardom and symbolic degeneracy: television and the transformation of the stars as public symbols', *Semiotica*, vol. 92, no. 1-2 (1992): 3.



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## II.

### Kinship

The most common image of family – the nuclear family of married mom and dad, and two (maybe more, maybe fewer) kids – holds a central position in contemporary western media culture, and has done since at least the earliest days of television. From *Leave it to Beaver* (1950s) through *The Cosby Show* (1980s) to the current *Modern Family* (2009-), many successful TV shows, structured by the nuclear family, have marked the medium’s history in America and beyond.<sup>lxxxii</sup> Television has been particularly associated with the image of the family because of its status as a hub of domestic community, and the anxiety that has sprouted as a result of recent technological changes – with the rise of personal media devices undermining television’s historical hegemony – is often explicitly linked to the supposed disappearance of the family unit sitting together in front of the TV set. Of course, television is only one medium among many that reproduces the nuclear family as normative; but its assumed value as a familial and cultural glue remains strong in the multimedia era. Today, television’s intersection with celebrity culture is perhaps most obviously illustrated by the rise of the reality TV family in shows like *The Osbournes*, *Living Lohan*, *Hogan Knows Best*, *Snoop Dog’s Father Hood*, and *Keeping up with the Kardashians* (a key element of Alice Leppert’s analysis of the celebrity momager, Kris Jenner, in this section).<sup>lxxxii</sup>

The attendant rhetoric of ‘family values’ attached to the idealized image of family has had significant cultural power as a discourse since the onset of (the ongoing) culture wars of the 1980s, particularly in the US and the UK. Margaret Thatcher’s (in)famous comment in 1987 that ‘there is no such thing as society. There are only individual men and women, and there are families’<sup>lxxxiii</sup> neatly expresses the ways that capitalism in the neoliberal era rhetorically uses the family as cover while enacting economic policies that have, over the last

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few decades, eviscerated public institutions, weakened historical community ties, and effected change on the traditional family unit itself. The rhetoric's hollowness is exposed by the fact that since neoliberalism took hold, increasing fewer households in the US and UK comprise married couples with children; the blended family has become more prominent; and the number of single-person households has increased.<sup>lxxxii</sup> This is, in our view, at least partly because neoliberalism has wrought increasing income inequality, wage deflation, and more precarious employment conditions for the vast majority of ordinary people: all of which make the idealized nuclear family more difficult to achieve. Celebrity families can often appear to portray fantasy versions of cohesive, normative and wealthy households. However, though many are members of what is known, in the parlance of our times, as 'the 1%', celebrities also experience divorce, re-marriage, troubled children, and financial ruin. Whether made up of traditional or non-traditional kinship formations, whether wealthy or ruined, whether functional or dysfunctional, celebrity families multiply the heights of celebrity fantasy and identification in the ways they do and do not reflect our experiences of being a parent, child, or sibling.

Over the last 150 years the nuclear family has been repeatedly interrogated by some of intellectual history's most famous names. Marx and Engels, for example, argued that the foundations of the bourgeois family were 'On capital, on private gain'<sup>lxxxiii</sup>, while in their *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1972) Deleuze and Guattari argued that the family under capitalism was a key agent of social repression transforming individuals into docile servants of a system that exploited them economically and chained them to servitude by repressing desires in childhood.<sup>lxxxii</sup> The family and its capitalist structures was also, of course, critiqued by Marxist-feminists who directly linked gender inequality to the capitalist foundations of family life.<sup>lxxxii</sup> Though the chapters in this section do not take explicitly radical approaches, all of them to a greater or lesser extent consider the celebrity family's

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relationship with capitalism as one of commodification, and recognize that, as the content of a popular reality TV show, as a valuable media brand for the individual stars involved, as a mini-industry of celebrity production, or as a dynasty of successful stars, the celebrity family both sells itself and the individual members within it.

Feminists and critical race scholars have pointed out how the ‘family values’ mentioned above have been used repeatedly to stereotype, if not vilify, women and persons of color. ‘Family values proselytizers’ (as Hannah Hamad calls them in her chapter here) perpetuate a discourse of the family in crisis that is at best simplistic in its analysis and at worst is a self-fulfilling prophecy. For example, the ‘crisis discourse’ blames the break up of the bourgeois family on feminists and blames the break up of the black family on feckless fathers and lazy welfare mothers. These, and other gendered and racialized cultural stereotypes of parenting, also play out in the media’s representations of celebrities, often in contradictory ways. Whether in the sexualized dysfunction of Ryan and Tatum O’Neal, the blended families of Eddie Murphy and Will Smith, or the profit-oriented mother of Kris Jenner, several of the analyses in this section consider how celebrities perform and sometimes trouble the cultural politics of sex, gender and race in parent-child relationships.

Beginning with a queer reading of the celebrity portmanteau and a reminder that ‘show business dynasties have emerged from the studio era and the post-studio period alike’, Maria Pramaggiore, in her chapter ‘Filial Coupling, the Incest Narrative, and the O’Neals’, investigates the notion of the ‘filial couple’ and considers how we might analyze the celebrity couple who is not structured explicitly by romance or sex. Her particular focus on Ryan and Tatum O’Neal and the ‘docu-series’ they appeared in together in 2011 on the Oprah Winfrey Network – ‘The O’Neals’ – articulates how their filial coupledness is constructed by ‘the discourses of family dysfunction and incest trauma’, and offers a template for understanding

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how the ‘practices of celebrity should also be considered in relation to collective, familial dynamics’.

Following on from Pramaggiore’s claim that ‘dynastic celebrity exposes historically and culturally specific beliefs regarding genetics, breeding, and reproduction, parenting and childhood, youth and old age’, Rachel Dwyer, in her chapter ‘A Star is Born?: Rishi Kapoor and Dynastic Charisma in Hindi Cinema’, takes the idea of dynastic stardom to Bollywood and considers the narrative of the Kapoor family in Hindi cinema that has produced four generations of film stars, ‘asking if there is anything particular or unusual about stardom in Hindi cinema which accounts for the Kapoor family’s durability and dominance’. Dwyer specifically focuses on Rishi Kapoor (1952 - ), who, she suggests, ‘lived his life in the eye of the media, destined for stardom from birth’, but throughout the chapter she explores how both the men and women of the family, across its various generations, negotiate their individual styles with the Kapoor ‘family charisma’.

Bringing us back to Hollywood, Hannah Hamad, in her chapter, ‘The (Post-) Racial Familial Politics of Hollywood Celebrity Couples’, analyses how the ‘celebrity identities of Will Smith and Eddie Murphy, as they pertain to the politics of racial discourse at the dawn of the Obama era, are charged with meaning’ and how this ‘comes into clearest view when seen through the frame of coupledness and familial politics’. She closely considers how both men’s family lives are differently, and problematically, narrativized in the celebrity media through the ‘family values rhetoric that paints and pathologizes the black family as perennially “in crisis”’. Her close analysis of the Smith family also looks at the ‘industrial mobilization of their coupledness and their family dynamic, enabled by the couple’s partnership in their [own] production company’ in order to take into account how their children’s careers contribute to the Smith family’s image of dynastic celebrity.

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The 'industrialial mobilization' of kinship relations in the commodification of the celebrity family is exemplified by the Kardashians and their 'momager' Kris Jenner in Alice Leppert's 'Momager of the Brides: Kris Jenner's Management of Kardashian Romance'. Jenner serves as manager for all six of her children (and a few husbands/partners) while also being a celebrity in her own right. Jenner has been strongly criticized in the press for holding the dual position of mother and manager, the latter of which she profits from financially. But, as Leppert shows, 'Jenner's acceptance of this villainous role simultaneously works to protect her clients, as she sacrifices her own image and reputation in order for them to appear more sincere'. Jenner's management and commodification of various family weddings allows all of the family 'to profit from images of "fairytale romance," a fairytale in which Jenner, in her own capacity as a celebrity, often plays the role of the villain'.

<sup>lxxxii</sup> Muriel G. Cantor, 'The American Family on Television: From Molly Goldberg to Bill Cosby', *Journal of Comparative Family Studies*, vol. 22, no. 2 (Summer 1991): 205-216.

<sup>lxxxii</sup> For an analysis of the construction of celebrity fatherhood in many of the reality TV shows mentioned here, see: Hannah Hamad, "'Hollywood's Hot Dads": Tabloid, Reality and Scandal Discourses of Celebrity Post-Feminist Fatherhood', *Celebrity Studies*, 1:2, 2010: 151-169.

<sup>lxxxii</sup> See: Margaret Thatcher, 'Interview for *Woman's Own* ("no such thing as society")', Margaret Thatcher Foundation: <<http://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/106689>>.

<sup>lxxxii</sup> See Debra Caruso and Sandra Timmerman, 'The Disappearing Nuclear Family and the Shift to Non-Traditional Households Has Serious Financial Implications for Growing Number of Americans', Huffington Post, 25 January 2013: <[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/debra-caruso/retirement-plan-the-disappearing-nuclear-family\\_b\\_2534622.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/debra-caruso/retirement-plan-the-disappearing-nuclear-family_b_2534622.html)>; and Hannah Richardson, 'Nuclear Family in "decline", figures show, BBC online, 2 July 2010, accessed at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/10487318>

<sup>lxxxii</sup> Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* (London: Pelican, 1967), 100-101

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<sup>lxxxii</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, reprint ed., 1983).

<sup>lxxxii</sup> Two key examples of the latter are: Shulamith Firestone's *The Dialectic of Sex* (1970) and Michèle Barrett and Mary McIntosh's *The Anti-Social Family* (1982).

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### III.

#### Marriage

Chapter sixteen of Stephanie Coontz's *Marriage: a History* is entitled 'The Perfect Storm: The Transformation of Marriage at the End of the Twentieth Century'. In it, Coontz outlines the trends that constitute a crisis in the institution of marriage across the Western world since 1970: a steady decline in rates of marriage, a dramatic surge in the rates of divorce, and 'a whole flood of new alternatives to marriage'.<sup>lxxxii</sup> As Anthea Taylor argues in her chapter in this section, however, 'Despite the Western divorce rate widely conceded to be one in two, marriage retains its currency. Indeed, in many ways, it seems its stocks are on the rise, with marriage equality activists reinscribing its status as a desirable institution'.

The currency of marriage in its ability to legitimize, and de-legitimize, strikingly different types of coupled relationships is laid out and dissected by the chapters in this section through analysis of the ways celebrity couples dramatize these processes. As all of these chapters illustrate, marriage as an institution is a site of confluence between multiple different discourses, including the social, the cultural, the legal, the political, and the economic. During a time when marriage is becoming in some ways more inclusive, *vis-à-vis* the expansion of same-sex marriage rights, it nevertheless remains a controversial and discriminatory institution. Logically, in its legitimization of some couples, it inevitably de-legitimizes those couples and individuals who cannot or choose not to be married. And those who find themselves outside the institution (by choice or exclusion) are therefore positioned in cultural terms as abject, to varying degrees.

The analyses of celebrity couples in this section expose some of the ways that marriage is complicit in producing and reproducing the restrictions of normative relations in the contemporary period across very different geographical and cultural contexts. They also

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illustrate the ways in which getting married, or not, can alter the economic and cultural value of both the individual celebrity and the celebrity couple. Taken together, these remarkably diverse case studies – from the British royal family, Australian parliamentary politics, North Korean political culture, ‘celesbianism’, and American hardcore pornography – reveal the ideological complicity between marriage and celebrity across a spectrum of environments.

Margaret Schwartz, in her chapter ‘Diana’s Rings: Fetishizing the Royal Couple’, argues that ‘the royal couple is a key site where tension between royal mystique and its perceived consequence of dysfunction and entitlement has played out in public discourse’. Schwartz suggests that Princess Diana’s engagement ring, which Prince William later used to propose to Catherine Middleton, symbolizes the ‘tension between royal coupling as producers of lineage, on the one hand, and on the other as producers of cultural “relevancy” in such forms as celebrity, gossip, and visibility’. In this reading, the ring represents the continuity of royal values from the married Princess Diana to the Duchess of Cambridge, whilst simultaneously disavowing the threat to the monarchy posed by the behavior of the unhappily married and then divorced Diana.

In her analysis of Julia Gillard and her partner, Tim Mathieson, during the period of Gillard’s time as Prime Minister, Anthea Taylor moves the consideration of celebrity couples from the politics of the British monarchy to the parliamentary politics of Australia. The celebritization of politics is a growing area of scholarship within celebrity studies<sup>lxxxii</sup>, and Taylor’s chapter adds an important perspective on the intersection of celebrity, politics, and marriage by asking, ‘If successful leadership is presumed to require a successful relationship (as in a state sanctioned, heteronormative one), what happens when the celebrity political couple is not so easily assimilated into these loaded gendered narratives?’ By remaining unmarried (and child-free) while Prime Minister, Gillard strongly disrupted the cultural expectations of how to be both female and a politician. Taylor shows how Gillard’s



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relationship with Mathieson was constructed as illegitimate because it was not ‘officially sanctioned by the State’, and how, as a result, ‘their relationship effectively became a synecdoche for her ‘relationship’ with the Australian people’, which the media ‘also discursively constructed as ‘illegitimate’.

Keeping with the theme of politics, David Zeglen’s chapter, ‘It’s the Thought That Counts: North Korea’s Glocalization of the Celebrity Couple and the Mediated Politics of Reform’, illustrates how the Western media read the introduction to the world of the North Korean leader’s wife Ri in terms of their apparent celebrity couple elements – fashion, pseudo-events, and discussion of class background – as signs of reform within the closed and tightly-controlled regime. Exposing this process as flawed, as well as challenging celebrity studies as a discipline to be mindful of its own Western-centricity, Zeglen argues that the flow of ‘celebrity culture to North Korea should be understood as having undergone glocalization - a process that involves the selective borrowing of foreign styles which are then imbued with domestic meaning’, and suggests that Ri and Kim’s celebrity marriage ‘should be understood as a cultural hybrid comprising celebrity signifiers... that have been made to fit the local context of North Korean ‘gift culture.’

Shelley Cobb’s chapter, ‘Ellen and Portia’s Wedding: the Politics of Same-Sex Marriage and Celesbianism’ moves the theme of politics to the United States where the debates about equal marriage rights have recently acquired a higher-profile than ever before, partly, as her chapter suggest, through lesbian and gay celebrity couples who have married (in the states where it is legal) and who are now ubiquitous in celebrity media culture. Her particular focus on Ellen DeGeneres and Portia de Rossi’s marriage interrogates the ambivalent politics of the celebrity lesbian couple who participate in, and are legitimized by, the normative narrative of the married couple – from dating, to engagement, to wedding, to married life – even as both DeGeneres and de Rossi have spoken up for national same-sex

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marriage rights since they wed. Cobb argues that while the visibility of the equal marriage campaign ‘has relegated other fights for LGBTQ equality to the margins and elevated marriage as the key symbol of equal rights and citizenship...the prominence of the fight for marriage equality also contributes to the cultural weight of marriage itself as the optimum form of sexual intimacy, social acceptance and legal protection of individuals’.

Finally in this section, marriage as a form of legal legitimacy is cannily explored by Beccy Collings through an analysis of the (formerly) married porn-star celebrity couple Audrey Hollander and Otto Bauer, in her chapter ‘Audrey Hollander and Otto Bauer: The Perfect (Pornographic) Marriage?’ Collings challenges celebrity studies’ relative neglect of pornography as a site of celebrity production and argues that ‘traditional notions of the public/private and frontstage/backstage divides (so crucial to academic discussions surrounding celebrity image and the marketing of celebrity personae) are problematized when applied to performers for whom the most private of backstage activities are necessarily the public element of their careers.’ Her analysis considers how marriage seemed to affect perceptions of their work together, potentially influencing the outcome of an obscenity charge against their film *Filthy Things 6*. And she suggests that their transgression of the private/public divide exposes ‘the prevailing paradigms of celebrity behavior and self-promotion’ necessary for any ‘successful “celebrity” status, coupled or otherwise’.

<sup>lxxxii</sup> Stephanie Coontz, *Marriage, a History: How Love Conquered Marriage* (New York: Penguin, 2005), 263-280. Coontz notes that rates of divorce slowed in the 1990s, but that ‘rates of marriage fell even faster’ (277). Recent figures suggest that marriage rates have slowed further in the wake of the 2008 financial crisis.

<sup>lxxxiii</sup> See, for example: Mark Wheeler, *Celebrity Politics: Image and Identity in Contemporary Political Communications* (Cambridge: Polity, 2013).

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## IV.

### Love

The idea that love is a simple antidote to life's ills, both individual and collective, is one of the most familiar truisms in western culture. John Lennon's invocation that 'All you need is love / Love is all you need' is one of the most famous and explicit pop culture examples of this assumption, with The Beatles' manager, Brian Epstein, saying of the lyric: 'The nice thing about it is that it cannot be misinterpreted. It is a clear message saying that love is everything'.<sup>lxxxii</sup> But with respect to the late Mr. Epstein, things become a little more complicated than he suggests when we begin to scratch the surface. Most obviously, there are many different kinds of love: romantic love, parental love, sibling love, sexual love, and divine love, among many. Even (what we think was) Epstein's intention – to suggest that love is simply a force of 'good' over 'evil', and that Lennon was taking a pacifistic stance and urging the citizens of the world to unite in harmony – runs into trouble if we consider what Lennon himself had to say about the lyric:

According to journalist Jade Wright...when asked in 1971 whether songs like 'Give Peace a Chance' and 'Power to the People' were propaganda songs, he answered: "Sure. So was 'All You Need Is Love'. I'm a revolutionary artist. My art is dedicated to change".<sup>lxxxii</sup>

We can only speculate – and Lennon may very well have meant exactly what Epstein assumed – but what he is gesturing toward here, consciously or not, is that there is a politics of love that always lies beneath simplistic interpretations, that constantly informs the ways

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individuals relate to one another (and even think about their selves), and often does its best to remain uncovered.

The politics of love has in recent years become a hot topic in intellectual circles, as a particular strand of a wider blossoming of Affect Theory.<sup>lxxxii</sup> In ‘The Politics of Love and its Enemies’<sup>lxxxiii</sup>, David Nirenberg illustrates that notions of love and affect have never existed on a plane free of politics. Nirenberg’s fascinating analysis goes back as far as ‘the dry farming societies of the ancient Mediterranean world that produced some of our earliest written records’. These societies, he suggests, ‘were built on a vast array of reciprocal relations of varying degrees of formalization and asymmetry, ranging from master-slave at one extreme, through patron-client, lord-vassal, and creditor-debtor relations, to relations of hospitality, friendship, kinship, and marriage on the other’. Since there was no ‘dedicated vocabulary for such relations’, ‘terms of kinship (such as *father* and *son*) and affect (such as *love* and *friendship*)’, were (and here he quotes Raymond Westbrook) ‘promiscuously employed...for all manner of social, commercial, and legal reasons’. As such, these terms were ‘incestuously related to one another’ and are ‘encompassed by the terms we now translate into English as *friendship* and *love*’. ‘If today love can seem a liberation from possession and exchange’, Nirenberg argues, ‘it is because this ancient incest has been repressed’. In light of this reading, we might suggest that contemporary celebrity couple culture dramatizes this repression: at once obscuring the reciprocal relations of exchange in discourses of romance and private intimacy, while making explicit for public consumption those very exchanges.

The chapters in this section each focus to a greater or lesser extent on romantic celebrity relations, and show how celebrity couplings, in their production, often seek to harness the power of discourses of romantic love and intimacy. As critical readings, however, these chapters also expose the complicated politics of love that structure these celebrity

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relations, as well as taking into account the affective power of their mediations. Laura Kipnis, in *Against Love: A Polemic*, provocatively suggests that romantic coupledness in western culture constitutes ‘omnipresent propaganda beaming into our psyches on an hourly basis: the millions of images of lovestruck couples looming over us from movie screens, televisions, billboards, magazines, incessantly strong-arming us onboard the love train’, positioning all those who do not conform to this hegemony as abject.<sup>lxxxii</sup> Michael Cobb, meanwhile, articulates succinctly the importance of thinking critically about these issues by suggesting that they ‘are not wedge issues but central biopolitical concerns that ferociously animate our present and future politics. Marriage, gay or not, and for that matter most forms of coupledness, are at the heart of this political life’.<sup>lxxxii</sup> Taken together, then, these chapters serve as injunctions to consider the affective power of romantic celebrity relationships and their roles in structuring the ways we imaginatively relate to others.

This section begins with Suzanne Leonard’s chapter, ‘The Return of Liz and Dick’, in which she shows how the on-again/off-again romance (and marriage) of Elizabeth Taylor and Richard Burton has created ‘a celebrity couple whose mythologized pairing, if anything, has accrued more mystique since Taylor’s death in 2011’. She argues that this renewed contemporary interest in the couple must be understood within recent developments in celebrity studies and situates ‘their coupledness in a wider milieu wherein the boundaries between performance, intimacy and sexuality are forever blurred’. As such, she suggests Taylor and Burton are an ‘origin text of celebrity coupling’ and that their ‘perpetual claim to be escaping an invasive press’ contributed to the aggrandizing of their infamous passion, which is the basis for their current cultural visibility across various mass-market media texts.

Vanessa Diaz, in her chapter “‘Brad & Angelina: And Now...Brangelina!’ A Sociocultural Analysis of Blended Celebrity Couple Names’, offers an inside perspective of the celebrity press through her ethnographic study of celebrity magazine reporters and the

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phenomenon of the celebrity portmanteau, which is also a point of concern for other chapters in this volume. The reporters she interviewed suggest that the celebrity-blended name is metonymic of what celebrity journalism does – ‘We pair people up together and report on them as one unit’ – and what it seeks to create – ‘a new level of celebrity’. Through an analysis of cultural naming practices, Diaz argues that the celebrity combined-name ‘promotes (imaginary) intimacy between consumers and celebrity couples, thus encouraging the personal interest and investment of individuals in those couples’. She also gestures toward an explanation as to why the portmanteau is almost exclusively the preserve of white, heterosexual celebrity couples.

Many of the most recognizable celebrity couples are in early middle age, not too young to suggest impermanency, old enough to be married (if they choose) and have children, but not too old to appear unsexed. Linda Ruth Williams, in her chapter, ‘Jane Fonda, Power Nuptials, and the Project of Aging’, considers the ways that Jane Fonda’s ‘three marriages inform her public profile and the phases of her career’. She particularly focuses on Fonda’s marriage to Ted Turner as ‘a story of competing celebrity between 50-something megastars’, and argues that after their break up, Fonda developed a ‘lifestyle philosophy of gendered aging’ that she articulates in her late-life autobiographies. This performance of a lifestyle of aging, which is not only found in her books but also in her celebrity endorsements and in social media profiles, is central to ‘Fonda’s negotiation of coupling as key to two rebrandings she has fashioned: from younger revered performer/sex-goddess/fitness guru to still-sexualised, still-fit *grande dame*, and – crucially – from star to celebrity’. Williams therefore shows how Fonda’s romantic relationships with her successive partners can be read in terms of different stages of branding her celebrity, moving from a distant early stardom to shaping a more intimate relationship with her fans in recent years.

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Shifting the focus to a much younger couple, Diane Negra offers a close analysis of ‘Robsten’ – the now defunct coupling of Kristen Stewart and Robert Pattinson. In her chapter, ‘The Making, Unmaking and Re-making of “Robsten”’, Negra suggests that ‘their celebrity couplehood largely borrowed its terms of intimacy from the *Twilight* film franchise in which the pair’s fame was sourced, and shows how it was heightened by their frequent presentation as “hunted” paparazzi targets’. Furthermore, Negra claims that the apparent authenticity of the private space of the couple that the media seeks to expose, and the spectacle of that exposure, covers over the ‘industrial and ideological power’ of the celebrity couple. As such, Negra argues that ‘the tremendous public investment in the couple was a function of the desire to retain an image of innocent romance while simultaneously acknowledging how fraught that conception is’.

The ideological implications of the public’s and the media’s obsession with contemporary celebrity couples (and families) is considered in broader terms by Neil Ewen in his chapter, ‘The Good, the Bad, and The Broken: Forms and Functions of Neoliberal Celebrity Relationships’. Ewen problematizes the notion that celebrity relationships provide relief from the anxieties of everyday life under neoliberalism, and suggests that this process is not an even one across all forms of celebrity alliances. As such, the media often configure certain couples as “good” celebrity couples [that] articulate cultural desires for idealized relationships’, and others as “bad” celebrity couples [that] are examples of how not to live’. Inevitably, of course, upon close examination, those distinctions unravel and the normative ideologies that underpin the fantasies of both types are revealed. Ewen concludes his chapter with a brief consideration of the ‘broken’ couple, or ‘anti-couple’: a concept that is useful in part in that it highlights both the artifice and structuring conservative discourses that elaborations of ‘good’ celebrity couples usually manage to hide.

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<sup>lxxxii</sup> ‘The Beatles. All You Need Is Love (3:46)’, *Lastfm.com*:

<<http://www.last.fm/music/The+Beatles/Yellow+Submarine/All+You+Need+Is+Love>>.

<sup>lxxxii</sup> **Ibid.**

<sup>lxxxii</sup> See, for example: Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth (eds.), *The Affect Theory Reader* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010); Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011); Kathleen Stewart, *Ordinary Affects* (Duke: Duke University Press, 2007).

<sup>lxxxii</sup> David Nirenberg, ‘The Politics of Love and its Enemies’, *Critical Inquiry*, 33:3, Spring 2007: 253-605.

<sup>lxxxii</sup> Laura Kipnis, *Against Love: A Polemic* (New York: Vintage, 2004), 33-34.

<sup>lxxxii</sup> Michael Cobb, *Single: Arguments for the Uncoupled* (New York: New York University, 2012), 17-18.